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Cover: Aeschylus, *Hiketides* at the Delphic Festival in 1930.

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# Modern Greek Approaches to Ancient Greek Drama\*

Platon Mavromoustakos

According to some intriguing but unconfirmed reports found in Ionian historical writings, the first modern performance of ancient Greek drama in the Greek world can be traced back to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These reports refer to a performance given during the celebratory festivities that took place in Zante after the victory of the Christian armada in the naval battle of Lepanto, in the autumn of 1571.<sup>1</sup> According to this information, some of the island's young noblemen recited or performed Aeschylus' *Persai*, most probably from an Italian adaptation,<sup>2</sup> in the hall of a great mansion, specially transformed for the occasion, and in the presence of the Proveditore di Zante, Polo Contarini.<sup>3</sup> The analogy is clear enough: the purpose of the performance was to

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\* The text of this paper was initially a compilation of the following articles: i) Manner and Place; From the Italian Stage to Epidaurus (published in the program for the performance of *Hiketides* by the Centre for the Study and Practical Realization of Ancient Greek Drama 'DESMOI' in the summer of 1994), ii) Aristophanes and Theatro Technis (published in the program for the performance of *Ploutos* by Theatro Technis in the summer of 1994), and iii) On Performing Ancient Greek Drama: Circumstances and Conditions of the Modern Greek Stage, presented in the 'Ancient Greek Drama in All the Languages of the World' conference organized by the above mentioned Centre in Athens, in October of 1995. Further additions and editing took place in the summer of 1996 for a presentation at Chania, in Crete, on July 14<sup>th</sup>. Corrections and additions have been done since and a first version of the article was published in the volume *Παραστάσεις Αρχαίου Ελληνικού Δράματος στην Ευρώπη κατά τους Νεότερους Χρόνους* under the title *Το αρχαίο ελληνικό δράμα στη νεοελληνική σκηνή: από τους Πέρσες του 1571 στις προσεγγίσεις του 20ού αιώνα*, Athens 1999, 77-89. Translation of the first draft of this article was made by Christina Symvoulidou. The article has been used since for lectures and presentations in Brown University, Providence (April 1997), Harvard University, Boston (February 1998), the Finnish Institute at Athens and the Norwegian Institute at Athens (2000-2002). Several other articles published in Greek are the product of an ongoing research concerning modern performances of ancient drama which falls under the auspices of the European Network of Research and Documentation of Performances of Ancient Greek Drama. I am grateful to Professor Oliver Taplin not only for his comments and suggestions concerning the first draft of this article, but also for his fruitful collaboration and the invaluable help he has offered, in creating and organizing the activities of this Network.

<sup>1</sup> See Spyros de Viazis, 'Ἀγνώες ἐν Ζακύνθῳ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχαίων χρόνων μέχρι τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς, μέρος Α', *Ὀλυμπία* 13/1/1896; Leonidas X. Zoes, 'Τὸ θέατρον ἐν Ζακύνθῳ', in *Ἀπτική Τρις*, 1898; Leonidas X. Zoes, 'Ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας τοῦ Ζακύνθου θεάτρου', in *Ζακύνθιος Ἀθλῶν*, 1906. The event is also mentioned in N.I. Laskaris, *Ἱστορία τοῦ νεοελληνικοῦ θεάτρου, τόμος Α'*, Athens 1938, 295. It is interesting to compare a fictional account of the same event in the novel *Σοφροσύνη* by Dionysios Romas (Athens, n.d., 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. ii, 176, 313-334).

<sup>2</sup> However, up to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, no Italian adaptation of the *Persai* is listed in the catalogues of Leon Allatius, despite the fact that references to Italian adaptations of other tragedies are frequent (*Dramaturgia di Leone Allacci accresciuta e continuata fin all'anno MDCCLV*, Presso Giambattista Pasquali con Licenza de' Superiori in Venezia MDCCLV, ristampa anastatica a tiratura limitata, Bottega D'Erasmus, Torino 1966 [1774]).

<sup>3</sup> From my research to date of the relevant *dispacei* kept in the Venetian archive collections of the Proveditore di Zante Polo Contarini, no further information is available.

emphasize the parallel between the recent victory against the Turks and the victory of the ancient Greeks against the Persians in the naval battle of Salamis, and in so doing, to remind the people of the ancestry of the Ionian aristocracy, by relating the latter's much advertised Byzantine origins to the ancient world. This performance, which seems to stand apart from the main body of modern Greek performances of ancient drama, is of particular importance for the following reasons:

1. It appears to be the first ever performance of ancient Greek drama in the European world in modern times, since it predates by almost 15 years the performance of *Oedipus Rex* given in the Teatro Olimpico of Vicenza in 1585.

2. It provides a key to the way in which ancient Greek drama has been approached on the modern Greek stage, and allows us to understand one very important parameter of the extremely rich tradition of Greek theatre practice: the fact that the performance of ancient Greek drama in modern Greece is closely interrelated with the creation and development of the modern Greek state.

We should note, right from the start, that the extent of modern Greek performances of ancient Greek drama is impressive. According to a recent and, I believe, almost exhaustive catalogue, we can trace over 630 different productions of ancient Greek drama staged in the Greek world by modern Greek professional troupes.<sup>4</sup> In reality, a performance of ancient Greek drama in modern times necessarily implies a translation. The modern Greek experience provides important clues to the understanding of the objectives behind modern performances of ancient Greek drama and the problems associated with the use of translations. We may also remark that the performance and, in conjunction, the translation are historically determined by the way they address two specific problems.<sup>5</sup>

The first of these problems relates to the circumstances, that is, the historical, social, or ideological parameters determined by the context of the performance. There is no doubt that circumstances exert a double influence: they shape linguistic habits, and in so doing directly affect the style of a translation; but they also bias the choice of material for performance, and therefore modify the immediate goals of stage practice. In this respect, a key figure is the translator - he is the chief mediator between audience and text.

The second problem relates to the history of the theatre itself. The decisive factor here is the whole manner of theatrical expression: the conditions and terms of stage practice, which also influence the style of translation. But this is more than a mere matter of influence; it becomes a necessary condition. The limitations and possible choices of translating styles are determined by theatrical purposes, and the key mediator is no longer the translator, but rather the star actor or the director. This new mediator shapes the stage conception while publicizing the translation; he is the one who comes between audience and translation.

Accordingly, the aim of this article is to identify the major events in the production history of ancient Greek drama in modern Greece, during the 180 or so years

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<sup>4</sup> According to the first complete modern performance history of ancient Greek drama included in the series 'Ancient Greek Theatre' by Epikairoitita editions, vols. 1-47, there are 633 performances in all, including the works of Menander. This production history is the product of a thorough research carried out by Evangelia Andritsanou, Mary Iliadi, Nikos Karanastasis, Platon Mavromoustakos, Agni Mouzenidou, Christina Symvoulidou, Mirka Theodoropoulou and Iosif Vivilakis, a team of researchers gathered together for this purpose and working under the supervision of Platon Mavromoustakos.

