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Theatralia. 2024, vol. 27, iss. 2, pp. 64-79

ISSN 1803-845X (print); ISSN 2336-4548 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): https://doi.org/10.5817/TY2024-2-5
Stable URL (handle): https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.80610

[**Theatralia** 27 / 2024 / **2** (64—79)]
https://doi.org/10.5817/TY2024-2-5

Palace *protégée* and Pop-star: Elsa Enkel in Greece, 1913–1933

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[spectrum]

Abstract

Elsa Enkel was a German-born dance artist in operetta and revue theatre, active in early-20th-century Greece. Her career was heavily subsidised by the Greek monarchy in exchange for promoting royalist positions in the turbulent years around World War I; but she was also part of the rapidly developing entertainment market, adapting to ticket-buying audiences' tastes. Enkel's work exemplifies the tensions of light musical theatre ballet between royalist and market-driven pressures, and illustrates the role of this ballet as a Western cultural export that participated in Greece's development of a West-leaning, post-Ottoman identity.

Key words

Elsa Enkel, ballet in Greece, early-twentieth-century ballet, dance and WWI, ballet and royalism

This research was funded in whole or in part by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) [T1336-G]. For the purpose of open access, the author has applied a CC BY public copyright licence to any Author Accepted Manuscript version arising from this submission.

Ballet is one way in which Western European cultural production has expanded around the globe, reinforcing Eurocentrism and Western cultural dominance. Ballet was part of Western Europe's cultural imperialism since its early beginnings: Raoul-Auger Feuillet's 18th-century notational system, the *Chorégraphie*, turned proto-ballet vocabulary into a posited universal language, allowing it to circulate and disseminate French dance aesthetics. In the course of the 18th and early 19th centuries, ballet became a professional pursuit and bourgeois entertainment rather than a noble pastime, accompanied by the gradual multiplication of ballet schools drilling bodies in diverse localities into a Western European corporeal *habitus*. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, private ballet initiatives peaked, with the formation of avant-garde companies (e.g. Ballets Russes, Ballets Suédois) and the development of ballet in mainstream, profit-seeking spectacular contexts, from music halls to movie theatres (GUTSCHE-MILLER 2015; CARTER 2005; LEON 2023b). This ballet was exported as well, in international touring circuits also reinforcing Western aesthetics. But ballet's exportation just as consistently involved transformations and adaptations by/in the local contexts where it was introduced (GLON 2014: 315; ONO 2016). This article looks at ballet in early-20th-century Greece as an intersection of two negotiations: between ballet promoted by royal institutions and ballet as mass commodified entertainment; and between Eurocentric influences and localised responses. Ballet was a crucial terrain in which Greece, torn between royalist and liberal politics, as well as between Ottoman heritage and Westernising pressures, negotiated its identity in 20th-century modernity.

To do this, I focus on Elsa Enkel, one of the first historiographically acknowledged ballet choreographers in Greece, also active as a performer, actress, singer and quite possibly producer. She worked primarily in operetta and to a lesser extent *epitheorisi*, the Greek version of revue theatre. In these types of spectacles, ballet deviated from classical repertory and technique, approaching – like in Western European music-halls – pop spectacle and fashionable dance forms. Enkel's work therefore balanced between ballet's roots in 'high' opera culture and its iterations in 'light', popular contexts. As such, she is a crucial figure to understand ballet's negotiations between imperial heritage and the pop-culture market. Her artistic activity was bound to – even dependent on – the Greek palace's financial support, in exchange for aligning with the monarchy in a politically turbulent and divisive period (SEIRAGAKIS 2018). But her work was also embedded in the profit-driven theatrical entertainment market, producing large numbers of works for large numbers of audiences. Enkel was also a key agent through whom Western European performative forms filtered towards the peripheralised dance scene of early 20th-century Greece. She was German-born, arrived in Greece as a member of a foreign troupe on tour, and throughout her career transmitted Viennese operetta aesthetics to future generations of Greek or Greece-based dance artists. As such, she illustrates the modes of transmission of Eurocentric choreographic aesthetics, as well as the transformation of these aesthetics through their exportation. In other words, Enkel presents historiographic interest both as a (female) dance artist navigating a (male-dominated) transnational landscape, and as a figure through which one can address the dynamics of dance's circulations between

'high art' stages and pop culture, between Western European centres and European peripheries.

