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Classical Reception in Early Modern Festivals

Edited by Francesca Bortoletti, Giovanna Di Martino,
and Eugenio Refini

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Christopher Jotischky*

Roman Theatre in Greek, Greek Theatre in Italian: Dramatic Performance as a Vehicle of Latin-Greek Contact in the Early Modern Ionian Islands[1]

Abstract

Theatre in the early modern Ionian Islands was predicated on the mixing of elite Italian-speakers and non-elite Greek-speakers during carnival festival performances and other annual celebrations. The position of the islands as a Venetian territory meant that they developed a theatrical infrastructure in the style of Western Europe during the eighteenth century. Roman antiquity carried a greater cultural capital for local elites than elsewhere in Greece because of Latin's prime position as a classical language in Western European education. Furthermore, the importance of Roman comedy and tragedy to playwrights such as Molière, Diderot, Goldoni, and Shakespeare influenced Ionian theatrical tastes. Although classical Greek drama may have been performed, this was often in Italian translation for the benefit of the local Venetian authorities, while Greek-language adaptations of Roman plays are also documented. A consideration of three such productions from Zakynthos (1571, 1820s) and Kefalonia (1732) demonstrates educated local translators' investment in the Roman legacy as a mark of European cultural identity, and their concurrent desire that Latin drama be accessible to Greek-speaking audiences. It also shows that Greek-speaking Ionian audiences did not automatically view the dramatic legacy of Ancient Greece as their rightful or sole theatrical inheritance, contrary to how theatrical life would develop in the nineteenth-century Kingdom of Greece.

Keywords: classical reception; modern Greek theatre; translation; Ionian Islands; Venetian Empire

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1. Introduction

The Ionian Islands (Επτάνησα) off the west and south coasts of Greece have a theatrical history distinct from the rest of the post-Byzantine Greek-speaking world as a result of their lengthy colonial rule by the Venetian Republic during the late-medieval and early modern periods. The greater cultural connectivity (relative to the rest of Greece) of the Ionian Islands with Western Europe meant that the theatrical achievements of post-Renaissance Italy, France, Spain, Britain, and Germany had a stronger presence within this region, and therefore acted to shape local dramatists' and audiences' tastes (as attested in Matesis 2011, 1). Major European playwrights, such as Molière (1622-1673), Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793), and Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais (1732-1799), achieved earlier recognition in the Ionian Islands than in the rest of Greece because of the close links between the islands' theatrical culture and that of Venice, and consequently the rest of the Italian peninsula (Puchner 1999, 222; Pefanis 2003, 15-17). The Ionian Islands were also exposed much earlier than the rest of Greece to newly developed theatrical forms such as Italian opera; indeed, the earliest recorded operatic performance in Greece took place on Corfu in 1733 (Mavromoustakos 1995, 157; Kardamis 2004, 2n2). These Western European influences were joined by local playwrights to the dramatic inheritance of sixteenth-century Crete and, more distantly, of the Byzantine Empire, in their works (Puchner 1999, 223), which were often staged in festival contexts such as the pre-Lenten carnival, since, of the seven islands, only Corfu and Zakynthos had permanent theatres before 1800 (Fessas-Emmanouil 1989, 55, 78; Pefanis 2003, 39-40).

Classical reception in early modern Ionian theatre is a response to the linguistic and educational effects of this unique Greek-Italian cultural hybridity. The islands were effectively bilingual during the early modern period, with Greek spoken by almost everyone as a native language, but Venetian-influenced Italian used publicly by most elite and middle-class individuals (Mackridge 2009, 39). Educationally, elite Ionian culture was closely aligned with upper-class Venice, especially since so many aristocratic Ionian males went on to matriculate at the nearby University of Padua. Because of this situation, while a classical education in the rest of the Greek-speaking world centred around the religiously dictated need to read the Bible, the Church Fathers, and classical Greek and Neoplatonist philosophy in the original, Ionian males were exposed to a somewhat different set of educational assumptions, including, uniquely in the Greek world, the centrality of Latin as a classical language of equal importance to Ancient Greek (Beaton 1999, 29). Therefore, early modern Ionian dramatists, when reaching for classical precedents for their plays, were likely to draw inspiration from Roman comic and tragic traditions as well as from the

Ancient Greek theatrical inheritance, without placing any special emphasis on the latter because of a perceived cultural kinship between ancient and modern Greek-speakers.

