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# Greek Theater in Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean from 1810 to 1961

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## Abstract

*In this essay I examine the importance of theater in the communities of the Greek diaspora around the Mediterranean and in southeastern Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Greek translations of European plays and original modern Greek plays were both published and produced from Odessa to Vienna and from Constantinople to Alexandria. The onset of the Greek War of Independence in 1821 had an adverse effect on the public performances of Greek plays in the Ottoman Empire for several years, but performances resumed in 1856 with the Hattı-Hümayun (Imperial Edict). Theater at this time was used as a means to raise the consciousness of the Greek diaspora. It was supported by the touring professional companies, local amateur companies, and by intellectuals, teachers, and journalists who translated or adapted foreign plays into Greek but also wrote original plays. The demise of prosperous Greek communities during the twentieth century put an abrupt end to this all this activity.*

Greek theatrical activity in the countries of southeastern Europe and around the eastern Mediterranean during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has a prominent place in the history of Greek theater as is demonstrated by recent studies (e.g., Puchner 2002c:26). Cultural continuity and rupture, which were directly linked to the fortunes of the Greek communities in these regions (Chassiotis 1993), marked the course of Greek theater as it flourished in these communities during this period (Puchner 1992:333).

As early as the mid-eighteenth century, theater, as a literary genre, attracted the interest of Greek intellectuals and writers in Bucharest, Iasi, Odessa, Vienna, Trieste, Budapest, and Constantinople, in the context of the European Enlightenment that had placed an educational imperative on the moral improvement and social awareness of the individual (Tabaki 1988; 1993; 2001). Their initiation into theater began with reading the

works of European playwrights in the original because most Phanariot Greeks were polyglots. Subsequently, they translated into Greek plays by such writers as Molière, Kotzebue, Alfieri, Voltaire, Metastasio, and Goldoni (Tabaki 2001:400–408; Spathis 1986:69–75).

The first Greek translations of plays by Molière, Metastasio, and Goldoni were completed roughly between 1750 and 1810 in the very productive intellectual environment of the Phanariot Greeks who lived in principalities along the Danube. These translations were the product of a cross-pollination of Greek culture with southeastern European education during the period of Ottoman rule (Kitromilides 1998; Tabaki 2004). The same applies to the first original Greek plays<sup>1</sup> which were published by printing houses of the Greek communities in Venice (Nikolaos Glykys), Vienna (the publishers Polyzois Lambanitziotis and Makrides Pouliou), and Bucharest, as well as Moscow, Odessa, and Livorno, among other cities.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, an interest in theatrical performance developed alongside a growing interest in original Greek plays and in translation. The first theatrical performances took place either as part of extra-curricular activities in schools, such as those at the Hellenic Gymnasium of Iasi in 1803 and the Hellenic Academy of Bucharest in 1816, or as part of the artistic and literary interests of Greek intellectuals in the Greek communities of Wallachia and Moldavia, as exemplified by Athanasios Christopoulos and Theodoros Alkaios at the court of Alexandros Mourouzis in Iasi in 1805 and Rallou Karatza at the court of her father Ioannis Karatzas in Bucharest in 1816 (Puchner 1993:67–73). Amateur theatrical performances were also staged at the mansions of Phanariot Greeks in Constantinople (Rangavis 1894:12, 30–31).

With the establishment of the *Filiki Eteria* (Friendly Society) and preparations for the Greek War of Independence, Greek theater acquired a political and revolutionary tone and was placed in the service of the Greek cause for an independent state. Theatrical productions in Odessa from 1814 to 1820 (Tabaki 1980:229–238) and in Bucharest from 1818 to 1820 were mounted in the spirit of this cause. Plays performed in Greek translation were political, and patriotic tragedies by Voltaire, Alfieri, and Metastasio had themes inspired by ancient Greek history which recalled the glorious past. Particularly popular were productions of original Greek plays by Iakovos Rizos Neroulos, such as *Polyxene* and *Aspasia*, and by Georgios Lassanis such as *Greece and the Foreigner* and *Harmodios and Aristogeiton* (Puchner 2002b; Puchner 2002a). Four great actors emerged from these amateur productions: Theodoros Alkaios, Georgios Avramiotis, Konstantinos Kyriakos Aristias, and Spyridon

Drakoulis, the last of whom was killed during the battle at Dragatsani (Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou 1999:35–39).

