Whereas scholars have hitherto examined extensively the relation of Greek literature to other European literatures traditionally perceived as most significant, the reception of Russian literature in the Greek literary scene remains obscure, especially in regards to the first half of the twentieth century. In the 19th century, the proportion of Russian literature available to Greek readers in translation was relatively small in comparison to the total sum of translated literature. This started changing gradually at the turn of the century, before undergoing a major shift around the time of the Russian revolution. In combination with the foundation of the Communist party and the spreading popularity of Russian literature in Europe, the translations of Russian literary works experienced a unique flourishing in Greece. This paper focuses on one of the most translated Russian authors in Greece: Maxim Gorky. While taking into account the period before 1917, it examines the constant presence of Gorky on the Greek literary scene up until the World War II, and his reception by Greek authors and critics, especially during the 1920s. Gorky was received in Greece multilaterally: as a prose writer, he exercised influence on thesis novels and short stories, as well as on vagabond literature; as a model for Greek authors due to his mythologized life; and finally, as a literary theoretician who actively took part in the formation of the doctrines of socialist realism.

**Keywords:** Russian literature, reception, Gorky, interwar literature, translation

The relationship between Greek literature and what has traditionally been perceived as the major European forms has already been studied extensively. However, the presence and reception of Russian literature in the Greek literary scene remain obscure, especially regarding the first half of the twentieth century. This obscurity becomes even greater when we consider the beginnings of the second half of the century, due to the civil war.

One reason for this is the absence of bibliographical and indexing studies, which could reveal a strong presence of Russian writers in the Greek book market.\(^1\) Moreover, the important role played by translations in the first half

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1. The important role of translations in the shaping of the literary field has only lately drawn the attention of the scholars. A big step into that direction is Kasinis’ (2013) recently published work, which gives us statistical details about the translated
of the twentieth century, particularly translations from Russian, has been rather neglected. This is due to a more general lack of attention paid to interwar prose production, i.e. to the Greek authors who published and reached the apogee of their literary production mainly in the 1920s, a period which has been characterised by many scholars as aesthetically inferior. It is no accident that only a handful of interwar authors have found their way into Greek compendiums of literature and those who are included receive only a few lines at most. The vast majority are out of print today.

Also responsible for this neglect is the on-going focus of critics on the literary production of the so-called “generation of the thirties”. However, in spite of the subsequent evaluation of these authors as having had successful profiles during the interwar period, there is not enough evidence to show that –apart from a few exceptions such as Myrivilis (Politis, 2012: 62) or Karagatsis– they actually appealed to a wide reading public prior to the end of World War II. This one-sided dealing with the interwar period has resulted in literary books printed between 1900 and 1950. For a general overview of translations in the 19th century see Kasinis (2006).

2. For brief information about the writers of this period and an anthology of their work see Gorpas (1981).

3. The view expressed by Linos Politis in his History of Modern Greek Literature about Dimosthenis Voutiras is typical. Although he started publishing at the beginning of the century, Voutiras reached his peak in the 1920s and became one of the most prominent figures of the interwar years: “In the decade 1920-1930 Voutyras was at the centre of literary interest and influenced (one may say harmfully) a number of young writers. His work was prolific, but careless; writing was almost a necessity of life to him, and he did not take much pain over it; he went on producing until his death, continuing in the same vein throughout his long literary career.” (Politis 1973: 213).

4. See also the observation of Vasos Varikas, made almost at the end of the interwar period, in the year 1939: “Our literature has for a few years been presenting this phenomenon: a group of people, in other regards perhaps serious and respectable, continues, with the persistence of a passion that the psychiatrists would label monomania, to imagine itself as a spiritual leader of the nation, to strike all the poses that such a rank demands, to divide itself into imaginary camps and to fight Don-Quixotian battles [...] The lack of any general stir makes this theatre troupe seem like an assemblage of supernatural babies in the eyes of the reading public. In spite of their age they keep playing with dolls and making demands to be taken seriously” (Varikas, 1939: 8-9). For more information about the publicity that the so-called generation of the ‘30s
readings of authors not counted among the generation of the thirties being overlooked by researchers. Translated Russian authors make up a significant part of those neglected readings, authors who also played an important role in the shaping of literary production in Greece.