As Konstantina Zanou has shown, the mixture of overlapping cultural influences at play in the region during the early modern period led to the development of what she terms a 'transnational' Ionian identity which was neither fully Greek nor fully Venetian/Italian in the sense that either term would come to signify by the nineteenth century (2018, 6; see 13-15 for a brief overview of the early modern history of the Ionian Islands). Building on her important work, I argue in this article that the early modern Ionian dramatic tradition, and especially those elements of it which engage with classical reception, was the product of this same Greek-Italian cultural hybridity. The educated latinity of Ionian islanders, combined with their ready identification with the intellectual traditions of Latin-influenced Western Europe, meant that they felt no special need to ground their dramatic productions in the legacy of Ancient Greece to the exclusion of other elements. Similarly, they perceived no intellectual difficulty in incorporating Roman theatre into their dramatic repertoire, despite the strident claims which began to emerge from elsewhere in the Greek-speaking world during the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that drama was somehow proprietary Greek material, since the European dramatic tradition had developed in Ancient Greece.

To demonstrate how easily ancient Greek dramatic traditions were shorn of perceived Hellenic specificity and their Roman equivalents were domesticated within the region between the late sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I focus here on three case studies of actual productions or texts drawn from two islands: a reported performance in Italian translation of Aeschylus's *Persae* on Zakynthos in 1571; a fragment of a translation into vernacular Greek of Seneca's *Troades* from Kefalonia (1732); and the translation of Terence's *Hecyra* into vernacular Greek completed on Zakynthos in the 1820s by Antonios Matesis (1794-1875). These examples are then followed by a consideration of how the burgeoning movement for Greek independence began to change perceptions within the Greek-speaking world of the Greekness of the dramatic tradition during the early decades of the nineteenth century, undermining centuries-old Ionian traditions of theatrical interconnectivity with Western Europe.

2. Aeschylus's *Persae* (Zakynthos, 1571)

Although the tragic theatre of classical Athens does appear to have occupied a foothold in the local dramatic repertoire, this did not necessarily carry the assumption that early modern Ionians, as speakers of Greek, enjoyed an automatic association with or monopoly over this performance legacy. A festival production of Aeschylus's *Persae* on Zakynthos celebrating the Venetian victory over the Ottomans at the Battle of Lepanto (7 October 1571) is described in an essay written in 1895 by Spyridon De Viazis (1849-1927), in which he notes that the play was put on in Italian translation, with a cast of young nobles (qtd in Evangelatos 1970, 15-16). This event also happens to be one of the earliest documented theatrical performances in the Ionian Islands.

The historical truth of the performance is difficult to confirm, because De Viazis's rather generic claim to have found the relevant evidence in an old court archive has proved impossible for subsequent researchers to corroborate in the wake of the earthquake which struck Zakynthos on 12 August 1953, destroying many of its historic structures and archival holdings (Pylarinos 2003, 251; Zanou 2018, 29). No contemporary Italian translation of Aeschylus's play is known to exist (Puchner 1999, 226); nevertheless, one translation, the 'mediocre' prose version of Sanravius, printed in Basel in 1555, did exist in Latin by 1571, and it is conceivable that this could have been used as the basis of an Italian performing version (Mund-Dopchie 1984, 88). The Italian version of the play performed need not have been based on a published translation at all: it could, like Antonios Matesis's translation of Terence's *Hecyra* 250 years later, have been written down in a notebook without ever achieving publication. The play could also have been translated as a school exercise: Ionian students such as Matesis are documented translating Latin texts into Italian in the early nineteenth century (see Pylarinos 2002 for an example), and similar activities putting classical texts into Italian could have been carried out in earlier centuries.

