

Local involvement in modern Greek revivals of ancient theatres: Delphi and Epidaurus in the inter-war period¹

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Local community participation in the revival of ancient theatres as venues in Greece shaped the dynamics of the cultural reception of inter-war performances at Delphi and Epidaurus. Here I analyse local involvement within and beyond the theatrical context of the Delphic Festivals, as well as the long-standing identification of the village of Ligourio with the theatre of Epidaurus. These relationships reflect distinctive dimensions of the clash between community-led and institutional archaeology, which dominated national discourse on authenticity and identity. At the same time, the prospects of economic development through tourism in such remote areas encouraged local receptiveness to the revival of ancient theatres.

Keywords: local communities; authenticity; national imagination; Greek National Theatre; regionalism

Introduction

‘People from the village and surrounding areas gathered every night at the *koilon* and closely watched the rehearsals in silence. Residents from a wide surrounding area

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learnt and then, many years after the festivals, still remembered and sang the sufferings of the chained Titan'.² This description of local engagement with ancient drama was given by Koula Pratsika, leader of the chorus of *Prometheus Bound* at the Delphic Festival in 1927. A few decades earlier, at the end of the nineteenth century, near the recently excavated theatre of Delphi, the local community had yet to re-discover and re-determine its relationship with local heritage. The French Archaeological School of Athens had obtained a licence to demolish the village of Kastri in order to conduct an extended excavation³ and reconstruct the village nearby.⁴ Around the same time, in Epidauros, locals from the village of Ligourio ceded their lands and voluntarily assisted in the excavations in exchange for the construction of a road that would connect the ancient theatre with the town of Nafplio.⁵ Thus two agricultural villages, Kastri and Ligourio, were to be profoundly affected by new archaeological discoveries in ways that conditioned the locals' interaction with their ancient heritage.

The locals had previously owned these sites and retained a strong attachment to them. While the national press extolled the ancient theatres as magnificent examples of national heritage,⁶ the locals (as depicted by the travel writer Kostas Ouranis) saw themselves as humble peasants safeguarding their own countryside.⁷ Thus, community participation in the revival of these ancient theatres could be said to involve two dynamic clashes.

First, local identification with heritage led to a clash of interests between nationalism and regionalism in Greece. As Tziouvas argues, 'often ethnic identity or local cultures are appropriated by nationalism or national culture, and there is a common practice of subsuming ethnicity under nationality'.⁸ To explore this clash, I shall expand on the ideas behind Tziouvas' linguistic contentions to include cultural and political perceptions of local heritage.⁹ In particular, I argue that national politics can be seen as a centripetal force that seeks to absorb peripheral individualities, whereas regional identity can be seen as a centrifugal one that tugs local particularities away from the

2 K. Pratsika, 'Αναμνήσεις ἀπ' τις πρώτες Δελφικές Ἑορτές του 1927', *Ἡώς* 98–102 (1966) 126–31 (129). The *koilon* is the seating area of the ancient theatre. English translations of newspaper articles and other primary sources in Greek are my own.

3 E. Kastorichis, *Ἱστορική ἔκθεσις τῶν πράξεων τῆς ἐν Αθήναις Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρίας, ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδρύσεως αὐτῆς τὸ 1837 μέχρι τοῦ 1879 τελευταίοντος* (Athens 1879) 82–4; A. Kokkou, *Ἡ μέριμνα για τις αρχαιότητες στην Ελλάδα και τα πρώτα μουσεῖα* (Athens 2009) 122.

4 G. P. Kastriotis, *Οἱ Δελφοί: Ἱστορική καὶ ἀρχαιολογική αὐτῶν περιγραφή ἐπὶ τῇ βάσει τῶν νέων πηγῶν καὶ τῶν ἀνασκαφῶν* (Athens 1894).

5 K. Boletis, 'Ἱστορικό του νεότερων επεμβάσεων στο θέατρο του Ασκληπιείου Επιδαύρου και στον ευρύτερο χώρο του ἕως το 1989', *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* 57 (2002) 433; G. H. Kondis, 'Αρχαίο θέατρο Επιδαύρου και τοπική κοινωνία: ρόλος και σημασία μιας σχέσης', *Θεάτρον Πόλις* 34 (2017/18) 128–31.

6 *Το Ἄστυ*, 4 April 1899, 1; *Το Ἄστυ*, 31 January 1900, 2; *Ἐμπρός*, 10 May 1927, 1.

7 K. Ouranis, 'Οἱ Δελφικὲς Γιορτὲς', *Ἡώς* 103–7 (1967) 239–47.

8 D. Tziouvas, 'Heteroglossia and the defeat of regionalism in Greece', *Kambos: Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 2 (1994) 95–120 (115).

9 *Op. cit.*, 95–120.

centre.¹⁰ Over time, the meeting and interaction of these forces in Greece has done much to diminish linguistic, social and cultural differences in the name of national uniformity.

This type of internal colonialism¹¹ was in most cases deliberately incorporated into state-run nation-building projects and produced lasting effects on local communities. Employing hegemonic discourses on national values, such projects involved state appropriation of peripheral traditions and the nationalization of regional heritage.

The concomitant exercise of control also led to a second clash, this time between modern Western archaeology and non-official indigenous archaeologies.¹² In this context, Hamilakis has proposed a wider definition of archaeology,¹³ summarizing it as a series of practices and discourses regarding ancient things which includes groups or individuals that have created their own narratives about the material traces of the past.

In the two cases discussed here, local discourses came from a variety of groups and individuals that had formed their own interpretations and had engaged with the material traces of the past through a series of significant practices. As Plantzos notes, these perspectives were generally dismissed by national agents who sought to assume control of the material traces of classical antiquity in order to transform them into emblems of national identity.¹⁴ In that spirit, ancient remains were reimagined and revived to construct a present seen through the prism of an idealized and timeless past,¹⁵ while Western classicism and the modern Greek national imagination contrasted starkly with regional and indigenous archaeologies as instinctively exercised by peripheral groups.