<sup>5</sup> For a related approach, see G. Giatromanolakis, *Μεταφραστικές τάσεις*, *Διαβάζω* 26 (December 1979) 44-54.

that separate us from the first stage performance of ancient Greek drama in a modern Greek translation, and then to relate them to the parameters which determine the form of the two factors mentioned above, turning them into catalysts for the stage approach to ancient texts. The catalyst changes in relation to the period: sometimes it is the circumstances that give power to the translator, and sometimes it is the conditions that confer authority to the agents of the stage actions.

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The first verified and systematically studied performance of ancient Greek drama on the modern Greek stage that has so far been traced is the performance of *Philoctetes* in Nicholas Piccolo's adaptation, staged by students, actors and amateurs in Odessa in 1818.<sup>6</sup> This performance highlights all the issues: "[The theatre warms] the hearts of our people, towards the resurrection of our country." It is a phrase by Korais,<sup>7</sup> which sums up the Greek approach to the theatre during the age of Enlightenment. "The sole purpose of [the theatre] is to correct the moral habits and to educate the people; it is the common school of humankind, which makes up for the lack of other schools," says another.<sup>8</sup>

In trying to evaluate the effects of this performance today, we can accept as a fact that "inside the framework of the moral-didactic concerns characteristic of the Age of Lights in general, *Philoctetes* is a tragedy - not the only one, of course - which readily lends itself to some patriotic and political colouring, particularly from the viewpoint of ideological ferment pursued by modern Greek Enlightenment."<sup>9</sup> Piccolo's translation, or rather adaptation, of *Philoctetes* is from the original ancient Greek, but borrows from La Harpe's French version "the division into three acts"<sup>10</sup> and the removal of the choral parts (which, in Piccolo's version, are re-built into the text: the meaning of the lyrics is selectively re-worked into a prose monologue of Neoptolemos, interpolated into scene ii).<sup>11</sup> Piccolo's adaptation became extraordinarily fortunate on stage: one of the select few plays repeatedly performed during this period. In fact, the plays most often staged during this time are by Metastasio, and originated as opera librettos: *Achilles in Skyros*, *Themistocles*, *Leonidas in Thermopylai*.<sup>12</sup> On the whole, the choice of performing material is determined by a preoccupation with ancient Greek themes, as expressed in the following assertion: "The function of this transportation in space and time into Greek antiquity, as a reminder of ancient glory, an exaltation of virtue and patriotism, or simply as a revival of the mythological and historical figures of ancestral heritage, is to serve as an ideal and rouse nationalism and rebellion in the consciousness of the spectator."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The subject is comprehensively investigated in Spathis 1986a.

<sup>7</sup> See Dimaras 1968, 162.

<sup>8</sup> The phrase is by Konst. Asopius, see Dimaras 1968, 162.

<sup>9</sup> See Spathis 1986a, 158-159.

<sup>10</sup> In a letter published in *Λόγιος Ερμής*, the journal that best expresses the spirit of modern Greek Enlightenment. See Spathis 1986a, 159. See also Sideris 1976, 18. The latter is an essential textbook for the understanding of modern Greek performances of ancient drama.

<sup>11</sup> Spathis 1986a, 159.

<sup>12</sup> See Dimitris Spathis, *Άγνωστες μεταφράσεις του Μεταστάσιου και πρωτότυπα σκηνογραφήματα*, in Spathis 1986, 101ff.; Anna Tambaki, *Το ελληνικό θέατρο στην Οδησό (1814-1818)*, in Tambaki 1993, 39-49.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Tambaki, *Οι απειλήσεις των επαναστατικών ιδεών στο θέατρο του ελληνικού διαφωτισμού*, in Tambaki 1993, 62.

These ideologically charged performances, however, had a separate function: to prepare the overall framework of modern Greek theatre. To a large extent, they determined the form of theatre practice that was devised by the first professional troupes working in the newly independent Greek state. The subjection of theatre practice to patriotic tendencies continued to characterize the approach to ancient Greek drama for a long time after independence.

Similar circumstances, but different stage conditions, surround the first productions of ancient Greek drama after the foundation of the modern Greek state: both amateur performances, mostly by students, and professional stagings.<sup>14</sup>

A new element was now added: "the neo-classicism of the Bavarians, which shall intensify ancestral worship by nurturing it with relics and other offerings."<sup>15</sup> The prevailing attitude of both audience and theatre people is summed up in this review of a student production staged in the Greek Merchant School of Chalkis, in 1856: "We wish to congratulate them [i.e. the students] for honouring the Greek nation, by proving with their action that in any circumstances, anywhere, the industrious and studious Greeks shall never cease to appreciate and benefit from the inexhaustible intellectual wealth of our ancestors, the only priceless possession of our nation that cannot be taken away..."<sup>16</sup>

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This turn towards antiquity, particularly strong during the period of Greek Romanticism (1830-1880), stands in opposition to the official historical model that "wanted Greece to have three facets, and the middle one, the Byzantine, equal in splendour and glory to the ancient one.... But this model did not enter the collective consciousness; it barely touched the general outlook. In this respect, the ancestral role remained the jealously guarded province of the ancients."<sup>17</sup> At any rate, the Byzantine period is conspicuously absent from our body of evidence for the history of the Greek theatre, even today.

The repercussions of the mainstream European approach to performing ancient Greek drama, already implied in the famous *Antigone* production staged by Tieck in 1841,<sup>18</sup> took a long time to reach the Greek stage. From the 1860s - the 19<sup>th</sup> century's most decisive decade for the definition of modern Greek professional theatre - until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Greek approach to ancient drama was characterized by ideological concerns, analogous to those already described. The emphasis centred on the attempt to relate modern Greece to the ancient world, in order to confirm its continuity and national identity.<sup>19</sup> The first professional attempts conformed to this broader ideological and political background: for instance, a production of *Antigone*, in Alexander Rizos

<sup>14</sup> Sideris 1976, 26-28. For instance, some performances of *Ajax* by university students and semi-professional troupes between 1868 and 1893 (article by Giannis Sideris in *Θέατρο '58*, Athens 1958, 13). Also the *Persai* performed by a troupe of 'lay amateurs' in 1889, and performances of the same play by the 'Archaic Students' Union' in 1891 and 1893. See Iliadi 1992, 115.

<sup>15</sup> Dimaras 1968, 263.

<sup>16</sup> Sideris 1976, 28. The passage is an excerpt from *Πανδώρα Ζ'*, 45-46.

