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*Cherish the Past, Embrace the Future*

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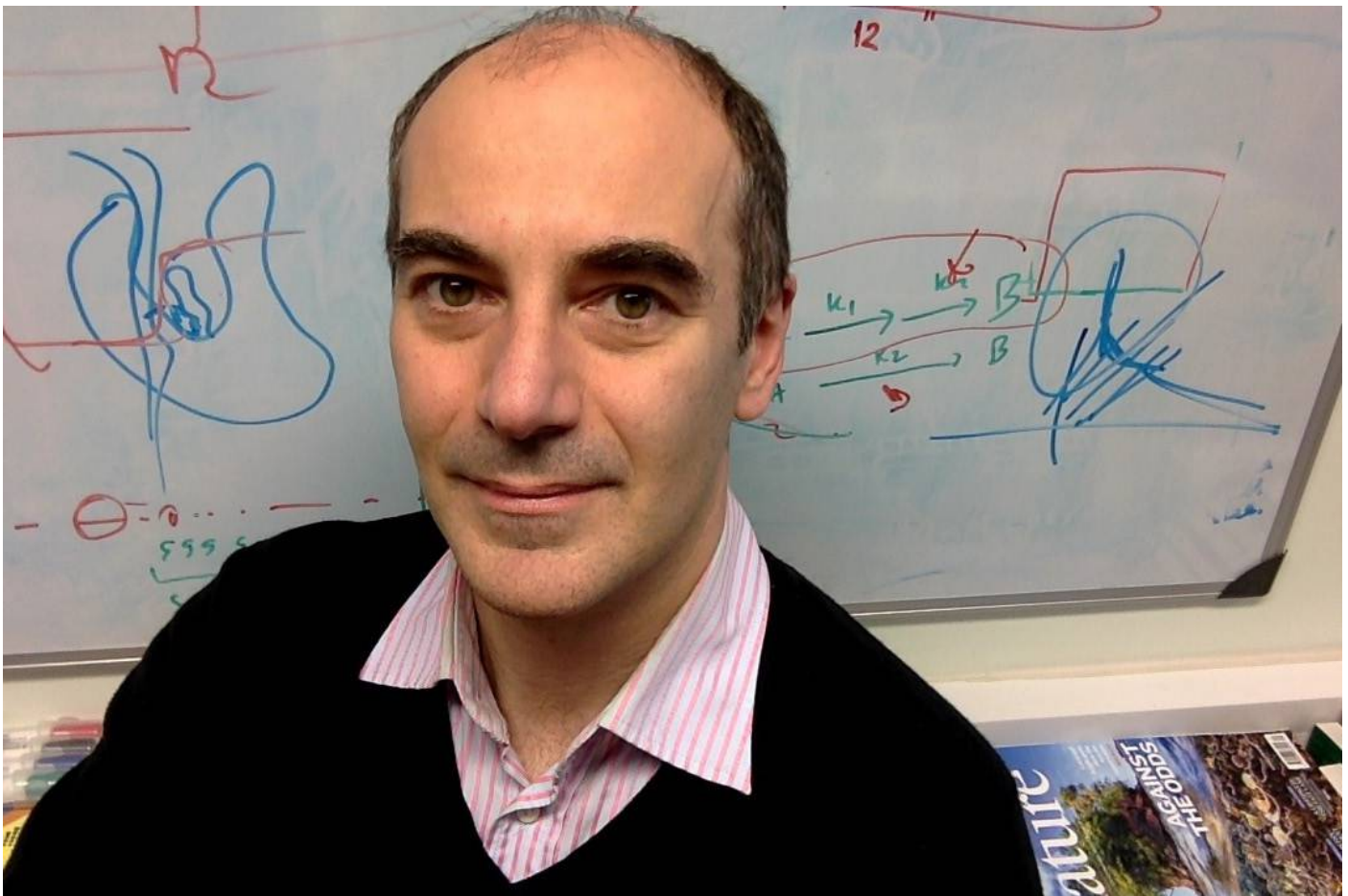
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## Interview with Dr. Achillefs Kapanidis

Professor of Biological Physics, Dept of Physics, Oxford University (2013 onwards)



"...My impression is that Greece is definitely punching above its weight if you consider the perennial lack of funding and underinvestment in science and technology, and the structural constraints that limit the conduct and administration of science..."

Achillefs Kapanidis, Professor of Biological Physics, Dept of Physics, Oxford University

After completing a degree in Chemistry at the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki (Greece), Achilles Kapanidis obtained a Master's in Food Science and a Doctorate in Biological Chemistry, both at Rutgers University (New Jersey, USA). After holding research scientist positions in single-molecule biophysics at Berkeley and UCLA, he started a research group as a senior lecturer at Oxford University in 2005, and became of Professor of Biological Physics in 2013; in 2011, Prof Kapanidis became a fellow of the European Research Council, and in 2016, he became a Wellcome Trust Investigator.

Prof Kapanidis is currently leading a group of physical and biological scientists, known as the "Gene Machines" group. The group studies biological machinery involved in gene expression, maintenance, and regulation, focusing mainly on gene transcription and DNA repair. The main tool of the group is single-molecule fluorescence microscopy, a technique that measures nanometre distances and molecular interactions in real time; the same method is used for performing super-resolution imaging and single-molecule tracking inside living cells. The work of the group is multidisciplinary, combining optics/photonics, imaging, biochemistry, molecular biology, modelling, and signal processing.

Prof Kapanidis has also been pursuing compact single-molecule imaging since 2006, a project that culminated with the development of a microscope currently being commercialized via an Oxford spin-out company.

Gene expression is the vital path that converts DNA information into functional proteins. Our group studies mechanisms and machines of gene expression using single-molecule biophysical methods and biochemistry. We observe single biomachines in real time, both "in vitro" and inside living cells. We also develop single-molecule fluorescence methods, instruments, assays and DNA-based biosensors. Our team is a Biological Physics research group within Condensed Matter Physics. We are also linked to many of the Oxford Doctoral Training Centres (DTCs) and the Wellcome Trust graduate programme in structural biology.

March 2020:

- We have initiated work on the novel coronavirus, aiming to expand our previous work on rapid labeling and detection of viruses to the novel pathogen, led by Nicole and Achilles. We wish them the best of luck in these unprecedented times!

From the webpage of Dr A. Kapanidis, University of Oxford,

<https://kapanidis.web.ox.ac.uk/>

At an interview, kindly conceded to the @GreeceinUK, Dr. Achillefs Kapanidis spoke about his scientific research, the pandemic, the efforts for a new vaccine and the life of an expat scientist.

**1. Could you please introduce yourself to our readers? Tell us please about your studies, your academic and professional trajectory and how you have come to work in the University of Oxford, leading a team that conducts research on Covid-19.**

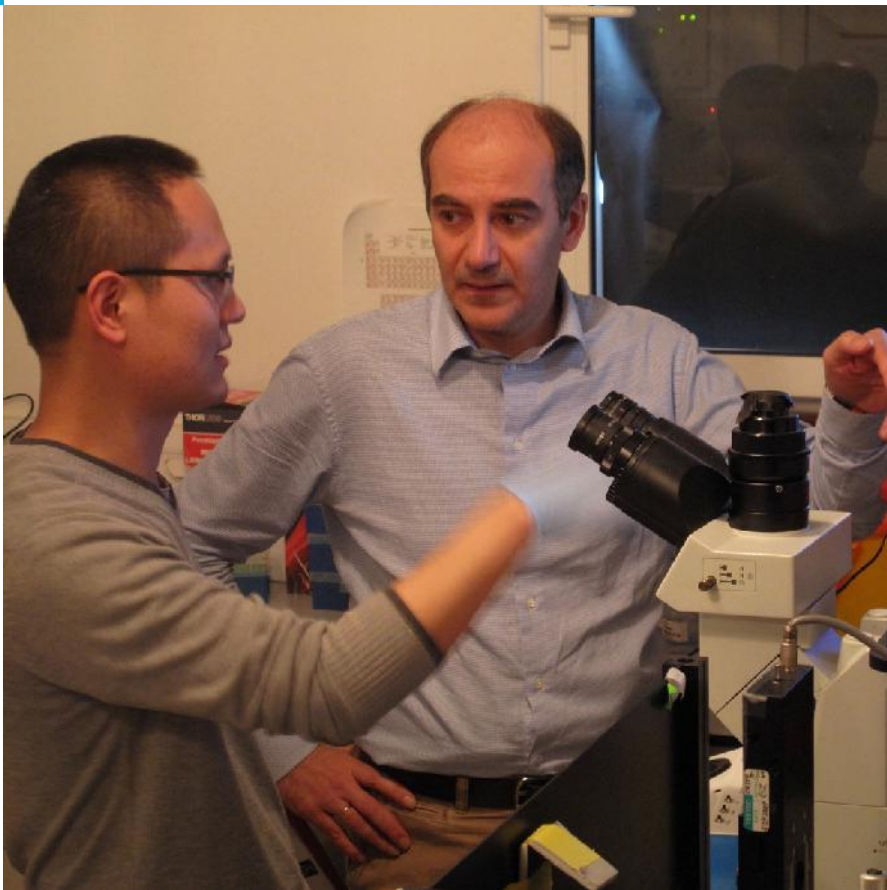
I have been born and raised in Thessaloniki, where I also completed my first degree in Chemistry at the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki. After completing a Master's in Food Chemistry at Rutgers University (USA), I received my PhD in Biological Chemistry for work I completed at the Waksman Institute of Microbiology, also at Rutgers. After holding research scientist positions in single-molecule biological physics at Berkeley and UCLA, I became a Senior Lecturer at Oxford University in 2005, and a Professor of Biological Physics in 2013; I have also been a European Research Council (ERC) grant holder and I am currently a Wellcome Trust Investigator.

Since 2005, I have been leading a group of physical and biological scientists (which we informally call the "Gene Machines" group) which studies microbial biological machinery involved in gene expression and regulation, with a focus on gene transcription and DNA repair. Our main tool is advanced fluorescence microscopy based on the observation of single protein and DNA molecules, linked with

sophisticated image/data analysis; the past few years, my group has also been working on rapid and ultrasensitive detection of antibiotic resistance and pathogenic viruses, including influenza and coronaviruses. My work has been published in more than 100 papers and book chapters, as well as in several patent applications. My group has also been pursuing miniaturized single-molecule imaging, a project that culminated my co-founding of the Oxford Nanoimaging spin-out; for these contributions, I was co-awarded the 2019 Innovator of the Year Award from the UK Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). Finally, I have been involved in the establishment of a new interdisciplinary institute at Oxford (to open in 2021) focusing on using cutting-edge physical approaches to study biological mechanisms in living cells.

**2. How could your team's research findings contribute to the efforts against Covid-19?**

We have been working on understanding the replication mechanisms of the influenza (flu) virus since 2012, and more recently, we have been exploring ways to detect that virus rapidly. In November 2019, we published a method that uses calcium to bind small pieces of fluorescent DNA to enveloped virus particles and to fluorescently label them (Robb et al.,



Jun Fan (photo portrays a discussion with a collaborating postdoctoral fellow)

Scientific Reports 2019); we can then observe labelled viruses on a sensitive fluorescence microscope, and assess their morphology and size. Our assay is extremely fast (takes just one minute), and works well on respiratory viruses such as influenza and RSV in clinical samples. Notably, the work on the clinical samples was a collaboration with the laboratory of Andreas Mentis at the Hellenic Pasteur Institute in Athens.

When coronavirus emerged in China, we reasoned that our assay should work with the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. We thus obtained permission to continue working despite the closure of our Department, and indeed established that our assay can detect the presence of the virus; part of this work was done in collaboration with the CEMIPAI CNRS Institute at Montpellier, who had access to SARS-CoV-2 in high containment facilities. Further, in work led by an extremely talented graduate student from Cyprus, Nicolas Shiaelis, and Royal Society fellow Dr Nicole Robb, we have introduced a new method for coronavirus detection based on applying machine learning to images of labelled viruses; this method is currently tested on clinical samples in our local hospital. The assay takes only minutes, with a validation accuracy, sensitivity and specificity of >90%. In contrast, the standard virus-detection methods (using the method RT-PCR) requires ~3

hours from the time of swab receipt to result, and for community testing, transport to these facilities adds substantially to the turnaround time.

We are now working with clinicians on turning our method into a rapid and scalable diagnostic test to detect SARS-CoV-2 in respiratory samples. Such a rapid test can have substantial impact, since widespread testing will be absolutely crucial for disease surveillance and control, even if a safe vaccine becomes available in the next 18 months.

**3. Pandemics cause unprecedented, incredible and to a certain extent irreparable social, economic, family and personal disruptions. Are pandemics however welcome by scientific and medical communities, as an opportunity for scientific research, technological advancement, testing of new scientific tools and experimenting on new, cutting-edge medical solutions?**

A pandemic is never a welcome development; the devastation that it can cause to societies, families and individuals, and especially to the most vulnerable, is something all scientific and medical community is extremely concerned about. Hence the great efforts of scientists to suppress epidemics and prevent them from escalating into pandemics; the successful containment of the first SARS in 2003, Ebola in 2014, and MERS in 2015 were recent examples of these efforts.

