

# Early 20th Century Greek *Tableaux Vivants:* Staging the Nation

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper focuses on tableaux vivants, a distinct performative genre that stands between the theatre and the visual arts and has close affinities with cinema. More specifically, it examines in detail the ideology and the repertoire of the tableaux vivants featured in Greek public festive and benefit performances in the early decades of the 20th century, in the midst of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and before the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1922). Produced in the context of amateurism (the performers and artists/scholars being members of the upper class) and enacting pieces of classical, byzantine and contemporary Greek painting, sculpture and architecture, tableaux vivants of the time offer a highly idealised image of the Greek past, present and future, and as such can be seen as a manifestation of the ruling classes' attempt to translate in a theatrical and visual language a continuous national narrative from antiquity to the present, as well as to boost the nation's morale in an extremely turbulent era in order to support further territorial claims. In that sense, these immovable pictures can be read as an 'invented tradition'.*

## KEYWORDS

early Greek cinema  
fine arts  
invented traditions  
national identity  
photography  
society amateurism  
*tableaux vivants*

This paper focuses on a series of early 20th century Greek *tableaux vivants* (or *plastikes ikones* in Greek), a distinct performative genre that stands between the theatre and the visual arts and has close affinities with cinema. These *tableaux vivants* featured in public festive and benefit performances of upper class amateurs in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and were closely associated with the major events of Greek history of the time, i.e. the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) – that resulted in Greece doubling its size by annexing new territories until then under Ottoman rule –, the First World War and the subsequent Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922), which was the country's last chance to accomplish the Megali Idea/Great Idea, namely expand its limits to “any land associated with the Greek history or the Greek race” (Clogg 1992: 76).

### A GENRE IN BETWEEN THE ARTS

The genre of *tableaux vivants* – balancing between mobility and immobility, movement and stasis – has a long history from the Middle Ages through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, any attempt to trace its origins, examine its typology, enumerate its various parallels in literature, photography, dance, music, performance/live art and film, and/or analyse its different uses (standing between high and popular art on a professional/amateur/private/public/ benefit/festive/commercial level), lies well beyond the scope of this article. However, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe, Australia and the US a specific type of *tableaux vivants* dominated, which is exactly the type presented on the early 20th Greek stage. In this type the participants would stand still and silent on a theatre stage or a non-purpose built hall, striking immovable poses and enacting either well known works of art (sculptures, paintings, etchings, photographs as well as literary works) or original syntheses (often of allegorical nature), all in the pictorial mode. Elaborate scenery, carefully chosen costumes and appropriate make up were used, as well as atmospheric lighting. The silent image was accompanied by music (sometimes original) or recitation. *Tableaux vivants* were extremely popular at that time either as a commercial variety show (McCullough 1975; Davis 1989; Pillet 1992; Anae 2008 and Burrow 2010) or as a home past time activity (Head 1860; Harrison 1882; Lorrendo nd.).

Staged *tableaux vivants* had known their cinematic counterpart as soon as the moving image made its appearance. Sometimes stage versions and screen versions were presented the one next to the other on the popular commercial stages of the western metropolises. As Adriaensens and Jacobs argue, as early as the late 1890s, leading production companies as

the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company produced numerous film versions of living pictures with titles pointing toward actual paintings by Gustave Moreau or Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, among others. [...] Such films showing *tableaux vivants* were intended for vaudeville houses, where spectators could compare living pictures on film either to living pictures as performed on stage or to the artwork that was evoked (or more likely a reproduction of it). (2015: 47, 49)

This comes as no surprise since cinema and *tableaux vivants* share the common fascination of the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century with movement: on the one hand, a still stage image by living people implying mobility and, on the other, a moving cinematic image, both modelled after an immovable, by nature, picture. It is in the context of intermediality, then, that well known paintings were enacted both on stage and screen. These pictorial compositions circulated across media freely, often without any direct acknowledgement of the original source, since they were not considered as the unique interpretation of an artist, but as authentic documents revealing History (Robert 2012: 20); this is a period when “a cinema *production* [was] conceived as a cinema of *reproduction*” (Robert 2013: 15). *Tableaux vivants* were deployed both in narrative and non-narrative proto-cinematic forms, with the most frequent sources being historical paintings and ancient sculpture (Chapman 1996; Robert 2013; Adriaensens & Jacobs 2015). Historical paintings – not necessarily previously realised on stage – informed many films of the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which treated similar themes (Robert 2013), contributing thus to the newborn medium's legitimation (Robert 2012: 76). Sculpture offered the opportunity of an inversion: instead of “frozen movement (...) the picture or statue coming to life” (Adriaensens & Jacobs 2015: 49). This was an early cinematic treatment of ‘Pygmalionism’, present in American, French and even Italian early short films, the trick films of the *cinémagicien* Georges Méliès or “the erotic nudie-cutie, screen gems courtesy of the Viennese Saturn Film Company” (ibid.: p. 50).<sup>1</sup>

## STAGING THE GREEK NATION

Leaving aside what remains a desideratum for early Greek cinema scholarship, i.e. the exploration of the stage *tableaux vivants*' relation to early Greek cinema,<sup>2</sup> this

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<sup>1</sup>Greek filmography includes a later film on this subject: *Oniron tou Glyptou/Sculptor's Dream or Pygmalion and Galatea* (1930), written and directed by the Greek American Lou Telegan (Pavlos Kyriakopoulos), who also kept the leading role. Not surprisingly it was a Greek-American production, for the most part shot in the US with only an opening scene filmed in Greece (Soldatos 2002: 44; Mouratidis 2009: 115-116).

<sup>2</sup>The entanglement of cinema and *tableaux vivants* has not yet captured the attention of early Greek cinema scholars. It is only with systematic archival research that every possible relevant still unknown aspect can be revealed. Until then spare information, like the one

paper focuses on the thematic repertoire and the ideology of these early 20th century upper-class amateur Greek stage *tableaux vivants* that render them “pages in our national life” (Fournaraki 2010a: 2073). This series of immovable pictures offer a highly idealised image of the Greek past, present and future, along the lines of the official national narrative (Liakos 1994). As such, the specific *tableaux vivants* can be seen as a manifestation of the ruling classes’ attempt to translate a continuous national narrative from antiquity to the present into a theatrical and visual language (Glytzouris 2001: 522; Glytzouris 2002; Fournaraki 2010b: 385-387). What is more, the upper classes seem to have focused on Greek history and art not only as a means of forming a national identity but also as an agent for boosting the people's morale in a turbulent era, in order to support further territorial claims.<sup>3</sup> Arguably, these mark an “important moment in the process of forming mass national culture” (Fournaraki 2010a: 2074) and therefore can be treated as “invented traditions” of a nation (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983).