<sup>17</sup> Alexis Politis, *Ρομαντικά χρόνια. Ιδεολογίες και νοοτροπίες στην Ελλάδα 1830-1880*, Athens 1986, 106.

<sup>18</sup> See Flashar 1991, 66-76. For a sketchy account of this performance, see Brockett 1991, 383.

<sup>19</sup> See Sideris 1976; Spathis 1983; Tambaki 1993.



Ragavis' translation, by the troupe of Demosthenes Alexiades and Pipina Vonasera<sup>20</sup> in Constantinople, in 1863; and another production of *Antigone* in the Herodion in Athens during the celebrations for the wedding of King George I.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike tragedy, comedy had a meagre presence on the Greek stage throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century: it is hard to turn comedy into a vehicle for the positive presentation of the ancient world and use it to strengthen the glorified image of the past revived by the modern Greek state, since its satire aims to ridicule any pretentious manifestation of the ancient world, in people or states. In the words of a critic reviewing a production of the *Clouds*, in 1868: "To think that we, the descendants of those men, the admirers of Socrates' wisdom and virtue, we who have often read the divine Plato with tears in our eyes while following his account of the death of that wisest of Greek men, [to think that we] after almost 2,000 years, now propose to ridicule that man..."<sup>22</sup> Within this intellectual framework, it seems natural that performances of comedies were rarely staged. Even the 1868 production of *Ploutos* in M. Chourmouzis' exquisite paraphrase (also ideologically charged, but in a different way) had to wait for almost seventy years to be vindicated.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the century, in 1895, "the inclination towards antiquity"<sup>24</sup> was spectacularly expressed (both literally and figuratively speaking) with the appearance of the 'Society for the Production of Ancient Greek Dramas'<sup>25</sup>, which based its performances on the ancient text. Two factors led to the appearance of this theatrically doomed attempt: on one hand, the historical circumstances that favoured the identification of modern Greece with its ancient civilization; and on the other, the extreme conservatism of the response to the challenge to the Greek language presented by the rising linguistic movement of *dimotiki*. The conflict reached an impasse during the performance of the *Oresteia* by the National Theatre in 1903, in George Sotiriades' translation and directed by Thomas Oikonomou,<sup>26</sup> leading to the uprising thereafter known as 'Orestiaká': a student movement against ancient drama performances in translation, closely linked with political strife and linguistic conflict.

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The start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also marked the start of a new era for theatre practice in Greece. The new outlook was defined by the projection of a different viewpoint, and was closely related to the creation of some new conditions for stage practice.

<sup>20</sup> On 7/10/1863. See Theodoropoulou 1992, 158. See also Sideris 1976, 33-35.

<sup>21</sup> On 7/12/1867. See Theodoropoulou 1992, 158-159. See also Sideris 1976, 42-45.

<sup>22</sup> Sideris 1976, 51-52, drawing it from *Palingenesia*. The performance took place on 12/5/1868. See Mary Iliadi, *Nephelae*, Performance History Appendix, Epikairoitita 36 (1994) 182. See also Sideris 1976, 51-52.

<sup>23</sup> Sideris (1990, 212) mentions this, but is not aware of the fact that the translator is Chourmouzis. He adds this information in his later publications (1976, 399). This adaptation was used by Koun for the performance he staged with students in the American College of Athens. For the history of this translation in later performances, see Evangelia Andritsanou, *Ploutos*, Performance History Appendix, Epikairoitita 44 (1994) 152, 154, 159-162, 166-170.

<sup>24</sup> I borrow the phrase from Dimaras 1968, 263.

<sup>25</sup> See Sideris 1976, 113-116, 185, 213-221, 225. For the performances of the Society, see Epikairoitita volumes 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 26.

<sup>26</sup> For the performance history of *Oresteia*, see Mavromoustakos 1992a, 166-167; 1992b, 122-123; 1992c, 118-119. See also Sideris 1976, 186-199.



The first rift in the one-dimensional approach of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the appearance of the director in Greek theatre practice, precisely at the turn of the century, two directors, in fact: Konstantinos Christomanos and Thomas Oikonomou. Christomanos managed to pave the way, through his “sensual attempts”<sup>27</sup>, for a new approach to ancient Greek drama that introduced the director as the new key figure in stage practice. Through his company, *Néa Skini*, he offered a provisional resolution of the linguistic conflict mentioned before, and an early example of the director as the dominant factor in the shaping of a performance. In so doing, he eased the way to a new-age mentality by mediating between audience and text. Let us see an account of the company’s first performance: “...I shall never forget the first night of the *Alcestis*, which also happened to be the first performance given by *Néa Skini*. The first of the customary three knocks had already sounded. After a while the curtain rose. Suddenly, Mr. Christomanos sees Hercules’ cudgel, for which he had placed a custom order and taken time to explain to the woodcarver all the minute details that its surface should bear. Indeed the cudgel seems exquisite; bulky, heavy, crude and full of knots. Still, Mr. Christomanos frowns; he orders the curtain down, grabs the cudgel and taking out a pocket knife starts carving the handle himself, risking his fingers in the process. It was the only part of the cudgel that had been left perfectly smooth; and he thought it looked like the neck of a bottle!”<sup>28</sup>

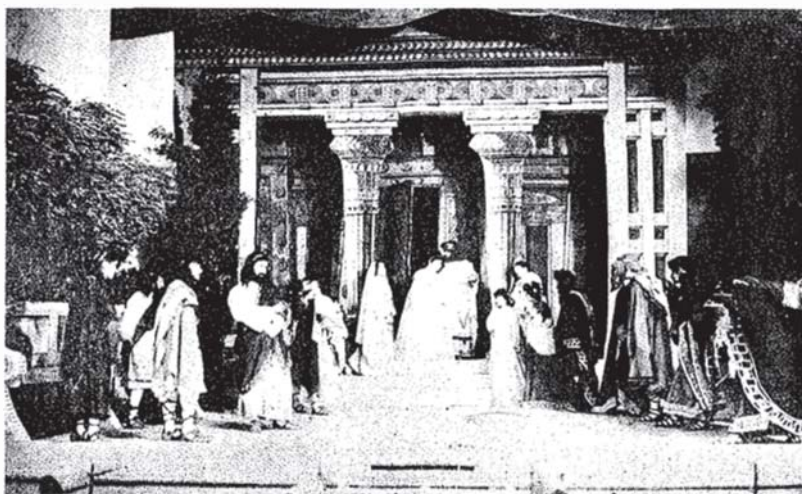


Fig. 6. Euripides. *Alcestis* at the *Néa Skini* in 1902.

<sup>27</sup> As characterized by Puchner 1984a, 133.