The scientific community is also aware that containment will not always work and that we are never too far away from the next pandemic, so having the scientific tools and organisational structures to address a spreading pathogen is of paramount importance. The need to face pandemics with rapid and decisive action to preserve human life focuses the minds and efforts of the scientists in deploying existing defences against the new virus, in innovating to exploit the vulnerabilities of the microscopic enemy, and in repurposing their work to provide necessary material and intellectual support to other vital activities. International cooperation has also hugely important in our efforts to understand, monitor and control the virus.

There is a sense of duty, public service and social responsibility that drives these contributions, along with the enormous satisfaction of the basic-science researchers to actually see their efforts making a difference in the short term, as opposed to the several years or even decades that it usually takes for fundamental discoveries to translate into tangible societal impact.

Pandemics, as other major events that dramatically reshape human activity, present also opportunities to deliver change for the better. There is no doubt that many of our scientific activities will be transformed for ever after the pandemic, either due to the shifting of our priorities as citizens and scientists, or to avert another ongoing disaster, that of climate change. For example, electronic means for scientists to meet and exchange ideas will help rationalise and minimise global travel for conferences; use of pre-print servers will expand to allow further dissemination of scientific information in a free and rapid manner; and (hopefully) international cooperation and innovation will boost our chances to control climate change.

***4. You have worked also in the USA. How would you compare working in the USA to working in the UK as regards science, scientific research, quick exploitation of the scientific findings and interaction between universities, institutes and the market?***

I have spent more than 10 years in the USA in early stages of my career, and this was an experience that shaped much of my approach to science; I was also fortunate to be in the USA during a large expansion of the scientific base and technological development both in academia and industry.

There is no question that US science was and remains extremely strong, powered by large number of research universities and diverse institutes, and there are many aspects to admire and enjoy about it. First and foremost, I enjoyed the vibrant culture of robust and constant questioning and debate about scientific questions and technological challenges (I guessed it satisfied part of the Greek nature!). In such debates, what mattered was whether an idea could survive scientific scrutiny; the status of the persons putting it forward or questioning it was not important. This flattened the hierarchy of “debating societies” and made people realise that they can contribute at any stage of their career, as long as their medium is logical reasoning.

I also liked the fact that the Universities and institutes are full of driven and adventurous young people from all over the world working together; I appreciated the large investment of institutions and the government in basic and applied research, which provided considerable resources to pursue difficult but worthy goals; the opportunity of young people to be involved in research from very young (e.g., undergraduate research is highly promoted in US research universities); the encouragement of translation of scientific findings into companies and products, that in turn provide high-quality jobs and address societal needs. The PhD was also long enough to allow substantial work to be finished and converted in seminal publications.

On the more negative side, I felt that the overabundance of resources made individuals more wasteful and less focused in their efforts; the time spent in a PhD degree was often, way too long, potentially leading to exploitation of some researchers. For academics, the prospect of not achieving tenure (i.e., the ability to stay in their position after very rigorous review) was very stressful and led to loss of work-life balance.

***5. Do you think that Greece is currently in a position - as regards the research infrastructure, the scientific expertise and the human resources - to conduct significant research projects in general, and in this specific occasion?***

Being away from Greece for a very long time, I can only offer only an impression biased from my interactions with colleagues during visits to participate in conferences, from occasional collaboration and participations in reviewing bodies, and from visits to see scientist friends I met in the US and UK.

My impression is that Greece is definitely punching above its weight if you consider the perennial lack of funding and underinvestment in science and technology, and the structural constraints that limit the conduct and administration of science. The country has institutions of excellence such as the Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology (IMBB) in Crete and the Biomedical Research Foundation of the Academy of Athens, where ground-breaking and pioneering advances have been made the past few years, showing that it is possible to perform research at the highest level in Greece, even during enormously challenging times such as the ones brought by the financial crisis of the past decade. However, there is a huge need to

support science and technology much further to expand the network of excellent institutions and raise the profile of research in all institutions. Funding should be more extensive and regular, and should complement European funding; returning scientists should be given the resources to start successful labs that attract external funding; entrepreneurship should be encouraged and supported to drive the formation of dynamic spin-out companies in areas where Greece should be leading in innovation. Some of the funding should be strategic and long-term and should not be just the agenda of a single government, but should rise over politics: where can we build on existing strength? Where can we develop local solutions to local problems? Where can we develop our resources in a sustainable way respectful of our environment?

I also take heart from the herculean efforts of the Greek scientific and medical community during the Covid-19 crisis, that had shown that the country can rise to meet this enormous challenge by working in a methodical and committed fashion.

**6. What are your personal estimations on the developments for the Covid-19 pandemic? Do you expect a safe vaccine to be produced soon? Do you believe that this virus may trigger other diseases or open new medical and health challenges? Or do you expect that it will soon become a chapter in humanity's medical history, like for ex. measles, chickenpox and mumps?**

As most scientists, I am an optimist, weighing of course the facts and figures in any "guesstimate". Regarding the availability of a safe vaccine, I am optimistic that at least one (and possibly more) will become widely available by the end of 2021, and possibly significantly sooner. For example, the Oxford-led vaccine that is currently in clinical trials is supported by an excellent track record (including the production for vaccines for previous coronaviruses), and there are plans to produce it in billions of doses (even before it is proven to work) to ensure wide availability should the trials prove successful. There are also efforts that use radically new approaches, which may result in pleasant surprises – the important matter here is the diversity of routes to ensure that a few of them will eventually work.

The scale of medical and health challenges associated with the new coronavirus is immense, and uncertainty always forms part of the picture. Since this is a new virus, we don't know what are the long-term effects of having had the virus and of

experiencing a different spectrum of symptoms; we don't know the effects of the various treatments, as well as any side-effects (long-term or otherwise) that the eventual vaccine will have, and of course we do not know how long any immunity (exposure-induced or vaccine-driven) will last. We will also have to deal with the effect of minimal (or no) health care for non-COVID conditions for an extended period of time, as well as the mental health effects of the lockdown and the "social-distant" world.

This is a traumatic episode in the story of human existence, much as the pandemic of Spanish flu in 1918 and the World Wars – but as with those painful episodes, we will adapt and bounce back, hopefully having learnt lessons that improve ourselves, our societies, and crucially, our natural environment.

**7. You have lived for many years abroad. What do you miss most from Greece? Is there anything that remains unchanged to a Greek living, even for a long period, abroad?**

There are many wonderful things that I miss from Greece, but the most important is family and friends, feeling the warmth of being close to loved ones, experiencing together the joyful moments and being able to help in the difficult moments. Traveling to Greece (when it was straight-forward!) and conferencing technology surely helped keep in touch but there is no substitute for a hug and a relaxed chat over coffee!

What makes more palatable for me living away from Greece is the sizeable and vibrant Greek community at Oxford, which provides some "home" comforts locally. As examples, consider our singing group "Nostos" where for 7 years we sing traditional songs with a modern twist, and our theatre group "Praxis" that has staged 6 plays in modern Greek in the Oxford the past few years; both efforts are linked with the Oxford University Greek Society. These efforts are in addition to the wonderful and well-attended social and cultural events organised by the Modern Greek Studies Program of the University, the Greek student communities of both Oxford Universities, and the local Orthodox Church community. Sadly, everything is now on hold due to the pandemic, but we are looking forward to resuming these activities when it is safe to do so.

Living abroad clearly changes one's attitudes, but I have never felt that my Greek "core" had changed substantially over the years. In fact, being abroad makes you much more aware of your identity and

your origins; I believe that the first country you experience when moving away from Greece, is actually Greece itself, since your new home allows you to place your Greek experience in perspective - plus you have to explain to everyone else what the Greek state of mind and what it is like living in Greece!

**8. Are you optimistic that, in the coming years or decades, there may be a reverse of the brain drain wave that was recorded in Greece in the past decade, or, in your opinion, the exit trend will continue in the years to come?**

I am indeed optimistic but much more needs to be done. There must be a compelling plan in place to attract back Greeks from abroad, and in fact, people who can contribute to the Greek society regardless of their origin. Greece can be a wonderful place to live, and nostalgic Greeks abroad are yearning to make the journey back "home" – but the risks of relocation need to be reduced to see reversal of the trend.

Judging from my experience at Oxford, we are seeing more people returning to Greece nowadays compared to a few years ago; this is a positive trend for Greece which I think will continue, although this may reflect Brexit-related dynamics and not a global trend. The effective and decisive response to pandemic (so far) by Greece can also be a factor, showing that the Greek state can indeed address formidable challenges. The ability of many workers in the digital economy to work remotely may mean that someone can relocate to Greece while working for companies abroad; further, there is a great opportunity to expand this sector in Greece. The government can do much more to attract talented individuals to Greece by helping the formation of new businesses, by providing more funding to attract and promote scientists to its Universities and institutes, and by encouraging the transformation of the industry sector into a more modern, diverse, and fair entity.

*Photos Courtesy of Achillefs Kapanidis*

*BBSRC. This is from the award ceremony of the BBSRC Innovator of the year 2019 award (May 15, 2019)*



## Greece welcomes the world

From 15 June, Greece has opened its gates to tourists and welcomes the world steadily and methodically, with rules and protocols. "We are proud of our collective national response to the pandemic," said a welcome statement by the Ministry of Tourism. "We are now opening up our country with a renewed sense of hospitality and welcome." "We make sure that this summer, our health and safety is our top priority. A constant and exhausting monitoring and evaluation process will increasingly allow us to extend a hospitable welcome to visitors. This summer we will share more, together. Our culture, history, democracy and nature. The exuberance of our spirit and the openness of our hearts."

### A plan for restarting tourism

On 20 May, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced the Greek government's plan for the support of labour and businesses, placing special emphasis on tourism. "From July 1, direct flights from abroad to our tourist destinations will start gradually. Our visitors are to undergo sample tests and our general health protocols are to be observed. This is not to cast a shadow, however, over our bright sun or our country's natural beauty. Our weapons

are: the passport of security, reliability and health earned by our country; Greece's great reputation; the shield of health, in all sites of hospitality; and of course, the passion of Greeks perpetually inspired by Zeus Xenios," said Mitsotakis.

According to Deputy Minister to the Prime Minister and government Spokesman, Stelios Petsas, the government has set five priorities for the revival of the tourism industry: the safety of employees; respect to visitors; strengthening our health structures in tourist destinations; support of tourism businesses; and cooperation with society, tourism stakeholders and the global community. Health protocols will be applied in all accommodations, for their safe reopening and operation in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. Every hotel in Greece is obliged to draw up and follow a protocol in accordance with the detailed instructions of the Ministry of Tourism. Hotels and restaurants are required to implement social distancing measures, provide each staff member with personal protective equipment (masks, gloves), adopt meticulous cleaning and disinfection policies and respond quickly in case a customer or a member of staff has Covid-19 symptoms. There



Peloponnese, Mani, Limeni of GNTQ / YSkoulas





will be designated quarantine areas on the islands for any positive cases among visitors, along with an increase in intensive care beds and a mandatory doctor at each resort to conduct tests.

On 15 June seasonal tourist accommodations reopened. Tourist accommodations which operate twelve months a year and organized tourist camps will reopen from 1 July. Yachting has already started since 25 May.

A statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs clarifies rules regarding testing and quarantine. From 15 to 30 June, international flights are allowed into Athens and Thessaloniki airports. However, direct flights between Greece and the UK continue to be banned until 30 June. Travellers originating from airports which are located in areas with a high risk of transmission of Covid-19, as indicated by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency, or from Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Albania and North Macedonia, will be tested upon arrival. An overnight stay either at a designated hotel or at a hotel of choice (in Athens or Thessaloniki) is required. If the test is negative, the visitor is then free to move to their final destination.

If the test is positive, the visitor is quarantined under supervision for 14 days. Travellers originating from all other origin airports, are only subject to random tests upon arrival. Upon being tested, the visitor is free to move to their final destination. If the test is positive, the visitor is quarantined under supervision for 14 days.

From 1 July onwards, international flights will be allowed into all airports in Greece. Additional restrictions on non-essential travel from non-EU+ countries may be applicable, pending guidance from the European Union. All visitors from air, land or sea, will be subject to random tests upon arrival. Upon being tested, the passenger is free to move to their final destination. In the event of a positive result, they will be contacted and placed on 14-day quarantine, with expenses covered by the Greek state.

### Greek summer is a state of mind

On 4 June, a new national campaign for the restart of Greek tourism was unveiled. "Greek summer is a state of mind." The main goal of the new campaign is to remind travellers from all over the world of



Milos, Kleftiko © GNT0/D. Iliadi



the Greek Summer experience, which is profound, authentic and humane. A message is sent from Greece to the whole world, focusing on a new brand: "Greek Summer". Greek Summer is not just the sun and the sea. Other countries also have that. Greek summer is a state of happiness beyond seasons and places. It is the feeling you experience when you are together with those you love - when you become one with nature and feel freedom inside yourself.

