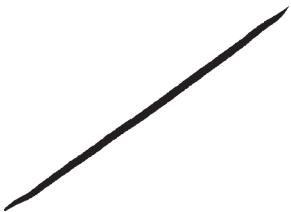


THEATRE IN GREECE DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract: The article attempts to provide an overall overview of the Greek theatre during the interwar period. Specifically, it examines the conditions that influenced playwriting and the establishment and operation of theatrical troupes and institutions. The interwar period sheds light on modern Greek theatre and its darker side, leading up to the current theatrical landscape. The article summarises its impact on theatrical practice, the reception of ancient drama, and the emergence and consolidation of important domains such as directing and theatre criticism within the institutionalisation of basic demands.

Keywords: interwar period, dramaturgy, actors, national theatre, commercial theatre, direction, criticism.

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Introduction

The economic and social crisis caused by the first World War brought radical changes to the political and cultural map of Europe. At the same time, the prevalence of the communist revolution in Russia and the strengthening of Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany caused serious breaches in the democratic states and the institutions of those states.

The reverberations of these events in Greece were very serious which took the form of the greatest tragedy in Greek recent history, namely the Asia Minor Catastrophe. At the same time, the previous Balkan wars and the national division had a catalytic effect on the political and social balance and inhibited intellectual and cultural development. The permanent overthrows of governments and the establishment of dictatorship seemed to be the most convenient solution for the management of extraordinary conditions, as shown by the short-lived dictatorships of Kondylis, Pagalos and the longest and most painful one, that of Ioannis Metaxas (Grammatas, 2017, 111).

1. THE DECLINE

During the two decades of the interwar period, the theatrical decline was experienced with greater or lesser intensity by all theatrical factors. Both intra-theatrical and extra-theatrical factors contributed to this decline. Among them,

the most important was the repertoire of troupes. The domestic dramaturgy was characterised by thinness, inadequacy, and a lack of quality, while the foreign repertoire was marked by an absence of artistic value, dominating the French boulevard.

The external and internal shocks left profound traces in the spiritual field. In particular, in the theatre sector, the experts talked about the “death” of theatre, the theatrical past of the “New Stage” and the “Royal Theatre” being presented in a beautified way, stressing the urgent need to address the situation.

The loss of lucrative Eastern markets, crucial for the economic sustainability of the Greek travelling theatre, the expensive tickets, the summer season, the inappropriate hours, the diversification of entertainment means, the heavy taxation, the sloppy performances, and the indifference of the managers of theatre companies were considered the main reasons of the decline by the press of the time. The emergence of the new, more attractive and above all more easily and cheaply accessible art of cinema was also a reason for the dwindling theatre audiences. Eminent intellectuals and ardent devotees of theatre turned passionately against the new art. In this context of the sudden changes in the theatrical production landscape, the quality of the repertoire was immediately affected, and the French boulevard became the permanent source for the troupes.

2. THE MUSIC THEATRE

The end of the First World War sparked a deep desire in people, whether on the battlefields or among civilians, to enjoy life and escape from unpleasant memories. Neither the economic crash of 1929 nor the escalating threat of a second war in the 1930s could stop this desire (Seiragakis 2009, vol. A, 28-29). This climate of frantic Dionysianism, embracing all social classes, also dominated interwar Athens. In these conditions, light musical theatre was the dominant theatrical genre in the first interwar decade.

The Athenians had already been exposed to musical theatre ever since the foundation of the modern Greek state through the Italian opera and operetta performances. At the same time, this genre cemented its connection with other European cultures. (Seiragakis, 2009, vol. A, 31). The revue, drawing its themes from current affairs, was the most suitable genre to celebrate the victories of the wars. Despite criticism in the interwar period, the revue persisted, with occasional attempts at renewal and improvement. However, none of those attempts matched the brilliance of the annual revues of the 1910s.

