Introduction

Eva Palmer Sikelianos needs no introduction.1 In 1934, this classic line was sufficient to introduce Eva Palmer Sikelianos (1874–1952) to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. A member of the New York social elite2—whose father, Courtlandt Palmer (from the large, pre-Revolutionary Palmer family of Stonington, Connecticut) was famous in his day for his defense of freedom of speech3—he had an international reputation for her out-of-the-ordinary creative activities. For decades, she attracted regular news coverage. In the New York Times alone, more than one hundred articles published between 1900 and the early 1930s tracked her transatlantic movements and theatrical performances (figure I.1). Eleanor Roosevelt required no further references from the woman who made the introduction: Beatrice B. Beecher, great-niece of Harriet Beecher Stowe and a member of another legendary American clan. The First Lady wrote directly to Eva Palmer Sikelianos, inviting her to talk at one of her press conferences on how to harness America’s future creative power.4

Today, Eva Palmer Sikelianos has slipped into the footnotes of other people’s stories. As Eva Palmer, she appears as the “first lover”5 of the brilliant American salonist Natalie Clifford Barney, the ravishing muse of Renée Vivien’s novel A Woman Appeared to Me, and the “miraculous redhead”6 who performed with Colette in Pierre Louÿs’s “Dialogue au soleil couchant.” As Eva Sikelianos, she is remembered primarily as the wife of the Greek poet Angelos Sikelianos, who shared his cultural work by reviving international festivals of drama and athletic games at Delphi in 1927 and 1930, and as the sister-in-law of Isadora Duncan. Today, she needs an introduction. The renown that made her recognizable to Eleanor Roosevelt has faded, and Eva Palmer Sikelianos has become an ancillary player in the history of other personages.

I was myself introduced to Eva Palmer Sikelianos while leafing through books and magazines about Greece in my parents’ library in the 1960s and 1970s. The name and pictures of Eva Sikelianos appeared in several highbrow magazines of contemporary Greek culture. In one, I found a close-up of her middle-aged face and torso in a Greek tunic, with fashionable people in Western dress visible in the background. I was mystified by
“There is a report from London that Miss Eva Palmer will go on the stage” (April 5, 1903, SM7).

**LOOKED LIKE GREEK GODDESS:** Miss Palmer Landed In Classic Costume (September 1, 1907).

**MISS PALMER WEDS ANCIENT PHILOSOPHER:** Angelo Sikeliános, Whom She Met in Greece, Followed Her Over Seas. CEREMONY AT BAR HARBOR. Society Bride Some Time Ago Adopted the Classic Garb of Tunic and Sandals (September 10, 1907, 7).

**GREEK DRAMA TO BE GIVEN AGAIN AT ANCIENT DELPHI:** An American Woman Will Produce Aeschylus’s “Prometheus,” With Native Talent, in Memory of George Cram Cook, Founder of Provincetown Players (October 11, 1925, X8).

**DELPHI AWAKES FROM HER SLEEP OF 2,000 YEARS...** (May 1, 1927, RPA3).

**EVA P. SIKELIANOS HERE TO TALK ON GREEK ART:** Weaver of Robes for the Delphic Festival Will Also Lecture on Byzantine Music (September 29, 1927, 17).

**DELPHIC FESTIVALS BEGIN:** Thousands See Aeschylus’s “Prometheus Bound” on Mount Parnassus. (May 2, 1930, 8).

**GREEKS OPEN BIG THEATRE:** 15,000 See Dedication Play at Huge Open-Air Structure in Athens...designed by Mme. Eva Sikeliános (April 25, 1933, 15).

**GREEK PLAY CHOSEN BY SMITH SENIORS:** ‘The Bacchae,” a Tragedy by Euripides, Will be Seen Outdoors in June... under the direction of Mme Eva Palmer Sikeliános (March 18, 1934, N3).

**BRYN MAWR GIVES PLAY AS GREEKS DID:** “Bacchae” of Euripides Staged in Open Air, Chorus Keeping Time With Cymbals. INCENSE BURNS ON COLUMN 62 Students, Chosen by Mme. Sikeliános, Join in Chants – Audience Is Absorbed (June 2, 1935, 2).

**NEWS OF THE STAGE:**...Mme. Eva Palmer Sikeliános...has been appointed by the WPA to produce Aeschylus’s “The Persians.” Plans call for a large arena and a male chorus of fifty voices. (July 24 1938, 13).