Opening Greece's tourism season from the picturesque island of Santorini, on 13 June, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis invited travellers to visit Greece stressing that "safety is our utmost priority".

### **British media: Looking forward to a Greek summer**

#### ***Greece – A rare success story***

Greece's successful handling of the coronavirus crisis has attracted the British media's attention. It has been noted that the country reacted swiftly and decisively to the threat of the novel coronavirus and managed to keep the death toll remarkably low, recording one of the continent's lowest casualty rates. The FT characterised Greece as "a rare coronavirus success story", while the Guardian noted that "the country's ability to cope with a public health emergency of such proportions was not a

given", as Greece's health system had been gravely hit by the economic debt crisis and as the country has a large elderly population, like Italy. "Greece had all the trappings of a Covid-19 disaster waiting to happen – but it has defied the odds", wrote the Telegraph.

Greece's successful handling of the crisis is largely attributed to the swift and early action taken by the Greek government and the decisive leadership shown by Greece's Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. An ad-hoc scientific committee was set up with top epidemiologists, virologists and infectious disease experts, headed by Sotiris Tsiodras, a soft-spoken Harvard-trained professor of infectious diseases, who soon became very popular, coming across as frank, serious and empathetic. On 27 February, just one day after the country's first Covid-19 case was diagnosed in Greece's second-largest city, Thessaloniki, the government cancelled the annual carnival. On 11 March, it closed down schools, and within days it limited non-essential travel. Bars, cafes, restaurants, malls, cinemas and museums were also shut. Greece went into full lock-down on 16 March. "The prime minister...acted very fast and took the right decisions much earlier than other countries," said Elias Mossialos, a professor in health policy at the LSE and adviser to the Greek government. At the beginning of the crisis, Greece had just 560 ICU beds, but it now has close to 1,000. "Acting early bought time to prepare," said Prof Mossialos. [FT, Telegraph, Guardian]

At the same time, the Greek public, often characterised as "a hardly law-biding folk", welcomed the harsh restrictions and abided by the lock-down rules, demonstrating discipline and trust in the authorities, noted the Times. "The resilience gained through years of crisis may have prepared Greeks to cope with the pandemic," wrote the Observer.

In an interview with Sky news, Greece's Tourism Minister Harry Theoharis highlighted three things that contributed to Greece's success: first, the determination and tough decisions that were made early on by the Prime Minister; second, the effectiveness of the government and the public sector (health employees, police, civil protection authorities etc.); and third, the responsibility and seriousness shown by Greek people. "United, we managed to escape the worse of it. We want to use the same principles - the same three ingredients - to guide us through the crisis, as we open up our economy."



Tinos, Kionia Beach © GNT0 / YSkoulas

### *Restarting tourism safely*

Greece's plan for restarting tourism was widely reported in the British media, which highlighted the gradual easing of the restrictions and the measures implemented for the safety of visitors and staff. The reopening of the Acropolis after two months of lock-down was welcomed. "The marble had space to breathe", wrote travel writer Rachel Howard in the Guardian, describing her unique experience of visiting the Acropolis without the usual crowds. The restart of regular ferry services to the Greek islands attracted much attention, raising hopes of a visit to Greece's sun-drenched beaches. Reporting from Kimolos, ITV referred to the preparations carried out on Greek islands for the prevention of the spreading of Covid-19. Preparations involved the expansion of state-run health services to combat coronavirus to the islands, with intensive care units being placed on five islands – Lesbos, Samos, Rhodes, Zakynthos and Corfu – alongside existing facilities on the island of Crete. BBC reported from Milos and Sikinos, interviewing members of mobile testing teams crossing the Aegean Sea in high-powered boats as well as locals.

"Hotel owners have welcomed the safety guidelines, with many saying they will go further and introduce their own safety measures", wrote the BBC. The challenges that Covid-19 presents for Greek tourism

are often mentioned by the British media, which stresses the vital role that tourism plays for Greece's economy. Can the summer be saved? Many hoteliers appear cautiously optimistic and ready to welcome guests. Traditionally, British tourists represent a large part of the visitors to Greece, especially in islands such as Corfu, Zakynthos, Rhodes and Crete. "The race is on, now, to get the British back by August", told the Telegraph Constantinos Anastasakis, a local tourism official.

Moreover, some island residents are now wondering if the Covid-19 pandemic could be an opportunity to move to a more sustainable tourism model, away from the over-tourism of the past. [BBC]

### *Air bridges with the UK*

Whether British travellers will be able to return to Greece this summer and experience the abundant sunshine and hospitality will depend to a large extent on the amendment of the FCO's advice against "all non-essential" international travel, on the resumption of air connections and the creation of travel corridors or "air bridges" between Greece and the UK. The British government's decision to impose a 14-day quarantine to all travellers entering the UK could deter British people from travelling abroad this summer. The measure has been largely contested by some of the UK's biggest travel and

hospitality firms as well as by MPs who worry about the impact of the quarantine on the British economy. On 29 June, the 14-day quarantine will be reviewed. Should travel corridors be put in place, Greece is expected to be among the first countries exempted from the quarantine due to its low rate of coronavirus infections.

Speaking to the BBC's Coronavirus Newscast, Tourism Minister Harry Theoharis, urged the UK not to require Greeks to isolate when they arrive. "What I can say is that this is the time for us to start thinking about lifting these restrictions, to try to remove as many barriers as possible. We urge other countries, including the UK, that as soon as we do that, we would welcome reciprocities, so if we don't impose quarantine on people coming from the UK from some day onwards, we would welcome the UK to extend to us the same approach."

The ban on direct flights between Greece and the UK continues until the end of June. "The ban [on passenger flights from] Great Britain remains in place for the next two weeks," Harry Theoharis announced on 12 June. This decision is in line with the EU commission's latest recommendation that travel restrictions at the bloc's external borders be phased out gradually and in "a strictly coordinated" manner. [Guardian]

Despite all the uncertainties, many British people long to visit Greece again. Searches for package holidays to Greece have risen and there are discounts in flights and accommodation. [Travel Weekly, Telegraph] For many travellers, a Greek summer holiday in 2020 remains a dream that may well become true.

*Photo credits GNTO*

"Let us make this summer the epilogue of the [Covid-19] crisis.". "Greece had shown by its handling of the crisis that it was a "passport of safety, credibility and health".

"Our weapon is the passport of security, reliability and health earned by our country. Greece's great reputation. The shield of health, in all sites of hospitality. And of course, the passion of Greeks perpetually inspired by Zeus Xenios."

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis,  
announcement reproduced by the BBC

"We'll keep the core of the experience. We were very very careful to ensure that the core of the experience which is the smile, the open arms, the warm welcome are going to be still there. And, if you like, the smile will shine through the masks. We also, I would say that the coming to Greece will also have a healing part in the sense that we all need a break from this confinement, from this constant worry that we've been through for many many months some of us. There are some people in the frontline of fighting this disease, other people because they've gone through painful processes. So I think we all need this kind of healing process that vacations can bring."

Tourism Minister Harry Theoharis, BBC  
Coronavirus Newscast

"With less than 3,000 cases of Covid-19 since the pandemic began, Greece is currently being hailed as one of the safest European countries for holidaymakers this summer."

Telegraph

## International Greek Language Day – The benefits of learning Greek in the UK



(from left to right) Gonda van Steen (King's College Koraes Chair), Liana Giannakopoulou (University of Cambridge and Chair of the Society for Modern Greek Studies), John Kittmer (Chair of the Anglo-Hellenic League) and Polymnia Tsagouria (The Hellenic Institute, Royal Holloway, University of London)

A panel discussion on “Modern Greek Language and Culture in Britain’s Higher Education” took place at the Embassy of Greece in London, to mark International Greek Language Day which is celebrated on the 9th of February.

Professors representing some of the most prestigious British universities where modern Greek language and culture are taught were able to present their views on the challenges of teaching Greek to students in the UK. Additionally, suggestions were made for the promotion of Greek studies in the future. The panel comprised of Gonda Van Steen (King’s College Koraes Chair), Liana Giannakopoulou (University of Cambridge and Chair of the Society for Modern Greek Studies) Kostas Skordyles (University of Oxford) and Polymnia Tsagouria (The Hellenic Institute, Royal Holloway, University of London). The discussion was moderated by John Kittmer, chair of the Anglo-Hellenic League.

### Teaching foreign languages in the UK

As John Kittmer noted in his introductory remarks, learning foreign languages is not popular in the UK. Although there is a large number of migrant and diaspora communities in the UK, who often speak many languages, only 32% of British 15 to 30-year-

olds can read and write in a language other than their own. This is compared with 89% across the European Union. To a large extent, this is related to the fact that, since 2004, foreign language teaching in UK schools has ceased to be compulsory beyond the age of 14. Even those students who choose to continue learning a foreign language usually achieve low scores in external language exams taken at the age of 16. Few students choose to take a modern foreign language at A level (the exam for admission into UK universities) and this has a knock-on effect on the demand for foreign language courses at UK universities.

### The Greek language in the UK

Although there are relatively few modern Greek speakers worldwide, modern Greek is ranked 20th by the British Council for its importance in the UK and the reason for this is the large number of British people visiting Greece every year. The presence of so many Brits in Greece is an opportunity which we are not currently taking advantage of, said Kittmer. In any case, despite adversities, Greek language professors and departments continue to thrive. “Είμαστε ακόμη εδώ. We are still here. We’ve proved brilliant, we’ve proved creative and we are still teaching Greek for those who want to learn it”, stressed Kittmer.

### Teaching Greek at British universities

The professors participating in the panel discussion spoke about the lessons in Greek language and culture which are offered by their departments. Unfortunately, the interest in modern Greek studies as a stand-alone discipline has decreased in recent years, but important research on modern Greece continues to be carried out in a range of disciplines, such as history, anthropology, media studies, comparative literature and linguistics. Kostas Skordylis noted that Oxford remains the only university in the UK which offers degrees in modern Greek at undergraduate level and doctorate level. However, the number of students is not high. Cambridge University stopped providing a degree in



modern Greek in 2013, but Greek language and culture continue to be taught. As Liana Giannakopoulou mentioned, students at Cambridge are offered the opportunity to take two papers: 'An Introduction to modern Greek language and literature' and 'The presence of ancient Greek myth in modern Greek literature'. The Centre for Greek Studies at Cambridge, which was launched last summer, aims to expand the teaching of modern Greek and further to develop research in Greek studies.

So, who are the students that decide to study Greek language and culture at university level in the UK? According to Giannakopoulou, they are students from all around the world — most of the time not Greek — and usually students who come from the faculties of classics or modern languages or history. They are often very bright and very inquisitive students who enjoy a challenge, because Greek is not easy! Many of them discover how learning even a bit of modern Greek history, or a bit of modern Greek culture, opens their eyes to European culture more broadly. Gonda van Steen spoke about the activities of the Centre for Hellenic Studies at King's College, noting that trips to Greece, or public events organised on campus, can arouse students' interest in modern Greek. Drawing from her own experience, Polymnia Tzagouria explained that even informal modern Greek courses, which are open to all students and to members of staff, can be very successful.

### Suggestions for the promotion of Greek studies

During the discussion, a number of suggestions were made for the promotion of modern Greek teaching in the UK. Books and audiovisual material for teaching Greek have certainly improved in the last decades, but there is still scope for further improvement. Interactive online Greek courses

appear to have much potential, as long as they are designed in an attractive way and are equipped with adequate audiovisual material. Following the example of Goethe Institute, the foundation of a centre for Greek Language, which would offer Greek language courses at all levels, would be costly but most probably highly efficient. Some of the participants stressed the need to attract students among second generation Greeks, who already have some exposure to the Greek language and culture. To achieve this, departments which offer modern Greek should improve their relations with Greek language secondary schools, present their work and advertise the benefits of studying Greek at university. As is the case with any foreign language, learning Greek helps to expand a person's horizons and contributes to intercultural communication. These communication skills are increasingly sought after by employers in the UK, especially when they are accompanied by a degree from a renowned university, regardless of the subject. Furthermore, as investment opportunities in Greece increase, the employability of Greek speakers is enhanced, both in the UK and abroad.

After the panel discussion, a video entitled 'Did you Know you Speak Greek?', produced by the General Secretariat of Public Diplomacy, was screened. The event ended with actors Kyriaki Mitsou and Konstantinos Alsinos reciting poems by Dionysios Solomos.