After 1922, the revue's popularity diminished as the new political and national trends, and, in particular, the great Idea debacle, took away its satirical dimension.

The coexistence of authors from the older and younger generations and the flexibility of the older ones in adapting to the new requirements ensured the revue's continuity. The heyday of the operetta continued throughout the first decade of the interwar period, and according to Sideris, until the 1930s, Athens was certainly a brilliant temple of the operetta (Sideris 2008, 319-320).

3. THE REPERTOIRE. GREEK DRAMATURGY

Greek troupes, as led by the protagonists Kyvelis and Kotopoulos, were constantly called to support Greek plays., with the short-lived quality troupes emerging from time to time being the ones entrusted with this task. The comparison with foreign theatrical plays was a constant point of reference, and emancipation from foreign influence was an imperative request (Georgopoulou, 2008, 319-320).

The external adoption of modernist ideas and forms and the inability of creative assimilation and artistic transformation of sociological and metaphysical concerns by the Greek playwrights were seen as obstacles to the development of dramaturgy. The state's indifference and the lack of an organised state institution could also be seen as one of the main causes of the decline of dramaturgy. However, the improvement of stage performance conditions was proposed as a possible solution for the development of domestic drama.

During the first interwar decade, dramaturgy was still under the influence of older dramatists such as P. Horn, Sp. Mela, G. Xenopoulos. The new playwrights did not have a comparable contribution to that of the older ones.

In the 1930s, the older writers did not play a leading role in the field of drama. However, the lack of important dramatists, the uncritical imitation of foreign patterns, the global post-war crisis, the state's indifference, and the time required to transform history into fiction continued to be considered the most important causes of the decline of dramaturgy.

As the most durable and clearly dominant genre in the dramatic field, **ethography** became the centre of intellectual and theatrical dialogue. Ethography is often identified with the past, but its transcendence characterises the attempts of the avant-garde. Thus, the study of Greek dramaturgy is directly linked to the subject of ethography, which joins the broader dimension of the demand for Greekness, a concept that regularly resurfaces and affirms its importance. We ascertain that its influence is so profound that it accompanies every attempt to escape from it, and ethnographic elements are found in all dramatic genres, even in

those considered opposites, as, for example, urban drama. Ethography survived the entire interwar period as the basis of experimentation for the application of newer intellectual movements and trends (Vassiliou, 2005, 131). Among the older playwrights, Gr. Xenopoulos and P. Horn consistently and efficiently engage in ethography, while among the younger ones, we find Dim. Bogris.

The relationship of Xenopoulos's plays with Greek life in both the capital and the countryside, is particularly direct and lively, and therefore the ethographic dimension strongly characterises his dramaturgical production. However, we would not call Xenopoulos an ethographer, as we call Bogris and Horn after 1921. The main focus of Xenopoulos' dramaturgy is the erotic, the presentation of the erotic emotion in all its manifestations and digressions (Pefanis, 2001, 168-169). The other focal points of his plays, such as the political or social aspects, are always dimly lit and serve as the dominant erotic element. These other focal points are always weaker. In this context, at least some of his plays would match the "emotional ethography" term attributed by M. Lygizos (Lygizos, 1980, 102).

It is worth noting that, in the early interwar period, two of the best examples of the ethographic genre were written, which were staged many times to this day. *Fidanaki*, Pantelis Horn's first and perfect attempt in the ethographic field, was staged for the first time by the Kyveli's troupe in 1921 without her own participation. With Aim. Veakis and Maria Alkaiou in the leading roles, the play has had a rich stage career since then. The play was a successful representation of an Athenian court as a space for the cohabitation of the popular class. The dominant motif was the naturalistic depiction of the moral impoverishment caused by material poverty. *Fidanaki* (or *To Fintanaki*) was performed several times on the interwar Athenian stage by major and minor troupes (Sideris, 1961, 1351-1353). The performance of the National Theatre in 1934, directed by F. Politis, highlighted its successful ethography dimension by utilising the modern facilities of the state stage.