<sup>28</sup> Excerpt from an unsigned text, included in an advertising pamphlet of *Néa Skini*.

This performance of the *Alcestis* by Nēa Skiní (Fig. 6), in November of 1901,<sup>29</sup> involved a heated conflict between the director and the original translator.<sup>30</sup> The expression of an internal struggle for power, this conflict promoted a new priority: the translation had to be approved and accepted by the director. This meant that the translation had to be harmonized with the stage objectives of the performance, not with extra-theatrical circumstances. The distinctive aesthetic of Christomanos and his hierarchical order finally induced him to undertake the task of translation himself, believing that, like every other element of the performance, the translation too should stem from the director. This was to be expressed even more forcefully at the next significant moment of theatre practice, one of the most propitious moments in the history of the modern Greek theatre: the production of *Oedipus Rex*, directed by Photos Politis and starring Emilius Veakis, in 1919 (Fig. 7). The choice of play bore the influence of Max Reinhardt's production of this tragedy in 1910. And the translation was the director's own.<sup>31</sup>

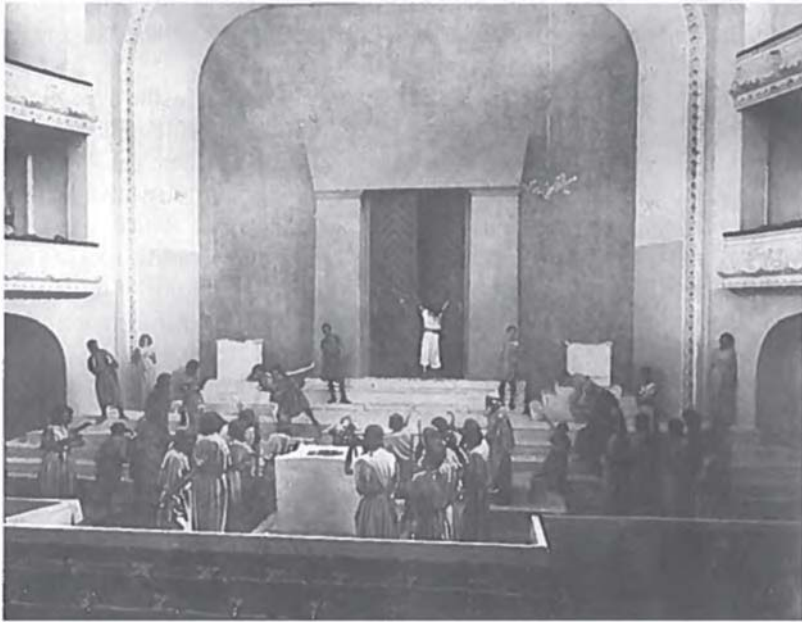


Fig. 7. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex* at the Eteria Ellinikou Theátrou in 1919.

<sup>29</sup> Iliadi 1993, 148-149. See also Giannis Sideris, Τα ελληνικά θεατρικά έργα: η παρουσία τους στη Νέα Σκηνή, *Θέατρο* 2 (March 1962) 15-25; Sideris 1976, 180-184; Sideris 1990, 229-280.

<sup>30</sup> On the conflict with Elias Voutierides, see Giannis Sideris, Η Άλκηστις στη Νέα Σκηνή, *Ο Αιώνας μας* (September 1947) 217-220. See also Kostas Georgousopoulos, Η Άλκηστις του Κ. Χρηστομάνου. Μια ανακοίνωση, *Η Λέξη* 56 (July-August 1986) 693-701; Iliadi 1993, 148-149.

<sup>31</sup> Andritsanou 1992, 175-176. See also Sideris 1976, 266-278. For an interesting analysis of the performances of *Oedipus Rex* by Politis, see Puchner 1984a, 133-135.

The evolution of theatre practice is not, of course, linear. The appearance of the director does not have a direct continuation in Greek theatre life. As soon as Nēa Skini closed down, the old model dominated the field once more. Theatrical activity in Greece was now centred around the figure of the star-actor; the performance was shaped according to his wishes, and aimed towards his own distinction. (The 1919 production by Photos Politis was an exception to the rule.) The translation slipped to a supporting role - no company was large enough for two star-actors, unless such a move was dictated by the response of the audience; and even then, the second star was hardly ever the translator. The famous actress Marika Kotopouli used Sotiriades' translation of the *Oresteia* for years, in productions that followed the general guidelines provided at the start of the century by Thomas Oikonomou,<sup>32</sup> but modified according to the fluctuating needs of a company with an ever-changing cast and often different technical means. The same was true of Emilius Veakis: he toured for years with the production of *Oedipus Rex* translated and staged by Photos Politis,<sup>33</sup> earning the disapproval of the latter. During the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some modern plays with ancient Greek themes also found their way into the staple repertory. Chief among these were Hofmannsthal's *Electra*, Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and Legouvé's *Medea*.<sup>34</sup> These were deemed sufficiently 'antique' by the stars, and became the basic supplementary fare in the changing repertory of most Greek star companies from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup>

The year 1927 marked a return to the movement initiated by the dynamic presence of Konstantinos Christomanos. It was a significant moment in the history of modern Greek approaches to ancient drama, since it laid down the parameters that continue to define these performances today: the first Delphic Festival, organized by Angelos Sikelianos and Eva Palmer, and built around the performance of *Prometheus Bound* in I. Gryparis' translation.<sup>36</sup> 1927 was also the year of Photos Politis' production of *Hecuba*, in Apostolos Melachrinou's translation, starring Marika Kotopouli and staged in the Panathinaikón Stádion. These two performances, each from its own perspective, led to a re-evaluation of stage practice: the performance of ancient Greek drama now became the focus of intellectual inquiry, and claimed a special place in Greek theatre practice. There were many new demands. Aside from the debate on the issue of open-air performances,

<sup>32</sup> In the original performance of Sotiriades' *Oresteia*, in 1903, Marika Kotopouli was not even a member of the cast but took part by reciting the 'Ode to Aeschylus', written for this purpose by Kostas Palamas. Later on, she performed the trilogy in 1912 and again in 1924, using her own company. See Mavromoustakos 1992a, 166-167; 1992b, 122-123; 1992c, 118-119.

<sup>33</sup> Andritsanou 1992, 176-180.

<sup>34</sup> See the introductory notes in the performance histories for the ancient plays with the respective titles in the Epikairoitita vols. 12, 16, 25, 26.

<sup>35</sup> The Greek tour of Adelaide Ristori, in 1865, seems to have served as an example to prospective Greek stars in this respect. See Sideris 1976, 35-42.