## "Thebes: The Forgotten City of Ancient Greece", Paul Cartledge



Paul Cartledge is A.G. Leventis Senior Research Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge University, and A.G. Leventis Professor of Greek Culture in the Faculty of Classics emeritus. He is the author, co-author, editor and co-editor of over 30 books, including *Democracy: A Life* (O.U.P., new edition 2018). He co-edits a monograph series 'Key Themes in Ancient History' (C.U.P), and sits on the editorial boards of three journals, and on the development committee of the educational charity, Classics for All. His media work includes a recent video in Dan Snow's 'History Hits Live' series, on Sparta, many appearances on BBC Radio 4's *In Our Time*, and many collaborations as historical adviser with Bettany Hughes, most recently her 6-part series 'A Greek Odyssey' for Channel 5. Paul Cartledge is an honorary citizen of modern Sparta, and he holds the Gold Cross of the Order of Honour (awarded by the President of the Hellenic Republic).

"Thebes: The Forgotten City of Ancient Greece", is the latest work by acclaimed classical historian Paul Cartledge. that vividly brings to life a largely forgotten city rich in history and myth, firmly putting it back on the map.

Continuously inhabited for five millennia, and at one point the most powerful city in Ancient Greece, Thebes has been overshadowed by its better-known rivals, Athens and Sparta.

According to myth, the city was founded when Kadmos sowed dragon's teeth into the ground and warriors sprang forth, ready not only to build the fledgling city but to defend it from all-comers. It was Hercules' birthplace and the home of the Sphinx, whose riddle Oedipus solved, winning the Theban crown and the king's widow in marriage, little knowing that the widow was his mother, Jocasta.

The city's history is every bit as rich as its mythic origins, from siding with the Persian invaders when their emperor, Xerxes, set out to conquer Aegean Greece, to siding with Sparta – like Thebes an oligarchy – to defeat Pericles' democratic Athens, to being utterly destroyed on the orders of Alexander the Great.

In 'Thebes: The Forgotten City of Ancient Greece', the acclaimed classical historian Paul Cartledge brings the city vividly to life, and argues that it is central to our understanding of the ancient Greeks' achievements – whether politically or culturally – and thus to our own culture and civilization.

*Note by the publisher*

**PICADOR**

**EBOOK**  
28.05.20

**HARDBACK & AUDIOBOOK**  
12.11.20

**THEBES**  
The Forgotten City of Ancient Greece  
**PAUL CARTLIDGE**  
*'Intrusive, inspiring and vitally illuminating'* Bettany Hughes



Prof. Paul Cartledge wrote a very interesting article for his new book, on ancient Thebes, specially for the readers of @GreeceinUK.

**THEBES: The Forgotten City of Ancient Greece by Paul Cartledge - published by Picador (eBook: May 28 2020; hardcover November 12 2020)**

**TEN THINGS YOU REALLY OUGHT TO KNOW ABOUT THEBES (ancient Greece version)**

### Preliminary Remarks

I have long had the ambition to write a book about the ancient Greek city of Thebes, partly because for lengthy periods it was the capital of a federal regional system, partly because for a time (371-362 BC) it was the most powerful and influential city in all Greece, and partly because it produced some quite remarkable individuals who deserve to be better known. I gave a hint of what might be in prospect by including Thebes among the 'eleven cities' through whose history I tried to re-create, in brief, a representative picture of Hellas, the ancient Greek world (Ancient Greece: A Very Short Introduction, OUP 2011). But when it came to writing up a fullscale account, what struck me over and over was how often and to what extent ancient Thebes had not been given its due, had even indeed been 'forgotten'. Hence the subtitle of my book. In what follows here, I aim to provide a taster that I hope will encourage readers to sample the entire book.

1. Thebai (ancient spelling) is NOT in Egypt but in Greece, somewhere in the middle of mainland Greece, about 90 km NW of Athens. There was

indeed a Thebes in Egypt, actually the capital of New Kingdom (late second millennium BCE) Egypt, Egypt of the Pharaohs. But unlike Greek Thebes, that city has rarely if ever been totally forgotten.

2. Ancient Greek Thebes does not deserve to be forgotten, indeed deserves not to be forgotten, ever. Many reasons or examples could be given for why (not), but I confine myself here to a mere NINE, beginning with the fact that there was not just one ancient Greek city of Thebes - but two: the City of History and the City of Myth. The interest and importance of the former (History) are more restricted, more esoteric even. The interest and importance of the latter (Myth) are mega, indeed almost global - at any rate, within the context of Western (Euro-American) civilisation. My new book aims to do justice to both Cities of Thebes.

3. Greek myths have a timeless, ubiquitous, resonant charm - capable of being told and re-told over and over, capable of appealing to people of all ages. (Autobiographical spoiler: It was the Homeric myths of Troy and the Odyssey that got me started on the road to academia - aged 8.) The Greek word *muthos* means simply a(ny) traditional tale. Some Greek myths - like those Homeric ones - are epic (from ancient Greek *epos*, which just means 'word' - some word!); others were more ordinary. Thebes was possibly the most - certainly one of the most - fertile generator of myths in ancient times, of epic myths that have stood the test of time. They are not exactly timeless, but they can be made to speak over and over again, to an infinite variety of disparate audiences. In the book I discuss a generous selection.

4. Let's start here with the foundation myth of the city of Thebes itself. You might assume that a Greek city, if it had a single named founder, or founding father/mother, would have been founded by a Greek person. Wrong! In the case of Thebes, anyhow. All ancient witnesses were agreed that it was founded by Kadmos (Cadmus in Latin transcription) and that he originated in the Near East, more specifically the Levant, even more specifically from where Lebanon

**'An incisive, inspiring and vitally illuminating account of a city which changed the ancient world and which deserves to be remembered by the modern. A masterful book written by a master historian'**

***Bettany Hughes, bestselling author of 'Istanbul' and 'Helen of Troy'***

(...) Thebes, said to be the birthplace of Heracles, should have been a big player. Lying on a fertile plain in the centre of mainland Greece, it was, in the late Bronze Age, one of the foremost cities. According to legend it was founded by Cadmus, a traveller from the Levant who sowed dragon's teeth in the fertile Boeotian soil from which warriors sprung up to build and defend the city. Its acropolis, measuring 700m by 400m, was the largest of its time. Yet, while it did become the most powerful city in Greece, that golden period lasted for barely a decade (...).

*The Times, "Thebes by Paul Cartledge review — from fleeting glory to oblivion", The 'forgotten city of ancient Greece' is restored to life, Patrick Kidd, 29.5.2020*

is today. For Kadmos was a Phoenician (Greek term) from the city of Tyre, and the story went that he'd made the trip across the eastern Mediterranean to mainland Greece, not to found a city but to rescue his sister, Europa, who'd been snatched/raped by a Greek. But not by any old Greek, but by a rather extraordinary Greek, in fact by no lesser a personage than the king and father of all the Greeks' immortal gods, great Zeus himself. Kadmos, though, didn't content himself with finding and saving his sister (who gave her name to an entire continent – it's odd to think that Europa was not herself European...): he stayed put in Greece, settled down - and founded Thebes. Not in any ordinary way, mind. The city's first inhabitants sprang from the ground - making them literally autochthonous – into which they had been 'sown' in the form of dragon's teeth. (The Greek word drakon meant a super-large serpent/snake.) Soon the city was surrounded by massive stone walls and equipped with a - suitably magical - number of Gates: seven.

5. This new Thebes was the mythical city in which a certain Oedipus ('Swell-Foot') was later born, into the royal house named the Labdacids after its founder Labdacus. Though - alas for him and not only him - it took a long time to uncover that fact, a calamitously long time both for himself personally and for

Thebes. For, as his parents had been foretold by the great oracle of shining archer-god Apollo located at Delphi (not far from Thebes), their as yet unnamed son was destined, doomed, to murder his father first, before marrying (and having sex and children with) his very own (widowed) mother. Those basic rudiments of the Oedipus myth are probably quite widely known, and they are horrible and horrifying enough. But the many bells and whistles added to the myth heaped evil upon evil, horror upon horror. With his mother-wife he sired four children who were also his half-brothers and -sisters. When he too late discovered that fact - that he was not only



a patricide but also monstrously incestuous - he blinded himself; when his mother-wife learned the truth, she committed suicide. Oedipus was then exiled, but his two sons/half-brothers fell out with each other and fell into civil war in which they killed each other; of the two daughters/half-sisters far the more famous is Antigone - condemned to death for impious treachery by her dictatorial maternal uncle, she hastened it by committing suicide by hanging.

6. Who could possibly want to spend a single moment more contemplating such a gruesome birth, life and death as Antigone's? Many millions of us, that's who, and we still do. The Athenian Sophocles' tragic play *Antigone* (c. 440 BCE) and Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* (French pronunciation, 1944) are two of the most performed and re-performed plays in the entire Western canon. As I write, two directors whose work I deeply respect are contemplating a new *Antigone*. Yet *Antigone* is just one of the great Sophocles's extant 'Theban plays': he also wrote two *Oedipus* plays, one set in the unfortunate's native city (*Oedipus Tyrannus*, or *Oedipus the King*), the other in the playwright's native Athens, indeed in his own home village (*Oedipus at Colonus*). And what of the other two members of Athens' 5th-century BC holy trinity of astonishing tragic dramatists, Aeschylus (the older) and Euripides (the younger)? Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes* (probably 467 BC) survives, as does Euripides's *Bacchae* (405 BC, named for the 'mad' female devotees of the ecstatic god of theatre himself, Dionysus, whose mother was Theban). So - what was it about those (pretty

horrendous) Theban myths that so attracted some of the greatest playwrights of ancient Greece - and indeed of the world - and their audiences? I have a go at trying to answer that tough question in the book. But I can't leave the *Oedipus* myth without at least mentioning Freud's 'Oedipus complex'.

7. Pindar: the Classical Athenians thought they were a cut above other Greeks, culturally speaking. They were particularly snotty and snooty towards their Theban near-neighbours, whom they derided and derogated as mere 'Boeotian swine', more interested in the belly than in the mind or the soul. Not so! One of my main reasons for trying to make us remember the Thebans was that in fact some of them made huge contributions to the high-cultural life of ancient Greece. Take Pindar, for prime example. He was born in the late 6th century BC and lived until the mid-5th. A lyric poet, his speciality was epinician verses - verses commissioned by victors in all the four great, all-Greek panhellenic games or athletics and hippic festivals. The greatest of all was the ancient Olympics, dedicated to mighty Zeus of Mt Olympus. The first verse of Pindar's first Olympian Ode famously begins: 'Best is water...'. But, being Greek, he then at once qualifies it with a 'but...'. Such was his fame as an emblem of Greekness that, when King Alexander had Thebes almost totally razed to the ground in 335 BC, as punishment for its betrayal of the Greek cause in the Persian Wars of 480-479 BC, the house Pindar had lived in over a century earlier was the sole secular structure he allowed to stay standing. That near-annihilation caused Thebes to be 'forgotten' in the most literal sense for 20 years - it simply ceased to exist. It is where my narrative of the historical city effectively ends.

8. Pronomus: another Theban with a claim on our attention is a skilled musician whose floruit fell about half a century after Pindar's death, around 400 BC. Pronomus - whose given name could be interpreted to mean 'for or on behalf (a musical) mode (nomos)' - came from a family of musicians, but he was the most famous, and, what's more, he achieved his fame on the toughest of stages - the theatre of Dionysus at Athens! Tragedies at Athens such as those mentioned above and their attached satyr-dramas were set to music and accompanied on an oboe-like reeded instrument called the aulos. Pronomus was a champion auletes; indeed, his fellow-countrymen, when their city was re-founded in about 315 BC, hailed him as the supreme champion on the aulos in all Hellas. Round about

**'Paul Cartledge has done it again - he has shone a light on a crucial epicentre of ancient Greek affairs that so often gets overshadowed by the might of Athens. He does it with assured scholarship, a clear and engaging style, and more than a hint of humour. Thebes is lucky to have Cartledge as its champion!'**

*Michael Scott*

"The Forgotten City', as Cambridge professor Paul Cartledge calls it in his engaging new history, nonetheless was of enormous political and cultural importance . . . One of the many strengths of Cartledge's book is the way it illustrates how hearsay, history and myth combined to form the basis of Theban culture . . . Cartledge's great achievement is to solve the riddle of why Thebes disappeared and put the ancient city back on the map.'

*Daisy Dunn, Literary Review*

400 BC a potter and painter working in the Potters' Quarter of Athens created a magnificent volute-amphora celebrating our Pronomus, surrounded as he is depicted by the chorus of a winning satyr-drama and with none other than Dionysus himself in attendance. Like many of the finest Athenian vases, it was exported to Apulia (Puglia) in south Italy, where it was interred as a grave-good and excavated over 22 centuries later in 1835.