A series of *tableaux vivants* presented in the Greek royal premises in the mid-19th century can be considered as a forerunner of the 1910s public performances. It is in the 1858-1859 season that Queen Amalia of Greece decided to organise instead of the standard ball an evening of *tableaux vivants* in a palace room. The experiment was repeated at least once, only a few months before she and King Otto were dethroned (1862). In both cases all the performers were well known-ladies and mademoiselles of the upper class. There was no scenographic credit, but experts on archaeology or folk culture were involved, such as Alexandros Rizos-Rangavis for the 1862 performance (Rizos-Rangavis 1999: 85). As pictorial evidence proves, these were simple compositions that consisted of a single person behind a frame (**Fig.1**). However rudimentary these compositions may have been, some of the seeds for

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mentioned by Kousoumidis (1981: 20) on a 1910s series of cinematic short *tableaux vivants* entitled *On the Acropolis*, shot by the French Leon – hailed as “the first Greek cinematographer” (Soldatos 2002: 15) (more on Leon in Arkolakis 2009: 160-161) – and starring Greek actors, cannot be correctly interpreted and integrated harmoniously into the narrative of Greek cinema.

<sup>3</sup>These specific *tableaux vivants* can be aligned with a number of performative events of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (patriotic drama, comedy, operetta and revue) that express ardently the contemporary popular patriotic feelings (Delveroudi 1988; on Greek revue, see also Hadzipantazis & Maraka, 1977: 116-123). Similarly, patriotic intentions can be traced in the cinematic production of the time. See, for example, the newsreels of the Balkan Wars, the First World War and the Greco-Turkish War (Lambrinos 2005: 127-214) as well as “Dimitris Gaziadis’ unrealized master work *The Geek Miracle (To Elliniko Thagma, 1922)* [...] envisaged as immortalizing the recapture of Asia Minor (Greco-Turkish War, 1919-1922) [...]. The film was never completed, except in fragment reels from the actual battles, which Gaziadis had filmed himself [...]. The devastating defeat of the Greek army forced him to substitute triumphalist narratives and national myths and patriotic glory with short and private folk stories of consolation” (Karalis 2012: 16).

future development of the genre in Greece were already present: on the one hand, the quest of forming a national identity, which guided the meticulous research for 'authentic' local dress undertaken by Rangavis after the Queen's suggestion – research that was very much related to the royal couple's interest in inventing and establishing a type of national dress shortly after their arrival in Greece (Droulia 2001; Christodoulou 2002; Macha-Bizoumi 2014); and on the other, the close affinities these events shared with the royal circles and upper class amateurism.



**Fig. 1:** Greek *tableaux vivants*, Royal Palace, 1858-1859. Source: *O Ion ton Athinon* (1912: 170)

It is in the context of amateurism that a significant number of *tableaux vivants* were produced in the 1910s, only this time as a part of public celebratory or benefit performances (Sideris 1962; Sideris 2000: 46-60) and in close relation to the political and military events of this turbulent era. These much more sophisticated and regular performances were organised by cultural societies or clubs of Athenian upper-class amateurs and took place in either of the two indoor theatres of the Greek capital: the Dimotiko Theatro Athinon/Athens Municipal Theatre (opened in 1888 – demolished in 1940s) or the Vasilikon Theatron/Royal Theatre (opened in 1901 – still in use today under the name of Ethniko Theatro/National Theatre), at the time both serving as receiving venues. Those benefit performances were a highly respectable and extremely popular spectacle, despite their limited frequency – at least twelve performances are identifiable in a period of eleven years (See:

Appendix). Despite the high ticket prices (*Ethnos* 2.5.1921; *Estia* 19.1.1915), the Athenian public attended en masse these evenings, which were also attended regularly by the royal family. In many cases, a second performance would follow the first, this time at lower prices for the less privileged viewers (*Estia* 22.1.1915). In all cases, the audiences seem to have been enthusiastic about a show that supported both national and artistic causes and offered ideological satisfaction as well as aesthetic pleasure.



**Fig. 2:** *Tableau Vivant: Japanese Garden, after Toyokuni.* Amateurs Club for the benefit of Sotiria Sanatorium, Royal Theatre, 27 & 28.12.1910. Artist: N. Othoneos. Photographer: E. Lester. Postcard. Source: Sideris (2000: 179)

The number of *tableaux vivants* presented in one evening was not fixed, but there was no such show with more than ten. When the moment came, the curtain went up and an immovable but living composition of one or more participants would appear for only a few minutes, while live music or verse recitation was heard. Despite its limited duration, this was the highlight of the evening; it was not unusual for the audience to applaud enthusiastically, forcing the curtain to open and close more than once (*Patris* 1.4.1912). In addition, this was the moment everyone would remember after the show, since selected *tableaux vivants* were photographed in advance, printed as postcards and sold separately during the intervals – e.g. (**Fig.2**) (*Athine*, 24.1.1915; *Estia*, 24.1.1915; *Akropolis*, 21.1.1915).

The programme of the evening was always a varied one, featuring – besides the *tableaux vivants* – pieces of theatre, music, dance, literature and cinema. Performances of one-act plays (frequently in the original French language), poem recitations, music concerts, singing of western, Greek folk or folk-like songs and dance performances in ancient Greek or folk/traditional costumes were regular on the programme. Parades in national dress (Appendix: PERF. No 11), talent shows (Appendix: PERF. No 10) or films were the exception.



**Fig. 3:** Publicity photograph. *I Miti tis Athinas/Athena's Nose* (Emile Lester, 1914).  
Source: *O Ikonografimenos Parnassos* (1914: 7).

The inclusion of a screening in a Greek *tableaux vivant* performance seems to have taken place only once, but marks an important moment in the history of the early Greek cinema, since the film was especially produced for that evening: *I Miti tis Athinas/Athena's Nose* (Emile Lester, 1914 – lost) (**Fig.3**) was commissioned by the Ipirotiki Epitropi Despinidon/Young Epirote Ladies Committee to form part of a performance for the benefit of the Northern Epirus cause (Royal Theatre 25.4.1914) (Appendix: PERF. No 6). The film dramatized the story of a Danish archaeologist

who, obsessed with the lost statue of Acropolis Pallas Athena, visits modern Greece. There, he hopes to find a living impersonation of the lost statue in the face of a young Athenian lady, whose nose has the supposedly correct size. *Athena's Nose* was actively supported by the Greek Palace, as King Constantine I himself appeared in it and a preview was given at the royal premises.<sup>4</sup> The film was generously funded and directed by the royal photographer and cinematographer Emile Lester,<sup>5</sup> written by the acclaimed playwright and journalist Georgios Tsokopoulos and starring in the leading role the playwright, journalist and theatre historian Nikolaos Laskaris, surrounded by female members of the Syllogos Erasitechnon/Amateurs Club. It was filmed in various Athenian and Attica locations (the Acropolis, Heinrich Schliemann's residence, down-town cafés, seaside resort Neon Faliron and a village near Megara). Therefore, all the preconditions were met for the film to make a success in Greece and, at the same time, to hopefully reach international audiences, promoting thus the country's political claims through the field of art. Unfortunately, the reception was not enthusiastic at all, while the main points of critique were focusing on the lack of technical means and the inexperience of the director, who had never shot a fiction film before. Similarly, all participants were equally inexperienced and there is no evidence as to if the film was shown on a public occasion ever again (Sideris 1962; Kouris 2014).<sup>6</sup>

The amateurs aimed at providing high production values, despite the fact that everyone working for these events (both members of the clubs and special collaborators) offered their services on a voluntary basis. The presentation of *tableaux vivants* was most of the times a result of collaboration between erudite scholars (archaeologists) and visual artists (painters or sculptors) (See: Appendix).