<sup>36</sup> Sideris 1976, especially the two chapters of part II. See also Giannis Sideris, Νεοελληνικές ερμηνείες του αρχαίου θεάτρου ως τις Δελφικές Εορτές (1817-1927), *Ηώς* 103-107 (1967) 401-475. For concise information on this performance, see Agni Mouzenidou, *Prometheus Bound*, Performance History Appendix, Epikairoitita 7 (1989) 128-142. This is actually the second time that a translation by Gryparis is presented on-stage: the first was the 1925 production of the *Seven Against Thebes*, staged by Spyros Melas' Théâtre Technis (See Evangelia Andritsanou, *Seven Against Thebes*, Performance History Appendix, Epikairoitita 2 (1992) 125-131). Gryparis had published the translation of *Agamemnon* as early as 1906 (it was completed before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), and he was one of the few translators lavishly praised by demoticists.

and more particularly on the use of ancient theatres for these performances,<sup>37</sup> almost every element of staging now became a major concern. These issues, which included specific elements like dancing, settings and pronunciation, as well as the appeal of ancient drama today, enriched the discussion with many theoretical and practical arguments. It is an ongoing discussion, even at present, and constitutes the unique experience and remarkable individuality of modern Greek stage tradition.

Within these complex issues, the way in which the translation relates to the demands made by the performance remained a chief concern.<sup>38</sup> It occupied a central place in the thoughts of Photos Politis,<sup>39</sup> and became the focus of the whole approach of the two directors who most shaped the perspective of modern Greek performances of ancient drama after the second World War.

The first of these directors was Karolos Koun. With Laiki Skiní originally, and later on with Théâtre Téchnis, he introduced the dominant role of the director, as well as a new approach to the theatre in general, and to Aristophanic comedy in particular. This ultimately led to a complete system, readily recognized, with specific acting terms and a clear aesthetic viewpoint that provided accessible references to the concerns underlying the whole post-war creative scene.<sup>40</sup>

The Greek acting code characteristic of Théâtre Téchnis was undoubtedly vindicated by Koun's productions of Aristophanic comedies. Note from the beginning that Aristophanes was Koun's playwright of choice even at his first attempts at directing, during the time when he was still a teacher of English at the American College of Athens. *The Birds* and *Ploutos*<sup>41</sup> (mentioned above) were two of the productions that stood at the very beginning of his preoccupation with ancient Greek drama, and at the origins of the vision that formed his aesthetics. In his speech of 1943, crucial for the understanding of his aesthetic attitude, Koun mentioned among other things: "...starting from the beginning, from the foundation of Laiki Skiní, a decade ago ... the aesthetic elements that thrilled me then were related to the Greek 'popular' culture, somewhat schematically expressed, as manifested in village and island life, in our folk songs, and even further back, in Byzantine icons and ancient Greek vases. And the plays that we chose then: *Erophile*, *Alcestis*, *Ploutos*, *The Birds* conformed precisely to this spirit."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> A debate initiated by the open-air performance of *Oedipus Rex* in 1897; see Sideris 1976, 35-42; Platon Mavromoustakos, *Manner and Place: From the Italian Stage to Epidaurus*, Program *Ilketides* of the performance by the Centre for the Study and Practical Realization of Ancient Greek Drama "DESMOI", 1994, 43-52.

<sup>38</sup> See critical reviews by Vasos Varikas, *Κριτική Θεάτρου 1961-1971*, Athens 1976; Alkis Thylios in the 12 vol. edition of the Ourani Foundation, Athens 1977-1981; Stathis Dromazos, *Αρχαίο Δράμα, Αναλύσεις*, Athens 1984; Stathis Dromazos, *Αρχαίο Δράμα, Κριτικές*, Athens 1993; Kostas Georgousopoulos, *Κλειδιά και Κώδικες Θεάτρου I, Αρχαίο Δράμα*, Athens 1982; Giannis Varveris, *Η κρίση του θεάτρου*, 3 vols, Athens 1986, 1990 and 1994; Tasos Lignades, *Θεατρολογία I & II*, Athens 1990 & 1991; Tasos Lignades, *Το Ζώον και το Τέρας*, Athens 1993; Politis 1983, vol. I, 15-18 & vol. II, 153-146.

<sup>39</sup> Politis 1983, vol. I, 15-18 & vol. II, 153-156.

<sup>40</sup> The aesthetic beliefs of Karolos Koun were clearly expressed as early as 1943 in his speech *Η κοινωνική θέση και η αισθητική γραμμή του Θεάτρου Τέχνης*, and were made even clearer in his writings on the subject of modern Greek performances of ancient drama which are reprinted in Koun 1987.

<sup>41</sup> Karolos Koun had first staged *Birds* in the theatre of the American College of Athens, with the students' Theatrical Society, in 1932 and again in 1939 (with Laiki Skiní, on January 28, with the cooperation of Kyriazis Charatsaris). *Ploutos* was first staged in the theatre of the American College of Athens on the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of April 1936.

<sup>42</sup> Koun 1943, 18-19 (reprinted in Koun 1981 and in Koun 1987).





Fig. 8. Aristophanes, *Birds* at the Art Theatre in 1959. The premiere took place at the Herodion by the Art Theatre of Karolos Koun.

It was certainly not a matter of chance that Koun first approached ancient Greek drama through these two Aristophanic comedies.<sup>43</sup> *The Birds*, more than any other of Aristophanes' plays, provides an excellent opportunity for experimentation with stage movements and with solutions to staging problems based on improvisation (Fig. 8). *Ploutos*, from its borderline place in the body of Aristophanic comedy, Old and New, leaves plenty of scope for an experimental approach and a free association with different periods in the history of the theatre. These performances afforded the first clear expression of the way in which Karolos Koun would define the new, modern approach to ancient comedy, and establish an acting code which developed into one of the most important modern Greek traditions of stage practice.

Koun's views, as expressed in his writings, were much less clear than the values which emerged from his performances, since it is the stage actions, especially in Koun's ebullient productions, that provide the expression of any theoretical approach. Still, even these vague assertions do give us some clues. In order to understand Koun's intentions, one has to go back to his speech of 1943: "... my starting point was the basis of Greek popular reality with all its wealth of primitive and native elements. Setting my own intellectual and spiritual needs aside for the moment, I thought that I should grab the first really intense, genuine manifestation of life that would come my way."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> His first professional production of *Ploutos*, staged in Théâtre Kipou on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1957, still used the original paraphrase by Michael Chournouzis. Settings and costumes were by Giannis Moralis, music by Manos Chatzidakis, and choreography by St. Papadaki. His first professional production of *The Birds*, staged in the Herodion on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1959, was based on a translation by Vasilis Rotas. Settings and costumes were by Giannis Tsarouchis, music once more by Manos Chatzidakis, and choreography by Rallou Manou. Four separate performances of *The Birds* were actually planned, but the first one caused such a stir among some of the audience and in the press, that the rest of the performances were cancelled. The production was repeated the following year in Athens and Thessalonica, under much more favourable conditions.