A student from Kydonies (Ayvali), under the instruction of Konstantinos Oikonomos, recited Aeschylus's *Persians* at the mansion of Dimitris Manos in Constantinople in 1820 (Marcellus 1861:227–283). And in 1821, after the Greek War of Independence had begun, a secret performance of *Konstantinos Palaiologos* (authored perhaps by Zambelios) was staged at the home of a pharmacist in Pera, a suburb of Constantinople. The performance was interrupted by Turkish authorities who stormed the house and violently ended the play (Puchner 1995:306–309). The bloody events that occurred in Constantinople and Smyrna following the beginning of the Greek rebellion ended all Greek theatrical activities in the Ottoman Empire.

Following the Revolution, the Greek communities of Constantinople, Smyrna, and Alexandria (all major sea ports) grew substantially when Greeks arrived from the islands and the mainland of Greece in search of a better future. As they achieved a degree of economic prosperity and began to enjoy some political unity and relative power, they revived Greek theatrical activity in the second half of the nineteenth century. It came into public view as soon as the political, economic, and social conditions encouraged by the *Hatı Hümayun* in 1856 made it possible. The revival of Greek theater took two forms: professional touring companies and local amateur groups sponsored by theatrical societies, associations, clubs, and schools. As an expression of Greek culture, the theater catered to the need for entertainment of the growing Greek middle class in major cities. At the same time, theater cultivated a sense of Greekness based on the dissemination of the Greek language, history, traditions, and customs among the wider mass of Greeks in the Ottoman Empire. In some cases, these Greeks had begun losing touch with their Greek heritage and identity by living among ethnic peoples who did not speak Greek and were not Orthodox Christians.

### *Constantinople*

Constantinople, which had an increasingly large Greek population (287,000 in 1878), became the center of Greek theatrical life from 1858 to 1922. In 1858 Dionysios Tavoularis headed the first of a long line of important theater companies from Athens which performed in Constantinople. These companies were often frustrated by the preferences of the upper classes in Athens and Greek government officials for foreign companies, so they performed in Constantinople for long periods of time,

lighting up the Greek theatrical life there. The most prominent were those companies managed by Pantelis Soutsas, Dimosthenis Alexiadis, Dionysios Tavoularis, Michael Arniotakis, Nikolaos Lekatsas, Georgios Petridis, and Ekaterini Veroni. They performed in venues such as Naum, Crystal Palace, Byzantine Alcazar Verdi, Croissant, Variété, and Mnimatika. Some of these spaces were controlled by drama clubs, others by societies, schools, and even coffee-shop owners. Smaller theater groups also contributed to Greek cultural life in Constantinople, but mostly in the suburbs like Galata, Tattavla, Mega Revma, Ypsomathcia, Diplokionio, and Makrochori (Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou 1994).

Professional theater companies tended to perform mainstream European plays, especially in earlier years when they presented a wide range of plays to satisfy public demand for frequent changes in the program. A program usually consisted of a serious drama followed by a one-act comedy. The repertoire of these companies included plays derived from classical Greece by Alfieri, Monti, Voltaire, Racine, and Metastasio. Other repertoire included comedies by Molière and Goldoni, plays by Victor Hugo, Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Byron, and Alexandre Dumas as well as melodramas by living commercial playwrights.

Gradually, European drama was supplanted by the plays of modern Greek playwrights like Ioannis Zambelios, Alexandros Rangavis, Dimitrios Vernardakis, and Spyridon Vasiliadis and plays with lighter themes and one-act comedies by Angelos Vlachos, Nikolaos Zanos, Charalambos Anninos, Dimitrios Koromilas, and Dimitrios Kokkos. The Turkish ban on plays with themes from recent Greek history, however, prevented Greek communities in the Ottoman Empire from keeping up with the kind of theatrical developments that their compatriots in the independent Greek nation state enjoyed. Despite the ban, the Greek communities of Constantinople and other cities with an active theatrical life enjoyed a rich repertoire of over a thousand plays, many of which promoted a nationalist mission along with a strong dose of pure entertainment (Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou 1996).