9. Philosophers: Plato, a proud Athenian, in one of his many philosophical dialogues labelled his native city as the 'town hall' or 'mansion house' (prutaneion) of sophia. Sophia could mean any skill or knack, such as Pronomus's expertise in playing the aulos, but more famously it came to be identified as one of the four cardinal virtues, in which sense it is best translated Wisdom. Plato too it was who seems to have coined the word philosophia, love of sophia in this sense of wisdom. Many of his dialogues feature as their principal interlocutor his own philosophical mentor, Socrates (born 469), partly because Plato never forgave his fellow-Athenians for convicting Socrates in 399 on a twofold charge of impiety and anti-democratic pedagogy. But it was not only Athenians who were attracted by Socrates's teaching. Among his more prominent pupils were two Thebans, Cebes and Simmias, published philosophers in their own right, though their writings have not survived. Even more

remarkably unconventional than they, perhaps, was another Theban immigrant philosopher, Crates (born about 365 BC), who abandoned a life of comfort in Thebes for a life on the streets in Athens – and thereby helped to give a boost to the new-fangled philosophic lifestyle known as Cynicism. But he also taught another immigrant, Zeno (from Cyprus), the recognised founder of another new and far more influential philosophy, Stoicism (so named because Zeno taught within the Painted Stoa or Colonnade in the agora of Athens). Where would the Romans (among others) have been without Stoicism?

10. Epameinondas: Thebes and philosophy aren't normally thought of as going together like a horse and carriage, but my final exhibit was also reputedly an adept of yet another current philosophy, Pythagoreanism. Epameinondas – for it is he – was born some time in the latter part of the 5th century BC and died, in battle, in 362. He was in the view of a reliable commentator (Sir Walter Raleigh) the greatest ancient Greek of them all – an opinion I'm inclined to share. We unfortunately know far less about him than we ideally would like to for one simple, rather sad reason: the biography of him composed by his fellow-Boeotian, Plutarch (c. 100 AD), did not survive. All is not however lost in that regard, since the Plutarchan biography of Epameinondas's comrade-in-arms Pelopidas has been preserved, and that has quite a lot to say about the two of them in action together. Epameinondas apparently never married; he seems to have been a preferred homosexual, in a city where that sexual preference was actively supported rather than excoriated – famously, the Theban so-called 'Sacred Band', an elite infantry force first prominent in the 370s, consisted of 150 adult male homosexual couples. So, on his tombstone Epameinondas proudly proclaimed that he had left behind as his legacy two 'daughter' cities, cities of which he had been the principal founding father: Messene and Megalopolis. Both were Peloponnesian, both anti-Spartan, the latter the capital of a new Arcadian federal state (as was Boeotia itself), the former an enduring symbol of liberation. For hundreds of years, most Messenians had been Helots of Sparta, enduring a quasi-servile status that denied them the Hellenic birthright of political as well as personal freedom. By freeing the Messenians from the Spartan yoke, Epameinondas deserves to be ranked alongside the other great 'liberators' of history – Bolivar, Sherman, Garibaldi ... How it would have grieved him, had he lived a further 27 years, to witness the near-annihilation of his beloved Thebes.



### Concluding Thoughts

So, why and how has ancient Greek Thebes (ever) been 'forgotten'? How could that possibly be? In brief, for three main reasons or in three main senses. First, Thebes never produced a local historian to rival Thucydides of Athens, and Thebes suffered from being not only Athens' near-neighbour but also for long periods its active enemy. Second, in 335 the city of Thebes was nearly obliterated totally and for ever, and, although it was resurrected 20 years later, it never regained its previous fame or quality. The ostensible reason or excuse given for that brutal treatment was an act of betrayal 145 years earlier – siding with the Persian invaders. Thebes paid a very heavy price for that not altogether incomprehensible earlier decision. Finally, the original verses in which the founding and other early myths of Thebes were framed did not survive as such, and it is due to Athens and its creative dramatic and other artistic geniuses that those myths have survived – to the present day. Ancient Thebes so far from being justly forgotten deserves its place in the Hellenic sun, which is what I have sought to give it.

(...) Alongside Athens and Sparta, Thebes was, as Cartledge puts it, 'a member of Greece's fateful triangle'. Although the city was never allowed to forget that, unlike its two rivals, it had sided with the Persians in the great struggle for Greek liberty, and although, during the Peloponnesian War, its role was generally that of a jackal, snapping at Athenian carcasses left it by the Spartan wolf, the time came in the following century when it too, as Athens and Sparta had both done, enjoyed a time in the sun.

For the span of two brief but dazzling decades, the 370s and 360s BC, it blazed as the leading power in Greece. Under the leadership of Epaminondas, a general and statesman whom Cartledge salutes as the 'worthiest' of all the ancient Greeks, the Thebans smashed the hitherto invincible Spartan war machine, liberated an entire population of slaves from Spartan rule, and built a formidably well fortified city from scratch (...).

*The Spectator, 'The history of Thebes is as mysterious as its Sphinx', Tom Holland, 13.6.2020*

## Discovering the ancient city of Tenea- A lecture by Dr Elena Korka

The prominent archaeologist Dr Elena Korka delivered a fascinating illustrated lecture on the discovery of the ancient Greek city of Tenea at the Hellenic Centre, in London.

The lecture was organised by the Greek Archaeological Committee UK. It was introduced by the committee's chairwoman Dr Zetta Theodoropoulou-Polychroniadis and followed by a short presentation by archaeologist Konstantinos Lagos on the coins that have been found in Tenea. Professor of classics and ancient history Paul Cartledge made the concluding remarks.

During rescue excavations in Faneromeni near Chiliomodi of Corinthia, Dr Elena Korka discovered in 1984 an early Archaic sarcophagus, the interior of its lid displaying a unique composition of two lions. Because of the importance of this find, surveys were conducted in the area which resulted in locating the ancient city of Tenea.

Tenea was particularly active in the 8th century BC, during the process of colonisation of Syracuse. Pausanias informs us that the citizens of Tenea were descendants of Trojan prisoners held on Tenedos until brought here by Agamemnon, while Strabo

mentions that here, in Tenea, was where King Polybus nursed Oedipus. During the Roman period Tenea was not destroyed, as the inhabitants were considered to have a common background with the Romans also coming, according to myth, from Troy.

Led by Dr Elena Korka, Greek and foreign scholars undertook in 2013 the first systematic excavations of Tenea. The excavations have so far brought to light the Archaic cemetery with unique finds, an ancient main road, a magnificent Roman funerary monument built on top of Hellenistic structures and set in the middle of the Hellenistic and Roman cemetery and, very recently, elaborate domestic complexes. The burial remains that were unearthed show a highly developed urban settlement with a long and continuous flourish, from the Archaic to late Roman times. They reveal a well-organized and prosperous local society, strongly influenced both from the East and later from the Roman world.

As excavations in Tenea continue, in the following years new evidence is expected to be found revealing more about this fascinating newly discovered city.

*Photo credits: Katerina Kalogeraki*



*Photo 1: Dr Zetta Theodoropoulou and Ambassador of Greece in the UK Dimitris Caramitsos-Tzirias,*

*Photo 2: Dr Elena Korka, Photo 3: Professor Paul Cartledge and Bettany Hughes*

## When Tomatoes Met Wagner- "A local Greek story with global dimensions"

The award winning Greek documentary 'When Tomatoes Met Wagner' travelled to London for a number of special screenings at the Bertha Doc House.

The documentary tells the humorous and uplifting story of two ingenious Greek cousins, Christo and Alexandros, and five village women, who tackle the world market with their home grown, organic tomatoes. They may be up against cheaper, homogenised seeds and more regular produce, but their tomatoes have something special going for them - they ripen to sounds of Wagner. Alexandros plays Wagner in the tomato fields to help the tomatoes grow, uses stories to market the products and convinces people from all over the world to visit his village, Elias. With humor and poetry, 'When Tomatoes Met Wagner' speaks to us about the power of human relationships and teamwork and the importance of reinventing oneself during difficult times.

The film premiered at the prestigious Berlin International Film Festival in 2019 and was the Greek official selection for the 92nd Academy Awards for the Best International Feature Film category.

The first screening of the documentary at Bertha Doc House in London was followed by a Q&A with the film's director, Marianna Economou, and

its protagonist and organic farmer, Alexandros Gousiaris. The audience also had the opportunity to taste organic Greek food, in collaboration with UK Greek & Mediterranean Food Suppliers Odysea.

Interviewed by Yannis Haniotakis for Livemedia, Alexandros Gousiaris noted that the documentary has an "Aristotelian balance". It comprises emotion, humour and political messages, which are not at the forefront but rather implied. Director Marianna Economou spoke about her encounter with Alexandros Gousiaris and her visit to his village Elias in Karditsa. "What struck me is that a small village with only 30 elderly residents has managed to produce something special, in a successful way. This small group of people has managed to export their products worldwide, from the US to Japan and Europe. I was particularly interested in the topic of abandoned villages and towns, which is an international issue. But when I met those people, I was absolutely fascinated by their personalities. And they suggested a different approach to the issue-how we can find solutions based on our mentality and the way we approach life and things. This is a small, local Greek story which has global dimensions."

Additional info: [www.anemon.gr/films/film-detail/when-tomatoes-met-wagner](http://www.anemon.gr/films/film-detail/when-tomatoes-met-wagner)

*Photo credits: Myrto Papadopoulos*



## Dimitrios Skyllas, "All my music is one piece"



THE COMPOSER DIMITRIOS SKYLLAS (1987) IS ONE OF THE MOST DYNAMIC CREATIVES OF HIS GENERATION. AT THE AGE OF THIRTY, THE BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA HONOURS HIS MUSIC BY COMMISSIONING HIM A LARGE-SCALE WORK FOR THE BARBICAN CENTRE, MAKING SKYLLAS THE FIRST GREEK COMPOSER IN HISTORY TO RECEIVE A COMMISSION BY THE LEGENDARY ORCHESTRA. HAVING A HIGHLY VERSATILE CREATIVE CHARACTER AND INFLUENCED BY CONCEPTS SUCH AS TRADITIONAL RITUALS, LAMENTS AND BELIEF, HIS MUSIC IS CONNECTED WITH THE WORLD OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE, THEATRE AND THE ARTS. AFTER HIS UK DEBUT AT THE HISTORICAL WESTMINSTER ABBEY IN 2016, HE ACHIEVES A SERIES OF COLLABORATIONS WITH ICONIC VENUES SUCH AS THE V&A MUSEUM, THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL AND THE BRITISH CERAMICS BIENNALE. IN GREECE, THE ONASSIS FOUNDATION INVITES HIM TO PERFORM HIS PIANO PIECE ABYSS TO MAKE THE FIRST PUBLIC APPEARANCE OF THE HISTORICAL PIANO OF MARIA CALLAS. IN 2018 HE COMPOSES THE ORIGINAL SCORE FOR THE TRAGEDY ELECTRA AT THE ANCIENT THEATRE OF EPIDAUROS BY THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF GREECE. HIS NEW COMPOSITION KYRIE ELEISON IS A CO-COMMISSION BETWEEN THE BBC AND ONASSIS STEGI. AFTER THE WORLD PREMIERE AT THE BARBICAN (2020), THE GREEK PREMIERE WILL TAKE PLACE AT THE ONASSIS STEGI BY THE ATHENS STATE ORCHESTRA. DIMITRIOS SKYLLAS ALSO APPEARS AS A SOLOIST OF HIS PIANO MUSIC, WHILE, MANY OF HIS PIECES ARE BEING PERFORMED INTERNATIONALLY BY WORLD-CLASS PERFORMERS.

At the Barbican Centre, London, the BBC Symphony Orchestra performed the world premiere of 'Kyrie Eleison' by Greek composer Dimitrios Skyllas, the first Greek composer ever commissioned by this legendary orchestra.

In a programme based on grief, rituals and spirituality, 'Kyrie Eleison' stands between two of the most iconic figures of classical music, the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt and Rachmaninoff. With references to Ancient Greek tragedy and his music for Electra in Epidaurus, Byzantine church music and laments from the region of Epirus, Skyllas is aiming to create a platform of new rituals that connect the old with the contemporary.

Dimitrios Skyllas (1987) is based in London and he is considered to be as one of the most dynamic and leading creatives of his generation.

'Kyrie Eleison' was co-commissioned by the Onassis Foundation (Ιδρυμα Ωνάση).

Dimitrios Skyllas gave the @GreeceinUK a very interesting interview and shared his feelings and views on music, on his works and on his iconic premiere of 'Kyrie Eleison'.



**1) You have 'conquered' many iconic venues in London where famous and world-class musicians have performed (Westminster Abbey, V&A museum, Royal Albert Hall). Your recent concert - commissioned to you by the BBC - premiered in January 2020 in the Barbican centre. How have you received the audience response to your works and in particular the premiere of 'Kyrie Eleison', in these venues?**

I have been very lucky, I feel that the audience is always supportive to what I do. Perhaps because I don't follow the conventional route of composers. I feel great performing in different spaces, museums, cathedrals, experimental venues. Each of them has a different type of audience. But it is true that with important venues come high expectation. Kyrie Eleison was indeed the peak of my career, also my creative anxiety and my fear of rejection! I was blessed to have such a large number of Greek people in the audience, I felt that they brought justice to my piece, mainly because they connected to the Greek side of my music.