Of primary interest here is less the historical reality of the performance than De Viazis's belief that such a production could have taken place, and under such linguistic circumstances, according to his understanding of the sixteenth-century cultural life of his native island. De Viazis was born half a century after the collapse of Venetian control over the Ionian Islands in 1797, but he was three years old before the official language of the British protectorate of the Ionian Islands changed from Italian to Greek in 1852 (Gekas 2017, 24; Mackridge 2014, 68). The honorific nature of the *Persae* performance would suggest the presence of Venetian officials; an Italian-language translation could have been selected to accommodate Venetian colonial administrators, or to demonstrate to such authorities the thoroughly Venetian identity of the island. In fact, a classical Greek drama such as the *Persae* would almost certainly have been chosen for performance because of the imagined similarities between the Ottoman defeat at Lepanto and the Persian defeat at Salamis depicted in the play. Furthermore, although the supposed date of the *Persae* production, 1571, would situate it only a few years before the heyday of the theatre of the so-called Cretan Renaissance and the vernacular dramas of Georgios Hortatsis (fl.1576-96), the concurrent popularity of vernacular performances in other parts of the Greek-speaking world does not necessarily mean that classical tragedy would automatically have been performed in a vernacular Greek translation. Hortatsis's plays are not based directly on classical originals, and there is no evidence that a thriving tradition of translating classical Greek drama into vernacular Greek existed at all during the period.

Whether or not this performance took place as a matter of historical record, therefore, the linguistic contortion of performing a tragedy by Aeschylus in Italian translation on a Greek island is a plausible result of the cultural interconnectivity between the Ionian Islands and the Italian-speaking world during the period. Audiences who spoke Greek as their native language, as the majority of sixteenth-century Zakynthians did, need not have regarded classical Greek tragedy, a form which has no direct parallel in surviving Greek-language theatre of the period, as proprietary material with which they, as Greek-speakers, enjoyed a privileged relationship. The performance of *Persae* in 1571 thus represents both the early modern Ionian theatre's embrace of vernacular translations of ancient drama and the bilingual theatrical life which was a hallmark of the islands' dramatic traditions under Venetian rule. The performance's uncertain historical veracity means that our ability to assess important factors such as the extent to which Aeschylus's tragedy had been domesticated into contemporary Venetian theatrical practice, or the linguistic accessibility of the Italian translation itself, is severely curtailed. Nevertheless, the readiness with which nineteenth-century local historians accepted that the performance had indeed taken place demonstrates that, in the early modern Ionian Islands, Ancient Greek drama does not appear to have been integrated into a vernacular Greek theatrical paradigm, and was therefore just as much the intellectual property of the Venetian authorities as of their Greek subjects. As we shall see below, the Roman dramatic tradition seems to have benefited from a wider Ionian audience than might otherwise be expected due to this lack of a sense of national ownership of particular ancient theatrical legacies.

3. Seneca's *Troades* (Kefalonia, 1732)

A highly mysterious fragment from Kefalonia, dated to 1732 and apparently the opening of a vernacular Greek translation of Seneca's *Troades* (*Trojan Women*), is preserved in the first volume of an anthology of texts from that island compiled by Ilias Tsitselis (1904, 19; see Evangelatos 1970, 95-7, for the surviving fragments and brief discussion). As Spyros Evangelatos, the only modern scholar to treat the fragment in full, explains, Tsitselis's failure to elaborate on his own sources means that we cannot trace the verses' provenance further back than the latter's anthology (1970, 96), but their language and style are in accordance with that of early modern Ionian theatre in Greek. This anonymous translation can tentatively be linked to the Kefalonian dramatist Petros Katsaïtis (c.1660/1665-c.1737/1742), whose classically inspired tragicomedies *Iphigenia* (Ιφιγένεια, 1720) and *Thyestes* (Θυέστης, 1721), were both composed on the island and held an important place in the Ionian Greek-language theatrical repertoire during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There is, however, very little firm evidence to support Katsaïtis as the author of the fragment other than a similar geographical provenance and stylistic overlap.