References to Enkel recur in historical accounts of Greek light musical theatre (SEIRAGAKIS 2009; MARAKA 2006; GEORGAKAKI 2013) but neither a study of her whole oeuvre nor a contextualisation of her work in dance-historical frameworks is available. My arguments here are based on aggregated information from a wide range of materials on Enkel's career from her arrival in Greece in 1913 to her death in 1933: press (reviews, commentaries, listings), programmes, musical scores, photographs, and libretti as well as secondary sources. The first part of the article sets the stage for the discussion by explaining the Greek historical, political and dance context at the time of Enkel's activity and providing a biographical overview placing her in relation to it. The second part looks at Enkel's relationship with the Greek palace to explore how ballet and royal power were imbricated in a Balkan post-Ottoman country whose monarchy was a Western import, notably in the context of World War I. The third part investigates how Enkel's performances were also dictated by market pressures, transforming royalist aesthetics into popular entertainment with commodified value. The fourth and final part examines how Enkel's work, both under royal patronage and within the entertainment market, negotiated Greece's modernisation as a Western-modelled state; how it helps understand Greece as a recipient of European cultural exports through its royal family, and as a market for Western-coded mass cultural products; and what indications her work gives about the Greek dance landscape's responses to the Western exports it received.

Methodologically, my arguments are situated in the frame of New Modernist Studies (MAO and WALKOWITZ 2008), which invites us to expand modernism horizontally/spatially – to regions like Greece, that are systematically excluded from dance historiography – as well as vertically – to pop-cultural products ignored by a classist distancing of the artistic canon from mass entertainment. Within this frame, my proposal is that Enkel's ballet participated in a negotiation of how Greece would process a West-imposed modernisation.

I understand the way in which ballet mediated this processing through the notion of social choreography as theorised by Andrew Hewitt. His 2005 study *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* is written against the grain of modernist depoliticization and de-historicisation of dance, seeking 'the historical agency of the aesthetic' (HEWITT 2005: 2). Through the notion of social choreography, Hewitt approaches the aesthetic domain of dance 'as a space in which social possibilities are both rehearsed and performed' (HEWITT 2005: 4). In this perspective, dance does not merely reflect or represent the socio-political realm, but actively coforms it by providing a space for the rehearsal – the 'trying-on' through embodiment and performance – of emerging subjectivities. Based on this, my project here is not to pursue Enkel's artistic biography – as notable as that may be – in an internally-defined dance-historical narrative, but to untangle how her choreography afforded a space where modern Greek Westernised subjecthood(s) could be probed and, gradually, collectively internalised.

Setting the stage

In the early decades of the 20th century, when Enkel was active, Greece was still in a process of disentanglement from the Ottoman Empire. When she arrived in Athens in 1913, the country was caught in the Balkan Wars, where several Balkan countries (Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro) fought against the Ottoman Empire and each other for the annexation of Ottoman territories. Greece came out of these conflicts with significant territorial gains. While Enkel's star was rising, World War I erupted. Greece officially entered the war in 1917, after years of proxy implication and national division as to the position it should adopt in the conflict. Having finally fought on the side of the Entente – as opposed to the Ottoman Empire's siding with Central Powers – Greece had the opportunity after the war to pursue further Ottoman territories in Asia Minor, where large Greek-identifying communities lived. The campaign to annex these territories was the peak of the country's irredentist vision – the *Megali Idea* [Great Idea] – according to which Greece sought to 'recover' territory from the pre-Ottoman, Byzantine period. But with the so-called Great Powers' support for the Greek project withdrawn, the campaign was countered by Ottoman/Turkish forces, culminating in the destruction of the Greek-majority city of Smyrna/Izmir in September 1922: a traumatic event followed by large numbers of refugees and population exchanges radically changing the population makeup of mainland Greece (on these events and their aftermath see CLOGG 2002: 77–106; BEATON 2019: 192–232; LIAKOS 2019: 33–117).