Dimitris Bogris is one of the young playwrights who emerged during the interwar period, being mainly recognised in the field of ethography. After an initial attempt in the field of urban drama with *Iatro Mavridis* in 1921, his first dynamic appearance was with *Engagements*. The play was presented by the "Youth troupe" in Pagrati in 1925. With the author's hometown of Salamis as a dramatic space, the play shows the traditional values and social conventions of provincial life, emphasizing the relentless force of fate. Although it was later considered a milestone in interwar dramaturgy, it did not receive sufficient acclaim from the critics of the era, perhaps because of its indifferent or even negative attitude towards the troupe. By contrast, the performance of the National Theatre in 1936, directed by Dim. Rontiri and with the perfect interpretations of Aim. Veakis, Alexis Minotis, Sapphos Alkaiou, and Nikos Paraskevas, highlighted

the ethnographic richness and garnered appreciative comments. However, the more refined critics had greater demands from the author and pressed him to move away from ethnography and move on to more qualitative theatrical genres (Oikonomidis, 1936).

The theatrical genre of **urban drama** introduced by Xenopoulos, who was also its theoretical exponent, which was identified with the regeneration of modern Greek theatre at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, experienced a late revival in the first decade of the interwar period. This phenomenon can be partially explained by historical and ideological factors: the delayed urbanisation of Greek society and the dynamic intervention of the left in the first interwar decade (Vasieliou, 2005, 100-101).

This theatrical genre is represented either by older playwrights such as Sp. Melas and Dim. Tagopoulos or by younger ones such as Th.N. Synadinos, K. Bastias, and Mich. Rhodes. In the second decade, the increased demand for Greekness leading to the past, the renewed interest in both ancient and modern classical drama, the gradual weakening of the leftist ideology, and the establishment of the Metaxa's dictatorship in 1936 are some of the causes that led to the noticeable decline of urban drama.

Poetic theatre, whether in metre or poetic prose, is a rare theatrical genre, which presents several difficulties in its stage presentation. It requires special acting and vocal skills from the actors. Commercial troupes therefore refuse to include poetic dramas in their repertoire, and the public systematically avoids them. Thus, the acceptance of the poetic theatre needed a strong practical foundation, which was provided by the performance of *Triseugene* by K. Palamas in 1935-1936 at the National Theatre, directed by Dim. Rontiri, with Alexis Minoti and Katina Paxinou in the lead roles. The quantity, the length, and also the discussions on the critical and theoretical texts written about the performance (Puchner, 1995, 497-548) enriched the dramaturgical theory, overturning the opinion about the unsuitability of poetic texts for the stage and promoting the new scenic ways to highlight the texts (Georgopoulou, 2008, 355-35).

NEW DRAMATIC GENRES. THE AVANT-GARDE.

Along with the older dramatic genres, new ones enriched dramaturgy in the interwar period. In the second interwar decade, historical drama attracted the interest of younger and older playwrights alike. This genre gave the authors the

opportunity to use new aesthetic currents and dramaturgical techniques, as well as psychography, both in the content and structure of the cinematic form of tableau-images. *Lord Byron's* Lidorikis, *Emperor Michael* of Agg. Terzakis, *Iulianos* of N. Kazantzakis, *Ioudas*, and *Papaflessas* of Sp. Mela thus represented the new ideological and aesthetic directions.

Lighter dramatic genres were revived, while *comédie* hovered between comedy and light drama, echoing the interwar laxity and need for cheerfulness. Gr. Xenopoulos belongs to the serious representatives of *comédie*, being one of the first to try to define the term theoretically. This genre perfectly suited Xenopoulos' temperament and dramatic choices, as he ardently desired to be "the chosen one" of the Greek theatre. He used the genre to the fullest in his theatrical plays.