Whoever was responsible for this translation of Seneca, its very existence reveals that the Roman dramatic tradition held a place in the rich mixture of influences operating within the Ionian theatrical world during the early modern period. The eight lines of surviving text reverse the direction of linguistic and cultural travel of the performance of *Persae* in 1571. While the sixteenth-century performance supposedly featured a classical Greek tragedy put into the language of the islands' Venetian rulers, the present translation apparently brought Seneca's Latin-language original into the linguistic register and metre that had developed under the theatre of the Cretan Renaissance and was the most frequent vehicle for Greek-language Ionian drama during the early modern period, although the loss of the translation itself does not allow us to argue this with absolute certainty.

The eight verses of the fragment are not part of Seneca's play, but form an introduction to the translation. I quote them here in Greek to emphasize their vernacular nature:

Η τραγωδία Τρωάδες είναι ωνομασμένη
του σοφωτάτου Σένεκα λατινοσυνθεμένη
και εσυντέθη νεωστί εις την πεζή τη φράσι
σε στίχους από λόγου μου, πούχα την μεταφράσει
εις το νησί του Κέφαλου, στου Πάλιου τα μέρη.
Το όνομά μου 'πιθυμώ, τινάς να μην το ξέρη,
Στα χίλια εφτακόσια τριάντα δύο έτη,
εκ της επανθρωπήσεως Χριστού του ευεργέτη.
(Evangelatos 1970, 95-6)[21]

[The tragedy is named *Trojan Women*, composed in Latin by the most learned Seneca, and it has been composed anew in our common speech in verses of my own; I translated it on the island of Kefalonia, in the region of Palio. I

---

[2] All translations are mine.

> desire that no one know my name. In the year one thousand seven hundred and thirty two after the incarnation of Christ our benefactor.]

Two points should be made here. First, the verses of the translation were in the decapentasyllabic metre typically employed in Cretan theatre, not the *senarii* used by Seneca for the dialogue of the original. No precedent for the Latin metre, or for the iambic trimeter of Greek tragic dialogue, exists in Modern Greek poetry, which is constructed around stress rather than syllabic length, and so a direct imitation of either Seneca's metrical practices or those of Attic tragedy would presumably have sounded out of place to the translation's intended audience. A further similarity with the poetry of the Cretan Renaissance is the (classically inflected) use of a *sphragis* in which the author claims ownership of the work, although the best-known Cretan example of this device, a passage at the end of the epic poem *Erotokritos* (Ο Ερωτόκριτος) by Vitsenzos Kornaros (1553-1613/14), is not anonymous: indeed, Kornaros explicitly states that he "do[es] not want to hide" his identity ("δε θέ' να κουρφευτώ", 4.1533; text from Kornaros 2016), the precise opposite of our translator here.

Second, we must ask why the translator would have deemed such an introduction to be necessary at all. Seneca's original contains no such section, but an explanatory prologue is commonplace in both tragic and comic spoken theatre and Italian opera of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and early modern translators of ancient dramatic texts often included such sections in imitation of ancient comic practice, suggesting that the translator was familiar with the theatrical traditions of the early modern Italian peninsula. The surviving verses assume that not just the translation, but also the playwright (Seneca) and his language (Latin) are unfamiliar to the intended audience, which in turn implies that this was composed of non-elite spectators who had not been exposed to Seneca and his tragedies as part of their education, while the vernacular Greek nature of the translation would have ensured the play's accessibility to the widest possible cross-section of contemporary Kefalonian society.

Despite the loss of the translation itself, we have, in addition to the eight introductory verses quoted above, a prose hypothesis for the play, written in a much more archaizing register:

> Μετὰ τοῦ Ἰλίου πόρθησιν οἱ Ἕλληνες ἐκληρώσαντο τὰς αἰχμαλωτίδας τῶν γυναικῶν: τοῖς γὰρ ἐν ἀξιώμασιν ἔδωκαν, Ἀγαμέμνονι Κασσάνδραν, Ἀνδρομάχην Νεοπτολέμῳ, Πολυξένην δ᾽ Ἀχιλλεῖ: ταύτην μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ τοῦ τάφου ἔσφαξαν, Ἀστυάνακτα δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν τειχῶν ἔρριψαν. Ἑκάβη δὲ τῆς μὲν Ἑλένης κατηγορήσασα, τοὺς ἀναιρεθέντας δὲ κατοδυρομένη τε καὶ

