

*Attic Drama in Bulgaria*

*The beginning*

The research interest of the Plovdiv University group in the reception of Attic drama in Bulgaria dates back to 1997 when Mr Spyros Merkouris invited professor Kleo Protokhristova to submit an article to the catalogue of the international exhibition “A Stage for Dionysus” (the *Melina Mercouri* foundation). This exhibition was presented within the international programme “Thessaloniki, European capital of culture” and later travelled to London, Sirakuza, and New York in the course of the next couple of years. In 1999 it was in Plovdiv for the “European Month of Culture” event, which ran parallel with an international conference on the topic of “Ancient Greek Drama – a Contemporary Theatre 2,500 Years Old” co-organised by Mr Merkouris and professor Protokhristova.

In 1999-2000, the Department of Literary History and Comparative Literature at the *Paisii Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv appointed a team (Kleo Protokhristova, Diana Nikolova, Svetla Cherpokova) to research the Bulgarian reception and appropriation of the Classical heritage. The team put forward a number of projects at university level under the general heading of *The Reception of Attic Drama in Bulgaria*.

The research focus of these **projects** has been the literary, scholarly, translation, and theatre reception of Attic drama in Bulgaria from the Revival period to nowadays (with the works of Aeschulus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes in the centre of attention):

- 1. *The Reception of Attic Tragedy in Bulgaria* (2000-2002)**
- 2. *The Tragedies of Attica and the Arts: The Case of Bulgaria* (2003-2004) –** the impact of Attic drama onto Bulgarian art (music, fine art, cinema [feature films, documentaries, and animation], and theatre);
- 3. *Tragedies as Texts and on Stage (The Bulgarian Theatrical Reception of Attic Tragedy)* (2005-2006) – dedicated to** saving and reconstructing the presence of the classical Greek heritage in the Bulgarian theatrical memory.
- 4. Medea in Bulgaria – *Mechanisms of Appropriation and Utilization* (2007-2008)**
- 5. *The Fate of Oedipus – Bulgarian Trajectories* (2008-2010) –** what is worth mentioning here is that the focus was placed on the secondary reception of the tragedy – I mean the various modern dramaturgical transcriptions of the myth.

These projects were financed by the Research Fund of the *Paisii Hilendarski* University, while the latter two were also sponsored by the University Foundation. The following **activities** have been carried out over the last decade or so:

- Libraries and archives were and still are being researched – the result is a voluminous bibliography of reception facts.
- These facts have laid the foundations of a database of the various forms of reception of Attic tragedy in Bulgaria from the Revival period to nowadays.
- In addition, a collection of programmes, notices and posters from performances of Ancient Greek tragedies has been started. Reviews and responses in the press to performances, both newly found and already profiled, have been collected and archived.
- The initiatives of the series of projects have fostered the establishment of an informal network of theatre buffs, musicians, painters, art critics, and various other enthusiasts prepared to work on the reception of the classical heritage.
- A number of publications have been seen through the press, among them the two volumes of presentations at the workshops on *Medea* and *Oedipus*.
- The efforts of the team have been rewarded by uncovering virtually unknown or well forgotten performances of *Medea* – Rosa Popova’s (1899), Zlatina Nedeva’s (1921-2), a visiting Russian performance staged by Nikolay Massalitinov, starring the Bulgarian actress Germanova (1926), and the still enigmatic performance of the Plovdiv Theatre starring Teodorina Stoycheva (1937).
- The team was invited as a partner to the ARCNET Database (The European Network of Research and Documentation of Performances of Ancient Greek Drama) and started cooperating with the Oxford group established by professor Oliver Taplin and in charge of the APGRD Database (The Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama at the University of Oxford) and the Open University people led by professor Lorna Hardwick who introduced us to their own achievements catalogued online in the Classical Reception Studies Network.
- The team took part in international initiatives such as the First International Congress of Theatre Studies in Athens (28<sup>th</sup> Sept—1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2005), the annual summer seminars on Attic drama at the Epidauros, and the festschrifts in honour of Walter Puchner and Eva Stehlikova.
- Over 100 dossiers were compiled, using the ARCNET standard form and documenting the Bulgarian performances of the dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, as well as

modern adaptations of their texts. These were submitted *last summer [?]* to the European Network of Research and Documentation of Performances of Ancient Greek Drama.

- Two workshops were organised, one under the heading of *Who Is Medea To Us?* and another one on the topic of *The Fate of Oedipus – Bulgarian Trajectories*. The presentations were published in collections of essays printed by the Plovdiv University Press in 2009 and 2011 respectively.
- The first website which hosted the data has been transformed into the new website *Attica in Bulgaria*. The latter was launched earlier this year and the existing database is in the process of being transferred and corrected; naturally, our new research has also found its place in it.
- MA theses deserve a mention here: two of them, on *Medea* and *Electra*, have been completed in previous years; another two are currently being written: one on the Bulgarian Reception of Aristophanes and one more on Heiner-Muller's Mediation of Classical Reception.
- The Plovdiv team has taken part in three of the seminars organised by our colleagues at Sofia University, namely the seminars on Tragedy and Politics: the Political Oedipus; Educational and Cultural Politics; and the Bulgarian Theatrical Reception of Attic Drama.
- To wrap up this list of activities, let me add a note on our recent trip to the UK: it included a visit to the Open University in Milton Keynes where we met up with professor Lorna Hardwick and discussed the various issues of reception; we were also shown around the Classical Studies Centre in Oxford by professor Oliver Taplin.