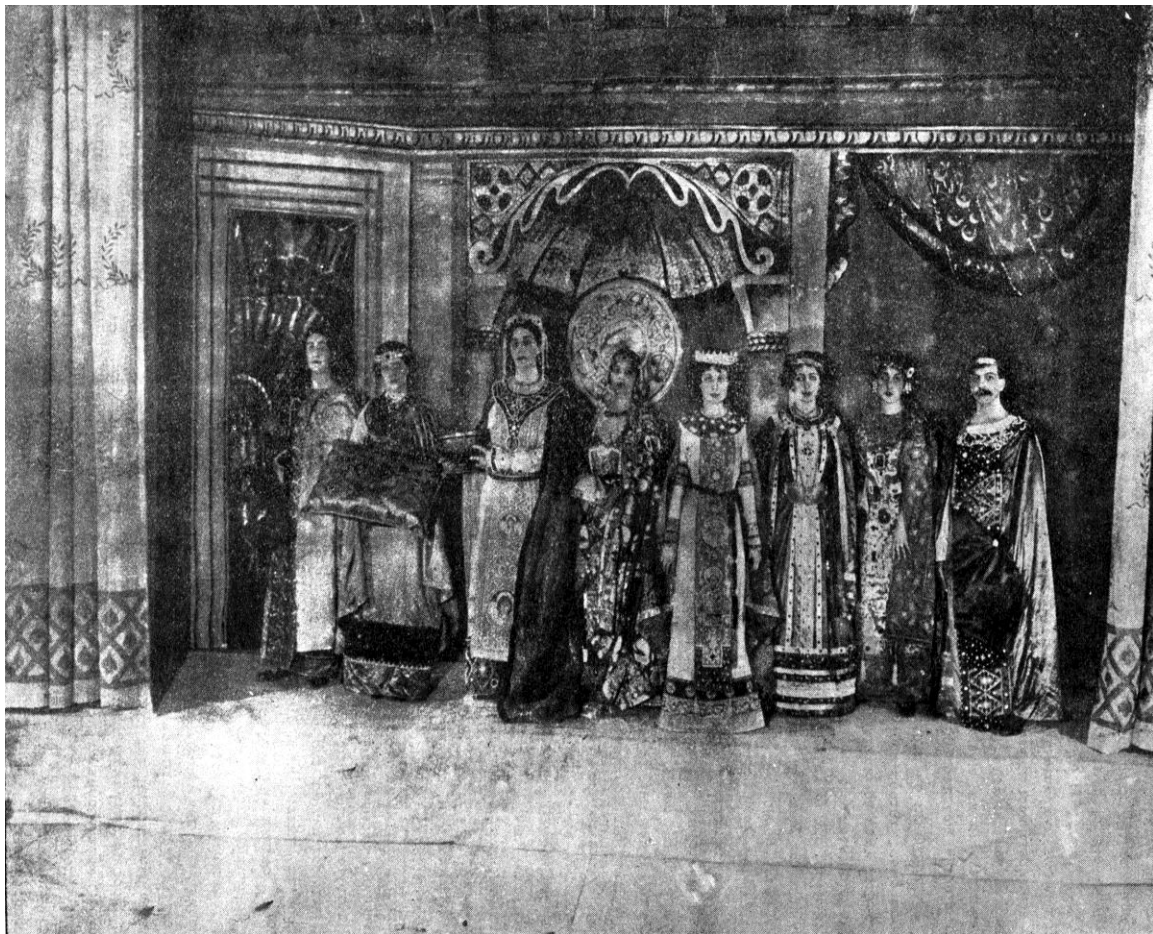
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<sup>4</sup> This must have been one of the rare appearances of any member of the Greek royal family in a fiction film. The King, the Queen and their siblings, however, “starred” in numerous newsreels during their life time and even after death in an attempt to establish and mythologise royalty (Lambrinos 2005: 289-324).

<sup>5</sup> Lester, possibly a German, of whom very little is known, filmed charity activities and other official events with the participation the Greek royal family, some of which were exhibited in public venues (*Embros*, 28.3.1917). He also exhibited reels from the excessive warfare of the time in the royal premises (*Embros*, 8.12.1914). He reportedly filmed the Greco-Turkish War in Asia Minor; the screening of a 1h30m film of his at the Pantheon was organised by the Syndesmos Psychagogias ton Polemiston/Association for the Recreation of the Warriors (*Embros*, 14.9.1921; however, another newspaper of the same day attributes the “great war film” to the otherwise unknown Mrs Triantafyllou and Pikra (*Scrip* 14.9.1921). Moreover, Lester was the photographer of the *tableaux* of the Amateurs Club performance for the benefit of Sotiria Sanatorium (Royal Theatre 27 & 28.12.1910) (Appendix: PERF. No 1) (**Fig. 2 & 9**).

<sup>6</sup> Until recently, the film was considered unfinished; therefore it could not be perceived as the first Greek feature film before the legendary *Golfo* (Konstantinos Bachatoris, 1914 – lost) (Rouvas & Stathakopoulos 2005: 16).

While the archaeologists would suggest a work of art as a possible model, the visual artists were in charge of the pictorial aspect (staging, scenery, costumes, make-up, lighting), thus creating a harmonious stage picture in one of the very first such instances in modern Greek theatre. In most cases, they had at their disposal a stock collection, e.g. the pioneering folk costume collection of To Lykio ton Ellinidon/Lyceum Club of Greek Women (Macha-Bizoumi 2010) (Appendix: PERF. No 5) or the available generic stock scenery of the hosting venues, e.g. Royal Theatre (**Fig.4**) (Appendix: PERF. No 1; *Embros*, 14.12.1910). In some cases, new scenery was designed especially for a *tableaux vivants* show (e.g. Appendix: PERF. No 6 (**Fig. 5 & 6**) – an extremely rare practice for any type of performance at the time, with the exception of the Athenian revue (Hadjipantazis & Maraka 1977; Hadjipantazis 2002: 294-300; Hadjipantazis 2012: 169-180; Konstantinakou 2013).



**Fig. 4:** *Tableau Vivant: Empress Theodora's Procession with Retinue*. Amateurs Club for the benefit of Sotiria Sanatorium, Royal Theatre, 27 & 28.12.1910. Artist: N. Othoneos. Source: *Elliniki Epitheorisis* (1911: 1197).