**2) You have said that "Kyrie Eleison" is based on sounds from ancient tragedy, byzantine and ecclesiastical music and lamenting songs of Epirus. All these elements and sounds are quite familiar to Greek origin audiences, wherever they are in the world. But to what extent do these sounds resonate with foreign audiences?**

This is one of the greatest challenges of my music. I feel that what I do is purely Greek, yet made with international standards and needs. I have a feeling that different cultures understand completely differently my work. The southern part of the world reacts with more passion, they are less reserved and they want louder sounds. However, what I do is highly connected with the feeling of a strong core, of home, of personal feelings. So, my sound is very personal and all audiences can connect to that quality.

**3) How have your life and your career changed since the premiere of 'Kyrie Eleison', which was the first ever commissioned work to a Greek composer and such a young one, by BBC? Do your Greek or British colleagues treat you differently? Have your relations with Greek or British colleagues and friends been affected in a certain way? What challenges does this extraordinary commission set upon your future works?**

The important thing is that I don't treat them differently! Deep inside I know that I am the same person I was before this commission. It is true that people who don't know me, do seem to respect my work more nowadays. However, maybe I am gradually becoming more demanding. This is a good thing. There are so many things I want to do with my life and my music, so I don't want to waste my time when things or collaborations don't function well. The greatest challenge right now is to feel free and not try to compete my new works with Kyrie Eleison.

**4) In an interview with in.gr you said that "you are very keen on creating narrations". What is the narration you would like to give or the messages you would like to convey to the audience through 'Kyrie Eleison' ?**

Music has the power of giving strong narrations and yet, sound is a highly abstract material so one can hide things in it. Kyrie Eleison follows the very standard, classical form of introduction, main body, climax, catharsis. Even this decision is a narrative itself. Before I started composing Kyrie Eleison, I knew that I wanted to explore different sides of human emotions, grief, fear, nostalgia, love, faith. And all these combined, can create a wide open platform where the listener can make a very personal journey guided by the sound.

**5) Although I understand that 'Kyrie Eleison' is a milestone in your career up to now, which is the piece of music among these you have composed that you are particularly fond of and why? Are there common elements in your compositions or are there sounds and themes that are fundamental for you and which you always return to, when composing music and what are these?**

People often ask me which piece of mine is my favourite one but you know, I only compose one piece! All my music is one piece. Sometimes I compose for the piano, or for voice, or for orchestra, they are all different aspects of the same creature, my music. Every time I have a new commission it is like I am given a new task, to add something new to my existing material. So, to answer this question, my favourite piece is my whole music!

**6) What inspires you and prompts you each time to choose what to compose in a specific music form and genre? How challenging is it to transform inspiration into a composition for a chamber or symphony orchestra?**



I only compose one style, my personal style. It doesn't matter if I have to write music for a solo instrument or an orchestra. Of course, writing for a large ensemble such as a symphony orchestra, has a lot of technical requirements and challenges. The most obvious is to be able to handle and orchestrate all these instruments at the same time. But you might be surprised if I tell you that writing a piano piece can be more difficult. This is because you have to create the same effect and artistic interest using only one instrument.

**7) *Is there a composer you admire particularly or is there a piece you would like to have composed yourself?***

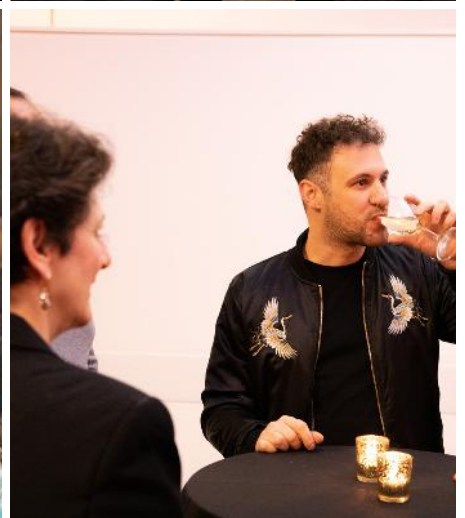
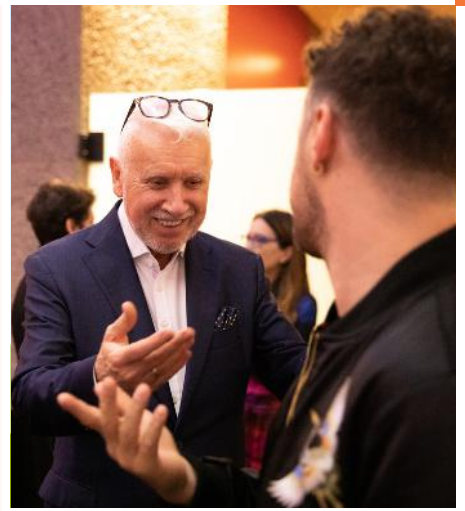
I admire too many composers. I am saying this with a hint of guilt, but I am not very much into classical music lately. I don't feel connection. On the contrary, I am attracted to different types of music such as religious/spiritual music and traditional music. I can't listen to Mozart very much, but I can listen to old religious chants, written 400 years ago before Mozart lived. A good example is the female composer Hildegard Von Bingen, a polymath of her time. For some reason, I connect to this music although it was written 900 years ago! So it seems that I am looking for a functional character in music. I hope one day I will be able to say that my music

is functional. The same way the ancient tragedies were for the Greeks. As for a piece of music, there is no piece of another composer that I would have liked to have written myself. This is a healthy and refreshing thought!

**8) *What is the greatest anxiety of a young composer? Has it to do with inspiration and creativity, with the audience's response, with the fellow composers' and music community's reactions or with the critics?***

I can only reply for myself and my own experience. My only challenge is to engage the new audiences with new music and to eliminate this idea that 'classical music is boring'. I am really not interested of what the musical community of the critics say. All I want is to have the resources and the budget to continue creating new music. The rest will come.

**9) *When I, personally, hear contemporary 'classical' music pieces, I, as a layperson, get the impression that contemporary artists consider music compositions as a sort of creative experiments, a challenge on how to combine in an innovative way sounds, instruments and forms rather, than as pieces to be addressed to a wide public. I feel that audiences may often find interesting modern compositions that are based on atonal music, experimental and minimalist music, dissonant intervals, different scales, unusual***



*Dimitris Skyllas with John Kittmer (Former Ambassador in Greece, Anglo-Hellenic League), Dimitris Skyllas with Paul Hughes (Director of BBC Symphony Orchestra), Dimitris Skyllas with Dimitris Kraniotis (Ark4Art)*

*rhythms, and unconventional perceptions of melody, however it seems to me that they always feel more excited and 'comfortable', when pieces written on classical forms of 18 c. and 19 c. are performed. In brief, I find that contemporary compositions are more focused on artistic innovative creation than audience-centred. Would you agree with that perception of mine?*

I totally agree with this. Yes, indeed, this is how the post-modern composers approached their music in the previous century. Music, somehow, lost its simplicity of expression. It is what we said before, music stopped to have narrative. If you ask me, I don't understand it, especially because most of composers continue writing this way. I personally make challenging music but I always think it is somehow accessible to the wide public. I care to create an experience, a journey that people can follow. I hope that Kyrie Eleison belongs to this category.

*10) How, in your opinion, does the Greek audience differ from the audience in other countries when it comes to watching classical music concerts?*

Unfortunately, the Greek audience is way behind. This is not their fault. It is because Greece doesn't have a tradition in classical music, so it is not part of the culture the way theatre is. Every time I perform my music in Greece I find great interest and response to what I do. This gives me hope. We have a long way to reach an international standard when it comes to classical music concerts. But this is not only the public's role, it has to come also from the composers, the promotion of the concert halls, and

the intention of music-making. It is a combination between both sides.

*11) In times of economic scarcity, culture is the first to be hit, as it is considered to be a luxury by many people. On the other hand, we observe in Greece a spectacular increase of cultural institutions (Onassis Cultural Centre, Theodorakis Foundation, Stavros Niarchos Foundation). Would you think that the Greek audience's interest in art and music has increased, or does art still remain an affair for the affluent, while the general public still sees art as a luxury?*

The foundations are definitely improving the standards of new art. I am privileged to be working with some of them and more specifically with the Onassis Foundation who co-commissioned Kyrie Eleison with the BBC. However, I do think that more emphasis is given to theatre, dance and performing arts, and less to new music. Music always suffers. If theatre is a luxury for the general public, then new music is luxury even for the art world !

*12) What are you currently involved in and what are your plans for the future?*

I have taken some time off to get some rest and think of my next steps. I would like to compose for cinema and theatre, but also to make some projects that connect Greece to the UK, especially these hard times of Brexit. I also want to go back to piano playing, I miss performing my own music, so I might compose some piano music as well. People always enjoy seeing the composer on stage playing his own music!



Snylla

## “Greece: Biography of a Modern Nation”

The book 'Greece: Biography of a Modern Nation' by Prof. Roderick Beaton, former Director of the Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College London, now in Greek by Patakis publishing house.

Tony Barber, FT's Europe commentator, wrote on Roderick Beaton's "Greece: Biography of a Modern Nation":

The most impressive achievement of Beaton's book is the way that he captures the full dimensions of Greece's recent troubles by setting them in the context of the two centuries since the 1821-32 war of national independence.

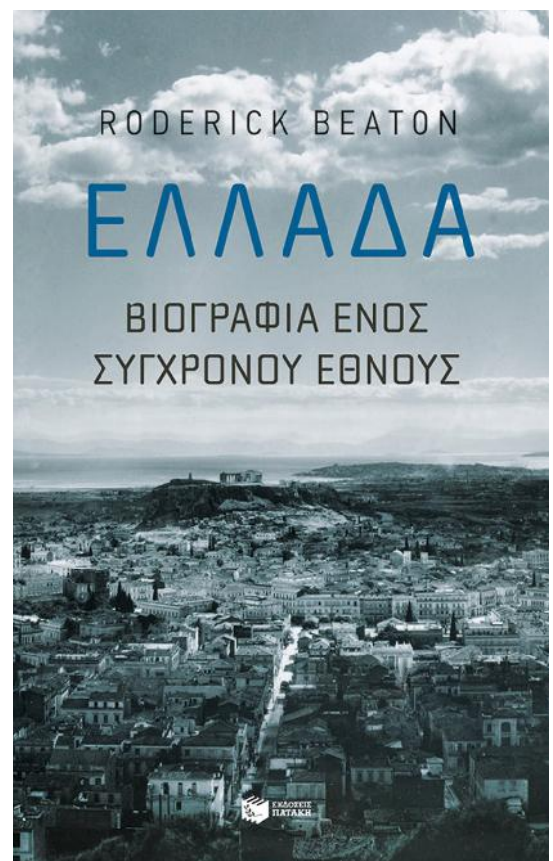
Beaton sheds light on recurrent patterns of political conflict, social change and economic upheaval to which most non-Greek policymakers and commentators during the 2010-18 debt crisis were too busy or — less forgivably — too ignorant to pay attention. He demonstrates that the crisis broke out along a set of interconnected historical faultlines relating to the contested nature of Greek identity, the role of the state and the nation's place in the modern world. These deep-rooted aspects of the crisis have by no means gone away. In some form or other they are likely to generate fresh challenges in the future.

Few scholars are better qualified to treat such themes than Beaton, one of the English-speaking world's

leading authorities on modern Greek culture. He is the author of *Byron's War* (2013), an examination of the English poet's life through his devotion to Greek independence, and of *George Seferis: Waiting for the Angel* (2003), a biography of the Greek diplomat-poet who won the 1963 Nobel Prize for literature. Beaton was also, until last year, professor of modern Greek and Byzantine history, language and literature at King's College, London. His new book — judicious, well-researched and commendably up-to-date — deserves to be the standard general history of modern Greece in English for years to come. (...)

Beaton makes the important point that no matter how severe Greece's recent difficulties, there has been no collapse of public order, no triumph of political extremism and no rise of separatist movements. Greece's democracy and international alliances are intact. I, for one, would like to think these successes will enable Greeks to celebrate the forthcoming 200th anniversary of independence with confidence.

*FT (20.3.2019)*



## Stavros Dritsas a most promising Greek pianist working in London



### *Stavros Dritsas – biography*

Aged 23, Stavros Dritsas has been recognised as one of the most imaginative and creative pianists of his generation. Described as a 'special and intellectual artist, who possesses a beautiful, lucid sound' (Critics Point), Stavros's career spans in having a busy concert schedule, being the Artistic Director of the City of London Soloists, as well as teaching piano at the Blackheath Conservatoire.

Stavros performs regularly in Greece, United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia and Russia, including recitals at the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire, Antwerp's Palace of the Knights, Teatro Sperimentale di Ancona, Scriabin Museum, Conway Hall, University of Bonn, the Athens Megaron, Elgar Room of the Royal Albert Hall, and S James's Piccadilly. A keen chamber musician, his recently formed duo with violinist Paula Gorbanova has appeared in London and abroad, as well as broadcasting for Radio 3 in Latvia, followed by a recital at the Latvian Academy of Music. As a soloist, Stavros has performed concertos with the Athens

Youth Symphony Orchestra, the City of London Soloists, the Covent Garden Chamber Orchestra, and the Athens Sinfonietta. In 2020-2021, Stavros will be playing concertos with the Athens Philharmonic, Kazan Chamber Orchestra, as well as with the Toronto Sinfonia in his Canada debut, combined by recitals in Europe, America and Canada. He has been a Talent Unlimited Artist since 2017.