<sup>44</sup> Koun 1943, 19.

The search for ethnic identity - a claim with many reverberations in the modern Greek political and intellectual scene ever since the 1930s - had a corresponding facet in Koun's general considerations regarding ancient Greek drama. The decisive date for his approach to ancient Greek drama was 1957 when, after almost 15 years of professional theatrical presence, Koun applied his skill to the production of an Aristophanic comedy. It was also the date of his now well-known speech on ancient Greek drama, where he first expressed the views that would define a new direction in theatre practice: "The forms developed by our thoughts today, and our feelings, necessarily draw their shape and colour from the very same nature that once embraced our ancient ancestors. The shepherd, even before sunrise, has to follow the same ancient trails to guide his flocks to pasture. The fisherman will beat his octopus on the same age-old rocks, salesmen bearing their baskets will still try to find some shade to protect their animals and merchandise from the burning midday sun. In Greek villages and islands, throughout the countryside, wherever the mechanical civilization of our century has not intruded yet, wherever people live and work in direct contact with nature, the rhythms, the shapes, even the sounds of life must really bear a remarkable similarity to the rhythms and shapes and sounds preserved in history as the mark of ancient Greek life."<sup>45</sup>

Another of Koun's assertions made his intentions even clearer. On the occasion of the performance of *The Birds* in the Théâtre des Nations in Paris (a production of the utmost importance for the whole concept of the modern Greek approach to ancient drama), he specified: "It is not so easy, choosing which elements to use from popular culture, because one must find elements that can be 'married', fitted together in the same way that paint blends into wood; not unsuitable elements. One must find new material that can be harmonized with the old, through some aesthetic, formal or mental affinity. And this is where the great difficulty lies."<sup>46</sup>

The search for popular models implied by this view led Koun to a systematic investigation of the formal elements that constitute the directly perceived characteristics of a particular version of 'Greeknness'. These elements formed eventually the comprehensive theatrical tradition of *Theatro Technis*, a tradition that dictated the presentation of almost all of the surviving Aristophanic comedies in theatrical festivals in Greece and abroad, securing the fame of the company.<sup>47</sup> All of these productions explored a manner of physical expression marked by a sense of continuity in the history of Greek popular tradition. Starting with the use of a bead string and a gramophone playing popular lyrics in *Ploutos* and the experimentation with modern Greek lyric poetry in

<sup>45</sup> Extract of Koun's speech, *Τό αρχαίο θέατρο*, addressed to the International Theatre Conference in the Herodion, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1957, reprinted in Koun 1987, 33-34. Similar views are often expressed by Koun. See for example Koun 1987, 64-68 (Η Ελλάδα και η τραγωδία, 1965), 81-82 (Βαθιές κι ριζες στην Ελλάδα, 1971), 85-90 (Σε πάντα χρόνια θέατρο, 1971), 92-99 (Αισθάνομαι πάλι ελεύθερος και πάλι ευτυχημένος όταν μπορώ να έχω επαφή με τους ανθρώπους, 1975), 110-118 (Μαγειεία, πάθος και συγκίνηση κυρίαρχα στοιχεία της τραγωδίας, 1976), 155-156 (Πάλι την αρχαία τραγωδία, 1984).

<sup>46</sup> Koun 1987, 40-41 (Οι Όρνιθες στο Θέατρο Εθνικών).

<sup>47</sup> The information of these performances is based on evidence collected from the archive of *Theatro Technis*, and cross-referenced with the performance histories compiled by M. Iliadi, M. Theodoropoulou, E. Andritsanou, C. Symvoulidou and N. Karanastasis for the Epikairota editions of the surviving Aristophanic comedies. With the exception of *Ecclesiazousai*, *Theatro Technis* presented all of Aristophanes' plays in the following order: *Ploutos* 1957, *The Birds* 1959, *The Frogs* 1966, *Lysistrata* 1969, *Acharnians* 1974, *Peace* 1977, *The Knights* 1979, *The Wasps* 1981, *Thesmophoriazousai* 1985 and *The Clouds* 1991.



*The Birds*, Koun soon turned his efforts with *The Frogs* into an attempt to emphasize a ritualistic element that is, visually, a combination of eastern and western traditions. With the important production of the *Acharnians*, Théâtre Technis embarked on a new course: the creation of an atmosphere of popular feasting was now combined with the encoding of a way of acting that was enriched by material drawn from the Greek shadow puppet theatre, Karagiozes. Koun followed a similar approach in *Lysistrata*: the exploration of Greek popular types now became the axis of his considerations. Finally, in the production of *Peace*, the various approaches tried so far combined in creating an atmosphere of popular revelry, which from now on characterized Aristophanic comedy in the collective consciousness of modern Greek spectators.

From a different perspective, but exercising a similar influence on post-war Greek theatre practice, Dimitris Rondiris (first with the National Theatre, and later with his own company, Piraikōn Théatron) followed along the lines set by Photos Politis in his performances of *Oedipus Rex* (1919, 1925 and 1933), *Hecuba* (1927), *Agamemnon* (1932), and *Persai* (1934, Fig. 9).<sup>48</sup> Photos Politis based his original approach on some of the stage solutions proposed by the productions of Max Reinhardt, but went on to enrich Reinhardt's model in a way that allows us to consider his work "the creative response of modern Greek theatre"<sup>49</sup> to problems and issues first expressed by the Austrian director. The brief sojourn of Photos Politis in the newly-founded (in 1932) National Theatre played a decisive role in defining this institution's *modus operandi*.



Fig. 9. Aeschylus, *Persians* at the National Theatre in 1934.

After the death of Politis in 1934, Dimitris Rondiris took over the National Theatre and developed this tradition, but with a significant creative twist. He formed a comprehensive approach to modern stagings of tragedy, based on the revelatory function of rhythm; and this led to a soundly structured rhythmic method of interpretation. We should also note that Max Reinhardt exercised a more direct influence on Dimitris

<sup>48</sup> For the performances of *Oedipus Rex* in 1919, 1925 and 1933, see Andritsanou 1992, 167-196. For *Hecuba*, see Mirka Theodoropoulou, *Hecuba*, Performance History Appendix, *Epikairoitita* 20 (1993) 151-163. For *Agamemnon*, see Mavromoustakos 1992a, 165-187. For *Persai*, see Iliadi 1992, 113-126.

<sup>49</sup> Puchner 1984, 137.