> θρηνήσασα, πρὸς τὰς τοῦ Ὀδυσσέως ἤχθη σκηνάς, τούτῳ λατρεύειν δοθεῖσα. (Evangelatos 1970, 95-6)[32]
>
> [After the sack of Troy, the Greeks assigned the female captives [to masters]. They were allotted according to rank, Cassandra to Agamemnon, Andromache to Neoptolemus, Polyxena to Achilles. This last they slaughtered over the tomb [of Patroclus], while they threw Astyanax from the city walls. Hecuba, making accusations against Helen and lamenting and mourning the slain men, was dragged off to the tents of Odysseus, since she had been given to him to serve.]

The content of this summary of events leading up to the play's action appears unremarkable to a classically trained reader, but only because it echoes the language and style of the prose hypotheses frequently attached to classical Greek tragedies in the manuscript tradition. What it demonstrates, however, is that the translator (assuming that the hypothesis and the introductory verses are the work of the same person) reserved different registers of the Greek language for different purposes: vernacular Greek for the translation itself, and an archaizing discourse more customary in Greek prose of the time in other contexts. Indeed, this hypothesis shows that the translator was aware of the conventions surrounding the presentation of a classical Greek tragedy, and of the appropriate linguistic register for such a summary; Seneca's Roman tragedy is therefore packaged here for a contemporary Greek audience in the same trappings as a tragedy from fifth-century BCE Athens.

Why would an eighteenth-century Greek translator be interested in a Senecan tragedy when a Euripidean tragedy with the same title already existed in Ancient Greek? As we have already seen, classical Athenian tragedy does appear to have occupied a toehold in the region's theatrical repertoire under Venetian rule, but, as I argued above, this need not indicate that Ionian speakers of Greek imagined themselves to enjoy a privileged relationship with the form. Although Euripides was popular in early modern Europe, Seneca's influence on Renaissance and later dramatic traditions, including in Italy, was also strong (Citti 2015; Mayer 2015; see Capirossi 2020 on the reception of Seneca in the early modern Italian cultural zone). Seneca's *Troades* is not simply a Latin retelling of Euripides's tragedy of the same name, but combines the subject matter of Euripides's play with that of his *Hecuba*, adding a healthy dose of Stoic philosophy for good measure; translating Seneca, rather than Euripides, would have yielded a very different

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[3] Archaizing features include the use of the dative case (ἀξιώμασιν, Ἀγαμέμνονι, Νεοπτολέμῳ, Αχιλλεῖ, τούτῳ); inflected aorist participles, both active and passive (κατηγορήσασα, ἀναιρεθέντας, θρηνήσασα, δοθεῖσα); the verbal infinitive (λατρεύειν); and the (not especially idiomatic) use of conjunctive particles (γάρ, μέν, δέ, οὖν). None of these features is found in spoken Modern Greek.

dramatic product. The translator has therefore engaged in a complex process informed, on the one hand, by Seneca's importance as a literary figure in the contemporary Western European dramatic tradition, and, on the other, by the desire to make Seneca's *Troades* appear as comprehensible as possible to an eighteenth-century Kefalonian audience. Seneca's text was presumably selected for translation because it was deemed to be a significant part of the dramatic repertoire which should be available to Greek-speakers. But the translator has then tried to contextualize Seneca's tragedy within two distinct Greek dramatic legacies: the Cretan Renaissance theatre, which appears to have dictated the metre of the translation itself; and, with the hypothesis, the manuscript traditions of classical tragedy. The result is a hybrid product which could only have emerged from the early modern Ionian world.