**EVA SIKELIANOS 77, IS DEAD IN ATHENS:** Widow of Greek Poet Won Acclaim for Revival of the Delphic Festival in ’27 (June 5, 1952, 31).


the caption: “High Priestess of Delphi.” The text around the picture spoke of her life with Angelo Sikeliános, and how she helped him to organize two revivals of the ancient Delphic Festivals in 1927 and 1930 as part of his plan to make Delphi an international center of culture and learning. Elsewhere I read that she had come to Greece in 1905 or 1906 (sources were inconsistent) with Raymond Duncan, brother of Isadora, and his Greek wife Penelope, after pursuing a life in theater in Paris for several years. She married Angelo Sikeliános, brother of Penelope, in 1907 and supported his poetic career with absolute dedication. Having spent all her money to produce the festivals, she returned to the United States to raise funds for Angelos’s larger project, his Delphic Idea. She failed; then World War II interrupted the Delphic plan. Now impoverished, she stayed in the
United States. But, according to these sources, her love for Sikelianos never waned. In the last pages of a large volume celebrating her legacy, I found a photograph of an older Eva Sikelianos, in Delphi, near the end of her life, back in Greece to honor the dead Sikelianos. She was dressed in a Greek tunic again. Always she was in her Greek tunic; her slight figure, penetrating eyes, plain face, and straight-lined dresses of natural fibers were an obvious display of fashion independence. Here, her tired body rested on the seats of the theater of Delphi. The same volume opened with a photo of a youthful Eva Palmer, fashionable and pretty, in the white satin tulle dress of her New York society debut. In this way, it set up a contrast between her life before and after Greece to make the narrative point, stretched out over four hundred pages of exposition, that Eva Palmer, once a beautiful, rich American, sacrificed herself for the love of Greece and Sikelianos. Thus, the images of the Eva Palmer before Greece underscored the overwhelming philhellenic passions of Eva Sikelianos after Greece, who absorbed the lessons of Greek national culture to help realize the dreams of her husband, the noted Greek poet. Eva Palmer Sikelianos struck me as a temporal misfit: lost in the past, misapprehending contemporary Greece, and underestimating the force of its forward-moving currents.

Decades later, a Kodak No. 1 snapshot of 1906 caught my eye (figure I.2). I was drawn by its distinctly round shape, a charming by-product of the limited technology of the first roll film camera. A crowd of some fifty people is gathered in a street in Athens. It takes time to find Eva Palmer (then still unmarried) in the crowd. She is slightly off center to the left. She is turned away from the camera, and she wears a sleeveless white tunic that exposes her arms, shoulders, and back. Her hair is gathered in a low chignon. She looks like an ancient statue. Her classicizing dress and pose echo the rhythms of the city’s neoclassical buildings; but they collide with the appearance of Athens’s residents. Though Greek, they do not wear Greek-style tunics. Some men have on business suits topped with fedoras or straw hats, and others wear the uniform of the servant (shirt, vest, and fez) or laborer (jacket or vest and fisherman’s cap). There are child laborers present, perhaps also some street children. A woman dressed in the style of the Paris belle époque is carrying a baby. At least half the men are staring at her. An unidentified man has stopped to confront her. The focal point falls on the tense space of interaction between them.

Though hard to read, the photograph confirmed my impression that Eva Palmer Sikelianos was a modern anomaly, focused on living in the past. My initial conclusion was challenged, however, by the volume in
which the photograph appeared. Entitled Γράμματα της Εύας Palmer Σικελιανού στη Natalie Clifford Barney (Letters of Eva Palmer Sikelianos to Natalie Clifford Barney), this Greek translation of 163 previously unpublished love letters caused a bit of trouble in Greek literary circles. The collection covered the years 1900 to 1909, with a few stray letters from later decades. Published in Greece in 1995, the letters were appearing in print roughly nine decades after they were written, and yet, prior to the book’s appearance, no one in Greek circles publicly discussed Eva Palmer’s love life. After its publication, protectors of Angelos Sikelianos’s reputa-
tion scrambled to limit the book’s impact. They marginalized its editor and translator, Lia Papadaki, a scholar with encyclopedic knowledge of Sikeliános’s oeuvre. Suppressed in Greece and unpublished except in Greek translation, Palmer’s letters gained limited notice.