Amateur theater companies were the second key part of theatrical activity in these Greek communities. Springing from the uneasy spirit of Constantinopolitan Hellenism, local theater companies proved singularly productive, particularly when professional companies were absent, thus demonstrating the vibrant cultural and educational sensibilities of the Greek community in Constantinople. The city had its fair share of theater clubs, societies, and associations, some with a charitable mission, others with only entertainment as their objective. Among the most notable amateur companies were the Aeschylus and Sophocles Theater Companies in

the suburb of Tatavla and the Sophocles and Evelpis Theater Companies in the suburb of Pera (Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou 1996:304–327). These amateur companies showed a clear preference for plays written by local playwrights, foreign plays translated by fellow Constantinopolitans, and plays (both Greek and foreign) with themes from ancient Greek history. They also performed melodramas and one-act comedies, frequently drawn from the repertoire of professional theater companies.

Lectures organized by the various literary societies played a significant role in spreading knowledge about Greek drama. Among these societies were the Mnemosyne Club in the suburb of Phanari and the Omonoia Club in the suburb of Diplokionio. The most important one, however, was undoubtedly the Hellenic Philological Association of Constantinople. The most popular topics addressed by invited speakers were ancient Greek drama with its various genres and playwrights and, less frequently, European drama (Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou 2000:138–150). These learned societies and literary circles of Constantinople were the third major force promoting the production of Greek theater next to the professional and amateur companies. The learned societies were organized by Constantinopolitan scholars, journalists, and teachers who also wrote, translated, and published plays covering practically every type of drama of the nineteenth century. Among the best-known scholars are the Phanariot Greeks Georgios Soutsos, Alexandros Soutsos, Panagiotis Soutsos, Iakovos Rangavis, and Alexandros Rangavis. Many more intellectuals deserve special mention for their contributions to Greek drama, however, including Dimitrios Vyzantios, Nikolaos Ayvazidis, Alexandros Zoiros, Michael Hourmouzis, Odysseas Dimitrakos, Dimosthenis Misitzis, and Alexandros Stamatiadis, all of whom wrote original plays. Ioannis Raptarchis, Pantaleon Kavafis, Georgios Xanthopoulos, and Stavros Voutyras also deserve special mention for translating plays (Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou 2006:137–162).

Several important Greek actors emerged from the theater scene in Constantinople during the nineteenth century. Many of them were forced to leave in 1922 following the Asia Minor catastrophe, but they continued their acting careers in Greece where they achieved fame and recognition. Two of these families of actors who relocated to Greece are the Veronis and Kotopoulis families. Ekaterini Veroni is considered one of the best Greek performers of the nineteenth century along with her sister Sophia and her brothers Dimitrios and Themistoklis. The first members of the Kotopoulis family to achieve recognition were the parents, Dimitrios and Eleni Kotopoulis, who paved the way for their four daughters—Antiope, Fotini, Chrysoula and Marika, the latter of

whom achieved real stardom. Another renowned Greek actress of the nineteenth century who relocated to Athens from Constantinople was Evangelia Paraskevopoulou (Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou 1994:327–361).

Greek and European drama, particularly melodramas and operettas, continued to flourish in Constantinople during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The watershed year for theatrical life in Constantinople was 1904 when Sarah Bernhardt arrived to perform. With the beginning of the First World War in 1914, events that precipitated the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the 1922 exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey also brought about the extinction of Greek community life and Greek theatrical activity in Asia Minor (Pezopoulou 2004).

### *Smyrna*

After Constantinople, the next major center for Greek theater in the Ottoman Empire was Smyrna (Izmir), the largest commercial seaport in Asia Minor. The geographical position of Smyrna combined a large port with a fertile hinterland, which attracted people of every nationality including Greeks, French, British, and Dutch, all of whom established communities that gave Smyrna its cosmopolitan character (Solomonidis 1954:16–21). It is for this reason that Smyrna's theatrical scene was largely founded on the activities of European amateur drama clubs at the end of the seventeenth century (Solomonidis 1954:9–15, 33–46). A group of European actors, known as the Group of Amateurs, began staging performances in 1824 at the Madamas Theater in the French neighborhood of Smyrna. Greeks took part in these performances and, in 1829, they staged the first public performance in Greek of Metastasio's *Artaxerxes*, (Solomonidis 1954:47–51).

In Smyrna, as in Constantinople, the Greek lyric theater enjoyed great popularity. The performances of operatic works provide evidence that Smyrna had a large and sophisticated audience that enjoyed this kind of theater. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the operas gave way to operettas which flourished along with another extremely popular type of musical performance, the revue.