Recent highlights include Stavros being the recipient of the 2019 Young Soloist of the Year by the Gina Bachauer International Music Association, as well as the successful launch of the City of London Soloists, whom he directs from the keyboard. The City of London Soloists, of whom Stavros is the Founder and Artistic Director, is an unconduted chamber orchestra comprised by some of London's finest young musicians. Having gained a residency at the Conway Hall, the orchestra's ambitious 2020 plans include collaborations with renowned soloists and composers, as well as touring in Spain and Belgium.

Stavros made his first recording at the age of 16 for the Greek National Radio, with whom he has also recorded works by Bach, Beethoven and Chopin. He has also recently recorded chamber music works by Schubert for BBC Radio 3 in collaboration with British actor, Martin Jarvis. A keen performer of contemporary music, he performs and commissions works by Ronald Corp, Fotis Koutzagiotis and Stephan Hodel in London and abroad.

Stavros Dritsas was born in Loutraki, Greece in 1996. He began his musical studies at the Music High School in his native Corinth, at the age of twelve, and continued his training at the Hellenic Conservatoire in Athens and the Schola Cantorum in Paris under the guidance of Agathe Leimoni. He currently resides in London and is a postgraduate student at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama under the tutelage of Lucy Parham, from where he holds a Bachelor in Piano Performance. His studies in London have been generously supported with scholarships by the Guildhall School and the Henry Wood trusts.

*Photo Credit Madeline Robinson*



### ***Has it always been a dream of yours to become a pianist?***

Not at all! Up to the age of twelve, I had no idea about piano in general. My childhood career goals were slightly more adventurous: I wanted to be a criminologist, or a soldier, I was even considering having a career as a Prime Minister...

My first piano lesson came at the age of twelve, which was when I joined the Music Secondary School of Corinth. Piano was a compulsory subject – I was completely clueless when I attended the first lesson. Without any hint of sentiment in my words, I immediately felt at home and I knew that I had found my life path. My teachers back then were very encouraging, so there was not a single second thought: I wanted to become a pianist, that was it. After that first lesson, there was no other option in my head.

### ***How often do you practise?***

Practice has to be daily, there is no other way. My aim is: never less than four and never more than six hours per day. Some of my colleagues would find it little, but we have to be realistic: piano practising

is one of the most mentally demanding and stimulating activities. It is impossible for the brain to stay focused and productive for any longer – at least this is the case for mine! In the meantime, there is so much more to do than practising: attending classes, teaching, paperwork, networking, organising concerts, and the list goes on. And on top of that, one has to live too – and live well, in order to be productive. I strongly believe in well-being: just “being” has a lot of long-term dangers.

### ***Have you ever thought of going back to Greece and pursue a career there?***

I regret to say that no, I have not. However, I do go back often, and I am always delighted to be involved in anything about Greece and help my country as much as I can. I actually feel that I can do more for my country and myself from abroad.

***The ‘brain drain’, a thorny issue severely exacerbated during the crisis years in Greece, seems to persist, despite the progress the country has been making in the last years. What conditions force young people to leave Greece and seek a better future abroad?***

As far as I am concerned, the “classical music drain” has always been the case for Greece. For a hard working and motivated classical musician, building a career based in Greece cannot work that well, for many reasons. Brain drain in general: just a bit of progress is not going to change anything, and even if it does, it is going to take long. I believe that three crucial elements need to be addressed: corruption, the paternalistic relationship between citizens and state, and most importantly we, Greek citizens, have to realise our individual responsibility for the way our society functions. So many examples to count: state universities being half-destroyed by external people, private properties being vandalised nearly in every protest, avoiding to pay taxes, asking “that uncle who works in the Ministry to promote my application”, and many, many other examples that reveal a society deeply ignorant of social responsibility and with no sense of meritocracy. I have failed to find a single English word to translate “αυδωσία”, as the word “impunity” does not quite describe it. If you ask me, an actual expat, the brain drain will not end when the conditions above get addressed, but when they become a core part of our society’s unconscious.

***Is there a specific project you are currently working on? What are your future medium and long-term plans?***

Many at the same time, and I am trying my best to remain organised and productive. As I mentioned earlier, practising is only one bit of what one needs to do in order to pursue a career in classical music. Towards that aim, my projects and plans focus on expanding my concert calendar, managing my newly-founded orchestra, as well as attending competitions and expanding my professional network. It sounds like a lot to put on the same plate, but this is the way to go.

***As far as we are concerned, you happen to be the first Greek artistic director of a London orchestra, of all times. How do you feel about that?***

The City of London Soloists is an orchestra of which I am very proud of. I do not feel any particular merit just because I am Greek, however, I would like to send a message to my fellow-Greek musicians living abroad: we need to be daring, take risks, and believe in our strengths. Greek classical musicians moving abroad are possessed by some certain inferiority



Photo Credit Madeline Robinson



complex, because classical music education in Greece is not particularly solid. Moving abroad and interacting with musicians who have studied in the best educational systems can be terrifying and off-putting; but where there is talent, motivation and integrity, great things can happen. When I decided to form the City of London Soloists, I had a certain vision. I believed that I had found a gap in London's musical life, and I felt that my ideas might be good enough to cover it – who knows if I am right, only time will tell. In that sense, I do feel proud for being Greek and in charge of a London orchestra: but more than that, I will feel ten times prouder if other Greeks find my initiative inspiring and then dare to pursue their own projects. Recently, Dimitris Skyllas, London-based composer, had his work performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra. I am now trying my best to establish the City of London Soloists. In Oxford, Greek-Cypriot Marios Papadopoulos directs the stellar Oxford Philharmonic. Is there any better promotion for our nation?

***You are currently studying Masters in Piano Performance at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, under the tutelage of internationally acclaimed concert pianist Lucy Parham. Any thoughts?***

I did my Bachelor at the GSMD and I am enormously delighted to continue my postgraduate studies there. The Guildhall School of Music and Drama constantly ranks among the top-10 music universities worldwide, so I do feel privileged to study in such a place. Studying with Lucy Parham is hugely rewarding; for an aspiring performer, studying with such an experienced concert pianist is

just invaluable. More than just “becoming a better pianist”, Lucy has helped me towards shaping my musical voice, find my way into the profession, as well as think outside the box and be enterprising. She has also given me precious advice, ranging from performance tips to sheer professional attitude. She is a real mentor, not just my piano professor. Equally important with our lessons is attending her recitals. She is a great musician!

***Who is your favourite composer and what is your favourite opus?***

Too many to name. I do feel attached to certain composers from time to time, partially depending on what I practise. I can certainly not imagine my life without Schubert, Chopin and Bach.

***On February 22 the City of London Soloists had their official London debut. How do you feel about that? Was it an outstanding experience for you?***

It was definitely stressful. When I have to perform, all I have to do on the day is to practise, dress up, get on stage and play. Being the artistic director of an orchestra means that you are practically responsible for every single matter. Everything went through my hands: from the musicians' scores, to the lighting on the evening! The concert was nearly sold-out and the audience gave some fantastic feedback, so I am overall happy and relieved. It seems that our innovative ideas do have a certain appeal to people. Isn't this what an artist desires: to feel that his work speaks to people?

*Photos Courtesy of Stavros Dritsas*



## Department of Classics, King's College London - Greek Play 2020: "Dionysus in the Underworld"

The Greek Play of the Department of Classics, King's College London, has been a longstanding annual tradition since 1953. The Greek Play 2020 is the 67th production. The project remains the only annual production of its kind in the UK, bringing performances of Greek drama in the original language to audiences of up to two thousand across the run at the Greenwood Theatre.

This year's production 'Dionysus in the Underworld' was particularly special. The King's play has always sought to make Greek drama relevant and accessible to modern audiences, particularly young people. To that end, this year a new play was created by combining Euripides' *Bacchae* and Aristophanes' *Frogs*. In this new drama, Dionysus is living in 2020 and decides to do something about the climate emergency. Along with his faithful employee (not slave, this time!) Xanthias, he journeys to the underworld to revive Euripides - a playwright he thinks will inspire humankind to change. When Dionysus arrives at Pluto's Palace, the old argument between Aeschylus and Euripides about who is the greatest of poets starts up again. Euripides decides to present his new 'edit' of *Bacchae* to Dionysus, with Pluto's court and Xanthias taking up the roles. Watching the play finally inspires Dionysus to make a choice about how he should respond to this emergency and thus save humankind.

The piece was created by writer and director David Bullen, who is co-artistic director of award-winning theatre company *By Jove* as well as Greek Play Executive Producer since 2015. David was joined by student associate director Isaac Freeman, who is in his second year of reading Classical Studies. The play was performed by a fifteen-strong cast of students from across the Faculty of Arts and Humanities from the 26th to the 28th February 2020.

"When Athens was on the brink of annihilation in 405 BCE, plays by both Euripides and Aristophanes unusually featured the god of theatre, Dionysus, in the starring role. Both *Bacchae* and *Frogs* dramatize terror that civilisation is about to be wiped out. The King's Greek play 2020 unites them to address age-old themes of threatened extinction, rebellion, and the power of art to change the future."

*Professor Edith Hall, Professor of Classics at King's and one of the leaders of the Advocating Classics Education campaign*

*(Extract from Department of Classics' announcement of the Greek Play 2020 on King's College London website)*

### A Note from the Directors

Last summer we sat down with what seemed an impossible challenge. We had been considering either Euripides' *Bacchae* or Aristophanes' *Frogs* for the 67th King's Greek Play – and then Edith Hall suggested we do both, reworking them into one piece. Both, after all, feature the god Dionysus in the lead role, and both were originally performed in 405 BCE, shortly before Athens surrendered to Sparta at the end of the Peloponnesian War. Euripides had also recently died, giving Aristophanes license for his plot in *Frogs* where Dionysus journeys to the underworld to revive the poet and, in doing so, revive Athens' fortunes. In this sense, these are two plays that certainly mark the end of an era and certainly it is fascinating that they feature stories of Dionysus, Athens' patron god of theatre. But how we, entering the third decade of the 21st century, were to combine these two-and-half-thousand-year-old plays was a mystery. At least at first.

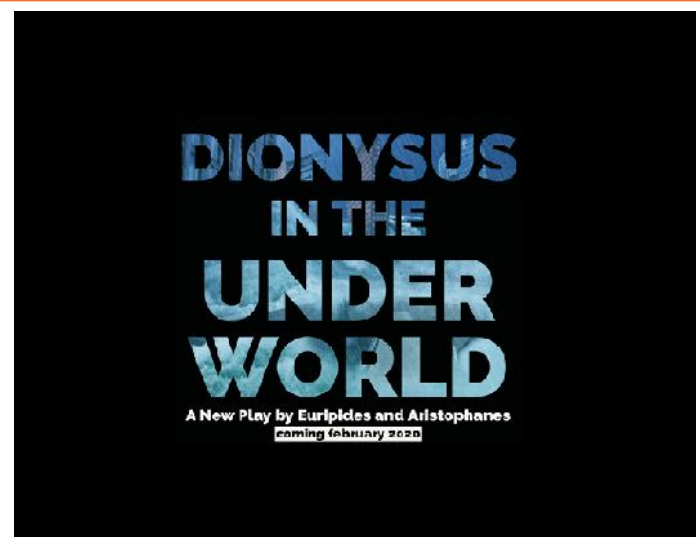
In her recent book *Theatre and Environment*, Vicky Angelaki calls for a 'revisionist approach to the canon through the lens of the environment'. Dionysus' cultic connections to the earth, to fertility and to renewal lend themselves to an ecological reading of *Bacchae*. And if Dionysus were to venture into the underworld on a quest to save civilised life today, he would surely seek a poet who could effectively raise the alarm about the climate emergency. And so we took up the climate emergency as the connecting thread to weave our plays together.

(...)

*David and Isaac*

*Directors of Dionysus in the Underworld*

*(Extract from the introduction in the brochure for 67th Annual Greek Play, 'Dionysus in the Underworld')*



Isaac Freeman, co-director of the play 'Dionysus in the Underworld', gave an interview to @GreeceinUK providing insight into directors' approach on this daring, world first production.