Throughout these years, the country was undergoing modernisation in the form of de-Ottomanisation. Its history was constructed as a teleological path between ancient and modern Greece, the Ottoman years recast as a bleak parenthesis, their wide-ranging traces in culture and collective *habitus* excluded from a Westernised vision of Greek modernity. Greece's political organisation followed the *vasilevomeni dimokratia* system: a (West-imported, from the Danish Glücksburg line) monarchy combined with an elected government. Liberal politicians, often in discord with the palace, also marked Greece's modernisation process. In the period when Enkel was active, the royalist-liberal opposition was personified in a long-term rivalry between king Constantine and Eleftherios Venizelos, the country's charismatic multiple-times prime minister. Crucially, this opposition was not demarcated along class lines. Constantine represented a conservative force associated with the stability of the so-called 'Old', pre-Balkan-Wars state of Greece; Venizelos a reformist one, interwoven with the newly acquired territories and populations of the Greek nation (cf. BEATON 2019: 211). There were affluent and working-class supporters on both sides, explaining how someone like Enkel could hope to reconcile royal propaganda with pop spectacle. The two political figures' rivalry intensified – to the extent that for part of 1916–17 the country had two governments – around the question of Greece's position on World War I, with Constantine promoting neutrality to support Germany and Venizelos insisting on alignment with the Entente. Enkel's association with the palace was therefore imbricated in prominent political debates that, as we will see, transferred onto

the stage. In the turbulent time after 1922 Constantine abdicated, with consequences for Enkel's career and a push of the light musical theatre scene as a whole towards market-directed pressures.

Enkel[1] was allegedly born in 1890 in Hamburg and started performing on operetta stages in Vienna in 1908. She arrived in Athens in 1913, touring with a Viennese operetta troupe invited by Greek impresario Apostolos Kontaratos. She started performing in Greek operetta productions, notably in collaboration with the Ioannis Papaioannou troupe. She quickly became a local superstar, her face appearing in grand scale on the central Stadiou avenue (MELAS 1933: 1) and her first *timitiki* (a performance in her honour) had already happened in the same year. By 1915, Kontaratos was managing the Enkel-Kontaratos company with Enkel as its prominent persona. Performing works like *Oi Bagapontes* (*Die Landstreicher*, 1899) and *O Komis tou Louxemvourgou* (*Der Graf von Luxemburg*, 1909), Enkel became a mediator of Viennese operetta practices and aesthetics to Greece, while also starring in local productions, for instance by composer Theofrastos Sakellaridis or director/librettist Miltiadis Lidorikis. She extensively toured both within the country (Volos, Thessaloniki, Kavala, Patra, Corfu, Syros) and in the Eastern Mediterranean (mainly Turkey and Egypt). From 1918 onwards – one year after the country's much-debated entry in World War I – her impressive path was marked by recurring withdrawal announcements followed by recurring returns to the stage with varying troupes. After her death in 1933, by then a Greek citizen, she was fondly remembered by Greek media, who credited her, from her very first appearance, as 'having made our light musical theatre progress, in a few days, by thirty years at least' (MELAS 1933: 1).

Enkel came from a dance context in Germany and Austria where light musical theatre ballet coexisted with – among others – modern dance, gymnastic and rhythmic practices, and classical ballet in state-controlled and -funded stages. The dance landscape in Greece was influenced by all these genres: in the first decades of the century modern dancers like Isadora Duncan appeared on Athenian stages; 'rhythmic gymnastics' schools offered Dalcroze-type Eurhythmics classes to young women; from the 1930s onwards, classical dance schools also multiplied, in conjunction with the foundation of the Opera ballet in 1939. The Greek dance landscape, however, differed significantly from the Western European ones that influenced it. Until World War II, modern dance's presence was fragmentary and more prominent in educational than performative contexts[2] – for instance through the work of Koula Pratsika and her dance school, which later became Greece's state school of dance (TSINTZILONI 2015). In the cases where it was practised as a performance rather than a primarily educational pursuit, modern dance was closely bound to drama; as for instance in the work of Eva Palmer who choreographed for antique tragedy (LEONTIS 2019), or Vassos Kanellos who developed a form of 'chorodrama' (LEON 2023a). Classical

1 Biographical information in this paragraph is drawn from aggregated primary sources as well as from (GEORGAKAKI 2013: 57) and (SIDERIS 2000: 88–92).

2 I thank Steriani Tsintziloni for this insight.

dance was scarce, mainly present within operas, while full repertory works were hardly ever seen. No systematic classical education or dedicated institution existed before the 1930s. 'Ballet' mainly referred to dance in light musical theatre, a stigmatised profession associated with an equally stigmatised femininity, that Enkel was crucial in starting to overcome. Given these divergences, Enkel's transmission of dance practices from Berlin/Vienna to Athens has to be seen as a transfer between structurally different dance landscapes.