The Efterpi, the first large theater of Smyrna, opened in 1841, thus inaugurating the beginning of frequent visits by touring theater companies from France and Italy to perform, most often melodramas. The first Greek-language production by an amateur drama society was staged in the Efterpi Theater in 1845, and the first mention of a show staged in Smyrna by a Greek touring company dates from the spring of 1866 when the Markezini-Delli Players headed by Dionysios Tavoularis arrived and performed in the city. In later years, the Efterpi Theater hosted produc-

tions by the touring Greek companies of Pantelis Soutsas, Dimosthenis Alexiadis, Michael Arniotakis, Nikolaos Lekatsas, Ekaterini Veroni, Nikolaos Kardovillis, Evangelia Paraskevopoulou, Dimitrios Kotopoulos, the New Stage Players of Konstantinos Christomanos, and others.

The vibrant theatrical life of Smyrna required additional spaces besides the Eferpi Theater to accommodate the growing number of performances by Greek and European theater companies. The Kamerano Theater opened in 1862 as did the Alhambra and Eldorado Theaters (both of which were open-air theaters). The Sporting Club Theater opened in 1894, the Havouza Theater in 1900, and the Gay Theater in 1909. Two of the last major theaters to open were the Splendid and Kremer. Besides these major venues, a host of smaller theaters operated in the various neighborhoods and suburbs of Smyrna.

In addition to the touring companies that performed in Smyrna, local amateur theater groups provided entertainment year round. The Greek community of the city supported numerous literary societies and theater associations from 1860 to 1922 and organized theatrical performances either for charitable purposes or to explore theater as a means of expressing artistic and ideological goals, such as the cultural rebirth of the enslaved Greek nation. Among the most frequently mentioned literary societies are the Omonoia Reading Society of Smyrna (1865), the Smyrna Drama Society (1870), the Shakespeare Drama Society of Smyrna (1905), and the Arts Society of Smyrna (1919).

The long-standing presence of Greek and foreign theater in Smyrna indicates the presence of a significantly large educated public that supported this art form. Apart from the audiences, a much smaller portion of this public was also contributing to the art of theater in Smyrna as actors. Among the best-known actors were Mitsos Murat (1878–1964), Kyveli Adrianou (1887–1978), and Yiorgos Glinos (1895–1966) (Solomonidis 1954:55–297). All three of them relocated to Greece when Smyrna was destroyed in 1922. Playwrights and translators of plays also played significant roles in the cultural and intellectual life of Smyrna. Writers like Ioannis Isidoridis Skylitsis, Fokion Voutsinas, Konstantinos Yakinthos, and Georgios Yperidis contributed substantially to increasing the repertoire of the theater companies, both with original plays and translations of European plays. Other playwrights specialized in writing revues. Among them were Evangelos Pantelidis, Christos Papazafiroopoulos, Sylvios Lailios Karakasis, Andreas Koutouvalis, and Nestoras Laskaris (Solomonidis 1954:297–327).

The blockade of the port of Smyrna by the allied forces of the Entente Cordiale during the First World War led to a thorough reorganization of the local Greek theater scene. Professional theater companies,



like the Arts Players of Smyrna, the Patriotic Players, and the Smyrna Musical Players, became more engaged in the political side of their art because of the war (Solomonidis 1954:226–264). The destruction of Smyrna in 1922 ended the life of the Greek community there and its century-long theatrical tradition.

### *Egypt*

In the early nineteenth century the small number of Greeks who lived in Egypt (no more than 5000) benefited from the French colonial rule and, subsequently, from a tolerant Egyptian regime. They focused their economic activity on trade and shipping and experienced remarkable growth and prosperity except during the Greek War of Independence. In 1841, for instance, Greeks accounted for one third of the total shipping in Alexandria. The number of Greeks in Alexandria grew and the Greek Community Association of Alexandria was established in 1843 (Soulogiannis 1994). Similar Greek community associations appeared in Cairo in 1856, Mansur in 1860, Port Said in 1865, and Suez in 1888 as well as in other towns such as Damati and Rosetti. These communities founded Greek schools such as the Tositsaia School in Alexandria, the Averof High School in Alexandria, and the Ambetios School in Cairo. They also built hospitals, churches, orphanages, and nursing homes for the elderly including the Benakis Orphanage in Alexandria and the St. Panteleimon Nursing Home for the elderly in Cairo. The dynamism, cohesion, and prosperity of the Greeks in Egypt led to the opening of their own post office in 1859 and a Greek bank in Alexandria in 1870.<sup>2</sup>