We cannot know if this translation was ever performed in public; if it was, it would provide compelling evidence for a popular reception of classical drama within the eighteenth-century Ionian Islands. Its very existence, however, does demonstrate that at least some educated individuals in the region were interested in widening the bounds within which appreciation of classical drama customarily operated. A vernacular Greek translation of Seneca's Latin play required of its audience neither a classical education nor a knowledge of Italian, rendering the piece suitable for performance in a public context such as a religious or civic festival, where the spectators might plausibly have been drawn from all ranks of society. Behind this enigmatic fragment therefore lies one of the earliest recorded attempts from the post-Byzantine Greek-speaking world to promote popular access to masterpieces of classical literature, both Ancient Greek and Roman, which is a direct result of the cultural hybridity of early modern Ionian theatre.

4. Terence's *Hecyra* (Zakynthos, 1820s)

Our final case study brings us back to Zakynthos, and to the dawn of Greece's modern era of national independence. Antonios Matesis is best known today for his comedy *The Pot of Basil* (Ο βασιλικός), first performed in 1832, but before completing this work he had, at some point in the 1820s, prepared a vernacular Greek translation of Terence's *Hecyra*. This translation apparently never received a public performance, and was published in full only in 2009 (Pylarinos 2009), but it represents a vital landmark in the Ionian reception of classical drama because of its chronological coincidence with the struggle for Greek independence and its demonstrable legacy as an inspiration for Matesis's own *Pot of Basil* (see Jotischky 2023 for an assessment of the relationship between the two plays).

Roman comedy largely drew its plot material from the (now mostly lost) New Comedy of fourth-century BCE Athens, and was therefore not generally highly regarded in the Greece of Matesis's lifetime (Jotischky 2024, 75). Adamantios Koraïs (1748-1833), probably the most significant Greek classical scholar of the early nineteenth century, complained that Plautus and Terence had done little other than 'imitate and translate the Greek comic writers' (να μιμώνται και να μεταφράζωσι τους Έλληνας κωμικούς; 1988, 159n3), while Stefanos Koumanoudis (1818-1899), Professor of Latin Philology at the University of Athens between 1846 and 1886, acknowledged the importance of Roman comedy, but only as a vehicle for preserving otherwise lost Greek-language works (1849, 245). Nevertheless, the plays of Terence in particular were held in high regard in much of the rest of Europe during the early modern period, and were frequently used as school texts (Delcourt 1934, 8-10; Kes 1988, 19; Barsby 2013, 447). *Hecyra* had attracted the interest of major dramatic figures such as Denis Diderot (1713-1784), serving as a crucial inspiration for his *Le Fils naturel* (1757), and it is likely that Matesis selected the play for translation as a result of its importance in the theatrical traditions of Western Europe, which, as we have seen, were a central driving force behind elite Ionian dramatic productions during the period (Jotischky 2023, 326).

Like his friend Dionysios Solomos (1798-1857), Matesis had begun his literary career writing poetry in Italian, before switching decisively to Greek during the 1820s, almost certainly motivated by a desire to play a part in the ongoing process of the formation of a Modern Greek literary canon during the decade in which the creation of an independent Greek state was becoming a realistic prospect. As his other writings from the period, such as his "Treatise on Language" (Πραγματεία περί γλώσσης, 1824), an essay arguing against the use of archaizing registers in Modern Greek, demonstrate, Matesis's Ionian geographic context was wedded to an outlook which incorporated the wider Greek-speaking world in discussions of literature and language. The accessibility of Matesis's translation of *Hecyra*, which is in vernacular prose (albeit with many Zakynthian dialectal features) and features clear indicators, such as stage directions (missing from the Latin original), that Matesis intended the work for performance, speaks to the public nature of his ambitions for the Greek reception of Roman drama, as does his later use of plot material from *Hecyra* in a comedy of his own.