These differential dance contexts pose a historiographic challenge insofar as Western European methods and terminology do not allow one to fully grasp Greek dance history. In what follows I therefore use the term 'ballet' in plural ways, to acknowledge its context-sensitivity. I use 'light musical theatre ballet' to refer to what 'ballet' means in Greek primary sources: dance that was classically informed but deviating from classical technique and repertory, or the group of (mostly female) dancers performing it. I use 'classical ballet' to refer to the heritage of classical dance developing mainly in Western Europe. Of course, the two are related: Greek light musical theatre ballet was linked, through circulating practitioners and works, to Western European music-hall ballet, which in its turn was in exchange with institutionalised classical ballet (GUTSCHE-MILLER 2015: 56). Therefore, terminological boundaries point to differences without implying that the practices described were wholly distinct. Methodologically, the Greek sources have led me to a significant deviation from dance studies' focus on movement, embodiment, and dance as an autonomously understandable form. Greek light musical theatre ballet can only be approached in its embeddedness in complex interdisciplinary productions with equally interdisciplinary practitioners, as Enkel's biography shows. What appears in the sources is dance as an element of expanded theatrical practice, where different art forms coexisted and overlapped in a non-institutionalised context of production – a fact that is obscured if research concentrates on embodiment and kinetic information only. Indeed the sources available often provide minimal or no movement descriptions. Consequently, I will be extensively referring to interdisciplinary – mainly textual – aspects of works, and looking at dance as kinetic material but also as a dramaturgical element in entertainment spectacle.

Enkel's royal patronage

Enkel's longest collaboration was with the *Ellinikos Mousikos Thiasos* [Greek Musical Troupe] of impresario Apostolos Kontaratos. Both programmes and press often refer to it as Enkel's company, underlining the prominent position she held. Comprising an opera and an *epitheorisi*/operetta branch, *Ellinikos Mousikos Thiasos* was heavily subsidised by the palace. As Manolis Seiragakis (2018) argues, these subsidies gave it an advantage over other companies of the time, especially during the winter seasons' lull; they allowed Kontaratos and Enkel to continue entertaining Athenian audiences even during war-related shortages. Enkel's astoundingly fast and impressive career development therefore had as much to do with her performative skills and navigation

of translocal aesthetics, as with being part of an exceptionally funded company under the aegis of the monarchy.

The king's implication with *Ellinikos Mousikos Thiasos* was part of his positioning in the eyes of the public. Enkel appeared in various charity, public interest, or public entertainment events related to the palace. The company marked key dates relating to the monarchy, for instance closing the theatre on the anniversary of Constantine's father George's death (SEIRAGAKIS 2018). Intersecting entertainment for a wide audience with celebration of the monarchy, it hosted events marking palace-related developments, like a 1915 'Lunch of the poor' for the king's medical recovery (*SKRIP* 1915b). The royal family's regular presence among Enkel's audience sealed this public image, sometimes also through symbolic acts: in a 1915 honorary performance, among Enkel's various gifts from admirers was a portrait of Princess Alice in a golden frame, signed and offered by the Princess herself, a gesture then duly reported by the press (*EBROS* 1915).

Kontaratos and Enkel's work also intersected with royal interests in the dramaturgy of the company's performances. A prime example at the peak of Constantine's rivalry with Venizelos was *Xifir Faler*: a 1916 blockbuster *epitheorisi* that remained notorious for its extravagance, not realistic for any other company to stage. Enkel performed in various roles and co-choreographed it with the young Greek dancer Karl Fredos. *Xifir Faler* explicitly dealt with the ongoing debate regarding Greece's entry in World War I. It opens on mount Olympus, where a war minister decides to travel to a neutral country, evidently Greece. He meets a character called Neutrality – *epitheorisi* characters often personified abstract concepts – with whom he explores the challenges Greece faces because of an Entente blockade. They encounter characters (including the Futurist and the Blasé), allowing the *epitheorisi* to satirise trending topics; in a late scene in the 'Labyrinth of Newspapers', a fight ensues for Public Opinion, a character who seems a bit lost (script reproduced in (HATZIPANTAZIS and MARAKA 2003: 371–487); summary in (GEORGAKAKI 2013: 72–77)). Several points in *Xifir Faler*'s dramaturgy illustrate its alignment with the palace, most notably in that Greece is presented as a neutral country, as the king wanted it to remain, and Neutrality is a main character. The blockade condemned in the plot referred to the actual naval blockade imposed in 1916 by the Entente on parts of Greece as a response to the king's support towards Germany, causing thousands of Greeks to face starvation. Enkel's parts included Venus and the spirit of ancient beauty, but it was one of her roles in particular that concentrated the pro-royalist thrust of the performance: *Xifir Faler* staged a parade of actors in different eras' Greek army uniforms in which she appeared as a Byzantine soldier of the future with a double eagle – a Byzantine symbol – on her chest, speaking directly to the country's craving for the realisation of the *Megali Idea* through annexing former Byzantine territories. Accompanied by a royalist anthem, this scene implied that the realisation of the country's expansionist dreams lay with the palace. Enkel repeated this appearance at the height of the Asia Minor campaign, occasionally combining it with nation(al)ist hymns honouring the royal family (*MAKEDONIA* 1921). For such reasons, analysts today underline the royalist alignment of *Xifir Faler*