This paper focuses on translations of Russian literature in Greece during the interwar years and aims at shedding light on the proportion of the book market and the press devoted to Russian authors, as well as at revealing the existence of a wide reading public that consumed this literature. Moreover, this paper tries to depict briefly which Russian works were translated via which languages, and the subsequent reception of those translations by Greek authors. As a specific example, I have chosen perhaps the most translated Russian author of all, and definitely the one with the most multilateral reception in Greece: Maxim Gorky.\(^5\)

Nineteenth century translations from Russian have already been dealt with –largely bibliographically but to a lesser extent also interpretatively– in Sonja Ilinskaja’s study entitled Η ρωσική λογοτεχνία στην Ελλάδα. On the basis of this book, one can conclude that Greek readers first came to contact with Russian literature in the last two decades of the 19th century. All major Russian authors were translated, although mainly in fragmentary form, in periodicals and newspapers of that era (e.g. Πανδώρα, Εστία, Έσπερος, Εβδομάς) (Ilinskaja, 2006: 63-71).

The big shift, however, seems to take place at the end of the 19th century with the foundation of the Marasleios Library in 1897 in Odessa by Grigorios Maraslis. This collection offered the Greek reading public (albeit a limited one because the prices were prohibitive for the lower classes) quality translations in luxurious editions.\(^6\) Moreover, from 1897 onwards, more and more translations created in the interwar years, see Kayalis (2003: 295-307). All translations from Greek are my own unless otherwise stated.

\(^5\) This paper is an abridged version of two chapters of my doctoral thesis entitled The Reception of Russian Literature in Greece, 1917-1953, which I am currently writing at the LMU University, Munich. There I discuss in detail the question of the Greek reading public of Russian literature, as well as the reception of Maxim Gorky in Greece.

\(^6\) The two most important translations from Russian are a two-volume collection of short stories, which includes writers such as Chekhov, Tolstoy, Gogol, Gorky (print-
tions of Russian literature began to appear in journals and the daily press. This increase is remembered, many years later, by Kostas Varnalis who writes about his reading habits at the beginning of the 20th century:

At that time (1903-1910) Russian literature was entering into our intellectual life with an unprecedented momentum. It was a true revelation. The Marasleios Library, the periodical Παναθήναια, the newspaper Άστυ, in its feuilletons, were giving us abundant translations of Russian masterpieces. Astonishing names, astonishing new worlds! Gogol, Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy. The "ocean" of the Russian soul was flooding all Europe and Greece. In second place came the new Russian litterateurs, Andreyev, Chekhov, Gorky. The dilettante Andreyev, the petit bourgeois Chekhov, the vagabond Gorky, the vagabond who revolted. (Varnalis, 1975: 55).

Despite the increase of publishing activity in Greece, the offer of books at an affordable price and the strong presence of Russian literature in the press, the percentage of independent publications (i.e. those stemming from publishing houses/printing-offices and not from periodicals or newspapers) remained relatively low.

The constitution of the reading public in the interwar years seems to have undergone a radical change, however. The rate of illiteracy declined remarkably, and more and more Greeks were finishing at least primary school (Tsoukalas, 1992: 392-393). An unprecedented flourishing of publishing houses can be observed in the 1920s, while literary and popular periodicals increased in number. This is also the period during which the most important popular family periodicals—such as Μπούκετο, Οικογένεια, Εβδομάς and others—made their appearance. More and more publishers also began to create literary series, mainly translating literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the 1930s, although the publishing houses stagnated, mainly because of the overtaxing of printing paper, the reading public continued to be supplied by the newspapers, which in addition to their feuilletons could offer cheap books because the paper they used was tax-exempt (Kayalis, 2003: 298). Admittedly, cheap books offered by newspapers had been available since the late 19th century, but the trend grew at this time.

ed in 1903-1905), and a two-volume History of Russian literature, the first of its kind published in Greek, by Alexander Skabichevsky (printed in 1905).