These ideological clashes encompass the heterotopic dimension of classical Greek antiquities noted by Ioannidou.¹⁶ A heterotopic identification of such spaces consists in ideologically connecting contemporary Greek realities with an idealized perception of classical antiquity. Initiatives to re-use ancient theatres stimulated a connection between present-day Greek communities and the classical past by systematically exposing them to cultural revivals. As Van Steen has demonstrated, by the nineteenth century the Greek intelligentsia had already begun to focus on the need to forge a homogeneous identity,¹⁷ with actions that included staging ancient Greek drama.

10 *Op. cit.*, 96.

11 D. C. Papadopoulos, 'Ecologies of ruin: (re)bordering, ruination, and internal colonialism in Greek Macedonia, 1913–2013', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 20 (2016) 627–40.

12 Y. Hamilakis, 'Decolonizing Greek archaeology: indigenous archaeologies, modernist archaeology and the post-colonial critique', in D. Damaskos and D. Plantzos (eds.), *A Singular Antiquity: archaeology and Hellenic identity in twentieth-century Greece* (Athens 2008) 273–84.

13 *Op. cit.*, 275–6.

14 D. Plantzos, 'Time and the antique: linear causality and the Greek art narrative', in Damaskos and Plantzos (eds.), 253–72.

15 D. Plantzos, *Οι αρχαιολογίες του κλασικού: αναθεωρώντας τον εμπειρικό κανόνα* (Athens 2014), ch. 8.

16 E. Ioannidou, 'Toward a national heterotopia: ancient theaters and the cultural politics of performing ancient drama in modern Greece', *Comparative Drama* 44/45 (2011) 385–403.

17 G. Van Steen, 'A history of turns, traditions and transformations', in B. Van Zyl Smit (ed.), *A Handbook to the Reception of Greek Drama* (Chichester 2016) 201–20.

One of the main purposes of these revivals was to raise awareness among Greek communities of this national heritage and laud its supreme importance.

By imposing this vision of culture, agents of nationalism sought to homogenize national identity and eradicate any regional discourses of localized heritage. A crucial element in delivering this vision was a process of ‘ethnogenesis’.¹⁸ Unlike places in northern Greece where a national attempt at internal colonization was strategically implemented,¹⁹ Delphi did not represent any particular ideological or linguistic challenges to this concept of centralized nationalism; Ligourio was a slightly different case since its population largely comprised Arvanites.²⁰ It was simply that the existence of community-led discourses on antiquities did not contribute to the homogeneous construction of a national rhetoric. Where any such factors existed regarding classical heritage, they needed to be eradicated through purist archaeological approaches and dictates that monumentalized antiquities. One example of this is the change of the name of Kastri to Delphi as part of the Hellenization and classicization of toponymy taking place all around Greece.²¹

As direct testimonies from these local communities are extremely rare, I have mainly relied on sources such as the national or regional press and other publications recording the personal views of participants in the festivals and intellectuals who attended the performances. I have also consulted unpublished archival sources. Together, these provide a novel perspective on the communities’ involvement in the spectacles and shed light on their dynamic relationship with ancient spaces. Recently, many valuable works in theatre studies, classical reception and cultural studies have demonstrated the existence of an extensive interest in the Delphic Festivals and the theatrical traditions of the National Theatre of Greece.²² These accounts usually focus on theatrical perspectives, national claims, symbolism and other aspects that illuminate the origins of these theatrical traditions.

18 K. Kotsakis, ‘The past is ours: Images of Greek Macedonia’, in L. Meskell (ed.), *Archaeology under Fire: nationalism, politics and heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East* (London 1998) 44–67.

19 R. S. Peckham, ‘Internal colonialism: nation and region in nineteenth-century Greece’, in M. N. Todorova (ed.), *Balkan Identities: nation and memory* (London 2004) 41–59; D. C. Papadopoulos, ‘Ecologies of ruin’, 627–40.

20 T. G. Zervas, ‘Learning Arvanitic in late 19th and early 20th century Greece: Linguistic maintenance and cultural idiosyncrasies in Greece’s Arvanitic speaking communities’, *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie* 50.2 (2014) 269–78.

21 R. S. Peckham, ‘Map mania: nationalism and the politics of place in Greece, 1870–1922’, *Political Geography* 19 (2000) 77–95.

22 A. Leontis, *Eva Palmer Sikelianos: a life in ruins* (Princeton 2019); G. Van Steen, *Venom in Verse: Aristophanes in Modern Greece* (Princeton 2000); P. Michelakis, ‘Theater festivals: total works of art, and the revival of Greek tragedy on the modern stage’, *Cultural Critique* 74 (2010) 149–63; D. Tsatsoulis, ‘Δυτικός “ηγεμονισμός” και εκδοχές διαπολιτισμικότητας στη σκηνική πρόσληψη του αρχαίου δράματος στην Ελλάδα’, *Λογίον* 5 (2015) 305–54; L. Martha and A. Kotsaki ‘Ancient Greek drama and its architecture as a means to reinforce tourism in Greece’, *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 148 (2014) 573–8; D. Spathis et al., *Εθνικό Θέατρο: Τα πρώτα χρόνια (1930-1941)* (Athens 2013).