Alongside this remarkable economic growth, the middle-class Greeks of Egypt encouraged literary and artistic pursuits, facilitating the development of theatrical activities among others.<sup>3</sup> The first Greek stage productions in Egypt took place in December 1864 when the Dramatic Society from Greece visited Alexandria and performed, among other plays, two patriotic dramas by Ioannis Zambelios (*Markos Botsaris* and *Georgios Kastriotis*) and a one-act comedy (*Lieutenant Palavras*). Unfortunately, little is known about the composition of this theater company (Chatzipantazis 2002:555–557). In the winter of 1867–1868 the company of Dimosthenis Alexiadis traveled from Athens to Egypt and performed at the Zizinia Theater in Alexandria, the first known modern Greek theater in Egypt. The star of this company was Pipina Vonasera who was received enthusiastically by the Greek community of Alexandria (Chatzipantazis 2002:643–649). In 1873, the company of Ioannis Ramfos traveled to Egypt and performed for the Greek community (Chatzipantazis 2002:881–885). By 1880 the Greeks of Egypt had become a key audience

for touring companies from Athens among which were the Menandros Players in 1880–1881, the Demosthenis Alexiadis Players in 1886, and the companies of Veroni, Paraskevopoulou, and Pantopoulos.

Around this same time the number of Greek theaters in Alexandria began to grow. Among the best known were the Polythema (1892), the Eden (1892), the Antonis Momferratos (1893), the Kordahis (demolished in 1899), the Alcazar (1899–1903), the Paradeisos (renamed Palais Crystal in 1897), the Pavsilypon, the Faliron, the Pyramids (1899–1904), the Theater of the Danube, the Bakos (1904–1907), and the Moharebey, most of which were open-air structures. Other theaters included the Alhambra (1907), the Ris, the Luna Park (which became the center of theatrical life in Alexandria after 1917, hosting the shows of traveling theater companies from Athens each summer), the Grand Casino (1919), the Belle Vue (1919), the Lyon, the open-air Belvedere, the Concordia, the Olympia (which hosted the shows of the traveling theater company of Marika Kotopouli), the Elvetsia (closed within two years), the Casablanca, and Moasat, the last two of which were short-lived. In later years, the Mohamed Ali Theater, built on the site of the old Zizinia, booked the traveling companies of Vaso Manolidou, Mary Aroni, Katerina Andreadi, Emilios Veakis, Ellic Lambeti, Ioannis Pappas, and Dimitris Horn (Gialourakis 1967:505–510).

The repertoire of the Greek theater companies performing in Egypt during the nineteenth century was similar to that of similar companies in Constantinople and Smyrna. Notable plays performed in Egypt were Dimitrios Vernardakis's *Euphrosyni* (1886), Bellini's *Hypnobates* (*La Somnambula*), Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* (performed by Ioannis Karayannis's Hellenic Melodrama Players in 1889), Shakespeare's *Othello* (performed by Dionysios Tavoularis's Menandros Players in 1893), Spyridon Vasileiadis's *Galateia* (1894), and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (performed by Evangelia Paraskevopoulou's Theater Company in 1901) (Gouli 2004:49–50).

The twentieth century in Egypt began with a landmark performance of Aristophanes's *The Clouds*, translated into modern Greek by Georgios Souris who visited Egypt for the opening night in 1901 (Karmatzos 1974:13–22). The New Stage Company of Constantinos Christomanos performed in Egypt in 1902 as did the company of Smaragda Isaia who performed Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* (Karmatzos 1974:23–29). In 1907 the Hellenic Melodrama Company of Dimitrios Lavrangas staged *Kyra Frosyni* and *Markos Botsaris*. Many celebrities and their companies performed in Egypt: Christoforos Nezer with Kyveli (1911) and later with Emilios Veakis (1922), Nitsa Ralli (1917), Rosalia Nika (1919), Vasilios Argyropoulos (1924), as well as Costas Mousouris, Vasilis Logothetidis, and Katerina