7. For more information about the publishing houses of the time, see Chatziotis (2001).
In the interwar years a new reading public was created, which we can characterise as lower-middle class, nestled somewhere between the learned and bourgeois reading public that spoke foreign languages, read foreign literature in the original and often neglected literature produced in Greece,\textsuperscript{8} and a purely popular public that consumed popular literature. This new reading public read foreign literature, but mainly in translation (Politis, 2012: 55).

It is among this new group of readers that we shall primarily, but not exclusively, look for readers of Russian literature. Their presence is clearly attested in an article of Angelos Terzakis, who remembers the first decade of the interwar years:

In the horizon of the East the last flames of the Greek campaign were dying out and from the North were coming the imperative messages of the biggest social revolution of the world... While a small group, which was socially privileged, still kept following the tradition of turning to the West, by travelling to its capital cities for study and by casting stereotypical views in its old moulds, another group, much more numerous and invisible, intellectually frivolous, but dashing in its will for knowledge, was rising up from the popular underground toward the path of revolution. The provincial student, with a small income, the "intellectual" young worker with the unexpectedly awakened ambition of social hero, constituted the main cells from which the new movement was recruiting its supporters. The thirst for knowledge was blind, and also one-sided.

It was then, that the Russian writers triumphantly invaded Greece. In the literary underground a wind of wild admiration was blowing for the heroes of misery and rebellion. Short-lived literary magazines were competing to publish any short story of a revolutionary writer translated from Russian and literary nestlings, without a future, were searching for spiritual emancipation in the extravagances of imitation. They were wearing labour hats on uncombed hair, growing beards like those of the illegal authors of the Tsarist period, falling

\textsuperscript{8} See also the remark of Yorgos Theotokas in 1929: “the classes who know French or English grab whatever the western post happens to deliver, with closed eyes, without any guidance, and waste their time in the incoherence and the superficiality of snobbishness” (Theotokas, 1988: 60). The same view is supported by Ioannis Sykoutris a few years later: “On the other hand, one should not forget, that lately with the spread of foreign languages, Greeks satisfy their reading needs also with foreign books” (Kayalis, 2003: 300).
platonically in love with prostitutes, just like the protagonists of Dostoyevsky, Gorky and Andreyev (Terzakis, 1934: 1015).

As it seems from the above excerpts, but also from the statistics that we can draw from book price lists and the frequency with which Russian literature appeared in the press, the number of readers of Russian literature underwent a radical change, as could be expected, following the October Revolution in 1917 and its effect on the press in Europe in general. The significance of the October Revolution is also reflected in the numerous publications focusing on Russia in the Greek press, which in turn led to a deeper understanding of Russia’s cultural life.

Alongside the October Revolution, the creation of the Socialist Labour Party of Greece (SEKE) in 1918 and its transformation into a Communist party in 1922, as well as the development of a more conscious labour movement and the spread of theoretical Marxist texts, probably also contributed to the creation of this reading public, which –although ideologically confused at this time– definitely had an inclination toward the Left and happily consumed Russian literature.

As a matter of fact, the response to such ideas was so big that in many circles of young intellectuals, poems were composed about Russia and the new hope of communism. In the memoirs of the leftist activist Agis Stinas, who experienced first-hand the development of the Greek Left from very early on, giving us information not only about Athens but also about the provinces, we find evidence about one of these poems:

Χαίρε Ρωσία, ελευθερίας αγέρας
Διώχνει τη σκοτεινιά των ουρανών σου[…]
Ο! Σεις αγνοί μεγάλοι ερωτευμένοι[…]
Τυράννου σκιάχτρο πια δεν απομένει
Μπρος στο γιγάντιο αναστημένο σόι
Του Γκόρκυ, του Κροπότκιν, του Τολστόι.9