In this article I examine local communities' involvement in ancient drama performances in the inter-war period, where participation fostered a reciprocal relationship between locals and the events. Besides the ideological and political dimensions of these events, I shall also explore the communities' expectations as regards tourism development. My study focuses on performances in the ancient Greek theatres of Delphi and Epidauros, as these are the two main ancient sites located on the Greek periphery where festivals with a significant cultural impact were held in the 1920s and 1930s. Four main theatrical productions were staged: Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* in the Delphic Festivals of 1927 and 1930, Aeschylus' *Suppliants* at the Delphic Festival of 1930,²³ and Sophocles' *Electra* by the National Theatre at Epidauros in 1938. What such initiatives at Delphi and Epidauros had in common was their engagement with the idea of the community, especially its involvement in events beyond the theatrical productions. This served the purpose of community-building and produced a public eager to transcend the individualism of the modern stage and modern society.²⁴

The Delphic Festivals and community participation

Those responsible for organizing the Delphic Festivals, Eva Palmer and Angelos Sikelianos, employed the local community in Delphi as a means to demonstrate the existence of a genuine connection and continuity between antiquity and modern Greek folk culture. To this same end, the festivals also included a series of events that involved music, dance, theatre and athletic activities.²⁵ The overall approach was vaguely spiritual and intentionally distanced from the style of ancient drama performances established thus far in Modern Greece,²⁶ instead attempting to harmonically fuse music, dance, poetry and acting in the theatrical productions.

23 An analysis of the productions' aesthetic and theatrical qualities does not fall within the scope of the present article: the two Delphic festivals (1927, 1930) will mainly be discussed as a single cultural project with a common social orientation.

24 E. Fischer-Lichte, *Tragedy's Endurance: performances of Greek tragedies and cultural identity in Germany since 1800* (Oxford 2017), ch. 4.

25 For audiovisual documentation see the Audiovisual Archive of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation: <https://archive.ert.gr/6841/>. For Eva's perception of the union of poetry, music, and gymnastics, see E. Palmer Sikelianos, *Upward Panic: the autobiography of Eva Palmer-Sikelianos* (Philadelphia 1993) 106–7.

26 The festivals were mainly financed by Eva. For an extended analysis of Eva's contribution see Leontis, *Eva Palmer Sikelianos*, 148–63. See also D. Tsatsoulis, *Δυτικό ηγεμονικό 'παράδειγμα' και διαπολιτισμικό θέατρο: για την πρόσληψη του αρχαιοελληνικού δράματος στην ελληνική και μη δυτική σκηνή* (Athens 2017) 91–108. The revival in Greece had already adopted either a Western theatrical tradition or a nationalistic attitude that involved national exaltation and often the use of the ancient text in performance. The stagings by Thomas Oikonomou and Konstantinos Christomanos provide clear examples of the two traditions respectively.

When assessing the approach taken to the Delphic Festivals, one must bear in mind that it consisted of a blend of ideas and perspectives ranging from Sikelianos' nationalist (and internationalist) ideals to Eva's avant-garde perception of nature and space, while Nikolaos Aiginitis' internationalist perspective prompted him to attempt to align the Delphic initiative with the Festival of Syracuse.²⁷ Eva and Angelos' relationship with Isadora and Raymond Duncan also shaped the aesthetics of the performances,²⁸ as did their acquaintance with George Cram Cook. Cook was an American writer and journalist who had moved to Delphi in 1922, adopted the local way of life²⁹ and remained there until his death in 1924: one of his plans had been to direct a play in the ancient theatre using locals as actors, and thus to some extent he influenced Eva's and Angelos' decision to include the community in their production.³⁰ What all these shared, in terms of the ideological orientation of their artistic production, was an experiential view of classical culture and a belief that the Greek landscape retained a universal essence that offered an alternative to Western modernity.³¹

In national terms, the Delphic Festivals reshaped the inter-war cultural expression of Greekness.³² An alternative vision of folk culture and Byzantine tradition was amalgamated with a powerful expression of spirituality that involved cultural and athletic activities,³³ in response to the horror of the First World War and the Asia Minor Disaster of 1922.³⁴ Sikelianos' approach was strongly influenced by these catastrophes, and his ultimate goal was to make Delphi a centre for universal peace and culture.³⁵ This perception of intercultural reciprocity is explicitly present in the *Suppliants*, which for Sikelianos represented the encounter and confluence of various

27 N. Aiginitis, 'Δελφικές Εορτές', *Ηώς* 103–7 (1967) 208–11. See also J. B. Burke, 'Angelos Sikelianos and the Balkan idea: a forgotten response', *Balkan Studies* 16.2 (1975) 119–25.

28 A. Glytzouris, "Resurrecting" ancient bodies: The tragic chorus in *Prometheus Bound* and *Suppliant Women* at the Delphic Festivals in 1927 and 1930', in E. Fournaraki and Z. Papakonstantinou (eds.), *Sport, Bodily Culture and Classical Antiquity in Modern Greece* (London 2011) 95–8.

29 Cook wore a *foustanella*, participated in the social life of the village, and saw himself as one of the the Delphi population (A. Glytzouris, *Η σκηνοθετική τέχνη στην Ελλάδα: Η ανάδυση και η εδραίωση της τέχνης του σκηνοθέτη στο νεοελληνικό θέατρο* (Athens 2001) 459–61).

30 S. Tsitsiridis, 'Ο George Cram Cook και οι Δελφικές Εορτές: Μια αγνοημένη σελίδα του πρωτοποριακού θεάτρου στην Ελλάδα', *Λογείον* 7 (2017) 267–98. See also Glytzouris, *Η σκηνοθετική τέχνη στην Ελλάδα*, 459–66.

31 A. Glytzouris, 'Η συμβολή της Εύας Πάλμερ-Σικελιανού στην αναβίωση της αρχαίας τραγωδίας στο νεοελληνικό θέατρο', *Proceedings of the XIII International Meeting on Ancient Drama* (Athens 2012) 276–8; Glytzouris, *Η σκηνοθετική τέχνη στην Ελλάδα*, 459–66.

32 A. Leontis, *Topographies of Hellenism* (Ithaca, NY 1995).

33 Similar athletic events had already taken place in revivals of ancient games from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (E. Bastea, *The Creation of a Modern Athens: Planning the Myth* (New York 2000) 204–12).