**Fig. 5:** *Tableau Vivant: War image.* Young Epirote Ladies Committee for the benefit of the Northern Epirus cause, Royal Theatre, 25.4.1914. Artist: P. Aravantinos. Source: Mavrikiou (2011: 115).



**Fig. 6:** *Tableau Vivant: Nike awakens the soldiers.* Young Epirote Ladies Committee for the benefit of the Northern Epirus cause, Royal Theatre, 25.4.1914. Artist: P. Aravantinos. Source: Mavrikiou (2011: 116).

The artist who introduced the genre of *tableaux vivants* to the 1910s Athenian public was Nikolaos Othoneos (1877-1949), a young painter who, upon his return from Munich (the cultural centre par excellence for Greek artists of the time), undertook the very first public *tableaux vivants* performance for the Amateurs Club in 1910. Painter and sculptress Eleni Georganti (1881-1977), her husband sculptor Nikolaos Georgantis (1883-1947), painter Maria Skoufou (1860(?)-1926(?)) and painter Anastasia Nafpliotou (? - ?) were the artists who worked for the Lyceum Club of Greek Women performances; Skoufou and Nafpliotou were among the first women to study at the Female Department of the Athens School of Arts (Sholion ton Technon, Tmima Thileon). Georgios Jakobides (1853-1932), a highly established painter affiliated to the Munich Academy of Arts, who by 1912 had already been appointed curator of the newly-founded Ethniki Pinakothiki/Greek National Gallery as well as director of the Athens School of Arts, also collaborated with the same institution. But the artist who gained distinction as a *tableaux vivants* designer is undoubtedly Panos Aravantinos (1884-1930), a young painter by training and the only one to follow a triumphant scenographic career, first in Greece (being hailed as “the father of Greek scenography”) and later in German-speaking countries where he worked mainly for the operatic stage (Mavrikiou 2011). Aravantinos, with his well-balanced, carefully posed, beautifully coloured and adequately lit, for the most part original, syntheses managed to “elevate the silent art of *tableaux vivants* to new, unprecedented heights” (*Estia* 26.4.1910, qtd in Sideris 2000: 59-60) and achieved what seemed to be the aim of the genre: to astonish audiences by reaching a high degree of verisimilitude.

The very first public *tableaux vivants* performance of the 1910s series was presented for the benefit of Fthisiatreio Sotiria/Sotiria Sanatorium<sup>7</sup> (Royal Theatre 27 & 28.12.1910) (Appendix: PERF. No 1). It was organised by the Amateurs Club, which was founded the previous year by upper class members of both sexes and operated under the auspices of Prince Christophoros.<sup>8</sup> The *tableaux vivants* programme of the evening, supervised by Othoneos, was extremely rich and very well documented. Half of the subjects were chosen from western or oriental works of art: for example, the painting “Le Concert” by Antoine Watteau (**Fig. 7**) or a Japanese print by Toyokuni depicting a Japanese garden (**Fig. 2**). Additionally, two portraits were presented: Thomas Gainsborough’s “Ms Siddons” and “La fleuriste”

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<sup>7</sup> Sotiria Sanatorium, founded in 1902, was run by a privately funded philanthropic society headed by Heinrich Schliemann’s widow, Sophia (Theodorou 2002; Papadopoulos 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Amateurs Club was divided into two departments, one for music and another for drama. Besides lectures and theatre performances, the club was the first to introduce to the public sphere the genre of tableau vivant (*Pinakothiki* 1909: 21). Today Amateurs Club has been dissolved.

by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, a French artist closely associated with the genre, since it was one of his own paintings that, according to historians, was made into a *tableau vivant* for the first time, during a theatrical performance back in 1761 (namely the painting "L' accordée de village" enacted during the performance of *Les noces d' Arlequin* by the Comédie Italienne [Holmström 1967: 217-218]). Additionally, a number of Greek subjects were enacted: Lemnian Athena (**Fig. 8**), East Parthenon Frieze Procession, a synthesis inspired by an ancient Fountain (**Fig. 9**), as well as the Byzantine mosaic of Empress Theodora's Procession with Retinue from San Vitale, Ravenna (**Fig. 4**). The programme was complemented by an enactment of the painting "Incense" by the best known Greek Orientalist painter Théodore Jacques Ralli, set in a Greek orthodox church.



**Fig. 7:** *Tableau Vivant: Le Concert*, by Antoine Watteau. Amateurs Club for the benefit of Sotiria Sanatorium, Royal Theatre, 27 & 28.12.1910. Artist: N. Othoneos. Source: Monthly Supplement of the newspaper *Athine* (1911: 3027).

Nevertheless, this mixed repertoire did not satisfy the Press, who readily suggested a selection of more indigenous themes on a national basis (*Embros*, 14.12.1910). Thus, the institutions that undertook the following *tableaux vivants* performances –

among which the Lyceum Club of Greek Women<sup>9</sup> – soon turned their back to their western models and opted for a selection of “‘the finest pages in our national life’, that is in national history” (Fournaraki 2010a: 2073). Greek iconography – which was easily recognised by the viewers – dominated entirely in the performances that followed. Greek subjects readily multiplied and expanded their range (all the way from antiquity to the present day) in order to present a fuller image of the nation’s past, present and future and thus serve more adequately the purpose assigned to them: to generate patriotic feelings and boost the viewers’ morale in order to support further territorial claims in a period of excessive warfare.

In those performances a four-phase structure of the national narrative can be discerned, mirroring, in a way, ‘the four ages of Greek civilization’ of the official historiography: Ancient Greece, Byzantium, the period that leads to the renaissance of Hellenism and modern Greece. There was no need for all four phases to be present in a single programme; in most cases a succession of only two *tableaux vivants* sufficed to shape the narrative of the historical continuity of Hellenism. There also appeared some imaginative syntheses in which all historical phases mingled. For example, in a pair of *tableaux vivants* titled “Ancient and modern Greece” the temple of Erechtheum on the Athens Acropolis was represented, while a few moments later young Greek women in folk dress would be sitting on its steps (Royal Theatre, 28.3.1912) (Appendix: PERF. No 3). In this succession of *tableaux vivants*, past and present dissolved into one another in a way in which the past was still alive, while the present only existed because it was fuelled by the past.