Hail Russia, a wind of freedom
Chases away the darkness of your skies […]
O! Thee pure, great men in love […]
A scarecrow of tyrants no longer remains
In the face of the giant resurrected lineage
This sudden spread of translations must also have had other causes. It is worth noting that even right-wing newspapers dedicated many pages to Russian writers, publishing either political or literary texts with the aim of attracting a wider reading public. This fact was noted and castigated in the middle of the interwar years by the well-known pioneer publisher Kostas Govostis. Govostis owned one of the most active publishing houses and he himself translated Russian literature at the beginning of his career. He also started printing the complete works of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy and he can be considered as a reliable witness of the time. In 1929, he published a history of Russian literature, translated into Greek via French, for which he also wrote the foreword. In this book, he discusses the most important aspects of translations from Russian and he remarks, referring to their proliferation:

In these last years the reading public of Russian writers has grown overwhelmingly. Dostoyevsky, Gorky, Tolstoy and the other giants of Russian literature have conquered the masses of the Greek reading public and have created fanatic followers and enthusiastic fans.

[...] And there are so many today who are interested in Russian literature, in Russian art, in everything Russian anyway, such that the Greek businessman dare not let the chance of taking advantage of this phenomenon escape him. And we have seen the biggest cinemas screening reactionary movies and promoting them as Soviet productions in order to fill their theatres. Let us not forget the newspapers, which until yesterday were still competing to be the first to publish orthodox Marxist works, not, of course, with the aim of a Marxist education of the reading public, but in order to increase their sales (Govostis, 1929: η’).

Concluding the discussion on the constitution of the reading public, we note that Russian literature did not constitute only a form of popular literature. There is evidence to show that Russian writers were also considered in Greece to be a form of high literature and definitely drew the attention of the demanding learned public. From the many available examples, I will only refer to two. In 1932, the publishing house Charavgi, put an advertisement for its

Of Gorky, Kropotkin and Tolstoy.

10. See, for example, Andreyev (n.d.).
books on the back slip of a new edition, dividing its literature to “αισθηματικά μυθιστορήματα [sentimental novels]” and “έργα καθαρώς φιλολογικά [purely philological works]”, i.e. between a more popular and a higher literature (Dorgeles, 1932).\(^{11}\) In the category of high literature, the majority of books are from Russian writers, alongside Knut Hamsun and D’Annunzio. The fact that Russian literature was regarded as high literature is also documented in the testimony of several Greek writers of that time. One of these was Dionysios Kokkinos, a highly active writer, journalist and historian of the interwar years, who was also the director of the National Library from 1935 to 1954. In an interview, where Kokkinos refers to the readings of his early years, he notes that he was initiated to the world of high literature via Russian authors:

> When I was in the fourth grade of high school [...] I read the work “Home of the Gentry”\(^{12}\) by Turgenev. This reading was, in a way, my conversion to more serious and modern art. This novel was for me a real revelation and from then on I was pursuing Russian writers and searching everywhere for products of Russian literature. [...] I was filling manuscripts and I was publishing some of those creations in provincial newspapers and at the same time I was reading Dostoevsky and other Russian authors in the feuilletons of newspapers, in the National Library and in French translations (Bastias, 2002: 77-78).

Consequently, we should assume that the aforementioned factors, in addition to commercial exploitation, but also to the fact that native Greek intellectuals followed Russian literature very closely and also imported many elements from France (where Russian literature had been well-known for many years) contributed to the particular impetus of Russian literature in Greece, which lasted at least until the end of the interwar period.

Russian literature was not the most wide-spread national literature at this time. The domination of French literature during this period, as also in the preceding one, remains undisputed. However, in analyzing the price lists of the publishing houses, it seems that the Russian writers indeed occupied second place, roughly on a par with their Scandinavian counterparts.\(^{13}\)

\(^{11}\) Special thanks to professor Alexis Politis for the reference to this book.

\(^{12}\) Also known in English as A Nest of Gentlefolk, A House of Gentlefolk and Lisa.