Rondiris than he did on Photos Politis, since Rondiris was his student for a while. Reinhardt's views found expression in a multi-faceted career, characterized by eclectic tendencies that acted as the unifying principle behind the various conflicting movements and inclinations present in his stagings. In general terms, we might say that for Reinhardt each new production posed a fresh problem to be solved; and thus, every style had its place in the final shape of the performance.<sup>50</sup> For him, the style of a production also included the handling of theatrical space, and the relationship between actors and audience. The origins of this tendency may be traced back to solutions tried out on stage in Germany as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The tremendous success of the famous performance of *Antigone*, staged by Ludwig Tieck in 1841, introduced new considerations to theatre practice at a very early stage.<sup>51</sup> Reinhardt was certainly aware of Tieck's experiment when he staged *Oedipus Rex* in Munich in 1910 in a circus amphitheatre, since he stated: "The important thing for me was to revive Sophocles' tragedy in the spirit of our time, to adapt it to the conditions and situations of our period. The idea of rebuilding the ancient scene, which presupposes an open-air performance and the use of masks, never even crossed my mind. The important thing for me was to relate the modern stage to the ancient one, by recreating the dimensions which determined the effect of the ancient theatre."<sup>52</sup>

Reinhardt's views, which were corroborated by his own solid classical education, played a major role in the development of Dimitris Rondiris' belief that tragedy "should be set free from the constraints imposed on it by a repertory conception".<sup>53</sup> This also marks a major point of difference between Rondiris and Photos Politis (who, with the exception of *Hecuba* staged in the Panathinaikón Stádion, always produced his tragedies in an enclosed space). Politis, faithful to what was an almost universal practice for European directors at the time, placed tragedy into the logic of a repertory theatre. The new demand now made by Rondiris for the interpretation of tragedy according to its own particular style, also meant the recognition of its inherent "ritualistic nature" and the acceptance of the need for "passionate and bulky chorus movements" in order to maintain tragedy's "celebratory character" which, alone, could "express tragedy's religious and deeply humanitarian spirit".<sup>54</sup> The manifestations of such a view on stage led to a demand for the use of the theatre for such performances; in reality, the new demand was for the return of these texts to the place for which they were originally composed.

<sup>50</sup> Puchner 1984, 137; Brockett 1991, 571-572.

<sup>51</sup> Tieck staged *Antigone* in Potsdam at the invitation of Wilhelm IV of Prussia. The realisation of this performance was, in itself, an innovation, since modern productions of ancient dramas were still unheard of. Tieck enlarged the stage by adding a semicircle that covered the orchestra pit, thus creating a space similar to the Greek theatre and the ancient *skene*. This production was soon transported to the National Theatre of Berlin, and adopted by companies performing in other German cities, and so became the model that would determine to a great extent the European approach to ancient dramatic texts. See Brockett 1991, 439-440.

<sup>52</sup> Puchner 1984, 128.

<sup>53</sup> The coinage of the phrase is by Kostas Georgousopoulos, in his analysis of Rondiris' approach to tragedy based on evidence from the director's archive. See the following articles by Georgousopoulos: Τζώρτζης Τύμισον και Ρωντρίρης, *Το Βήμα* 9/3/1986; Από την περιουσία στην εύρεση, *Το Βήμα* 4/5/1986; Η μέθοδος Ρωντρίρη 1, *Το Βήμα* 1/6/1986; Η μέθοδος Ρωντρίρη 2, *Το Βήμα* 29/6/1986.

<sup>54</sup> See Kostas Georgousopoulos, Η μέθοδος Ρωντρίρη 1, *Το Βήμα* 1/6/1986. The phrases by Rondiris are from the unpublished translation of an interview he gave to Robert Michel in the U.S. 9.3.1986, 4.5.1986, 1.6.1986.

The use of ancient Greek theatres for performances of tragedies emerged as a clear desire in European theatre practice as early as the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their acceptance was promoted by the production of *Oedipus Rex* by Mounet-Sully in the theatre at Orange in 1888. In modern Greek theatre life, the most comprehensive attempt to use an ancient theatre comes with the first Delphic Festival of 1927, and after the second Festival in 1930 (see Cover) a particularly astute theatre critic proposed the use of the theatre at Epidaurus for these performances.<sup>55</sup> Already for his first production of Sophocles' *Electra*, in 1936, Rondiris chose to use the Herodion in Athens.<sup>56</sup> This production was repeated in the same theatre the following year, and on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1938, it formally inaugurated the use of the Epidaurus theatre, before an audience transported from Athens by the Greek Hiking Society.<sup>57</sup> It was the first modern performance of an ancient drama given there by a professional company, and its tremendous success significantly promoted the issue:<sup>58</sup> the government decided to rebuild the right side of the *koilon* which had collapsed, and it became only a matter of time before the actual decision for the systematic use of the theatre for performances of ancient drama was taken.<sup>59</sup>

For Dimitris Rondiris, the theatre at Epidaurus constituted the ideal place for the materialization of his vision about ancient tragedy, as described by himself with the following words: "In my view, the proper way to transmit to contemporary spectators the tragic thrill, the holy fear, the real aesthetic feeling that constituted the ancient audience's response to these great classic dramas is this: to forego (supposing that we had enough historical evidence) all attempts at historical representation; to seek, instead, to provoke a genuine emotional response to contemporary spectators by a proper interpretation, by emphasizing the immortal, everlasting human truth, the deepest humanitarian element included in the ancient dramatic poetry, and to solve the problem of the lyric element of ancient drama in accordance with its very nature, by borrowing material from the reality of modern Greek life that displays the sense of unity evident in the Greek tradition from ancient times to this day."<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Gabriel Boissy, in an article published in the newspaper *To Έθνος* on 3/5/1930. He is taking his stance in the debate raging among Greek intellectuals at that time on the subject of whether the *Hiketides* and *Prometheus Bound* productions should be repeated in different surroundings. Boissy, himself a translator of *Oedipus Rex*, had, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, been an enthusiastic supporter of the use of ancient theatres, moved by Mounet-Sully's performance in Orange. See André Villiers, *La scène centrale. Esthétique et pratique du Théâtre en Rond*, Paris 1977, 24; Sideris 1976, 404, 408.

<sup>56</sup> First staged on October 3<sup>rd</sup>; translated by I. Gryparis, directed by Dimitris Rondiris, settings by Kleoboulos Klonis, costumes by Ant. Phokas, music by Dimitris Mitropoulos, choreography by Angelos Grimanis. Starring Katina Paxinou, Thanos Kotsopoulos and Eleni Papadaki. See Iliadi, Mavromoustakos and Theodoropoulou 1992, 163-185.

<sup>57</sup> See Iliadi, Mavromoustakos and Theodoropoulou 1992, 168-169.

<sup>58</sup> See the relevant report in the newspaper *Ελευθερον Βήμα* 14/9/1938.