### *Antiquity*

The majority of the subjects came from Greek antiquity. Due to the considerable development of archaeology and the existence of archaeological museums (Kokkou 1997), there was an abundance of pieces of ancient Greek art that could serve as models. The main source of inspiration was sculpture: Lemnian Athena (**Fig. 8**) (Appendix: PERF. No 1), Grave stele (Appendix: PERF. No 9), Procession of the East Parthenon Frieze (Appendix: PERF. No 1), Athens Hygieia and The three Graces crowning Hymen (Appendix: PERF. No 7), Tanagra figurines (Appendix: PERF. No 6

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<sup>9</sup> Lyceum Club of Greek Women was founded in 1911 by a pioneer of the feminist movement in Greece and the country’s first woman journalist Kallirhoe Parren (1860-1941) and is still active today, with 51 Branches all over Greece and 16 Bureaus abroad (Available at <http://www.lykeionellinidon.gr/lyceumportal/default.aspx>. Accessed 10 November 2017). Ever since it has played an active and important role in the preservation and presentation of Greek cultural traditions and folk customs, its main activity being researching and performing folk dances in authentic costume. Equally important has been the Club’s social contribution, especially in the domain of adult education for women and the defence of women’s rights (Bobou-Protopapa 1993; Avdela 2010).



**Fig. 8:** *Tableau Vivant: Lemnian Athena.* Amateurs Club for the benefit of Sotiria Sanatorium, Royal Theatre, 27 & 28.12.1910. Artist: N. Othoneos. Source: Monthly Supplement of the newspaper *Athine* (1911: 3025).

& 9), Archaic Korai of the Athens Acropolis, 6th century B.C. (Appendix: PERF. No 8) and the Erechtheum (Appendix: PERF. No 3). There appeared also some *tableaux vivants* modelled after pottery: Eretria vases from the Ethniko Archeologiko Mousio/National Archaeological Museum (Appendix: PERF. No 6) and Wedgwood style vases (Appendix: PERF. No 9). The original syntheses were few: Ancient altar (Appendix: PERF. No 2 & 4), Fountain (**Fig. 9**) (Appendix: PERF. No 1), while an unspecified 'ancient vision' was also enacted (Appendix: PERF. No 12).



**Fig. 9:** *Tableau Vivant: Fountain*. Amateurs Club for the benefit of Sotiria Sanatorium, Royal Theatre, 27 & 28.12.1910. Artist: N. Othoneos. Photographer: E. Lester. Source: Monthly Supplement of the newspaper *Athine* (1911: 3029).

The primacy of antiquity comes as no surprise, as, even before the formation of the Greek nation-state in 1830s, Greek antiquity had always been the main source of national legitimation, since modern Greeks considered themselves as the heirs of the ancients, whose civilisation was, moreover, the basis of all western civilization (Liakos 1994: 176). Therefore, in the Greek *tableaux vivants* context the glorious ancient sculpture was by no means used as a pretext for obscene exposure or nude/semi-nude display, as was very much the case in commercial theatres in the US or elsewhere (McCullough 1975; Davis 1989; Anae 2008; Burrow 2010). Quite the contrary: all female participants were fully dressed (carefully copying the pleat folds of ancient Greek costume) in an attempt to protect their respectability as well as that of the spectacle.

### *Byzantium*

Unlike ancient Greek civilisation, which had always been considered a keystone of modern Greek civilisation, Eastern Roman Empire was not included in the national narrative until the late 19th century (Liakos 1994: 179-183). The amateur *tableaux vivants* performers were mainly interested in portraying – with the exception of a Byzantine Madonna (Appendix: PERF. No 7) – members of the Byzantine royal court: Empress Theodora’s Procession with Retinue (**Fig. 4**) (Appendix: PERF. No 1), Crown of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (Appendix: PERF. No 5) and a Byzantine procession of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna (Appendix: PERF. No 8). The choice was made because these themes offered not only an opportunity for rich spectacle, but also a means of establishing royalty as a national institution, “that is, an institution which could claim origins in the national past” (Fournaraki 2010a: 2074). Furthermore, the country’s wish to see the Byzantine Empire restored on the aftermath of the Balkan Wars was adequately illustrated in these *tableaux vivants* (Fournaraki 2010b: 386).



**Fig. 10:** *Tableau Vivant: Queen Amalia’s court.* Lyceum Club of Greek Women. New Year’s celebration, Municipal Theatre, 6.1.1912. Source: *O Kallitechnis* (1912: 415).

### *Towards the renaissance of Hellenism*

Under the heading “Towards the renaissance of Hellenism” a number of enactments of the years under the Ottoman Rule and immediately afterwards, are included, since they are seen as illustrating instances that prepared the Greek War of Independence and the subsequent formation of the independent nation-state (Liakos 1994: 190). The Kryfo Sholio/Secret school (Appendix: PERF. No 4) and its flip-side O Mikros Sofos/The Wise Boy (Appendix: PERF. No 8), both enacting works by the acclaimed painter Nikolaos Gyzis, a professor of the Munich Academy of Arts, commemorated the long cherished national myth of Ottomans not allowing the unredeemed Greeks to attend school and thus forcing them to gather secretly in church niches in order to be taught how to read and write in Greek (Danos 2001), and illustrated the belief that “the Greek War of Independence comes as a result of slow but systematic education” (Angelou 1997: 21). In a similar way, the representation of Queen Amalia’s court in traditional outfit in a New Year’s celebration prepared by the Lyceum Club of Greek Women (Municipal Theatre, 6.1.1912) (**Fig. 10**) (Appendix: PERF. No 2), based on a well known existing photograph by Philibert Perrault (1847), is reminiscent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century royal *tableaux vivants* evenings and can be seen as yet another attempt to establish a connection between royalty and Greek national identity, this time alluding to the role of the foreign dynasties in the formation of the modern Greek state (Fournaraki 2010b: 385).

### *Modern Greece*

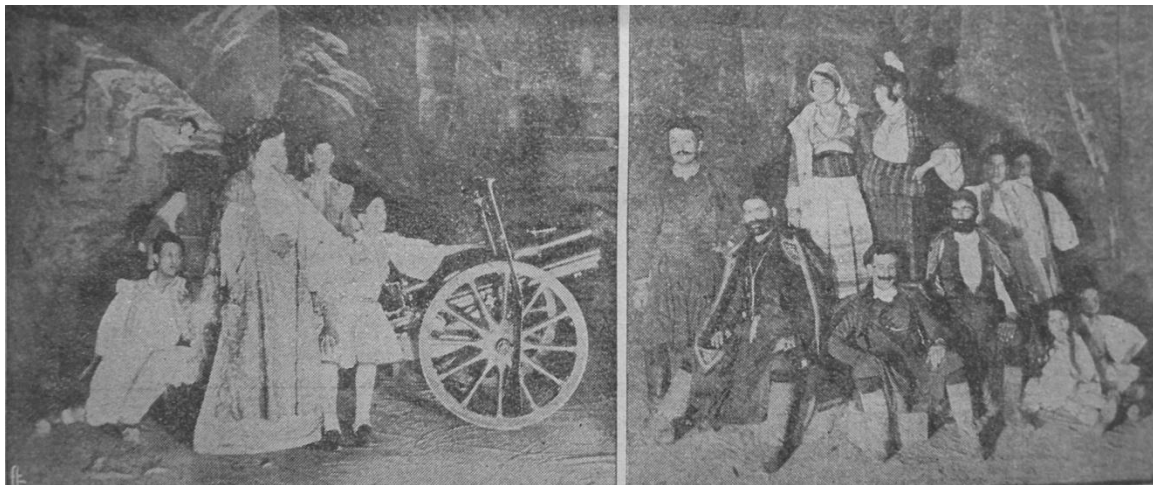
If this had been the course of the Greek nation throughout history and until 1910, what was perhaps of greater importance for the Greeks of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the country’s present and future: modern Greece had considerably grown recently, but the Great Idea, the idea of a ‘greater Greece’, was not yet accomplished. Between 1897 and 1922 the country was caught up in an almost continuous warfare with its neighbouring countries as well as at an international level, which was meant to fulfil its territorial claims (Clogg 1992). In the 1910s Greece’s irredentist politics was mirrored in the thematic repertoire of *tableaux vivants*, which place on stage either the soldiers preparing for the battle and fighting on the battlefield or the war refugees themselves; many of the stage images are of allegorical nature, as most of the popular iconography of the period (Meletopoulos 1968; Mazarakis-Enian & Papaspyrou-Karadimitiriou 1992).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly enough these stage *tableaux vivants* shared many common features with the numerous newsreels of the 1912-1922 warfare, the ones from the Asia Minor front being commissioned by the state. They both presented an idealised image of the war as well as an adequately prepared, well ordered and self-collected army that was undoubtedly destined to accomplish all of the nation’s dreams. They both failed to see the fierce aspect of war that was going to reveal itself only after the Asia Minor Catastrophe (Lambrinos 2005: 127-214).