\(^{13}\) The predominance of these three literature groups (French, Russian and Scandinavian) has been observed by other scholars. See Politis (2012: 51). In his statistical tables, Kasinis gives Russian literature the third place, after French and English, as it refers the most translated national literatures between 1900 and 1950 (Kasinis 2013: 8).
It is also important to ascertain which parts of Russian literature were translated. Prose makes up the overwhelming majority of the translated texts. This is true even for the periodicals, where for other European literatures much space was dedicated to poetry. Most of the texts belong to the second half of 19th or the early 20th century. Soviet literature, although occasionally translated in the press, did not reach the Greek public before World War II. This fact was observed at the time by Emilios Chourmouzios:

A time came, a period I define as being between 1915 and 1930, when Greece was ambitious to become a Russian or at least a northern province. It was the time when we discovered the Russians and the Scandinavians (from 1915 until 1920 periodicals made them accessible to the reading public and from 1920 there began a real publishing orgy, characterized by an astonishing excess of translations of Russian and Scandinavian literary works, novels and short stories) [...] And it is still interesting to remark that the Russian literature of the pre-revolutionary years continued to attract attention and partiality in the whole decade from 1920 to 1930, while the so-called post-revolutionary Russian literature remained totally unknown and inaccessible to the Greek public (Chourmouzios, 1940: 41).

In this translating craze, Maxim Gorky had a leading role. Indeed, one could bestow upon him the title of one of the most translated Russian author in interwar Greece, alongside Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. Furthermore, Gorky enjoyed a multilateral reception in Greece, as it was not only his literary works that drew attention. He was also appropriated as a philosopher, a literary critic, while his political and antimilitarist texts were also translated.

To speak in terms of numbers and taking into account the independent editions which, representing a bigger risk for the publishers, constitute a more reliable indicator of the popularity of any given author, in the interwar years, about 35 books (some of them in multiple editions) were printed with works of Gorky. This figure ranks him as one of the most translated European au-

κ'). However, if we consider only the interwar period, the percentage of English works drops, whereas that of Russian increases considerably. Moreover, in his table of the most translated foreign authors, three of the first six places are occupied by Russian authors (Kasinis 2013: κε').
Giorgos Michailidis

...thors in Greece. The same was attested already at that time by Petros Pikros, who incidentally owes his pen-name to Gorky (Gorky in Russian, like Pikros in Greek, means bitter)\(^\text{14}\) and was himself a translator of Gorky. In a long article published in 1928 under the title “Ο Γκόρκι σ’ εμάς εδώ”, Pikros writes:

> We all know that Gorky [...] always proved to be the most well-known author of all the Russians here. But even more generally, I believe that out of all the foreign writers, even when the French were very renowned, even when the Scandinavians were totally in fashion, I believe again that Gorky found himself to be the most well-known, the most read. [...] In the prehistory of our movement, for the petit bourgeois, the learned, the students, even the litterateurs and the educated, Gorky is ... I arrive at the point where I cannot find the appropriate adjective (Pikros, 1928: 130).

Despite his political affiliations, Gorky seems also to have been popular outside leftist circles in Greece and even during the years of the Metaxas dictatorship. In this way, the testimony of the historian Spiros Linardatos, according to which one of the first actions of the dictatorship was to burn, among others, the books of Gorky (Linardatos, 1967: 62-64), although true to an extent, does not comply with the evidence. At the same time, but also in the later years of the dictatorship, the most well-known journals such as the Νεο-ελληνικά Γράμματα of the publishing house Eleftheroudakis or the even more popular Μπουκέτο, were translating literary texts of Gorky and studies Gorky had made of contemporary European authors. Moreover, at least three independent editions were printed during the Metaxas’ dictatorship, one in 1938 and two in 1939.\(^\text{15}\)

Let us, after all, not forget that the man in charge of censorship was Kostis Bastias, who, although had been an anti-communist since the twenties, recognised a pure talent in Gorky and conveniently overlooked the latter’s political views. One can see this in an article that Bastias wrote in the periodical Πειθαρχία in 1931, responding to the critical comments of Petros Pikros:

> You see, we who do not tread the same path as the “pioneers”, we make the mistake of not seeing in the dramas of life only heroes and workers, or of seeing in the accidents of life only people of the proletariat. It seems to be a mistake, but we have learned to respect the artisans, the talent, no matter where

\(^{14}\) Details about the relationship between the two pen-names can be found in Bartzis (2006: 32-33).