34 Leontis, *Eva Palmer Sikelianos*, 103–15. For audiovisual documentation, see the Audiovisual Archive of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation: <https://archive.ert.gr/6866/>.

35 The image of Prometheus as a Christian figure of sacrifice in the performance of *Prometheus Bound* is one of the symbols of peace and hope for a new beginning (Glytzouris, "Resurrecting" ancient bodies', 95–8).

cultures.³⁶ Furthermore, the Delphic Festivals encapsulated a unique approach to staging ancient drama in Greece: they were the first attempt to depart from European tradition. In pursuit of this goal, Eva introduced novel techniques in the use of music, popular tradition and the human body.³⁷ Ultimately, the initiative exerted a profound influence on many aspects of theatrical production, such as costumes, direction and sets, and served as an alternative to the star system of ancient drama productions in Greece.³⁸ Since the Delphic festival represented a response to a period of crisis, it invited international audiences and addressed historical hardships through mystical aesthetics.³⁹

By underscoring the significance of Wilhelm Leyhausen's *Sprechchor* in ancient dramas staged in the inter-war period, Ioannidou suggests a dialogue between this and Sikelianos' approach, an idea supported by their shared fascination with archaic art and the primordial, Dionysian element.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Sikelianos and Leyhausen both attempted to move away from conventional bourgeois culture and towards the eternal values of Greek drama, through which, according to Ioannidou, they reflected their ideas of the supremacy of the Greek and German nations, respectively.

In symbolic terms, involvement of the local youth played an important role in the Delphic approach, bestowing the impression of a natural connection with the classical past. The athletic games organized in the stadium of Delphi provided an opportunity to exalt the male body as a symbol of the continuity of Greek culture ever since antiquity in terms of masculinity and youth, essentially depicting the male body as a model of vigour and power that signified a continuum between past and present, simply by transforming classical figures and representations into live athletes.⁴¹ Eva seemed to imply this in her application to the Archaeological Department of the Ministry of Education to re-use the stadium, when she lauded the local youth from Mount Parnassus for their courage and strength: 'the Greek populace preserves the [athletic] tradition in all its splendour, but nowhere as much on Greek soil as in the sturdy populace of Parnassos'.⁴² By contrast, the young local women were earmarked

36 Tsatsoulis, *Δυτικό ηγεμονικό παράδειγμα*, 91–108.

37 Leontis, *Eva Palmer Sikelianos*, 162–4; Tsatsoulis, 'Δυτικός "ηγεμονισμός"', 318–26.

38 For instance, the performances by Kyveli Andrianou and Marika Kotopouli (Y. Sideris, *To αρχαίο θέατρο στη νέα ελληνική σκηνή 1817–1932* (Athens 1976) 240–6, 248–53, 293–301).

39 Leontis, *Eva Palmer Sikelianos*, 149–51.

40 E. Ioannidou, 'Chorus and the Vaterland: Greek tragedy and the ideology of choral performance in inter-war Germany', in J. Billings (ed.), *Choruses, Ancient and Modern* (Oxford 2013) 327–45. Their relation can also be appreciated through the correspondence between Leyhausen and Eva in the early 1930s (Eva Sikelianos Archive, Benaki Museum, folder 31).

41 D. Plantzos, 'Dead archaeologists, buried gods: archaeology as an agent of modernity in Greece', in D. Tziouvas (ed.), *Re-imagining the Past: antiquity and Modern Greek culture* (Oxford 2014) 147–64.

42 Department for the Administration of the Historical Archive of Antiquities and Restorations Directorate for the Administration of the National Archive of Monuments, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Box 602 B, Folder C 1925. The plan was for the Delphic Festivals to take place in 1926, as Eva and Angelos had already obtained permission to perform in the stadium and theatre, but they were postponed until the following year.

for an artistic role and were initially intended to form the play's chorus. Although they were ultimately rejected, they nevertheless participated in the spectacles by performing local dances,⁴³ which were accompanied by villagers singing kleftic songs. In a documentary produced decades later, one of the women gave a first-hand account of her experience, in which she proudly described her participation: 'I was the best in the festival, ask Pagoula, in dance and everything. ... we took part ... and Sikelianos treated us, we were fourteen years old, to orange juice and suchlike, because we were the Delphi team; they took special care of us'.⁴⁴ Her affectionate attitude towards Sikelianos possibly reflects the general euphoria that the festivals aroused in the village, which for the first time witnessed a large number of Greeks and foreigners gathering enthusiastically there. Gradually, the community – primarily the local youth – and the village in which they lived acquired the role of being 'on display': the young men were portrayed as the genuine descendants of a population that had inhabited the same site down through the ages, while the village became what Dicks described as a talking environment: a space that functions as an exhibition presenting a series of unique symbols and messages to its visitors.⁴⁵

The emergence of such an environment was the result of the organizers' attempt to transform the community into an exhibition in itself, as proof of cultural authenticity;⁴⁶ hence, the festival programme declared:

Exhibition of Arts and Crafts ... an exhibition organized and displayed in various houses of the village will include examples of crafts of all sorts which still exist in Greece so that the visitor will form an idea of the life and art, along with the manners and customs of modern Greek peasants.⁴⁷

Presumably, Eva believed that Greek folk customs and crafts had been preserved unchanged, retaining elements of the ancient Greek essence alongside the oriental characteristics of more recent Greek tradition, and felt that this would be consummately illustrated by the village of Delphi. This explains her attempt to revive Greek antiquity through an alternative approach, adopting elements from folk tradition and Byzantine music.⁴⁸ This vision was echoed in the work of the famous photographer Elli Seraidari (also known as Nelly's), who covered both festivals.⁴⁹ Nelly's idealized perception of antiquity ingeniously reflected Eva's fusion

43 *Βραδυνή* 11 and 12 January 1925; Y. Tsarouchis, 'Θά μπορούσα να γράψω σελίδες ατέλειωτες για την Εύα Σικελιανού', *Ηώς* 103–7 (1966) 232–5 (234).