*1)'Dionysus in the Underworld' is the 67th Annual Greek Play of Kings' College and has attracted a great audience of all ages. What do you think accounts for the Greek Play's long tradition and what is the secret of its great appeal?*

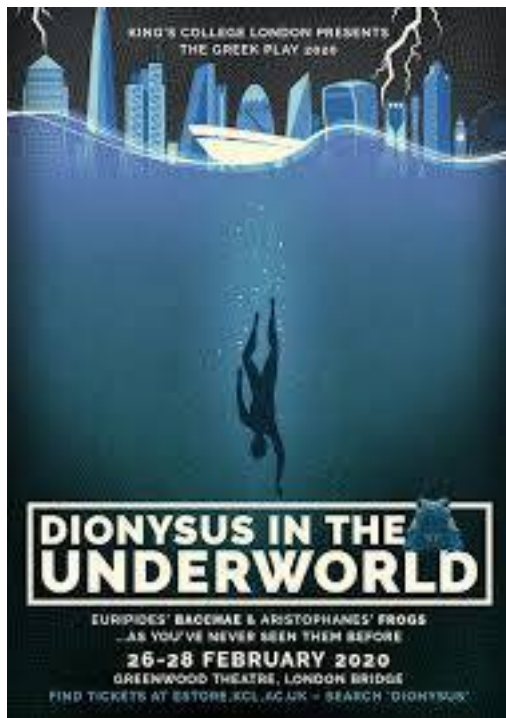
The Greek Play was actually one of the main reasons I came to study at King's, as I thought there was something very exciting about getting to experience Ancient Greek drama in its original language. It's not an opportunity that comes up a lot. We also always try very hard to make it accessible both to those with no knowledge of Ancient Greek, by using surtitles, and to those who aren't familiar either with Greek drama in general or with the specific play(s) we put on. Every year (and I'm confident that we succeeded in it this year) we try to put on a piece that is a full, well-rounded piece of theatre, theoretically enjoyable to anyone, and not just an academic study into how to perform Greek theatre. This year we heavily used music and dance, as well as striking visual imagery, to make sure it was interesting to watch from a number of different perspectives.

*2)You have staged a daring combination of a comedy and a tragedy, merging into the same show parts with comical content with tragical parts. Which of the two would you like to put more emphasis upon and how would you like the audience to perceive the play? As a comedy or as a tragedy? Have you succeeded in your aim? How have you received the audience response to the satyric-tragic combination?*

Comedy and tragedy heighten each other. Comedy is a lot funnier if it has tragedy to position itself against, and tragedy needs comedy so that it's not unbearable. That's why the Ancient Greeks performed satyr plays alongside tragic trilogies. Much of the audience response has been that they enjoyed it so much more for the fact that we had both. The Bacchae was (in terms of time) the larger portion of the play, but given that we started and ended with characters from The Frogs, both had, in my opinion, a similar level of impact on the audience. I think it would miss the point for us to present as a comedy or a tragedy. It was made better by the fact that it was both, and neither.

Photo Credit Simon Adrians.





**3) In my opinion the real challenge with the merging/fusion of two plays is not the staging/directing part, but the ability to convey to the audience the distinctive messages of both plays. Do you believe you have succeeded in this?**

It's difficult even to really know what the intended messages of the two plays are, given that we cannot ask the playwrights what they meant, but I think we did manage to convey what we considered to be the important messages of both plays, though admittedly with quite a lot of artistic license. We cut both plays down a lot, which means we did unfortunately have to lose parts of both plays that I personally would have liked to keep in if we'd had the time. Having isolated certain messages (for *The Frogs*, a desire to improve the world, and for *The Bacchae*, the power both of nature and of humans acting in groups, among other things) we did our best to portray them to the audience, and I think in the end we succeeded in getting across the most important messages.

**4) Dionysus is the God of nature, life, environment, rebirth of living creatures, natural impulses, fertility, vineyards and due to these qualities of his, I perceive he is the figure most apt to deliver messages on environment. However in *Bacchae*, Dionysus appears a quite controversial figure, as he leads women out of their minds, threatens the order of the city and the law, he is promiscuous, vulgar and destructive and leads Avgadi to an unspeakable crime. How successfully could such a Dionysus-figure convey the environment and climate emergency messages?**

I agree that he is an incredibly important and apt figure in the struggle for climate justice. The general perception of Dionysus is that he's the god of wine, and for some people, that's all they know about him. In some ways, this almost makes him more likeable. The Dionysus of *The Frogs* is certainly meant to be quite human, in a lot of ways. In some sense, we did struggle with the actions of Dionysus in *The Bacchae*, but we addressed it in the play. We are not necessarily supposed to sympathise with Dionysus, or even with his cause, but we can take from the play the power of both groups and individuals. No one in *The Bacchae* is entirely sympathetic- are we to sympathise with Pentheus, the tyrannical young king who is humiliated by Dionysus and is willing to imprison or kill the women of Thebes for their actions? Dionysus, who leads the women to 'unnatural' acts and murder? The women themselves, who commit those acts, but were influenced to do it? It's a complicated story. In some ways, we feel Dionysus is justified. He returns to his homeland to find he is unwelcome, and so he asserts his power. For a large proportion of the play, we join Dionysus in mocking Pentheus and showing off his abilities. The realisation of the horrors that are committed in Dionysus' name is slow. We weren't trying to promote black and white thinking on any issues, or necessary even push a specific agenda. We wanted people to use the production as a springboard to think for themselves, and as a realisation that action is needed on the subject of the environment rather than just talk.

**5) You have omitted the final scenes of both plays leaving the ending of the performance open. Why have you handled the play/s in this way? What was your aim? Would you agree that the viewer leaves without a feeling of Catharsis being attributed and without a sense of justice being restored?**

We did disrupt the ending of both plays, leaving the decision Dionysus makes in *The Frogs* very much open to interpretation, which certainly did run the risk of leaving the audience without the much needed catharsis at the end of the play. However, I think we counter-acted this effectively. We only really omitted Dionysus' closing speech at the end of *The Bacchae*, which is partially lost anyway, and the confusion and lack of a satisfying ending was deliberate. When we then reintroduced the characters from *The Frogs*, the comedy of the sequence brought the audience back to where we wanted them to be before the end of the show. We also ended with a final dance number, in an effort to bring some levity to the end, seeing the audience off clapping and laughing instead of crying.

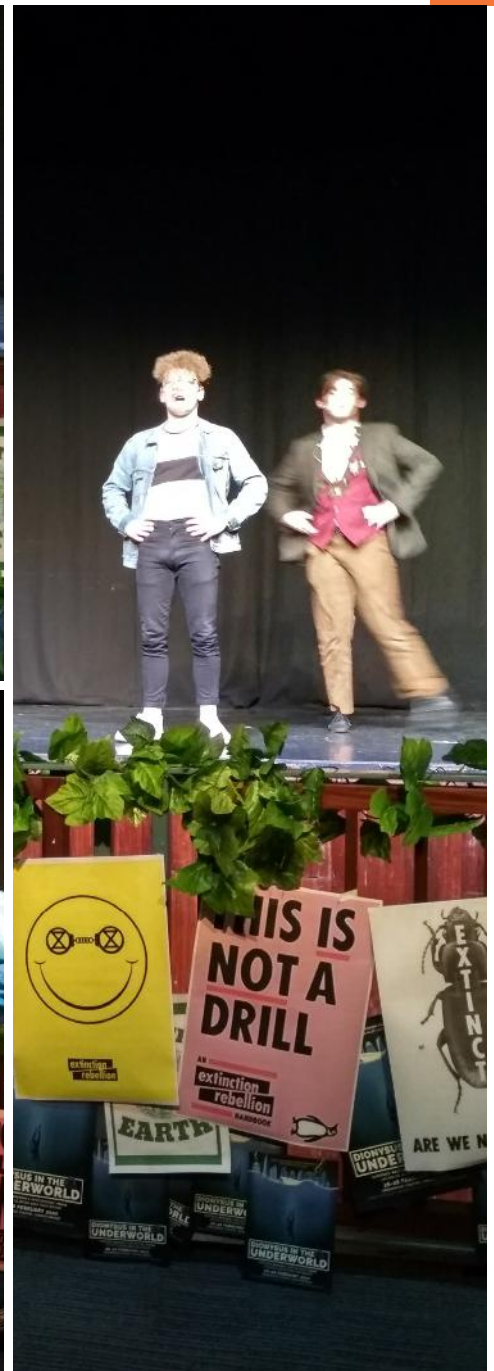


Photo Credit Simon Adrians.



**6) How would your Dionysus (a promiscuous revengeful god and/or an incompetent judge) – resonate with today's audience? What associations would you like to allude to and what similarities with modern societies would you like to underline?**

I think his flaws actually make it easier to make him resonate with an audience. If you look at his desires and motives at their most basic level, they're actually quite relatable. In *The Frogs*, Dionysus is bored and has a desire to better the world, or at least to better his own experience of it, by bringing back to it what he considers to be lost – a great playwright. In *The Bacchae*, he has been spurned by his own family, and grieves over the loss of his mother, and these things drive him to revenge. While I can't imagine many audience members had been through exactly the same thing, many of the emotions both versions of Dionysus go through are things everyone will have felt at some point.

We weren't trying to associate him with any particular modern figures, but Pentheus' denial of the power of Dionysus undoubtedly has parallels with modern leaders who refuse to accept the threat of or act urgently on climate change. This isn't something we deliberately put into the performance, but it's an interpretation that naturally occurred.

**7) As Dionysus, the leading figure in both plays (*Bacchae* and *Frogs*) is a god, are there messages you would like to convey about the divine element or God?**

I don't think we had any particular ideas in terms of trying to get across a message about the divine – Dionysus in both plays is in some ways quite a human character, with human wants and desires. I think we tended towards portraying him as a person rather than as a divinity. Of course, his terrible power is fully present in *The Bacchae*, and we didn't shy away from it, but at the end of the day, he's just another character in the plays, and he has a personality and desires and flaws like any other character.

**8) Why, in your opinion, Shakespeare's dialogues and plays usually remain 'unscathed' by modern directors, while Greek drama is always subjected to re-adaptations, re-contextualisation, and re-staging by modern directors? What are in your opinion the challenges and the dangers by this? What are the limits of artistic autonomy?**

In my opinion, there's no point in re-staging something unless you think you have something new or interesting to say with it, whether the production is Shakespeare or a Greek drama or anything else. I suppose Greek drama is usually staged in the UK in translation, and Shakespeare is usually performed using the original text, as it's at least partially understandable to the general public. Given that Greek drama is usually translated, that leaves a lot of scope for new interpretation. Even a production like ours, performed mostly in the original Ancient Greek, was influenced a lot by the translation we used for our surtitles. I suppose one danger of re-contextualising

might be that you lose the messages and nuance of the original text, and replace it with ideas of your own, but I think there is space for productions like that. That's the great thing about both Greek drama and Early Modern drama, to me – it's in the public domain, meaning we can do whatever we like with it. Some people will produce versions which are as faithful as possible, and some people will tear them apart to create something new, and most directors will do something in between. I think there's room for both way of doing things.

**9) *How challenging was it to direct a performance in both ancient Greek and modern English? How did British students-actors receive this challenge?***

Obviously the Greek posed a challenge, but the cast were incredible and worked unbelievably hard to learn their lines. They all had their own ways of learning, but they definitely helped each other very much along the way. The chorus found that learning lines that were sung was a lot easier – rhythm and melody meant the lines stayed in their heads with less effort. A fair number of the actors in our cast actually already spoke two or more languages, and so some of them already had some strong systems for learning new languages. Of course, none of them found it easy, as many of them had never actually studied Ancient Greek, and so found that they were mostly just learning the sounds. We had to work with them closely to make sure they understood the meanings alongside the words.

**10) *Is there another Greek drama that you would like to revisit and why? Would you experiment again with a two-in-one approach? What challenges does such a fusion set?***

I've always wanted to stage Agamemnon. I suppose the first thing to think about if you were to merge two plays would be which characters or major themes they had in common, so I've wondered whether a production of Agamemnon and The Trojan Women, with a focus on Cassandra and her journey, might be quite interesting. Of course, they're both tragedies, and so you potentially run the risk of piling misery onto misery, and so that would have to be something to address. Our fusion with Dionysus in the Underworld worked so well because we were able to completely pull apart one of the plays, The Frogs, and rewrite it ourselves, which allowed us to use it to set up the narrative of The Bacchae. It would be difficult to find a justification for combining two different plays again if I wasn't able to do that.

Overseen by a professional theatre-maker and performed in the professionally-equipped 450-seat Greenwood Theatre every February, the play is directed, designed, choreographed, produced, and performed by current King's students. It is a great opportunity to engage with the language, style, and subject matter of Greek drama in a unique, immersive way. Students who take part in the play often go on to leadership positions in the Classics Society and beyond, while a number of the play's alumni have pursued professional theatre careers.

*(Extract from Department of Classics', King's College, website on the annual Greek Play)*

An aerial photograph of a person lying on a sandy beach. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, and the beach is a light brown sand. The person is positioned in the center of the frame, facing away from the camera. The water's edge is visible, with gentle waves lapping at the shore.

## *Greek Summer is a State of Mind*

@GreeceInUK is a newsletter with a regular roundup of news related to Greece, Greek Politics, Economy, Culture, Civil Society, the Arts as well as Greece's distinctive vibrant presence in the UK. Our ambition is to offer an accurate and rich source of information to those interested in Greece and her people.

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