\(^{15}\) See, for example, Gorky (1939).
it flourishes: either in the hothouses of the rich, or in the hovels of the poor, and we respect it when its name is Goethe, as well as when its name is Maxim Gorky. It is enough for us that it exists (Bastias, 2005: 190).

Pikros’ testimony about the significant interest in Gorky and his large reading public can be verified in many ways. Firstly, through the continuous correspondence of the press—not only from the left—about the author, which many times is anecdotal and renders the life of Gorky mythical. To that contributed, of course, the adventurous Gorky’s life which was further enriched by many exaggerations in the short Greek biographies found in periodicals and some forewords of the independent publications. Moreover, Gorky’s romantic life, as it was so presented, spawned followers in Greece, so that we have a testimony about a writer who started imitating Gorky’s life. Grigorios Xenopoulos, while commenting on some contemporary writers, gives us the following interesting snippet about Spyros Melas:

Sometime also Spyros Melas recounted to me his poor childhood and recited all the menial professions that he did. But the difference is big! Melas did it to boast, after having read about the similar life of Gorky (Xenopoulos, 2009: 642).

Secondly, the significance of Gorky can be seen in the testimonies of Greek writers of the time. Kostas Varnalis describes the beginnings of Gorky’s presence in Greece, before the interwar period:

Gorky moved us more than all others. He moved us and transported us with his work and with his dramatic life. [...] He was fulfilling the deepest tendencies of our time more than any other, he was clearly providing answers to the most vital problems of the outcasts of life, that is, of all the popular masses. And he was doing so in totally nonconformist ways. The realism of the others (I am speaking generally) had something superficially dramatic. It was a mystic realism [...] It could not move life. [...] On the contrary, the realism of Gorky was devoid of mystic elements. It was realism full of life, simple and very powerful, a productive realism. Only he was on the right course of human history (Varnalis, 1975: 55).

16. See, for example, the foreword in Gorky (1930: 5-15).
An even more important indicator is the spread of Gorky’s translations to a wide range of publishing houses, every one of which addressed itself to a different reading public. Eleftheroudakis’ translations, for example, which are much more meticulous, as well as more expensive, were addressed to a more demanding reading public, whereas publishing houses such as that of Saliveros and Filologiki Kypseli, offered cheaper books (with more printing mistakes) to less demanding readers. An extreme example of the wide range of publishing houses that translated Gorky is the publishing house Kyrmitsis, which alongside the best-selling books of Jules Verne and Greek robber novels (the so-called ληστρικά μυθιστορήματα), published two books by Gorky. Moreover, the Gorky’s popularity incited publishing houses, such as Eleftheroudakis, to translate not only his literary works, but also collections with his best-known articles and speeches (Gorky, 1930). Finally, if we take into account that these translations drew the interest of publishing houses, periodicals and newspapers not only in Athens, but also in local publishing houses, as well as outside the borders of Greece, e.g. in Cyprus (Gorky, 1924a), we get a more comprehensive embracing impression of Gorky’s reception in Greece.

Another question, important for the study of Gorky’s translations, concerns the languages through which his works arrived in Greece. Today we know that the older view, namely that Russian literature came into Greece only via western languages, is not valid (Veloudis, 1995: 65). A large percentage of the work was translated directly from Russian, something which most of the time is stated on the cover of the book as proof of a more consistent work.  However, we cannot always trust the claims of the translators. Thus the publisher Kostas Govostis accuses some of his contemporaries, who although they claim to translate directly from Russian, in fact import the works through a third language. He says specifically:

The sorry state of Greek translation is known to everybody. Everybody who knows a few letters fabricates a translation, and the publisher who finds a printer for 50 drachmas cheaper "makes the deal" with the unknown translator. [...] In this way, the poor Russians came to Greece via Berlin, via Paris whilst others were collected shipwrecked in the Italian waters and still others were translated...from Greek (Govostis, 1929: θ ‘).