(HATZIPANTAZIS and MARAKA 2003: 344–363). More crucial, however, is that *Xifir Faler* was clearly read by its audiences as a pro-monarchy show: there are reports of enthusiastic chanting by royalists at the premiere, which took place in the presence of the king and members of the royal family (*EBROS* 1916b), while pro-Venizelos exclamations and ensuing reactions interrupted the work in the city of Patras (*EBROS* 1916c).

If Constantine supported Kontaratos and Enkel for reasons of political propaganda, his affinity for operetta was also an aesthetic choice, corresponding to the aesthetically validated forms of his Western European background. This preference can also be specified as a German-Austrian aesthetic. Constantine had a strong attachment to Germany (hence his support for the Central Powers during the war); that it was Enkel – a German-born, German-speaking ambassador of the style and aesthetics of German-speaking operetta – who became the face of the troupe he supported is not a coincidence. The Central Powers also included Austria, where Viennese operetta – Enkel's specialisation – differentiated itself from French precursors in what Carlotta Sorba (2006: 285) has called 'the most popular expression of cultural nationalization'. Enkel's operetta therefore not only proposed an ideal of Westernisation to a Balkan country, but also particularised this Westernisation through specifically Germany- and Austria-aligned aesthetic paradigms, at a time when alignment with Germany and Austria meant a crucial choice in the country's position in World War I.

Enkel's ballet was part of how the monarchy staged itself in the eyes of its public; benefitted from selective, top-down funding; appeared in productions performatively translating royal propaganda; and disseminated an aesthetic *habitus* associated with the monarchy's background and culture. In these respects, Enkel's ballet displays similarities with several aspects of Western European ballet, both historically and in the present: one can think, for example, of ballet's genealogy in the form of court spectacle as well as its enhancement in nineteenth-century imperial Russia; or of its institutionalisation under monarchical patronage in royal opera houses that in certain cases retain, even today, their royal title. But exactly like Western European classical ballet and Greek light musical theatre ballet had significant differences, it is impossible to assimilate the dynamics characterising the relationship between Enkel's ballet and Constantine's palace with the dynamics characterising the historical embeddedness of classical ballet in royal frameworks in Western Europe. Firstly, because the institution of monarchy had different status in Greece: while Western European monarchies largely predated the nation state and were often challenged by it as a republican project, the Greek monarchy emerged upon the foundation of Greece as a nation state. As such, it was a mode of Western European intervention in the new Balkan state, more a product of Western imperialism than an actor of it. The Greek palace was subject to Western European shifts of interest: most crucially in the period concerning us here, Great Britain, France and Italy withdrew support from the Asia Minor campaign when it was headed by the king. Secondly, and relatedly, because the Greek monarchy did not export its (dance) aesthetics as a form of soft power, but rather imported Western European aesthetics into a peripheralised state. This should be understood in the context of a wider – and interdisciplinary – import of Western European artistic

forms and ideas into Greece, the palace being only one among multiple individual and institutional agents mediating such imports. In other words, not only was the palace not in a position to export its own aesthetics outside of national borders; it was not even the sole ambassador of foreign aesthetics within them. Thirdly, because while Constantine meddled with artistic production, he did not use tools of cultural policy centralisation as Western monarchies did with regard to classical ballet: no state ballet institution (for performance or education) or strong state regulation of dance existed in Greece in Enkel's time. Finally, because ballet by Enkel was never an affair of the elites, be they aristocratic or bourgeois: since its very early years, operetta in Greece – and its dancers even more so – were seen as entertainment for urban audiences made up of diverse demographics. We therefore cannot understand Enkel's dance if we do not also place it in the context of market-driven entertainment spectacle.