44 *Παρασκήνιο: Η αναβίωση του αρχαίου δράματος, Δελφικές Γιορτές 1927* (1998), Audiovisual Archive of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation: <https://archive.ert.gr/6841/>.

45 B. Dicks, *Culture on Display: the production of contemporary visibility* (Maidenhead 2004) 17.

46 D. MacCannell, *The Tourist: a new theory of the leisure class* (Berkeley 1999) 91–107.

47 *Delphic Festival Programme 1927* (Eva Sikelianós Archive, Benaki Museum, folder 15).

48 Leontis, *Eva Palmer Sikelianos*, 103–20.

49 D. Damaskos, 'The uses of antiquity in photographs by Nelly: imported modernism and home-grown ancestor worship in inter-war Greece', in Damaskos and Plantzos (eds.), *A Singular Antiquity*, 321–36;

of classical and modern Greek customs and chimed perfectly with the ideological orientation of the festival. A reminiscence from Yannis Tsarouchis, the renowned painter and set designer who attended the festival, echoes this blend of conceptions as he reflected on local participation:

at sunset, among other games, the children in Delphi were also imitating the performance of *Prometheus*. Through their fresh, heroic voices, in the mountains, as they were reciting what they remembered, a Greek essence was revealed to me. An essence that the performance itself did not reflect so clearly.⁵⁰

It was thus the local representation of classical values, delivered via the voices of children from Delphi, which Tsarouchis deemed most authentic and natural.

The systematization of local customs achieved through the festivals was to some extent regarded as contrasting with the more natural, even organic, relationship between the locals and their heritage. As illustrated by the Greek cultural activity of the period, indigenous archaeologies often come to forge and represent the idea of a national identity, embodying the virtues of the nation's indigenous heritage to a degree that state-sponsored and academic archaeology does not and could not.⁵¹

The goal of attenuating regional particularities is apparent in the additional performance staged exclusively for the locals in Delphi and described in the following anonymously published poem:

Disciplined local peasants / not one of them attended the first performance / but they did attend the one intended / for them on the third day / ... once they had dressed up / no one stayed at home / ... a sea of faces / ... even though the sun was burning them / it lit up their clothes / a thousand crazed gleams / an unimaginable revolution of colours.⁵²

Treating regional communities as exotic museum pieces is precisely what bestows alleged superiority on the collectivizing forces, while undermining the locals' capacity to establish a rapport with the intellectual public by presenting them as passive, quaint figures. In other words, by marking out peripheral groups as special and different from the main national body, agents of modernity attempt to annex and absorb the cultural life of pre-modern societies.⁵³

On this way of thinking, though, although classical antiquity may have been a fundamental component of the bourgeoisie's national narrative, it was only the remote Greek rural population that supposedly retained an organic perception of it. In the

C. Katsari, 'Inter-war ideology in Nelly's's nudes: nationalism, fascism and the classical tradition', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 31 (2013) 1–28.

50 Tsarouchis, 'Θά μπορούσα να γράψω', 234.

51 Plantzos, 'Dead archaeologists', 147–64.

52 S. Georgantas, *Δελφικές Εορτές: αναμνήσεις από τις Δελφικές Εορτές 1927–1930 του ζεύγους Σικελιανού* (Athens 1971) 77.

53 Dicks, *Culture on Display*, 31.

eyes of the idealist (and adoptive Greek) Eva, this relationship was proof of the continuity of Greek culture from ancient to modern times, whereas for the locals, antiquities remained local objects experienced in everyday life. This was evidenced by their protective attitude towards the archaeological site,⁵⁴ which was more a reaction to its increasing popularity⁵⁵ than to any centralized national narrative. The locals' harmonious integration of antiquities and everyday activities seems to have disturbed some visitors, as can be seen in the newspaper *Estia*: 'Visitors to Delphi ... aspire to enjoy a moment of serenity and reflection in order to reconstruct the Sanctuary in their imagination as it once was, but this is not possible with nightshirts hung out in plain view from the houses overlooking the excavations, or with the noise from the public road'.⁵⁶ In contrast to Tsarouchis, the writer and journalist Spyridon Paganelis complained that the locals' voices intruded on the ears of a daydreamer.⁵⁷ As he strolled around Delphi soaking up the ambience – an act as much spatial as temporal – the ruins transported him back to an atmospheric past, from which he was rudely awakened by savage cries returning him to the wretched reality of the modern inhabitants of Delphi: 'The peasants' cries assault the hearing of the daydreamer, with the dissonant discordance of a boisterous reality ... in the sacred silence and the devout reverie of the soul absorbed in the charm of a lost world that once lived and thrived here.'⁵⁸ His words show that despite the locals' eager participation in the festivals, this native archaeology that perceived antiquity as an integral and organic part of the landscape still contrasted unfavourably with the classicizing national attitude towards those same antiquities. Perhaps more importantly, it also reflects the extent to which Western modernity had permeated the mindset of Greek intellectuals, who sought to impose an unequivocal and authoritative view of classical antiquity. The locals' vivid interpretation of ancient theatre as a central but ordinary part of existence is here in conflict with modernist perceptions of national heritage.⁵⁹

54 Ouranis, 'Οί Δελφικέζ Γιορτέζ', 239.

55 In Dicks's analysis: 'In cultural centres, however, where there is a strong educational function alongside tourist spectacle, local people may participate out of a conscious commitment to local history' (Dicks, *Culture on display*, 61).

56 *Estia*, n.d (retrieved from Konstantinos D. Karavidas Archives, Series III, Folder 101.1, American School of Classical Studies at Athens).

57 S. Paganelis, *Δελφοί* (Athens 1909) 57–9.

58 *Op. cit.*, 57.