Andreadi, among others. The National Theater of Greece performed at the Alambra Theater with a cast that included Eleni Papadaki, Katina Paxinou, Emilios Veakis, and Alexandros Minotis (Gouli 2004:56–59). During the Second World War, Greek theater in Egypt became even more active. Several local Greek companies, such as that of M. Dimitriou, set up drama schools. Dimitriou's Hellenic Players of Alexandria mounted plays throughout the war as did the companies of Kimon Sarolidis, Nikos Loris, and Mary Yannouli. Several professional companies from Greece also performed in Egypt during the war. Among these companies were those of Sofia Vempe, Adamantios Lemos, and Zaza Brilanti, all of whom were received warmly by the Greeks of Egypt whose sense of community was strengthened by the presence of the Greek government that had fled to Egypt during the occupation of Greece (Soulogiannis 2003:23). In the postwar years, the company of Karolos Koun performed in Alexandria (1949) and the company of Marika Kotopouli in 1951 as did other companies like those of Dimitris Horn and Mimis Fotopoulos.

Amateur theater companies sponsored by local drama societies also mounted plays that provided entertainment and food for thought for the Greeks of Egypt. The Société Artistique was a key sponsor of amateur drama performances and later, in 1924, the Muses Theater Society was especially active under the leadership of Georgios Oikonomidis, a teacher. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Aeschylus Theater and the Apollo Theater Societies took the lead and, in the aftermath of World War II, the key producer of plays was the Hellenic Society of Amateurs under the direction of Nikos Dougenis (Gialourakis 1967:525–526).

The highly active theater scene in Egypt inspired a number of authors to write plays. In the nineteenth century Maria Michanidou, one of the first female playwrights, wrote works that dramatized social issues. In the twentieth century Georgios Kitropoulos, Georgios Chrysavgis, and K. N. Konstantinidis all wrote plays of note. The plays of Evangelos Koletos, a prolific author, also deserve mention. The key writers of revues in Egypt during this period were Vasos Timios, Krinos de Kastro, Dimitris Kassarchis, Mikes Anatoleas, Yannis Halkeas, K. Romanos, George Kokkalis, Stavros Christoforidis, Charalambos Kasfikis, Antonios Plomaritis, and Andreas Palaiologos.

The theater of the Greeks in Egypt enjoyed a longer life than its counterparts in Constantinople and Smyrna and it was only after the events that took place on Black Saturday (26 January 1952) that the Greek theater in Egypt entered a period of decline. The last company from Athens to perform in Egypt was that of Dimitris Murat in 1960 after which the Greek community was, in essence, compelled to leave Egypt.

*Romania*

Much scholarly attention has been devoted to the contributions of the Greeks, especially the Phanariot Greeks, to the arts and letters of the Danube Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in the eighteenth century, especially in the years preceding the Greek War of Independence. Greek learning flourished in the courts of the Greek sovereigns, the Greek Academy of Bucharest (Saint-Savvas), and the Academy of Iasi, while printing houses published religious, scientific, and philological works for both the Greek and non-Greek reading publics (Papacostea-Danielopolu 1998). The background work of the Phanariot Greeks helped modern Greek theater grow in Iasi and Bucharest before the Greek War of Independence, and it encouraged writers, translators, and actors to devote themselves to the establishment of a Greek theater.

Greeks continued to lead the commercial and intellectual scene in Romania despite the heavy losses suffered by the Greek community there during the Greek War of Independence. Following the early efforts of Rallou Karatza, the Greek theater in Bucharest was led by Konstantinos Kyriakos Aristias. Rallou had spotted his talent and sent him to Paris in 1818 to study with the famous French actor François-Joseph Talma. Aristias was appointed to a teaching post at the Academy of Agios Savvas in 1827 where he taught acting, translated plays into Greek, and staged productions with his students. In 1833, in collaboration with a number of Romanian writers, he created the Philharmonic Society which set up a drama school, the first ever in the Balkans (Camariano-Cioran 1943:381-416; Puchner 1993:76). Although most theatrical activity was centered in Bucharest, the publication of numerous Greek newspapers and journals is testimony of the vibrant intellectual and cultural life in other Greek communities of Romania (Papacostea-Danielopolu 1969:315-325).