Enkel and the entertainment market

Seiragakis (2018) points out that from the palace's perspective, the funds provided to *Ellinikos Mousikos Thiasos* were significantly lower than what would have been necessary to keep a Royal Theatre active. Flipping this argument around, despite the very significant financial support Kontaratos and Enkel received, their work cannot be seen as the equivalent of a state institution. Rather, the company remained what Seiragakis (2018) calls 'a flexible, extroverted, subsidised troupe' which also used alternative financial sources. One source of extra-royal funding was private donors: a 1915 press cutting informs us that 'two committees with (...) members of the rich classes had to be formed, great effort and personal energy and moral support to be given, in order for the maintenance of the troupe to be guaranteed without governmental or municipal subsidy' (*SKRIP* 1915a: 1). But the most crucial extra-palatial source of Enkel's financial means was, of course, ticket sales. Shows had echeloned ticketing and decreased prices after the first performances, aiming to extract large proceeds from well-off customers and then attract wider groups of theatre-goers. This reliance on customer capital was not particular to Greece, but characterised the Viennese operetta landscape that Enkel came from too:

> operetta needed to appeal to as wide an audience as possible to remain economically sustainable: it was one of the most expensive and complex forms of commercial culture in the city (...) and lacked the security of a patron system or the imperial subventions (...) While its audience was primarily middle class, it spanned the working and high bourgeoisies. (BARANELLO 2021: 4)

A similar claim can be made about ballet. What happened in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the proliferation of music-hall and variety theatre ballet was a shift from a cultural product for bourgeois demographics (classical ballet in the Opera setting) to a cultural product sold *by* them, employing large numbers of working-class

dancers and addressing itself to wide audiences. Ballet in light musical theatre, as practised in Greece by people like Enkel, was part of this phenomenon.

The need to maintain a wide range of audiences as paying customers meant that, despite alignment with palace politics, Enkel's performances had to take a mild position on current events, so as to not alienate spectators. *Xifir Faler* once again demonstrates this: while the piece took a clear royalist stance, it also undermined the integrity of its own politics, introducing sparks of doubt in its interpretation. In the first act, Neutrality sings: 'Neutrality means, if you want to know, something that is like an embarrassment, if it happens to you' (HATZIPANTAZIS and MARAKA 2003: 387). A few moments later, undermining the idea that palace politics could lead the country to a realisation of the Great Idea – and its pinnacle, the annexation of Istanbul as a return to Byzantine Constantinople – she says: 'With me, poor man, don't expect to get to Constantinople' (HATZIPANTAZIS and MARAKA 2003: 388). Dance supported these deviations from the play's main political line, with a small dance appearing between the two above excerpts, adding to the frivolous, light ambience of the scene and thus undermining the possibility of taking a purely royalist interpretation too earnestly. Dance's dramaturgical role in *epitheorisi* was often that of entertaining 'filler', or even of spectacular attention-grabber countering nuanced political reflection. In *Xifir Faler*, Enkel and Fredos' dances contributed an apolitical allure to the work and even openly admitted they did: a personification of *epitheorisi* participates in a trio that includes the line 'with songs and with dance and the craziest coyness, I lose no time and sweep your mind away' (HATZIPANTAZIS and MARAKA 2003: 421). Dance is presented as one of the strategies through which *epitheorisi* makes its spectators *not* think, politically or otherwise, but rather is content to entertain them.

In the same way that ideological content had to cater to a wide range of audiences, so did the aesthetics of the productions. The music of operetta and *epitheorisi* had to be pleasant, catchy, striking the ideal balance between familiarity and fashionable novelty. The dances correspondingly had to reflect current trends: tango, maxixe, one-step and more made their way from dance halls onto the stage and vice versa. It was not necessary to integrate fashionable dances into the plotline of the (often very loosely plotted) works, but it was necessary to integrate them in the entertainment on offer; and so we read, in a programme for an Enkel staging of Franz Lehar's *Eva* (1911), that the troupe's ballet would perform dances as part of the work but also Argentine tango and 'new dance images' (*Eva* 1914). In other words, the dramaturgical and aesthetic integrity of the operetta was disrupted by the performance of dances whose main role was to please an audience thirsty for exposure to the new West-coded trends.