59 The locals' use of the theatres was not always conducive to the protection of the site: reports from both Delphi and Epidaurus in the early 1930s decried their repeated use of the archaeological sites for pasture and agriculture, which often led to neglect and damage, as indicated by the many cases of animals pastured on archaeological sites at Delphi (Department for the Administration... Box 602 E, Folder D 1933 and Box 602 ST, Folder ST 1934). For similar cases in Epidaurus, see Department for the Administration... Box 602 E, Folder B.

Electra as a national performance

Performed on 15 September 1938 in Epidaurus, *Electra* was a national cultural event that attracted the attention of renowned critics and intellectuals. It was a revival of the production staged in the summers of 1936 and 1937 in the Odeon of Herodes Atticus by the National Theatre, adapted to the architectural and natural setting of Epidaurus. The production was an ideological implementation of Kostis Bastias' views on the systematic re-use of ancient theatres. Bastias had enjoyed a position of influence under the Metaxas dictatorship since being appointed Director General of the National Theatre and Director of Letters and Fine Arts of the Ministry of Education in 1937. In such an ultranationalist regime, the event also served as propaganda, with the National Theatre being transformed into a cultural façade for the dictatorship.⁶⁰

The performance embodied the principles and objectives of the National Theatre as a repository of ancient Greek drama and high-quality theatre, as described in its foundation act published in the Greek Government Gazette no. 406, of 31 December 1930.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the Acts of the Council of the National Theatre of 11 May 1938⁶² specifically stated that ancient Greek drama, and especially tragedy performed in ancient theatres, was an expression of high art that the National Theatre should exploit for cultural and economic reasons.

The large seating capacity of ancient theatres rendered them ideal venues for mass productions and national spectacles, while the fact that Dimitris Rondiris was the play's director guaranteed a modern interpretation with strong European influences and a rigorous but flexible approach.⁶³ A prominent figure in the National Theatre's revival of ancient drama in open spaces, Rondiris had received a German education which introduced him to the school of Reinhardt and prompted him to incorporate German aesthetics and the Western model of performing into productions of ancient drama.⁶⁴ However, the Western tradition as inserted into the Greek artistic panorama

60 *Τρία έτη διακυβερνήσεως τοῦ Κ. Ιωάννου Μεταξᾶ 1936–1939* (Athens 1939). This does not mean that the performance blindly followed the ideological precepts of the dictatorship. Rather, Metaxas had given Bastias absolute authority to decide on matters of artistic expression, with a view to claiming the National Theatre as a cultural accomplishment of the regime. Metaxas' interview with Bastias in *Βραδυνή* on 15 September 1936, 1–2 indicates their agreement concerning the artistic and ideological objectives of the National Theatre.

61 Some of the National Theatre's first productions are discussed in I. Roilou, 'Performances of ancient Greek tragedy on the Greek stage of the twentieth century: An intercultural and sociological approach', in S. Patsalidis and E. Sakellaridou (eds.), *(Dis)placing Classical Greek Theatre* (Thessaloniki 1999) 191–202.

62 Archive of the National Theatre of Greece, Book of Acts of the Council of National Theatre of Greece, vol. 4.

63 P. Mavromoustakos, 'Ideological parameters in reactions to performances of ancient Greek drama at the end of the twentieth century' *The Athens Dialogues E-Journal* 2010. For a discussion of Dimitris Rondiris as director of the National Theatre, see K. Arvaniti, *Η αρχαία ελληνική τραγωδία στο Εθνικό Θέατρο: Θωμάς Οικονόμου, Φώτος Πολίτης, Δημήτρης Ροντήρης* (Athens 2010) 155–272, although she disregards the political role that the National Theatre served in Greek society at the time.

64 Tsatsoulis, 'Δυτικός "ηγεμονισμός"', 305–17; Tsatsoulis, *Δυτικό ηγεμονικό "παράδειγμα"*, 59–64.

was divorced from the sociocultural conditions of Greece and paid little heed to national particularities.⁶⁵ Leyhausen's influence on Rondiris was more evident in the staging of the play. The chorus performance, the *Sprechchor* and the ritualized atmosphere of the production all reflected ideas that Leyhausen had been implementing in previous years when staging ancient drama.⁶⁶ As a result of these constraints, the *Electra* was eventually staged as a monumental production with little or no consideration of local particularities or interests other than regional touristic prospects.

Consequently, the locals experienced the performance as an official, centralized production that assigned them the role of mere spectators. Besides the government's desire to gain their support for the initiative, their invitation to the performance with a reduced-priced ticket may also have been a means of securing media success by filling any empty seats. However, the locals continued to engage with the theatre, seizing the opportunity provided by the event for social encounters in their neighbourhood. Even without an active role in the production, as regular frequenters of the site they maintained their own pragmatic attitudes towards both the site and the performance. Furthermore, due to the remoteness of the location, they were constantly involved in production logistics, serving as drivers for the cast, renting houses to visitors and acting as guards at the theatre, among other activities.⁶⁷ Their active engagement with the performance is revealed in the following quotation:

But among the spectators [were] ...a few thousand – and this is quite overwhelming – naive peasants from the villages around Epidaurus. They began flocking to the sacred place from the morning, most of them arriving on foot from far away. At the time of the performance they paid for their cheap ticket, watched the tragedy reverently, from the upper tier, and at the end applauded with enthusiasm. Real theatre becomes the property of the populace.⁶⁸

This last phrase represents the official stance on national theatrical performances for the masses and reflects the regime's populist practice of creating a national spectacle in the countryside, in line with Bastias' views. In general, similar descriptions of the locals as humble peasants, astonished at the breathtaking spectacles, were not rare in the national press and established a supposed contrast between uneducated, pre-modern

65 *Op. cit.*, 314–16. For a discussion of the politics and social correlation of the direction of the national repertoire in relation to dictatorship and political dependence see also M. Delgado, 'La casa de Bernarda Alba [The house of Bernarda Alba]: Federico Garcia Lorca, the Spanish Civil War and the issue of historical memory', in N. Holdsworth (ed.), *Theatre and National Identity: re-imagining conceptions of nation* (New York 2014) 77–95.