The **comedy of morals**, deeply rooted in the Greek tradition, was systematically cultivated in the interwar period, especially from the middle of the second decade onwards. The social and political circumstances of the time were suitable for satirical treatment. The common themes of such comedies were the modern emancipated-intellectual woman, marital and extramarital affairs, the corruption of morals, the worldly display, and the out-of-bounds desire for social advancement. The genre was represented either by the older authors, among whom T. Moraitinis, Th. Synadinis, and Gr. Xenopoulos held an important position, or by the younger ones, such as Dim. Ioannopoulos.

Despite dramaturgy's general perception of stagnation, the interwar period saw the emergence of important examples of innovation. Apart from the troupes, who established the renewal of the Greek stage as their objective, both the commercial troupes and the national theatre, in their effort not to lag behind, presented plays that were innovative in both content and form. Also, some of the older playwrights, such as Xenopoulos and Horn, repeatedly attempted to introduce modern techniques and themes in their dramaturgy. Among the older authors, P. Horn was the one who advanced pioneering dramatic proposals, which sparked a wave of criticism. A representative example is *Sentzas*, a character-driven comedy that focused on shedding light on the multiple facets of the central character. To achieve this, the author used magnification, exaggeration, and repetition. Unfortunately, theatre criticism focused on the ideological axis of immorality of the central character and failed to assess the various aesthetic parameters of the play, specifically ignoring the relationship with European currents, such as Freud's psychoanalysis.

In the field of the interwar avant-garde, two plays by Galatea Kazantzakis¹, a prominent personality of the feminist movement, occupy an important position. The *Wounded Birds* stand out as the sole play by a female writer that was presented in 1925 by the pioneering troupe “Theatre of Art” of Sp. Melas. The troupe promised a substantial theatrical renaissance and presented to the Athenian public the contemporary successes of the French stage and the general plays of the European avant-garde.

The text of the play is lost, our knowledge of it is based on its reception, which was indeed noteworthy. Kazantzakis was influenced by the French playwright Lenormand in respect to the theme, specifically by the play *Les rates* (*The Unsuccessful*), and by Chekhov in general in respect to atmosphere. Social protest appeared in new and interesting expressive ways in G. Kazantzakis’ much-discussed play, *While the Ship Sails*. It has several peculiarities and presents challenges in understanding and interpretation that cannot be easily addressed on a realistic level. More generally, Kazantzakis’ play falls within the framework of expressionism. Specifically, it shows many similarities with O’Neill’s *Hairy Ape*, which belongs to the expressionist phase of the American playwright. Despite their imperfections and negative reception by critics, Kazantzakis’ two plays occupy an important place in the history of modern Greek theatre. They are seen as attempts to combine the Greek reality of the era with the European aesthetic of the previous twenty years, such as naturalism and symbolism, or with more modern ones, such as expressionism.

Aggelos Terzakis, in *Gamilio Embatario*, referring to the Chekhovian atmosphere of the *Three Sisters*, attempted to combine ethnography with psychography, as he depicted very successfully the drama of a family in the Greek countryside. Alekos Lidorikis in *Megali Stigmi*, in 1933, inaugurated pioneering techniques by presenting three different versions of his hero’s life, based on his decisions, and by introducing the motif of the commentator in the epilogue. Lidorikis, continuing his experiments in psychographic drama in *The Waiting Room* in 1939, delved deeper into the topic of human happiness – a common theme in his dramaturgy.

1 This is the first wife of N. Kazantzakis, whose work remained unknown for many years. Recent research has revealed a rich literary and theatrical work, Καστρινάκη Αγγέλα, (1997): «Γαλάτεια Καζαντζάκη», *Η παλαιότερη πεζογραφία μας. Από τις αρχές της ως τον Πρώτο Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο*, τ. Ι, Αθήνα: Σοκόλης.σ. 422-446—Β. Γεωργοπούλου, Β. (2011). Γυναίκες διαδρομές. Η Γαλάτεια Καζαντζάκη και το θέατρο, Αθήνα: Αιγόκερως.