Despite such adaptations to a market-driven logic, however, the closeness between Enkel and the palace meant that Constantine's decline – marked by his abdication in 1922 – was a blow to her career. An overview of her repertory as appearing in the press and programme archives shows that in the 1910s, she had a rapid and regular rise, averaging more than ten roles per year from 1915 to the early 1920s (apart from a break in 1919), with a staggering 23 (at least) productions in 1921. In the seasons of 1920 and 1921 – at a time when the Asia Minor campaign, under royal leadership, was

taking a downturn – Enkel mainly performed in the northern city of Thessaloniki. 1924 marks her last push with Kontaratos, with eighteen appearances in the Karamalis theatre in Peiraeus; from 1925 onwards, her name is seldom mentioned.

That Enkel did not navigate the market as well without royal support has to be understood against the background of light musical theatre coming under increasing pressure from the cheaply accessible emerging cinema as well as prose theatre's attempts to relegate crowd-pleasing operetta and *epitheorisi*. In response, light musical theatre increasingly engaged in sales-seeking strategies of visual extravagance, aggressive advertising, and innovative staging (KOURMOULAKIS 2020). Enkel therefore lost the palace's support at exactly the time when following market pressures was a question of survival. But she did not fully follow the market: despite participations in new productions, the vast majority of her work in the post-1922 years were either reprisals of previous successes, often by pre-war Greek composers (SEIRAGAKIS 2009: 210), or Viennese operetta repertory, rather than sustained shifts towards new trends. Several factors played a role here. First, as the 20th century unfolded, the influence of jazz became notable on Greek stages; African-American dances like the Black Bottom appeared through their appropriation by globalised entertainment markets; the ragtime, the Charleston and tap dance replaced the waltz popularised by Viennese operetta (VASSILEIOU 2005). But these were not Enkel's expertise. Second, Enkel's aesthetic universe was formed in late empire Vienna, a context much more industrialised than Greece, where the working class were not primarily factory workers, while family- and small-scale businesses and an informal economy thrived. Enkel was therefore aesthetically socialised in a place where the bourgeois/working class distinction was different than it was in Greece, a fact that did not help when diverse Greek demographics became crucial client bases. Finally, Enkel did not – possibly could not – produce work that spoke to the post-1922 Greek society, dealing with the failure of its irredentist dreams, the trauma of widespread life and cultural loss, the complexity of redefining its national identity after large-scale population exchanges and Greek-ethnic refugee arrivals. And it was not without impact for Enkel that Asia Minor populations that relocated to mainland Greece after 1922 were staunchly Venizelist.

Negotiating Greekness

Both in its royalist and its market-led dimensions, Enkel's work was part of a wide-reaching exportation of Eurocentric performative culture, fostering Western European cultural dominance. The choreographic paradigms within the works – classical ballet influences in composition and posture, elements of fashionable dances diversifying step vocabulary – were also Western, albeit often appropriated, imports. Enkel therefore mediated Western codes to a recently-formed Balkan country that needed to dismiss its Ottoman past, which was subject to an orientalist perception, to fulfil the Western European ideal of a modern nation state.

Xifir Faler again illustrates how Enkel's work brought Western paradigms to bear in the Greek local context. The show involved dances performed by its acting cast – the Maid danced the one-step, Neutrality opted for tango, maxixe and quadrilles – but also extravagant group scenes to be performed by an English ballet troupe from London's Coliseum music-hall. But the dancers did not reach Greece, due to the Entente's embargo; Enkel therefore taught the material to a ballet composed of Greek women (HATZIPANTAZIS and MARAKA 2003: 356–357), a notable feat at a time when being a *corps* ballet dancer was a highly stigmatised profession, out of the bounds of propriety for Greek women. This first step towards transferring light musical theatre ballet to Greek bodies points to why Enkel was particularly important in defining Greek light musical theatre dance: because of her influence on later generations of artists who would become prominent in the scene.

Exportation, of course, does not lead to passive reception: when Western European light musical theatre – choreographic or other – paradigms arrived in Greece, they were recontextualised, adapted, and therefore re-signified. In Enkel's career, the first sign of adapting to the new context was the speed at which she started performing in Greek: already in 1913, she performed a song in a Greek *epitheorisi* (SIDERIS 2000: 90) before starring in a production of *Eva* in Greek (specifically *katharevousa*, the conservative, literary non-vernacular). Such performances were remarkable feats for a German-speaker with no Greek experience; their historiographic significance, however, lies with the fact that they involved transformation of source material. Tobias Becker (2017: 7, 17) notes that

> in contrast to operas – which were, at this historical moment, either performed in their original language or translated as literally as possible – operettas, as commodities geared toward a paying mass audience, were fair game for translators who changed their texts in far more radical ways [...] this, of course, also had repercussions for the music. It was also not unusual to interpolate entirely new songs into an existing score, and instrumentation could be changed in significant ways.