66 Ioannidou, 'Chorus and the Vaterland', 338–9.

67 *Ναυπλιακή Ηχώ*, 28 August 1938, 2 and 11 September 1938, 2. See also the documentary 'Λυγυριό και αρχαίο θέατρο' (2007) directed by Giorgos Antoniou, about the relationship between locals and the theatre.

68 *Έθνος*, 12 September 1938, 3.

peasants and intellectually sophisticated spectators.⁶⁹ In particular, the locals' enthusiastic identification with the play's heroes was contrasted with the Western regard for authenticity and modernity. After describing the spectators' reaction to the play, the conservative newspaper *Vradyni* concluded: 'It is between these two extremes – the spontaneous emotion of the naive peasant and the reserved intellectual joy of the educated foreigner – that the critic of the Epidaurus performance should find a proper balanced stance.'⁷⁰ An interesting pattern can be seen in such critiques, especially as regards the National Theatre's performances; they employed a criterion based on the supposedly authentic element of the performance and national identity that had to be preserved and sanctified. These interpretations viewed the performances as exemplary for addressing the ideological issues of the period, while often neglecting the theatrical treatment as such.⁷¹

Expressions of gratitude and joy defined the locals' emotional attachment to the revived ancient site. During the performances, they viewed their theatres as living relics from another era, now being used for their original purpose. Their eager engagement with such performances also indicates their expectation that the number of visitors would increase and yield benefits for the community. Locals had demonstrated similar reactions the previous year, 1937, when the Ancient Theatre Group of the Sorbonne visited Epidaurus and gave an informal performance of Aeschylus' *Persians*, arousing amazement among inhabitants passing the site.⁷²

In addition, the locals' engagement with the performances reflected their feeling of ownership of the theatre as part of their regional heritage. For them, although the theatre might represent high culture worthy of national (and international) renown, they primarily regarded it as a locale for socialization. This ideological clash ensured that central agents extolled regional heritage (including classical monuments) and implemented a nationalist conception of it, which locals were compelled to endure passively. Thus, their archaeological discourse, in which the theatre formed an integral part of their neighbourhood and lives, was ignored in favour of a centralized

69 See for instance *Η Προϊα*, 13 September 1938, 2: 'The gathering of peasants from the vicinity is notable. Although uninitiated in questions of high art, they watched the performance silent and motionless for two hours, not only out of curiosity, but because they felt the thrill and terror of the tragedy permeating them'. While for many locals it must indeed have been the first time they had watched an ancient drama performed, this quotation demonstrates the impression of authority that such state-organized spectacles instilled and reproduced through the national press.

70 *Βραδυνή*, 3 September 1938, 3.

71 E. Papazoglou, *Το πρόσωπο του πένθους. Η 'Ηλέκτρα' του Σοφοκλή ανάμεσα στο κείμενο και την παράσταση* (Athens 2014) 207–58.

72 Mavromoustakos, 'Ideological parameters'; A. Burgaud, 'L'expérience du groupe de théâtre antique de la Sorbonne', in *Le Théâtre antique de nos jours: Symposium International à Delphes, 18–22 août 1981* (Athens 1984); P. Mavromoustakos, 'Théâtre en plein air et le groupe du théâtre antique de la Sorbonne: Les Perses à Epidauré', in L. Arnoux-Farnoux and P. Kosmadaki (eds.), *Le Double voyage: Paris–Athènes (1919–1939)*, Ecole Française d'Athènes, Athens, 2018, 293–300. See also S. Patron, 'Le groupe de théâtre antique de la Sorbonne', *Les Cahiers de la Comédie Française* 23 (1997) 48–53.

interpretation based on an exclusionary nationalism that ‘purified’ the classical antiquities, transforming them into historical monuments. From the perspective of institutional archaeology, the only envisaged benefit to locals of the performances would come from the money spent by other spectators. However, the lack of basic tourist facilities in Greece at the time rendered it unlikely that local communities would reap any substantial financial reward.

Tourism and communalism

Although the Greek countryside represented the opposite of a centralized industrial environment, local hopes for economic prosperity driven by modern infrastructure and facilities should not be underestimated. The desire for access to a road network and a preoccupation with tourist accommodation during the festivals are indicative of this interest, primarily inspired by the economic prospects that such development promised. The communities hoped that by increasing regional initiatives they would receive a proper share of the profits generated by the productions. Thus, despite the different degrees of local participation, both initiatives fostered the notion of communalism, of shared access to a resource. In the case of Delphi, there was a clear local presence in the events, even though the community did not participate in the organization or decision-making. In the case of Epidauros, the locals played a merely decorative role, but they actively engaged with their heritage.

In describing these interrelationships, the politician and intellectual Konstantinos Karavidas, an advocate of communalism, used an approach similar to Tziovas’ analysis.⁷³ He identified two main and contrasting components at play in Greece: one centripetal and dogmatic, subjecting the people to a collective discipline, the other centrifugal and allowing for variety and non-uniformity.⁷⁴ To give an example of his approach, when discussing a request to organize rural festivals in Greece, Karavidas stated:

my proposal has no relation to what occurred in Italy and Delphi with ancient dramatic performances. There, it was about a top-down and solely artistic attempt to represent ancient symbolism, intellectually accessible only to a few, thus something of a touristic enterprise. This, however, [his communalistic approach] refers to a bottom-up, experiential attempt to enhance the psychology and aesthetics of our populace.⁷⁵

73 Tziovas, ‘Heteroglossia’, 102–5. Communalism should be understood here as the sociocultural system whereby the local and indigenous population engages in the communal ownership and cultural manifestation of its particular values. This community-based arrangement reinforces independence and local empowerment.

