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**Greek Pontus in European Dramatic and Melodramatic Production:
King Mithridates and its Political Connotations**

Plemmenos I.

Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, Academy of Athens

Abstract

This study examines the use of historical Pontus on the Black Sea in the European theatre and opera from the 17th to 20th century. The vast majority of European artists of the time take as their point of inspiration king Mithridates VI (134-63 B.C.), whose reign coincided with the brake of three wars against the Romans that ended with the submission of Pontus to Rome. From the European dramatic works exploiting these events, this study focuses on two French theatrical works from the 17th century, which became a source of inspiration for later librettos: *La Mort de Mitridate* by Calprenède (1636) and *Mithridate* by Jean Racine (1673). In the 18th century, Mithridates inspired over 20 operas, three of which are discussed in this study: *Mitridate Eupatore* by Alessandro Scarlatti (Venice 1707), *Mitridate, re di Ponto* by Nicola Porpora (Rome 1730) and its namesake by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Milan 1770). On the above works, emphasis is laid upon their political as well as ideological dimensions. The study closes with the presence of Mithridates in the European literary production of the 19th century, by poets such as A. E. Housman and authors such as Al. Dumas (in *Conte Monte Cristo*), as well as the 20th century (mainly in novel writing).

Key-words: Pontus, Mithridates, opera, theatre, politics, ideology