This regularly happened in Greece: Lehar's *Zigeunerliebe* (1910) for example, was first performed with an entirely new instrumentation for its quartet because the Greek production did not have the original score (*EBROS* 1916a). Enkel was a key figure in applying this practice to dance, as her work involved extensive recontextualization and resignification of Western operetta choreography. One of her first jobs in Greece was to teach a dance number from *Eva* to the Kotopouli troupe, who would use it in an *epitheorisi* about the ongoing Balkan Wars. The so-called 'Chair dance' was performed in *Eva* along with a song referring to frivolous life in Paris; extracted from its original dramaturgical position and integrated in an *epitheorisi* with an entirely different plotline, it was paired with a song humorously referring to the relationship of women and soldiers during the Balkan Wars. In Enkel's later works, one encounters numbers performed in Western choreographic idioms but clearly relating to everyday realities in a Mediterranean country: for instance, in *Ti eine o Eros* (1915), a ballet of English

dancers performed a mosquito dance. Enkel's work also involved re-curation of material, to meet local audiences' expectations: in a 1913 performance of *Eva*, it is noted that Pipsi – a character she was deeply connected to in public imagination – appeared dancing *pentozali* and *balos*, two Greek traditional dances, in the intermissions (*EBROS* 1913).

Enkel's work contributed to a globalisation of aesthetics dominated by Western idioms, drawing both from classical ballet and from fashionable social dances. But her work also participated in local counter-action through appropriations and adaptations allowing the imported material to make sense in its new context. Nevertheless, the aesthetic framework of Greek light musical theatre ballet – in general and Enkel's work in particular – was Western European, and was perceived as such by audiences. Greece could use the stage to negotiate whether it would be more royalist or more liberal, more conservative or more progressive, more *Fledermaus* or more cakewalk; but the negotiation always remained within Western frameworks. This necessarily coded modern Greece as West-leaning, the 'post' of its post-Ottoman identity infused with a rejection of its Ottoman past. Enkel therefore performed and staged, in the sense of a social choreography (HEWITT 2005), a modern Greek identity that was negotiated *within* the confines of Western European aesthetics and transmitted these confines into the bodies of future generations of artists.

Conclusion

Funded by the palace and participating in the monarchy's public image, Enkel's work in Greece promoted royal interests in a period of national division, and disseminated royally-approved, Western European choreographic aesthetics – more specifically from Viennese operetta. In the context of peri-World War I Greece, this was not just a stylistic choice, but a distinctive alignment with German-speaking culture at a time when the country was debating its position in global conflict.

Catering to audiences ranging from bourgeois families to working-class spectators, negotiating form and content to increase ticket sales, Enkel also worked in a highly competitive entertainment market. Her royalist leanings and her loyalty to Viennese operetta, ultimately losing its fashionable edge, meant that she was not one of the market's most successful players; but even so, she was part of a landscape disseminating commodified Western European dance fashions, moulding Greek urban dwellers' ideas of entertainment through imported trends.

Enkel participated in the ongoing process of Greece's modernisation, both as a nation engaged in political alliances with Western Europe, and as an entertainment market aligned with Western tastes. We can understand Greece's modernisation, and Enkel's participation therein, as a push-and-pull of opposing forces: Constantine or Venizelos, conservatism or liberalism, Germany-Austria or the British-French alliance. This oscillation translated into the performative realm: centralised subsidy or market, Lehar and Strauss or tango and jazz, waltz or tap dance. As Enkel's example shows,

these are not either/or choices, but reflect the complex negotiations the country was undergoing, also through performative practices. Enkel's work illustrates how Greek light musical theatre ballet negotiated its reception of these forms by adapting and re-signifying their elements. Nevertheless, these adaptations and resignifications did not radically exceed Western frameworks: if Greece rehearsed its post-Ottoman identity on stage, the options it rehearsed were among a range that was always and already Western.

Elsa Enkel was a female artist navigating a transnational landscape, escaping from her role as a troupe member to become an agent of her own career, *and* a rod in the device of Western cultural dominance in a peripheralised, in-process-of-Westernisation post-Ottoman state. Both palace *protégée* and pop-star, Enkel was a translator, mediator, and transmitter, operating between Western cultural imperialism and Greek localised response. As such, she might be seen as an unexpected personification of Greek Westernised modernity's turbulent development.

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