74 K. Karavidas, ‘Η λόγια παράδοσις καὶ ὁ δημοτικισμὸς’, *Πλάτων* 13/25–26 (1961) 138–60.

75 Letter from Karavidas to personnel director of Agriculture Bank of Greece, Konstantinos Karavidas Archive, Series III, Box 101.2, American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

Communalism in this instance would imply people having a say in their own heritage according to their own community values; however, Karavidas' vision of active local engagement in organization was not fully achieved at Delphi or Epidaurus. Nevertheless, the productions there increased demand for cultural development and local initiatives, while tourist expectations assumed a more regional dimension that began to be addressed. Any cultural display involves the expectations of both locals and tourists, which are likely to clash at times, however much heritage projects are designed to be mutually beneficial.⁷⁶

The prospect of tourism led locals to welcome the productions, since these reflected their own cultural values.⁷⁷ In national terms, development of the countryside through the construction of tourism infrastructures had formed part of the Greek political agenda since the early twentieth century,⁷⁸ but this policy did not lead to regional development with any substantial impact until the 1950s. In the inter-war period, the Greek periphery was largely cut off from the big cities and tourism infrastructures were minimal.⁷⁹ Villages in the vicinity of these remains still had no electric light and often no direct access to drinking water. Consequently, the expectation of regional development that would encourage an influx of tourists was a powerful motive for engaging local involvement.⁸⁰

Local participation in the organization of the Delphic Festival appears to have been insufficient to ensure modern facilities for the village and production – unlike Syracuse for instance. Similarly, in Ligourio, the locals' repeated demands for a modern road network and hotel services reflect the village's remoteness. Kostas Ouranis provided a glimpse of the quaint preparations in 1927 at Delphi, describing local engagement, and at the same time confusion:

Villagers were coming and going in the streets ... carrying beds, sheets and other items. ... Local stores were decorated with fir branches and signs in French. ... All these created a muddled effect that just seemed untidy and sloppy, and so destroyed the gentle majesty of the Delphic landscape. ... The poor peasants did their best to give the visitors an illusion of city life. They had renamed their taverns 'bars', the barber shop had been converted into an 'Institut de Beauté' for the occasion, and they strove to make the foreigners who were guests in their hovels happy – yet what they could do was so little.⁸¹

76 Dicks, *Culture on Display*, 30.

77 Kondis, 'Αρχαίο θέατρο Επιδαύρου', 128–31.

78 Kokkou, *Η μέριμνα για τις αρχαιότητες*, chapter 6; A. Vlachos, *Τουρισμός και δημόσιες πολιτικές στη σύγχρονη Ελλάδα (1914–1950): η ανάδυση ενός νεοτερικού φαινομένου* (Athens 2016), ch. 3; National Tourism Organization, *Έκθεσις Πεπραγμένων* (Athens 1929) 13–14; National Tourism Organization, *Έκθεσις Πεπραγμένων* (Athens 1930) 3.

79 Vlachos, *Τουρισμός και δημόσιες πολιτικές*, chapter 3.

80 See M. Koutsouri, *Δελφικές Εορτές* (1981), Audiovisual Archive of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation: <https://archive.ert.gr/27200/> (08:00–08:14).

81 Ouranis, 'Οί Δελφικές Γιορτές', 239–44.

Despite their support for the locals' prospects, the organizers of the two initiatives had a very different approach to tourism. For Sikelianos and the Delphic Ideal, modern tourist development was not the main objective. Rather, the festivals were designed as a spiritual gathering of intellectuals that would revive a classical ethos through a multifaceted spectacle.⁸² Adopting a passionate alternative to Western classicism, Eva attempted to present intellectuals with a rural populace in the remote countryside as proof of an authentic connection to ancient Greece by way of surviving folk customs. As Leontis stresses, her preference for amateur performers and her non-commercial approach to staging testify to her wider utopian vision.⁸³

Similarly, local involvement in the national performance at Epidaurus was minimized, despite the clear goal of embracing international tourism. Nevertheless, the spectacle spurred locals to assimilate the national rhetoric into their own local perceptions of heritage. As Tziovas comments: 'nationalism usually outmanoeuvres regionalism in the name of putative folk culture.... Folk culture is ossified and monumentalized by the nationalist who passionately supports it.'⁸⁴ Thus, national rhetoric eventually dominated cultural expression, while regional particularities were slowly reduced to an artificial folkloristic display for tourists.

Conclusions

The response of local communities represents a distinctive case of the use of the classical past in Greece, where performances of ancient drama eventually shaped locals' perceptions of regional heritage. Furthermore, the presence of local archaeologies through everyday use of archaeological sites by local communities was at odds with staging national or symbolic spectacles that sought to present national heritage sites as proof of Greece's commitment to modernity.

In addition, in cases such as Epidaurus, national claims in the inter-war period included an authoritative perception of national identity that revolved around historical sites in a quest for national unity based on the notion of continuity and Greek exceptionalism. These claims subordinated the locals' involvement in the dogmatic discourse of national continuity, suppressing alternative perspectives. Nevertheless, despite the ideological aims of the producers, the locals considered the re-use of the theatres to be a singular opportunity for modern development in their remote villages and proudly identified themselves as the natural caretakers of the theatres. Ideological motives generated dynamic relationships between locals and the festivals, and expectations of development ensured their enthusiastic reception. Particularly in the case of Epidaurus, international success not only led to the

82 Of course, publicity and diffusion formed part of the organization, but the idea of mass spectacle as evoked by the National Theatre was far from Sikelianos' objectives.

83 Leontis, *Eva Palmer Sikelianos*, 164–5.

84 Tziovas, 'Heteroglossia', 116.

aggressive modernization of the physical surroundings of the theatre in the following decades, but also shaped the everyday life and occupation of the surrounding communities.

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