<sup>59</sup> We should note here that, in 1937, the 'Ancient Theatre Society' of the University of Sorbonne (one of its founding members was Roland Barthes) had come to Greece for a visit, and during an excursion to the Argolid the members of this student company went to see the theatre of Epidaurus. Once there, quite spontaneously and without preparation, with no music, the amateur actors performed *Persai* to the amazement of some villagers passing by the theatre while returning home. The account of this performance is included in André Burgaud's speech 'L'expérience du group de Théâtre Antique de la Sorbonne' presented during the International Conference at Delphi on *Το αρχαίο θέατρο σήμερα* ('Ancient Theatre Today') that took place in August 1981. See the annals of the conference, edited by the European Cultural Center of Delphi in 1984, 67-83.

<sup>60</sup> From a speech presented to the International Theatre Conference organized by the Institute of Theatre, Athens, July 1976, on the subject *Το αρχαίο δράμα στο σημερινό θέατρο* ('Ancient drama in today's theatre'), see Annals, 242.

The next performance staged by Dimitris Rondiris in the theatre of Epidauros was the *Hippolytus* production of 1954 (Fig. 10),<sup>61</sup> which inaugurated the Epidauros Festival. From the following year, despite the sudden removal of Rondiris from the management of the National Theatre, performances of ancient drama became a staple at Epidauros year after year, creating a unique experience in this theatrical genre. The Epidauros Festival, in an age where the success of an artistic event is a direct correlation with the size of the audience, remains one of the major cultural events in Greece; often functioning as an informal meeting place for people connected with the theatre, similar to the more formal meetings established in all European countries after the war. But Dimitris Rondiris stayed out: in spite of being the originator of this Festival, he did not stage another production at Epidauros until 1978 when his famous *Electra* was revived: 40 years after its first presentation there and 24 years after the establishment of the Festival marked by the *Hippolytus*.

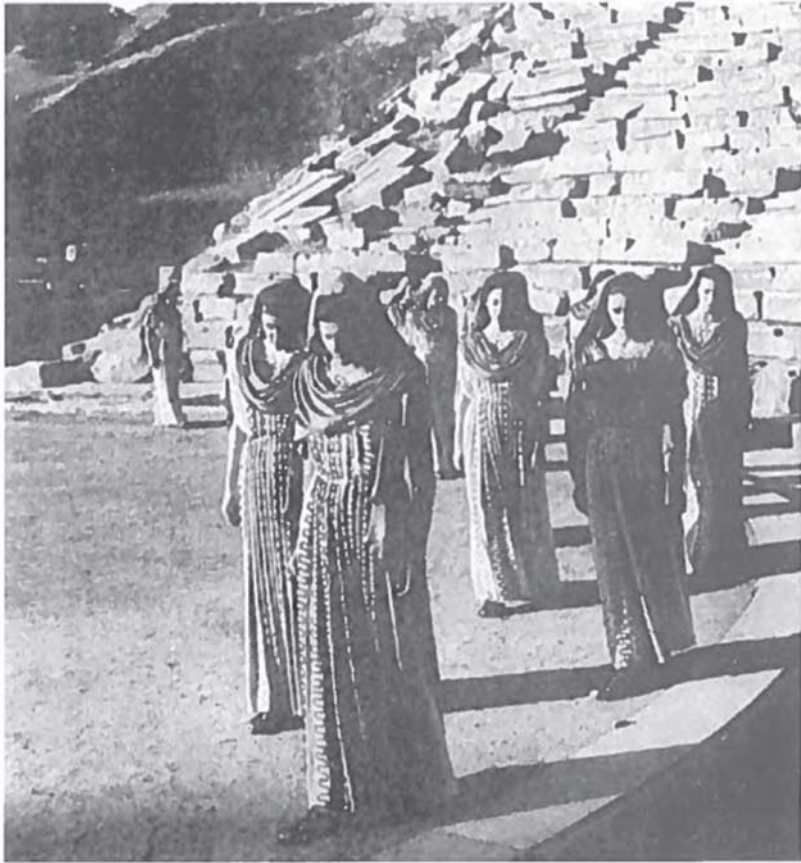


Fig. 10. Euripides, *Hippolytus* by the National Theatre performing at Epidauros in 1954.

<sup>61</sup> See Mary Iliadi 1994, *Hippolytus*, Performance History Appendix, Epikairoita 18 (1994) 157-172.



These modern approaches created new demands; chief among these was the need for the presentation of different translations in performances of ancient drama. The common feature in the approach of Théâtre Technis as shaped by Koun, and the approach of the National Theatre as defined by Rondiris, is the interactive support between performance and translation. Both of these elements tended towards freedom from the restraints imposed by extra-theatrical ideological concerns, and the circumstances that determined them during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And both of them inclined towards the exploration of theatricality itself. In reality, the practices of both Koun and Rondiris redefined the concerns that underlie modern performances of ancient Greek drama and guided the demands of theatre practice towards an introspective exploration that belongs entirely to the theatre. Through this perspective, the translation is harmonized with the overall stage conception. It is no longer a matter of correct rendition or a pretty turn of phrase: the translation now assumes a functional role and plays an integral part in the unified whole of the performance, by adding coherent arguments to the process that shapes the audience's response.

The wealth of modern performances of ancient drama, especially after the establishment of the Epidaurus Festival, created some new considerations that depend on the following basic principle: each new production of ancient drama must have its own translation, since it poses afresh its own demands. In this sense, the director becomes the new moving force behind the process of translation; and common interests and goals are recognized, providing a new hierarchical order of values behind the production terms of each performance. Still this curious parallel course gradually leads to the autonomy of the process of translation, since the style of the translation itself embodies the possibility of a stage conception. Thus the translator's desk is likened to the stage; the translation is recognized as a new version of the original conception embodied in the ancient text.

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Fig. 9. Photographic source: Βασίλης Φωτόπουλος, *100 χρόνια Εθνικό Θέατρο*, Αθήνα 2000.

Fig. 10. Photographic source: Το χρονικό των Επιδαυρείων, Αφιέρωμα του περιοδικού *Θεατρικά*, Αθήνα 1975.

Fig. 11. Courtesy of the EMI Archives, UK.

Fig. 12. Petrópulos Archive no. 568. Despite all our efforts, the person(s) owning the rights to this lyric sheet could not be found.

Fig. 13. Petrópulos Archive no. 414. Despite all our efforts, the person(s) owning the rights to this lyric sheet could not be found.

Fig. 14. Petrópulos Archive no. 567. Despite all our efforts, the person(s) owning the rights to this lyric sheet could not be found.

Fig. 15. Petrópulos Archive no. 593. Despite all our efforts, the person(s) owning the rights to this lyric sheet could not be found.

Fig. 16. Photographic source: *Néa tragúdia*, July 1936.