17. See, for example, Gorky (1924b).
We should also not overlook the fact that in some few cases the translations were not actually Russian at all. It is known that one of the first translators of Russian literature in Greece, Theodoros Vellianitis, took advantage of the ignorance of his contemporaries and put the name of a Russian poet under some of his own poems because it was difficult for him to publish them at the beginning of his career. In this way, as he claims, he enjoyed a very positive critical response (Ilinskaja, 2006: 62). Sometimes, however, the opposite took place. There are cases of Greek writers who translated Russian works and presented them as their own. An author who is forgotten today but was a well-known figure in the thirties, Yorgis Zarkos, accused Emilios Churmuzios in 1936 of stealing a short story from Chekhov:

Churmuzios is also a fraud. He translated a short story by Chekhov and published it as his own. The only difference that exists is that Churmuzios’ protagonist puts aspirin on his aching teeth, whereas Chekhov’s puts alcohol, because, when the latter wrote it, aspirin had not yet been invented (Zarkos, 2007: 55).

The translation of texts via other languages (particularly via French in the case of Russian literature) not only had repercussions on their quality, but was also capable of distorting them. In the interwar years, three editions of Gorky appear with the title or subtitle “αλήται” or “από τους αλήτες”. An examination of Gorky’s works leads us to the conclusion that there was no collection of this sort, but that it was a translation of a well-known collection with many editions from French, which carried the title Les vagabonds. Clearly, the title was deemed also to be commercially appropriate in Greece, where Gorky was known as the “praiser of vagabonds”. The fact that Gorky’s works were badly translated and to a certain degree distorted because of their importation via the French language, was already noted in the interwar period by Petros Pikros, who himself translated Gorky from French:

Now it is also known how Gorky met the wider public. From many kinds of translation, some in Katharevousa [...], others in the Demotic, others in a combination of the two and others in a language which is not anything of those.

18. See, for example, Gorky (1919).
Others directly from Russian and others second or even third hand. Unfortunately, I still do not speak any Russian and therefore a big part of Gorky’s charm must remain unknown to me, but judging from what I have read in other foreign languages, Gorky was murdered many times here in Greece. Many times! In this way, for one or the other reason, if we wanted to have Gorky in Greek, [...] we should translate him from the beginning in a straight-forward and well-worked language, but first of all directly from Russian. Until that happens, maybe we will speak about Gorky, but we will not know Gorky (Pikros, 1928: 132).

In contrast with other Russian authors, who were translated but not discussed by the critics, Gorky was often discussed in the press. Such discussions were sometimes even accompanied by short studies. Some of the biggest names occupied themselves with the life and works of Gorky, among them Kostis Palamas, Nikos Kazantzakis, Kostas Varnalis, Petros Pikros, Alexandra Alafouzou and others, and it is known today that in 1933 Yannis Ritsos gave a speech –unfortunately lost today– entitled “Η ζωή και το έργο του Γκόρκι” (Kotti, 2008: 191). Due to a lack of space, I will say here only that even when criticism was written by people not from the Left, Gorky was regarded as the author who maintained the tradition of the Russian classics and was most representative of the realist school. The following passage from Palamas is indicative:

The socialist critic is without mercy. Oh but how many things he makes us think and reflect upon with his negative satire. "He speaks correctly!" Why? Because he knows how to write [...] Because under the rejectionist socialist, under the despiser, contained in many things of the Logos, the artisan of Logos is hidden [...] A worthy pupil of Tolstoy (Palamas, n.d.: 487).