After the Treaty of Paris in 1856 and the rise of Romanian nationalism, the Greeks managed to benefit from the internationalization of shipping on the Danube and the Black Sea (Chassiotis 1993:84). The prospering Greeks of Romania showed a great interest in theater and invited many Greek companies to perform there. The first to visit Romania was that of Dionysios Tavoularis in 1859 right after an unsuccessful tour in Constantinople (Tavoularis 1930:62). The play, *Diakos*, was staged in the Belvedere Gardens of Bucharest in 1861 (Papacostea-Danielopolu 1969:330). Other Greek companies that performed in Bucharest include the Vasilios Andronopoulos Theater Company in 1868 and 1869 (Chatzipantazis 2002:640-641, 734), Themistoklis Veronis's Aristophanes Players in 1875 (Chatzipantazis 2002:966-967), the Menandros Players Company

in 1877 and 1899, the Dimosthenis Alexiadis Theater Company in 1879 and 1888, Emmanuel Lorandos's Sophocles Players in 1882 and 1898, and the theater company of Evangelia Paraskevopoulou in 1891, 1897, and 1899 (Papacostea-Danielopolu 1969:331–333). Similar activity was seen in Braila and Galati when a number of foreign plays with Greek topics were staged by the National Theater of Romania (Papacostea-Danielopolu 1969:487–488). Plays by Caragiale, the Romanian writer, were also produced (Papacostea-Danielopolu 1969:330–331), a testimony to the close interaction between the Greek and Romanian cultures (Kitromilidis and Tabaki 2004).

The theaters that staged these plays in Bucharest were the Theater of the Union Suisse Gardens and the Theater of the Buichard (or Belvedere) Gardens, the Hellenic Theater, and the Dacia Theater (Papacostea-Danielopolu 1969:330–331). In Constanza the Elpis Greek Cultural Society sponsored most of the theatrical activity and it commissioned the construction of a theater hall in 1898 designed by the French architect Piver (Papacostea-Danielopolu 1969:488).

### *Bulgaria*

The Greeks in the region that became Bulgaria were remnants of ancient and medieval Greek communities which endured five centuries of unremittingly harsh Ottoman administration. Their numbers dwindled and increased according to the flow of Greeks from other parts of the Ottoman Empire. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Greeks had shown themselves to be remarkably successful in trade and manufacturing and, under the protection of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, they achieved considerable economic strength that allowed them to build and run their own schools and establish Greek as the language of commerce and culture in that part of the world. The Treaty of Berlin (1878) that gave Bulgaria its independence from the Ottoman Empire also ensured the political, religious, and linguistic freedoms of ethnic minorities, like the Greeks, who had a long presence in that region predating the formation of the Bulgarian nation state. These freedoms enabled the Greeks in Bulgaria to reorganize and focus on their cultural pursuits (Apostolidis 1939:732–733).

After 1850 the middle-class Greeks in Philipoupolis, Varna, Pyrgos, Stenemachos, and Anchialos formed drama and music clubs to entertain themselves (Kotzageorgi 1996:91). They were able to enjoy professional theater performances after 1870 when traveling Greek companies that had performed in Constantinople and/or Romania, stopped in the cities of Bulgaria on their way back to Greece. Theatrical activity was also sup-

ported by amateur companies as well as by local schools and members of Greek literary societies (Kotzageorgi 1996:95).

Among the earliest Greek actors in Bulgaria was Vasilios Andronopoulos. He was professionally active after 1861, performing in the assembly hall of the Varna School for Girls in October of 1869 (Chatzipantazis 2002:733, 736–737). Another touring Greek company (whose name does not appear on the record) performed at the same school in December of 1871 (Chatzipantazis 2002:770–771) and in January of 1872 (Kotzageorgi 1996:96). The company of Ioannis Vasilciadis performed in the assembly hall of the Philipopolis Hellenic School for Girls in January of 1873 and in the autumn of 1873 the Orpheus Theater Company of Georgios Petridis performed at the facility of the Hellenic Society of Friends of the Arts (Chatzipantazis 2002:868–869, 902–903).