THE RECEPTION OF ANCIENT DRAMA

The most important performances of ancient drama until the establishment of the state stage in 1932 were presented in the context of sustained efforts to improve the theatrical landscape. These endeavours were undertaken intermittently by various troupes outside commercial theatre. Such performances sparked ample reflection regarding the manner of staging ancient dramas, especially the chorus parts. Two of the most important performances of the first interwar decade are Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* by Angelos Sikelianos in Delphi and Euripides' *Hekabe* in the Panathinaikos Stadium by Marika Kotopoulis, directed by F. Politis.

"The Delphic attempt" of Angelos Sikelianos is an important step in the revival of ancient drama, despite not being included in the plans of its initiators (Georgopoulou, 2003, 127-134). The whole project was part of the general plan of Sikelianos to make Delphi the "omphalos of the earth"/the centre of the world again. The second Delphic Festival took place in May 1930, during which *Prometheus* was reprised and Aeschylus' *Iketides* was presented for the first time on the Greek stage. The Delphic festivals inaugurated the open space for ancient drama performances. Moreover, for the first time, the chorus followed the imaginative choreography taught by Eva Sikelianou based on ancient vessels and modern traditional Greek dances.

The performance of Euripides' *Hekabe* in 1927 was the professional theatre's response to Sikelianos' challenge. It was performed at the Panathinaikos Stadium, and it was directed by F. Politis, with a translation – especially penned for the performance by Ap. Melachrinos. Marika Kotopoulis and Emilios Veakis were in the lead roles of Hekabe and Polymestor, respectively. The performances of *Prometheus* and *Hekabe* created a wide field of reflection regarding the public's relationship with ancient tragedy and the need to educate them in this direction.

In 1932, with Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, F. Politis inaugurated the National Theatre. The director considered Aeschylus a model of a high poetic style and since there was a new translation ready, courtesy of Gryparis, it needed to be tested on stage. The performance was highly anticipated by both the press and the public at the time as an important artistic event. The twenty years of strict criticism that F. Politis applied to the performances of other creators, his constant theoretical positions on the stage presentation of ancient tragedies, the perfect material equipment, the financial flexibility that the National Theatre granted to the new director, and the fatal confrontation with commercial theatre increased the demand for direction.

In 1934, true to his declarations, L. Karzis presented Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Phoenices* (*The Phoenician Women*) at the Panathenaiko Stadium, insisting on the archaeological reconstruction of the ancient performances with the use of

masks and the other accessories of the ancient “ὄψις”. Serious objections were raised, the main arguments being the loss of the basic components of the ancient performance and the need to approach ancient drama from a modern audience perspective and not the opposite.

In October 1936, at the Royal Theatre, previously called the National Theatre before the change of state, K. Bastias kept his promise and established the Week of Ancient Drama, an event that was praised by intellectuals and opened new perspectives in the field of ancient drama revival. The first play presented in October was Sophocles’ *Electra*, directed by Dim. Rontiri. The roles of Electra and Clytemnestra were performed by Katina Paxinou and Eleni Papadaki, respectively, and the translation was penned by G. Gryparis. In September 1938, with the cooperation of the Travelling Club, the state stage presented the Sophoclean *Electra* at the Theatre of Epidaurus, which was a highly praised event. It was the first time since antiquity that the tragic speech resonated in the Polykleitos Theatre.

In 1939, Sophocles’ *Electra* was also chosen by M. Kotopoulis to celebrate thirty years of her presence as a trouper in the modern Greek theatre. The translation belonged to the poet Ap. Melachrinou, while music to Ant. Evagelatos. The director K. Koon, directing a tragedy for the first time with a commercial troupe, attempted to apply his realistic performance concepts to ancient drama. This innovation, reinforced by Engonopoulos’s artistic intervention and the protagonist’s inability – despite honourable efforts – to adapt to the new acting style, caused a wave of reactions (Georgopoulou, 2011, 108-109). The last ancient drama performance in the interwar period was *Antigone* by the state theatre, directed by T. Mouzenidis, for the first time in the ancient theatre. Unlike tragedies, Aristophanic comedies did not thrive in the interwar period. The National Theatre and the commercial troupes did not present Aristophanes at all. This project was undertaken by pioneering theatre groups.