The continual presence of Gorky in Greek literature makes the study of his reception by Greek authors a necessary undertaking. As I claimed above, one of the reasons that the extent of the reception of Russian authors, and of Gorky specifically, is not so discernible is the neglect by Greek scholars studying interwar literature in general and prose in particular of the 1920s and its relationship to European literature. The example of Petros Pikros, who has only recently started being re-published and studied, is not an isolated one.¹⁹ As

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early as 1910, it had been observed that some characters of Kostas Paroritis’ book Στο Άλμπουρο were reminiscent of Gorky, while Alexis Ziras has noted the possible relationship between Nikos Nikolaidis and Gorky (Ziras, 1993: 93-94). One of the most well-known writers of that time, Dimosthenis Voutiras, was also known as the “Gorky of Greece”. Angelos Terzakis describes how he encountered the works of Voutiras and connects him not only with Gorky, but with Russian authors in general:

He was the Greek proletarian author of the proletarians. When I asked to become acquainted with his work for the first time, a friend [...] told me as a unique introduction and explanation: —You know...he reaches even the Russians. That was a degree of supremacy at the time (Terzakis, 1934: 1015).

The list could go on. Beyond the connection of Gorky with specific names of Greek authors, it is important also to connect him with particular literary trends of the time. Beyond the appropriation of Gorky by realist authors in general, he must be recognised as the main pivot of vagabond literature in Greece. This was noticed by critics of the time, such as Emilios Chourmouzios, who accused his contemporaries of imitating Gorky and Hamsun and saw the imitation of foreign literary types as dangerous for Greek literature (Chourmouzios, 1940: 43). It has also been recognised by contemporary critics, such as Panayiotis Mullas, who distinguishes two kinds of vagabond literature: a romantic one, which is connected with Hamsun and a social type of writing which follows Gorky. Since then, there has been a trend amongst Greek criti-

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20. “In particular, one of the main figures of the story, the capitalist bloodsucker of the workers, is so well-written that he reminds us (and this is not an unpleasant comparison for Mr. Paroritis) of some of the analogous strong types brought to life in the novels of Gorky” (Παναθήναια, 230 (30.4.1910), p. 62).

21. Moullas (1993: 51). Panait Istrati, who was quite popular in Greece at least until 1930, should be considered alongside Gorky and Hamsun.
ics to ascribe Greek vagabond literature only to Hamsun, rendering study of this literary form one-sided.

Gorky also played a leading role in the formulation of socialist realism in the year 1934, something that the official Greek Left tried to impress upon its writers. 22 Although it is not so easy to find social realist texts in Greece, especially before World War II, Gorky caused a stir in Greece, and not only through theoretical texts. A good example is the well-known poem of Yannis Ritsos “Επιτάφιος”, in which we see the appropriation of some of the social realist demands as they are expressed by the periodical Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι. 23 In this way, Ritsos not only turns to folk literature, but also gives an image of the mother at the end of the poem, which clearly refers to the image of the mother who continues the social fight after the death of her son in Gorky’s homonymous novel. 24 The special relationship between Ritsos and Gorky is also attested by the poem that Ritsos wrote entitled “Στο σ. Γκόρκι” (Ritsos, 1936: 254-255).

To sum up, the interwar period was a time in Greece when translations of foreign literature occupied a large part of the book market and played an important role for the reading public. Russian translations were highly represented, breaking into the reading habits of all social classes and ranging from popular magazines and publishing houses to the most learned ones, fertilising the literature of a whole period. The tracing of the cultural transfer from Russia could –among other things– shed more light on an interwar literature of Greece that until now has only been studied unilaterally. Maxim Gorky has a leading role to play in this, seeing as he was received multilaterally –as an author, a literary critic and a political propagator. He served as a life model in a time where self-taught writers were still held in high esteem. A deeper investigation into Gorky and Russian authors in general promises to shed more light on Greek literary production of the interwar period and probably other periods as well.

22. More about the transfer of Gorky’s views to Greece can be found in Dounia (1996: 324-342).
23. More about the subject can be found in Dounia (1996: 442-454).
24. A useful analysis about the presence of Gorky’s Mother in the work of Ritsos and Brecht has been made by Veloudis (1981: 123-131).
References Cited