Even before the outburst of the Balkan Wars, the New Year's celebration of the Lyceum Club of Greek Women (Municipal Theatre, 6.1.1912) (Appendix: PERF. No 2) presented a girl decorated with flowers as the New Year, a *tableau vivant* that did not only welcome the new year to come, but also expressed an optimistic view on the fulfilment of the Great Idea (Fournaraki 2010b: 385). Supporting territorial claims became standard practice in subsequent *tableaux vivants* performances well until the last act of this war, the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1922). It was only during the period of the National Schism (1915-1917) that no *tableaux vivants* performances were detected since the political division of the country prevented all kinds of staging of patriotic feelings or territorial claims (Sideris 1963; Delveroudi 1988: 299).

New Lands, the lands acquired after the recent Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, entered the *tableaux vivants* repertoire in the annual celebration of the Lyceum Club of Greek Women in 1914 (Royal Theatre, 1.2.1914) (Appendix: PERF. No 5). Macedonia and Epirus, along with Crete that was united with the motherland as early as 1908, were represented as women in ethnic dress accompanied by soldiers in front of Constantinople and Hagia Sophia, which were both symbols of the Byzantine Empire (Fig. 11).



**Fig. 11:** *Tableau Vivant: New lands.* Lyceum Club of Greek Women. Annual Celebration, Royal Theatre, 1.2.1914. Source: *O Ikonografimenos Parnassos* (1914: 7).

In addition, since Northern Epirus was a territory still under dispute between Greeks and Albanians, a series of *tableaux vivants* was presented by the Young Epirote Ladies Committee for the benefit of the Northern Epirus cause (Royal Theatre, 25.4.1914) (Appendix: PERF. No 6). They all were original syntheses by the young Epirote Panos Aravantinos, who had actually been on the battlefield. Besides

the ever-present *tableau* of ancient theme (Grave stele), the *tableaux vivants* of the evening offered a rather idyllic and non-violent image of Epirote refugees along with the soldiers' preparation for the battle, who are moreover blessed by the Church (**Fig. 5**). The evening culminated in an emblematic allegorical *tableau* (**Fig. 6**) in which Nike, the ancient deity of Victory, awakened the 20<sup>th</sup> century soldiers and led them to ultimate victory. Once more antiquity fuelled the present and pointed to the future.

Northern Epirus never became a part of Greece, but the First World War that had just started offered a new opportunity for greater territorial expansion. Since Greece did not enter the Great War from the beginning, but remained neutral, the performance for the benefit of the wounded British soldiers of WWI, organised by the Athens branch of Anglo-Hellenic League (Royal Theatre, 23.1.1915) (Appendix: PERF. No 7),<sup>11</sup> can be read as an overt call to the Greeks to support the Triple Entente. In order to promote Anglo-Hellenic friendship, the evening's programme featured enactments of both Greek (Athena Hygieia [the goddess of health], the Three Graces crowning Hymen and a Byzantine Madonna) and British subjects ("Street Vendors of London" or "Voices of London" and "Serena" by George Romney, a painting and a painter closely associated with the genre of *tableaux vivants*);<sup>12</sup> the latter were not easily recognised by Greek audiences. There appeared also an Artist's atelier,<sup>13</sup> but the most emblematic *tableau* of the evening was Lord Byron and

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<sup>11</sup> The Anglo-Hellenic League was founded in Britain in the aftermath of the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars in order to remove "existing prejudices and the prevention of future misunderstandings between the British and Hellenic races [...]. It also sought to stimulate [...] the interest in Hellenic matters, together with the improvement of the social, educational, commercial and political relations of the two countries" (Clogg 1986: 2). It featured an Athens Branch also dedicated to promoting Anglo-Greek understanding and friendship. Anglo-Hellenic League is still active in the UK today (see <http://www.anglohellenicleague.org/about-us/>. Accessed 10 November 2017). See also, Kouta (2017).

<sup>12</sup> The artist's model for the series of paintings titled "Serena" was the famous lady Hamilton, who is believed to have invented the 'attitudes', *tableaux vivants* for solo performer inspired by Greek antiquity (sculpture, mythology, literature and history) (Holmström 1967: 110-140).

<sup>13</sup> Antonis Fokas, a distinguished upper-class amateur and first costume designer of the modern Greek theatre, in a much later interview names Panos Aravantinos as the scenographer of a *tableaux vivants* show including an Artist's atelier at the Royal Theatre in 1915-1916. He also names the participant ladies and mademoiselles (Fotopoulos 1990: 242). Nevertheless, the Press does not publish any scenographic credit, nor the catalogue of Aravantinos oeuvre includes any relevant information (Mavrikiou 2011). Only one article counts Othoneos among the gentlemen of the Athens Branch of the Anglo-Hellenic League working for that particular event, but does not specify his contribution (*Akropolis*, 21.1.1915).

the Maid of Athens in front of the Erechtheum (**Fig. 12**), combining the two countries in an emblematic manner: ancient Greece stood as a background to the acquaintance of Lord Byron, the Philhellene par excellence, with young Teresa Makri or the Maid of Athens, whom the poet had met in 1809 Athens, dressed in traditional outfit.<sup>14</sup> In this striking *tableau*, reminiscent of the paintings, drawings, etchings and photographs of European travellers-artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, who depict ancient ruins along with the native population (Tsigakou 1979; 1995), British and Greeks came together, the old and the new mingled. Antiquity and modern times, Greece and the West dissolve into one another, all projecting to the future. If the past was still alive and the present existed only because it was fuelled by the past, the question was what would the future bring? How would the Greeks return Byron's 'friendship' in the decisive moment of January 1915?<sup>15</sup>

In fact, Greece entered the War as an ally to Britain two years later; the victory of the Entente Cordiale gave boost to the Greek irredentist aspirations. During the hard post-WWI negotiations, the evening for the benefit of the Infant Department of the Patriotiko Idryma Perithalipseos/Patriotic Institution of Healthcare (Municipal Theatre, 9.3.1919) (Appendix: PERF. No 10),<sup>16</sup> brought on stage all the four phases of the national narrative in two consecutive *tableaux vivants*: a personification of ancient Greece stood on a Byzantine throne, surrounded by allegorical figures in ancient Greek dress; later, ladies and mademoiselles in picturesque modern Greek dress were added to the initial picture.