Though partial and one-sided, the letters were sufficient to identify Eva Palmer as a crucial member of Barney’s circle of self-identifying “Sapphics.”¹¹ The young, upper-class artistic American, British, and French women formed a group in Paris in the first decade of the twentieth century and produced an “incredible Sapphic outpouring,” in the words of Joan DeJean in her masterful study, *Fictions of Sappho: 1546–1937.*¹² DeJean and others have analyzed the parallelism that Barney and poet Renée Vivien drew between themselves and the Greek poet Sappho of Lesbos, with a view to making Sappho a “distant ancestor” of their free-loving, woman-centered social order.¹³ The letters demonstrated that Palmer was another key player in this circle. Not only did her ties with Barney run deep; when she was a student at Bryn Mawr College in 1900, Eva Palmer introduced Barney and Renée Vivien to ancient Greek learning, laying the ground for their learned appropriation of Sappho.¹⁴

I noticed a distinct interpretive approach in Palmer’s handling of the fragmentary corpus of Sappho, as represented in her letters to Barney. She immersed herself intuitively in the unreconstructed gaps, responding to the lacunae of lost words and meaning with creative restoration. Moreover, fragmentary poems allowed Palmer to experience a different flow of time: one that moves not progressively forward toward fulfillment followed by decay, but backward, into the holes of history, to recover a past that never was in order to suggest a future that will never be.¹⁵ Willful anachronism was part of the group’s creative practice. Palmer, Barney, and others frequently put on period costumes and photographed each other in carefully assumed poses that commented on, parodied, and transformed words received from the past.

Over the years, Palmer and Barney formed many love triangles. Indeed, they sought out love triangles quite deliberately as the building blocks of their sexual-social community. In this too, they were creatively reading Sappho. The pursuit of desire, the triangulation of love, the unbearable pain of jealousy and broken ties were running themes found in Sappho’s work and repeated in Eva Palmer’s love letters. The letters chart the evolution of her relationship to Barney: chilly to Barney’s approach in July 1900, Palmer became her learned adviser, stage manager, and costume designer, and still later, her sidelined, humiliated lover. The tensions between Palmer and Barney became unbearable in June 1906, just after
Palmer, in a classicizing Greek costume, performed the role of Sappho’s runaway lover in Barney’s play *Equivoque*, a creative revision of several fragments in the Sapphic corpus. Palmer did indeed run away a few weeks later, to Greece, carrying the costumes she had made for *Equivoque* and another Greek-style tunic she wove while making the costumes.16

This last discovery stopped me in my tracks. Palmer’s unconventional Greek dress was the most conspicuous element in the round Kodak No. 1 snapshot, and it was rooted in her prior life: it was either a costume or the by-product of her costuming for *Equivoque*. It represented both a continuity in her conception of herself as she moved from Paris to Athens and a transition to another way of life. Reading Palmer’s correspondence from after her arrival in Greece, I gathered—and later confirmed when I read Barney’s side of the correspondence—that Barney was outraged to learn that Palmer was wearing Greek tunics in the streets of Athens. She was incensed that Palmer would make public modes of dress with in-group significance. For Barney, this kind of dress was meaningful only in private, carefully controlled settings. She was especially provoked because Palmer was making her public display in Athens, a place of no interest to Barney, filled—in her view—with subaltern people who did not merit her interest. In a letter of her own, she rebuked Palmer’s “performance of defiance.”17 Palmer did not protest. She wrote of the freedom she felt in Greece, and she never took orders from Barney again.

From that moment, Greek-style tunics would become Palmer’s daily habit, part of a broader drive against the forward movement of modern time that aspired not exactly to “make it new”—the modernist slogan read for the value it assigns to novelty—but to make it *old*: creatively to change the direction of modernity by implicating it in the revival of the inherited past.18 Palmer’s return to old styles and forms was not a misunderstanding of the present. The fact that the first tunic she wore in Athens’s streets was a costume from a Sapphic performance in Paris showed me that her inhabitation of the past was an act, but it was also a piece of what would become a lifetime commitment to making herself different through imitation of the Greeks: a continuation, in other words, of her modernist engagement with missing elements of Sappho’s universe.