THE STAGE ACT

i. The commercial theatre

The stage act in interwar Athens presented much greater interest than dramaturgy, especially in the field of new goals and achievements and the relationship with Europe. The troupes showed variety in composition but also in terms of formation, organisation and operation. Along with the older troupes of the commercial theatre, new troupes appeared, which in most cases also functioned as drama schools. These presented a specific programme and artistic vision, with the common goal of upgrading the theatrical art at the level of dramaturgy and stage performance, and especially promoting Greek plays. These troupes, although short-

lived and lacking in personnel and material resources, operated in competition with commercial troupes and often pushed them to renew their repertoire.

In the second interwar decade, the establishment and operation of the National Theatre and the competition with the commercial theatre were stronger and led to new theatre forms and collaborations. Moreover, the arrival of new actors and directors from Europe, becoming members of the troupes, strengthened the course and consolidated the avant-garde trends.

The two protagonists of the commercial theatre, Kotopoulis and Kyveli, dominated the first interwar decade. The largest percentage of foreign plays presented in the interwar period by the commercial theatre belongs to the boulevard genre, mainly French, with Verneig, Bataille, and Bernstein as main representatives (Kodekaki, 2004, 275-280). Trying to upgrade its repertoire as a counterbalance to the French boulevard, Kotopoulis, in addition to traditional honours performances, also established artistic evening ones where he presented quality classical, ancient, and contemporary plays.

In the first interwar decade, Shakespearean staging in the professional theatre was represented by the attempts of Kotopoulis, which aspired to continue the successful tradition of the Royal Theatre of the early twentieth century (1901-1905). The ancient-theme plays of the European authors of the Romantic period were included very early in the repertoire of the Greek troupes, replacing the ancient tragedy. Goethe's *Iphigenia* and the Austrian poet and dramatist Hofmannsthal's *Electra* were the "tragic" triumphs of Kotopoulis in Greece as well as in the troupe's tours abroad. In the second interwar decade, the actress systematically turned to the quality repertoire, using everything new available to the Greek theatre in all fields. In particular, her groundbreaking choices manifested themselves with clearly positive results in direction, scenography, and acting, expanding her aesthetic and artistic horizons.

The collaboration with pioneering directors of the free theatre, such as K. Koon (Kyriakos, 2012, 16-56), and the newly arrived from France, Giannoulis Sarantidis, as well as with imaginative and daring scenographers, such as N. Eggonopoulos, G. Tsarouhis, and Hatzikyriakos Gikas, constituted a contribution to the history of the interwar stage. The establishment of the National Theatre in 1932 prompted the two protagonists – Kotopoulis and Kyvelis – to stop their legendary rivalry and to join forces to employ a permanent director, Sp. Melas, and to collaborate with renowned artists such as painter Pericles Byzantios and the architect Dim. Pikionis. Although the presence of the two actresses on the same stage was initially impressive, the individual promotion, the inappropriate repertoire, and the lack of adequate preparation were negatively commented on (Sideris, 1932, 117; Thrylos, B', 1934, 48-50).

In the field of comedy, the troupe of Vassilis Argyropoulos stands out. Argyropoulos's favourite authors were Arnold Franz and Bach Ernst, whose comedies he often presented throughout the interwar period and which usually provoked negative comments due to their low level. In the second interwar decade, the troupe played several Greek comedies. At the same time, Argyropoulos turned to the quality repertoire, if we judge from Molière's comedies he approached, with himself playing the lead role (*Tartoufos* 1936, *Misanthropos* 1939).