The Greco-Turkish War that followed was considered as a unique chance for Greece to expand its borders to “any land associated with the Greek history or the Greek race” (Clogg 1992: 76). In the midst of this war the Lyceum Club of Greek Women, celebrating ten years of presence, organised a Gynekio Synedrio is Mnimin ton Iroidon tis Ellinikis Epanastaseos/Female Conference to the Memory of the Greek War of Independence Heroines (Royal Theatre, 11.4.1921) (Appendix: PERF. No 11)

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<sup>14</sup> Byron's verses on the Maid of Athens were heard during the performance (*Akropolis*, 21.1.1915). The Maid of Athens was painted by many western artists who visited Greece after Byron (Tsigakou 1987: 78-82).

<sup>15</sup> I read this *tableau* as embodying the view that detects “exoticism meet[ing] the glorious history” (Papaioannou 2014: 78) in the work of such traveller-artists as the British photographer James Robertson, who depicted native population in front of ancient ruins in his staged photographs, and not just as an attempt to create interest out of a monotonous subject (Constantinou & Tsigakou 1998: 19).

<sup>16</sup> The Patriotic Institution of Healthcare (1917-1921) was a philanthropic foundation that took care of soldiers and their families, sick, poor and disabled people as well as unprotected mothers and their children (Theodorou 2015).

and opted to stress its national role by presenting a *tableau* enacting the poem “Is monachin”/“To a Nun” (1829) by the Greek national poet Dionysios Solomos.



**Fig. 12:** *Tableau Vivant: Lord Byron and the Maid of Athens in front of the Erechtheum*, Athens branch of the Anglo-Hellenic League for the benefit of the wounded British soldiers of WWI, Royal Theatre, 23.1.1915. Artist: N. Othoneos (?) Source: © ELIA-MIET Photographic Archive

The last *tableaux* performance of the early 20th century Greek *tableaux vivants* series was presented for the benefit of the wounded Greek soldiers of the Greco-Turkish War. Just a few months before the final Asia Minor Catastrophe, the young Princesses (Olga, Elisabeth, Marina, Margaret and Theodora) left for a few moments the royal box and stepped on stage in order to incarnate an ancient vision (“vision antique”) (Royal Theatre, 2.5.1921) (Appendix: PERF. No 12). Thus, the Greco-Turkish War was signified as a major national cause, a cause which the princesses had to support literally in flesh and blood. Thus the royal family at the time did not need to allude to the past any more, but attempted to make themselves part of the national narrative, that is, the narrative of a glorious nation with deep roots in the past.<sup>17</sup> Ironically enough, it was as a result of the Greco-Turkish War that the Great

<sup>17</sup> The above activities of the upper-class amateurs most probably prompted similar performances on the professional stage, supervised by the well-known playwright, director and himself a distinguished amateur Miltiadis Lidorikis, who had contributed to the 1914

Idea came to a definite end. In 1922 the Greek forces were defeated by the Turkish army in Asia Minor and the consequent exchange of populations between the two countries terminated any further territorial claims (Clogg 1992).

## CONCLUSION

It remains a question whether the “silent art of *tableaux vivants*” ever reached the cinematic screen in Greece; what is beyond doubt is that the stage *tableaux* soon came out of the indoor venues of Athens and reached a wider crowd in open-air Lyceum Club of Greek Women performances that sought greater social influence. From the mid-1920s onwards the “pages of our national life” (Fournaraki 2010a: 2073) acquire movement – even if the immovable *tableaux* move on wheels – in the vast space of the reconstructed Panathinaiko Stadio/Panathenaic Stadium, along with costumed parades and circular dances. This massive outdoors spectacle – yet another invented tradition – narrates eloquently once more the national narrative from antiquity to the present (Fournaraki 2010a: 2071-2079; Fournaraki 2010b: 394; Antzaka-Weis 2010: 249-253) in a timeless ceremony further enhanced by its filming (Lambrinos 2005: 272-285). More recently, the concept of staging the historical continuity of Hellenism in the form of *tableaux vivants* was revived in the opening ceremony of Athens Olympics 2004, where in the context of a massive athletic spectacle the Greek national narrative was addressed to the whole world (Traganou 2010).

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performance by the Young Epirote Ladies Committee for the benefit of the Northern Epirus cause (Appendix: PERF. No 6). As a shareholder and manager of the Eteria Ellinikou Theatrou/Society of Greek Theatre (1919-1921), a company running under the auspices of the Eteria Ellinon Theatrikon Syggrafeon/Greek Playrights' Guild, Lidorikis mounted a series of patriotic *tableaux vivants* as part of the company's varied repertoire. For example, the revue *Panorama 1920* (together with scenes from the revue *Madame Marie*) included “historical *tableaux vivants*, 1821-1921” (*Embros*, 25.4.1921) (credits as given in the playbill: artistic direction Miltiadis Lidorikis, verse Timos Moraitinis, musical accompaniment A. Martino and scenery Emile Boyer). Moreover, in a varied bill matinee performance of the Society during the Greco-Turkish War national *tableaux vivants* were performed along with patriotic plays, extracts from the *Persians* by Aeschylus and patriotic revue scenes (*Embros*, 11.7.1921).