In the winter of 1880, two years after Bulgaria had become an independent state, the Greek community of Philipopolis hosted 25 performances by the Thespis Theater Company at the Greek-run Apollo Theater. In the autumn of the following year the Thespis Theater Company of Vasilios Andronopoulos performed at the International Theater of Philipopolis. Eight years later, in March of 1889, Spyridon Sfikas's Theater Company performed Spyridon Vasileiadis's *Galatea* in Philipopolis. Evangelia Paraskevopoulou, the leading actress of the company who played the role of Galatea, particularly impressed Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria. The company of Konstantinos Pervelis performed the play at the Luxembourg Theater in April of 1889 and again in 1892. Lalaounis's company performed it in Philipopolis with Evangelia Paraskevopoulou in the lead role in 1894. The company of Georgios Petridis performed in the same city in 1895 as did Ekaterini Veroni's company. Likewise, the company of Nikolaos Paraskevopoulos and the Menandros Theater of Dionysios Tavoularis performed there in 1899. The last Greek theater company to perform in Bulgaria was that of Nikolaos Kardovillis in 1901 (Sideris 1965:1230–1237; Gouli 2003:15–17). Other theaters in Philipopolis were the Alkazar and the Theater of the Gardens of the Czar Symeon, both of which were open-air affairs.

Greek drama societies in Bulgaria that supported local amateur theatrical performances included the Sophocles Drama Society in Philipopolis, the Theater Group in Varna, the Society of the Friends of the Arts in Philipopolis, the Philharmonic Association in Varna, the Hellenic Philharmonic Society in Stenemachos, the League of Friends in Pyrgos, and the Hellenic Friends of Advancement Society in Anchialos. Performances staged by these societies were either in the assembly halls of Greek schools or the town halls of the Greek communities and were invariably intended to raise funds for charities (Kotzageorgi 1996:102, 108).

Both professional and amateur theatrical activity entertained the Greeks in Bulgaria, but also helped them to bond culturally. The performances of Greek plays served to foster an ethnic self-awareness that raised the suspicions of Bulgarian governments, and Bulgarian authorities sought to obstruct Greek theatrical activities on several occasions (Kotzageorgi 1996:91). In 1905, for instance, the Christoforidi-Kokkou theater company was banned by the prefect and mayor of Pyrgos after which members of the company fled to Romania where they were arrested and imprisoned (Kotzageorgi 1996:102).

To conclude: the theater of the Greeks in southeastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean reflected the historical predicament of the Greek communities in these regions. Greek theater eventually disappeared in Constantinople, Smyrna, Romania, Bulgaria, and even Egypt before it emerged in the United States of America, Australia, Canada, and Western Europe where hundreds of thousands of Greeks immigrated during the twentieth century, especially after the prosperous Greek communities around the Mediterranean were destroyed or went into deep decline (Clogg 2004:23–59). It was in these countries, outside Greece, that the causes of Hellenism were taken up. But the nature of this theater was forever changed, from being the theater of the Greek merchant class intended for the leisure of its polite society and cosmopolitan audience to the theater of Greek immigrants who expressed their pain of separation, their grief for the lost homeland, their nostalgia for the old ways of life, their anxiety about survival in their new country, and their alienation. The study of this theater is certainly worth pursuing in order to complete the picture of Greek culture beyond Greece proper for this key period in the history of the Greek diaspora (Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou 2004:381–385). A part of this picture is also the Greek theatrical activity in Russia where Greeks, since the time of Peter the Great, created Greek communities in Mariupol, Odessa, Kherson, Taganrog, and other towns and villages in southern Russia and the coastline of the Azov Sea. Closely associated with these communities in the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth centuries were the Greek communities of the Pontos region, mainly Caucasia, Georgia, and Armenia (Chasiotis 1993:56–58). The theaters of the Russian and Pontian Greeks deserve a lengthy separate treatment that cannot be undertaken here (Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou 2004:380–381, n. 33).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Λχοῦρι (Stable) (1692), Κωμωδία των αληθῶν συμβάντων (A Comedy of True Events), Αυξεντιανός ο μεταννημένος (Afxentianos the Repentant), Αλεξανδροβόδδας ο ασυνείδητος (Alexandroudas the Unscrupulous) (1785), Το σαρανάκι της τρέλλας (The Roasting Pan of Folly), Ο χαρακτήρ της Βλαχίας (The Character of Idiocy), Η νέα κωμωδία της Βλαχίας (The New Comedy of Idiocy), and others.*

<sup>2</sup> Of the extensive literature on the Greeks of Egypt, I mention here two important works: Soulogiannis (2000) and Chatzifotis (2000). These studies contain bibliographies of all the literature on the subject prior to 2000.

<sup>3</sup> The relevant literature on the subject is very substantial. Four key works are Manolis Gialourakis (1962), I. M. Chatzifotis (1967a; 1967b), and Ίδρυμα Ελληνικού Πολιτισμού (1997).

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