Aliki Theodoridou-Nor, daughter of Kyveli and second wife of K. Theodoridis, began her career in 1932 (in collaboration with K. Mousouris until 1937). Having studied in Paris, she belonged to the new generation of educated actors, who, emerging in the second interwar decade, constituted a turning point in the theatrical landscape in contrast to the self-taught and empirical theatre players of the previous generation. The troupe had special performances of light plays, mainly from the typical interwar drama genre of *comédie* with the main representative, Hungarian writer, Fr. Molnár.

In 1936, Kat. Andreadis, having studied in Germany, founded her own troupe, which was added to the professional troupes of the interwar period. The performances of the troupe were mainly English comedies of morals. They usually had a major female role to highlight the talents of the protagonist. Although they were not approved by the most demanding part of the critics due to their lack of deeper intellectual content, they were nevertheless considered preferable to the French boulevard, satisfying the requirements of the average viewer.

ii. The National Theatre

In 1932, the establishment of the National Theatre, after long-term processes and considerations, prompted a shift in the field of drama and theatrical performance. The repertoire policy of the new theatre organisation provoked intense reactions. The marginalisation of important older actors, together with the authoritarian behaviour of managers, strengthened the competitive climate that prevailed in the artistic field. The classical repertoire, Greek and foreign, was part of the priorities of the state stage, which aspired to reach the level of the corresponding European ones.

iii. Attempts to upgrade and pioneer

In the context of the efforts to elevate the theatrical landscape and of the establishment of art theatre, which were imperative goals, especially in the first interwar decade, important attempts were made by organisations or persons with an amateur, semi-amateur or even professional character. These extraordinary and short-lived theatre formations – some of them started and functioned as

drama schools as well – were often presented at the premiere of important plays, highlighted actors with a rich subsequent stage activity, and showcased innovative stage achievements (Hatzipantazis, 2014, 423). However, their short duration, lack of preparation, insufficient technical equipment, and, in general, their operation on the fringes of the commercial theatre, prevented them from being taken into consideration, with some important pioneering achievements going unnoticed. One of the important achievements of those troupes was the restoration of Aristophanes, whose reception was underestimated until then due to the performances of the neighbourhood troupes, with an exaggeration of the farcical and sexual elements.

Performance-stations in the presentation of Aristophanes, which claimed an artistic character, were *Irini* from the “Hellenic Theatre Company” in 1919, *Plutus* from the troupe of “Neos” in 1924, *Ornithes* from “Eleftheran Skine” in 1929, and the performances of K. Koun in the second interwar decade (Diamantakou, 2021, 112-115).

The troupe of the “Athens Conservatory” in 1918-1924, directed by Thomas Oikonomou, and the “Hellenic Theatre Company” in 1919, founded by the Society of Greek Playwrights (*Oedipus Tyrannus* directed by F. Politis in “Olympia” with Veakis in the main role), marked important steps in the promotion of both Greek drama and theatrical practice.

In 1922, the Veakis-Nezer troupe became famous with the appearance of Veakis in Shakespearean roles (*Macbeth*, *Othello*) and Nezer in Molière roles (*Filargyros*, *The Imaginary Patient*).

In 1924, the Union of Greek Actors founded the “Professional Theatre School,” where F. Politis would test his directing skills by presenting, among other plays, for the first time *Vasilikos* by Antonio Matesis in 1927.

In 1925, the “Art Theatre” of Sp. Melas, with the students of the Hellenic Conservatory and the Athens Conservatory, established L. Pirandello and introduced the necessity of direction and visual coverage of the performance, using special artists for this purpose. New actors were tested with success, including Eleni Papadaki. After his term in Paris, Sp. Melas established “Free Stage” in collaboration with Mitsos Myrat and Marika Kotopoulis.

The exoticism combined with imaginative directing proposals, according to the example of the French avant-garde, impressed the Athenian public and established the directing institution. Young actors – later protagonists – Minotis, Paxinou, Glinos, and Katrakis successfully emerged, and the visual artists were recognised as essential contributors to the performance.