Terence's Roman comedy is domesticated effectively for a Greek-speaking audience. Vernacular Greek filler expressions such as τέλος πάντων ("anyway"), intended to convey the tone of a particular remark, are inserted liberally into Terence's dialogue. Certain passages are altered to incorporate Greek ideas familiar to Matesis's contemporaries, such as Haros, the personification of death derived from the ancient Charon, the ferryman who brings souls to the underworld (*Hec.*422; Pylarinos 2009, 517), or to substitute concepts such as the Roman name for the underworld, Orcus, with the more Greek-sounding Hades (*Hec.*852; Pylarinos 2009, 527). Terence is packaged for Matesis's Greek-speaking contemporaries not as a Latin playwright who draws inspiration from fourth-century BCE Greek New Comic plots (Apollodorus of Carystus's now lost *Penthera*, in the case of the current play; see Lefèvre 1999; Brown 2013, 20), but as a timeless writer whose comedy is totally effective in a vernacular register of the Greek language; in other words, his antiquity and use of Greek models are downplayed in favour of his part in Matesis's vision of a Modern Greek theatre which comfortably incorporates all manner of dramatic influences, including Roman.

Matesis's interest in translating Terence into vernacular Greek emerges from a dual impulse: to shape theatrical culture in the emerging Greek nation by bringing it in line with the tradition represented by the inheritance of Roman comedy which had been so influential in previous centuries to playwrights already canonical in the Ionian Islands, such as Molière, Goldoni, and Diderot; and to ensure that Greek-speaking audiences' access to classical drama was not dependent on their level of education, a goal apparently shared with the anonymous Seneca translator a century before. To these broader ambitions might be added a more local imperative: the increased need for Greek-language theatrical productions on Zakynthos following a petition in 1806 from the islands' citizens to its government for more performances in Greek (rather than Italian) (Fessas-Emmanouil 1989, 78). Matesis's Terence translation therefore represents not the beginning of a movement to classicize theatre in nineteenth-century Greece as a whole so much as the end of a long-standing Ionian tradition of absorbing non-Greek influences into the local vernacular dramatic repertoire, and a response to local concerns about the dominance of Italian-language theatre on an island where Italian was understood only by those at the top of the social ladder.

5. Conclusion: the Invention of Theatrical Greekness

The running theme throughout each of the cases we have examined here has been a lack of assumed ownership of the theatrical traditions of Ancient Greece by early modern Ionians, which went hand in hand with an openness to non-Greek – including Roman – dramatic influences. I have explained this largely through the islands' position as a bridge between Greece and Western Europe, occasioned by their history, unique in Greece, as long-term colonies of a Western European, not a Middle Eastern, power during the early modern period. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, however, an important shift of attitudes took place in the wider Greek world which would alter this Ionian theatrical distinctiveness.

The idea of Ancient Greece as the cultural progenitor of modern Europe was firmly established by the middle of the eighteenth century in Western European intellectual centres, but the involvement of contemporary Greeks in this process was initially minimal (Gourgouris 2021, 72, 134). As nationalist ideas became more firmly embedded in the Greek cultural sphere through the thought of revolutionary intellectuals such as the aforementioned Koraïs or Rigas Velestinlis (1757-1798), the perceived glories of Greek antiquity were increasingly adopted by such figures as a powerful signifier of the emerging Modern Greek nation and as a means to exploit Western interest in Ancient Greece in the service of the liberation of Modern Greece (Herzfeld 1986, 20). This Greek assumption of the classical legacy was expressed in literature through an increased rhetoric of Modern Greek ownership over forms originally developed in Greek antiquity. As we have seen, this situation was the opposite of that which pertained in the early modern Ionian theatrical world, which was comfortable domesticating non-Greek dramatic traditions without asserting Greek ownership over them.

Perhaps the most telling indication of a shift of attitudes in the wider Greek world towards the Hellenic nature of drama comes through the words of Matesis's contemporary Mitio Sakellariou (*née* Megdani; 1789-after 1863), whose translation of two plays of Carlo Goldoni was published in Vienna in 1818 (see most recently Papalexopoulou 2021, 6-7; also, Puchner 2001). Sakellariou's translation is accompanied by a preface directed to her "kind female readers" (τας ευμενείς αναγινωσκούσας) which is particularly revealing in its approach to the originality of Greek theatre. In arguing for the social good provided by drama, Sakellariou states that the theatre is the "noblest diffusion" (η ευγενεστέρα διάχυσις) emanating from every European nation (1818, η´), thus appealing to the international nature of the art form; she has no doubt, however, that drama is in origin a Greek phenomenon that "our wise ancestors first introduced" (πρώτοι οι σοφοί πρόγονοί μας εισήγαγον; η´-θ´), with the rest of Europe simply following suit.