## APPENDIX

Table of *tableaux vivants* performances, Athens 1910-1921

|   | DATE                          | VENUE                             | INSTITUTION                      | CAUSE                                       | REPERTORY  | ARTIST/<br>SCHOLAR  | SOURCES  |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | 27.12.1910<br>&<br>28.12.1910 | Royal<br>Theatre                  | Amateurs<br>Club                 | For the benefit<br>of Sotiria<br>Sanatorium | Le Concert, by<br>Antoine<br>Watteau/<br>Japanese<br>garden, by<br>Toyokuni/ Ms<br>Siddons, by<br>Thomas<br>Gainsborough<br>/ La fleuriste,<br>by Jean-<br>Baptiste<br>Greuse<br>/Lemnian<br>Athena/ East<br>Parthenon<br>Frieze<br>Procession/<br>Fountain/<br>Empress<br>Theodora's<br>Procession<br>with Retinue/<br>Incense, by<br>Theodore<br>Jacques Ralli | ARTIST:<br>Nikolaos<br>Othoneos/<br>Royal<br>Theatre's<br>stock<br>scenery for<br>the Empress<br>Theodora's<br>Procession<br>with Retinue | <i>Embros</i> , 14 &<br>22 &<br>29.12.1910<br>/Monthly<br>Supplement<br>of the<br>newspaper<br><i>Athine</i> ,<br>January<br>1911, p.<br>3025, 3027,<br>3029/ 0<br><i>Kallitechnis</i> ,<br>issue 10,<br>January<br>1911, p. 321 |
| 2 | 6.1.1912                      | Municipal<br>Theatre of<br>Athens | Lyceum Club<br>of Greek<br>Women | New Year's<br>celebration                   | Ancient Altar/<br>Queen<br>Amalia's<br>Court/ New<br>Year  | ARTIST:<br>Georgios<br>Jakobides<br>[Ancient<br>Altar]  | <i>Embros</i> ,<br>19.12.1911,<br>6, 7 &<br>9.1.1912/<br><i>Panathinea</i> ,<br>year IB, issue<br>267,<br>15.1.1912/ 0<br><i>Kallitechnis</i> ,<br>issue 22,<br>January<br>1912, pp.<br>403-404                                  |

|   |           |                             |                                |  |  |  |  |
|---|-----------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| 3 | 28.3.1912 | Royal Theatre               | University of Athens           | International Congress of Orientalists               | Ancient and Modern Greece: Temple of Erechtheum/ Young Greek women in folk dress sitting on the Erechtheum steps                       | ARTIST: Nikolaos Othoneos  | <i>Embros</i> , 29.3.1912/ <i>Patris</i> , 29.3.1912/ <i>O Kallitechnis</i> , issue 25, April 1912, p. 35  |
| 4 | 31.3.1912 | Municipal Theatre of Athens | Lyceum Club of Greek Women     | International Congress of Orientalists (6-14.4.1912) | Secret School, by Nikolaos Gyzis/ Ancient Altar  | ARTIST: Georgios Jakobides [Ancient Altar]   | <i>Patris</i> , 1.4.1912/ <i>Embros</i> , 30.3.1912 & 29.4.1912  |
| 5 | 1.2.1914  | Royal Theatre               | Lyceum Club of Greek Women     | Annual Celebration                                   | Part I: New Lands: Macedonia, Epirus, Crete / Part II: Crown of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos/ Glorification of Nike | EXPERT: Adamantios Adamantiou (professor of Byzantine Art and Archaeology, University of Athens) [Byzantine Crown] | <i>Embros</i> , 29.1 & 2.2.1914/ <i>Efimeris ton Kyriou</i> , year KH, no. 1048-1055, 1.1.1914, p. 1528-1531 & 2544-2545/ <i>O Ikonografiminos Parnassos</i> , year Δ, no. 200(42), 9.2.1914, p. 7 |
| 6 | 25.4.1914 | Royal Theatre               | Young Epirote Ladies Committee | For the benefit of the Northern Epirus cause         | Part I: Ancient pottery/ Grave Stele/ Female figurines of 'tanagra' type/ Part II: War Images  | ARTIST: Panos Aravantinos  | <i>Embros</i> , 12.4.1914/ <i>Athine</i> , 26.4.1914/ <i>Skrip</i> , 25.4.1914/ <i>Estia</i> , 26.4.1914/ <i>Pinakothiki</i> , year ΙΔ', issue 159, May 1914, p. 41-42                             |

|   |                       |               |  |  |   |   |  |
|---|-----------------------|---------------|--|--|---|---|--|
| 7 | 23.1.1915             | Royal Theatre | Athens branch of the Anglo-Hellenic League | For the benefit of the wounded British soldiers of WWI | Athena Hygeia/ Three Graces crowning Hymen / Byzantine Madonna/ Serena, by George Romney/ Street Ventors of London or Voices of London/ An artist's atelier/ Lord Byron and the Maid of Athens in front of the Erechtheum |   | <i>Estia</i> , 19 & 22 & 24.1.1915/ <i>Akropolis</i> , 21.1.1915/ <i>Skrip</i> , 21 & 22 & 25.1.1915/ <i>Embros</i> , 22.1.1915/ <i>Athine</i> , 23 & 24.1.1915/ <i>Nea Imera</i> [Tergestis], 24.1.1915/ <i>Pinakothiki</i> , year 10τ, issue 184-185, June-July 1916 |
| 8 | 23.3.1915 & 27.3.1915 | Royal Theatre | Lyceum Club of Greek Women                 | Winter Celebration                                     | Archaic Korai of the Athens Acropolis, 6th century B.C./ Byzantine procession of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna/ The Wise Boy by N. Gyzis  | ARTISTS: Nikolaos Georgantis [The Wise Boy] / Eleni Georganti [Byzantine procession] / Maria Skoufou [Archaic Korai]<br>SCHOLAR: Daphne Kalapothaki [Archaic Korai] | <i>Embros</i> , 20 & 24 & 28.3.1915/ <i>Skrip</i> 24 & 25 & 27 & 28.3.1915/ <i>Efimeris ton Kyrion</i> , period B, year 29, no. 1060, p. 2704  |

|    |                      |                             |                            |   |  |                           |  |
|----|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---|--|---------------------------|--|
| 9  | 14.5.1916            | Royal Theatre               |                            | In the benefit of the Royal Theatre   | Wedgwood style vases/ Grave stele/ tanagra figurines   | ARTIST: Panos Aravantinos | <i>Embros</i> , 29.4.1916 & 15.5.1916/ <i>Pinakothiki</i> , year ιστ, issue 184-185, June-July 1916, p. 61 |
| 10 | 9.3.1919 & 10.3.1919 | Municipal Theatre of Athens |                            | For the benefit of the Infant Department of the Patriotic Institution of Healthcare | Apotheosis of 'Greater Greece': Personification of ancient Greece on a Byzantine throne, surrounded by allegorical figures in ancient Greek dress/ the above plus ladies and mademoiselles in picturesque modern Greek dress | ARTIST: Nikolaos Othoneos | <i>Athine</i> , 8.3.1919 / <i>Embros</i> , 10.3.1919   |
| 11 | 11.4.1921            | Royal Theatre               | Lyceum Club of Greek Women | Female Conference to the Memory of the Greek War of Independence Heroines           | To a nun, poem by D. Solomos   |                           | <i>Skrip</i> , 11.4.1921   |
| 12 | 2.5.1921             | Royal Theatre               |                            | For the benefit of the wounded soldiers of the Greco-Turkish War                    | Ancient vision   |                           | <i>Ethnos</i> , 2.5.1921/ <i>Playbill</i>  |

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