In 1931, Veakis’ troupe presented for the first time Eugene O’Neill’s *Desires under the Elms* and, also for the first time, Chekhov’s multi-act work, *Uncle Vanya*. Then, in the summer of 1932, Kyveli presented the *Three Sisters* and Kotopoulis *The Seagull*.

The neighbourhood theatre was promoted, and Pagrati hosted the “Youth” Troupe in the summer months (1924-1929) and the “People’s Theatre” of Vasilis Rotas in 1930. Young playwrights showcased their skills together with the neighbourhood troupes, among which we can mention Dim. Bogris in *Engagements* and *Doctor Mavridis*, along with young emerging actors like K. Mousouris, Ant. Giannidis, and Eleni Chalkousi.

The young professor of the College, Karolos Koon, experimented with his students by renewing Aristophanes (*Frogs*, *Birds* 1932, 1933). In 1934, with the collaboration of Devaris and Tsarouhis, he founded the “Popular Stage,” looking for the foundations of “popular expressionism” in tradition (*Erofilis*, *Alcistis*). From 1939 onwards, he moved to the domain of psychological realism, which he ended up systematically cultivating in the following years.

The actor profession underwent significant changes, both in the trade union area (in the early 1930s, the actor’s work permit was instituted) and in the qualitative upgrading of the profession through the systematisation of theatre education.

In the field of theatrical achievements, the systematisation of theatre criticism can also be included, in 1928 acquiring its own union, namely the Union of Greek Theatre and Music Critics. The new generation of critics, including F. Politis, Alkis Thrylos, K. Bastias, P. Haris, Athanasiadis Novas, ensured significant progress was made in critical and theoretical thinking. Young intellectuals who returned from Europe after finishing their theatre studies, such as Mouzenidis, Katselis, and Karantinos (“New Dramatic School,” 1936), enriched the theatrical thought and, at the same time, actively engaged in theatrical practice.

Conclusions – Discussion

Theatre in the interwar period, so far, has been insufficiently studied. For this reason, many dark and obscure aspects were brought to light by modern studies in the 1990s. According to these studies, the ever-recurring decline due to historical reasons caused significant rearrangements in the theatre field. In the dramaturgy field, although dominated by ethnography, new theatrical genres appeared, with historical drama taking the first place and offering notable examples. The contact with European artistic trends, although it presented problems of assimilation, nevertheless offered important samples, which criticism failed to assess due to a lack of proper skills.

The progress in the reception of ancient drama is significant. The “schools” that prevailed from then on were formed in that period. In 1938, the Theatre of Epidauros was opened for the first time with a performance by Sofoklis – *Electra* (*Hlektra*). With the same performance and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the National Theatre triumphed on the stages of London and Berlin.

In the theatrical landscape, compared to the previous period, the achievements are more evident. The long-awaited establishment and operation of the National Theatre significantly improved theatrical life, acting as a solid counterweight to the commercial theatre, which was forced to adapt to the new demands, collaborate with directors, and improve their acting. The institution of the director was thus consolidated through the work of new directors, most of whom have been educated in Europe. The achievements in the field of theatre criticism were also impressive due to the improvement of the press and the contribution of educated critics, who penned articles in the most important newspapers and magazines. Among them, the most important were F. Politis and Alkis Thyrylos, nickname of Helen Uranus.

Theatrical education also underwent major improvements with the establishment and operation of drama schools, along with the consolidation of the demands for the professional and financial improvement of the actors.

The theatrical interwar period illuminates many dark or obscure parts of the modern Greek theatre, which leads us to today's theatrical landscape.

We thus summarised the period's contribution to the current fields of theatrical practice, the reception of ancient drama, the emergence and consolidation of important professions such as directing and theatre criticism, and the contribution to the establishment of basic artistic and administrative theatre institutions.

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