The claim to Greek dramatic exceptionalism espoused by Sakellariou is indicative of the paradox within which intellectual supporters of Greek nationalism found themselves during the period. Despite the Western philhellenic conviction that Greece was the origin of European civilization, contemporary writers in Greek were mostly reliant on Western European formal models within their own works, resulting in a large number of translations into Greek during the period: Sakellariou's version of Goldoni represents just two of the sixty-five known Greek translations of plays recorded between 1791 and 1821 (Constantinidis 1987, 16). Faced with the numerical superiority and more advanced stage of development of such literary genres outside of Greece than within it, nationalist-minded Greek intellectuals resorted to the argument that, even if they were forced to draw their immediate inspiration from some other literary tradition, all of European letters was ultimately a copy of those of Greek antiquity, and contemporary Greece could thus lay claim to all written modes of expression to be found within modern Europe.

Throughout this study, we have seen that, in the Ionian Islands, whose geopolitical trajectory was distinct from the rest of the Greek-speaking world during this period, as it would continue to be until 1864, the necessity of borrowing ideas from Western Europe to construct a Modern Greek literary and theatrical reality carried no such anxieties. Instead, the local interplay between Greek and non-Greek theatrical traditions points to an environment whose literary figures acknowledged how strongly intertwined their theatrical culture was with that of Western Europe, without feeling the need to assert their own tradition's chronological supremacy. The apparent linguistic illogicalities of Greek-speaking audiences translating Ancient Greek drama into Italian represented by the *Persae* production of 1571 are in fact easily explained by the need to accommodate an Italian-speaking audience of Venetian administrators, the lack of a strong sense of identification with the Ancient Greek past in the region during the period in question, and by the apparent absence of a local tradition of performing Greek tragedy in a vernacular translation which would have been comprehensible to Greek-speaking spectators. Concurrently, the Greek versions of Seneca and Terence we have discussed do not represent an attempt to reappropriate Greek plot lines originally appropriated for the Roman theatre so much as a desire on the part of Ionian intellectuals to create accessible Greek-language versions of theatrical masterpieces written in a language most of their fellow Ionians could not understand. With the culmination of Greek nation-building efforts in the nineteenth century, the resulting focus on the Ancient Greek dramatic legacy, evident in the writings of figures like Mitio Sakellariou, began to undermine the Ionian sense that theatrical appropriation from Western European traditions was a natural, or even desirable, process for Modern Greeks. The true role of a Greek-speaking intellectual began to be cast as emphasizing the importance of the Ancient Greek past as the root of the Modern Greek nation; the early modern Ionian theatrical inheritance, which embodied a Hellenism constructed of many constituent parts, of which Ancient Greece was just one, enjoyed little currency within such a literary environment.

Although this attitude would go on to prove highly significant in subsequent assessments of the Ionian theatrical legacy (see, for example, the comments of Giorgos Theotokas (1905-1966) that Matesis's *Pot of Basil* is a work of "purely Italian", καθαρά ιταλικό inspiration (1985, 387), it must be noted that such assessments reflect the priorities of the post-independence Greek world as a whole, and not the ideas of those early modern Ionians we have discussed here. Instead, the relative porosity between Greek and Latin dramatic traditions in the early modern Ionian Islands demonstrates that Greek-language high culture of the time was enriched by an openness to non-Greek influences which would later be distinctly lacking from the performative rush to embody Ancient Greece so characteristic of the nineteenth-century Greek state. Shorn of the automatic assumption of Ancient Greek superiority frequent in the literature of the period, the theatre of the early modern Ionian Islands illuminates a new direction for exploration of the reception of ancient Greek drama in Greece, thus rendering it a unique chapter in both the history of classical reception and Modern Greek theatrical life.

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