I became curious to trace this continuity: to follow what happened to the Sapphic modernity of Eva Palmer as she crossed into modern Greek society to become Eva Sikelianos.19 How did her former performance history of Sapphic roles in the circle around Barney inform creative activities such as her mastery of weaving and study, patronage, and composition of
Byzantine music? By what genealogy was Eva Palmer, the performer in theatricals that made Sappho a model of emulation for a protolesbian movement, connected with Eva Sikelianos, the director of the Delphic Festivals and other ancient revivals?

As I learned more about Palmer, the photograph of her standing in the midst of an Athens crowd became less a confirmation of what I thought I already knew and more of an invitation to consider the opportunities and challenges of an archive. Here was just one artifact from her archive: one of thousands of photographs and tens of thousands of unpublished letters, texts, musical compositions, woven dresses and costumes, and other materials. I was accustomed to reading photographs as witnesses, even though they are static products of technology, shot with intent, then printed and saved in fixed media that may or may not survive over time. Photographs often outlast the lives they document, which move and breathe, reach their biological end, and dematerialize. They involve conscious interventions and manipulations; in some cases, they are elaborately staged. To produce the snapshot of Eva Palmer on a street in Athens, the unidentified hand of someone accompanying her one fine day in 1906 set up a camera on a second-floor window overlooking the street. Palmer was a studied performer. She was wearing a costume, and although the street was not a stage, she took her place as if it were blocked. The hand steadied the camera’s focal point just to the right of Palmer’s head. A crowd gathered. A man stepped forward, and she reached toward him. The invisible hand pushed a button on the side of the camera, freezing Palmer’s gesture in an instant amid a circle of gaping strangers. The photograph was developed and printed in its distinctively round shape, and copies were made. One was archived, then selected almost ninety years later and reprinted in the Greek translation of Palmer’s letters. I bought the book and opened to the picture of the Greek-dressed Eva Palmer.

Observing the Athens photograph in a collection of love letters of Eva Palmer to Natalie Clifford Barney helped me to understand that Palmer’s 1906 passage from Paris to Greece was shaped by several commitments. I was left with the question of how to read artifacts with traces of her life: what more could a photograph of Eva Palmer in ancient Greek dress in a street surrounded by modern Greeks tell me about Palmer’s interactions and projects? In whatever way that I chose to unravel the complexity of the scene, I recognized this photograph—every photograph and artifact of Palmer’s past life discussed in this book—as an act: part of her lifelong “performance of defiance” aiming to produce a different understanding of the present.
When she was young, Eva Palmer, an avid reader and performer of scenes from books, submerged herself so deeply in myths that her mother called her simply “my little myth.” Entering adulthood at a time of rapid technological change and social flux, she was conscious of society’s loss of traditions, as modern life became more mechanized and alienated from an older order. To remedy what she saw as a loss, she became a kind of settler on the frontier of the Greek past, using it to build symbolic connections between present practices and past learning. In her relationship with Barney, for example, Palmer introduced Greek myths and props to give meaning to daily acts. Her animations of Greek culture followed a gendered intellectual practice of classical literacy, identified as “ladies’ Greek” by Yopie Prins and associated with women such as Janet Case, Virginia Woolf, and Edith Hamilton, who distinguished themselves by translating, performing, and embodying Greek letters. Yet Palmer’s practice of Greek extended the scope of interest. She collaborated with living Greeks, who regularly debated the contours of their national identity in relation to the ancient Greek language and texts. Which variant of the Greek language was the most classical? Was Byzantine or Western classical music closer to the lost music of ancient Greek? These seemingly erudite questions were matters of concern in the public arena, and Eva Palmer entered forcefully into contemporary debates relating to musical sounds, habitual practices, and performance aesthetics. When she discovered that Greeks were losing traditional modes of expression with the penetration of Western mass-produced goods, she gained expertise in handicrafts to revive techniques of making that might offer an escape from “the dreadful routines of the growing monster of the mechanical world.” She asked Greeks to return to older models to pursue a freer life. Palmer, the “little myth,” performed old Greece, restoring meaning to ancient poetry, weaving cloth using traditional methods, investigating non-Western modes of music making, directing revivals of Greek drama, and translating the poetry of Angelos Sikelianos. Her knowledge was wide ranging, creative, and deeply researched.

An actor who worked under the direction of Eva Sikelianos in the Delphic Festivals summarized the uncanny effect of her daily performance:

“She was the only ancient Greek I ever knew. She had a strange power of entering the minds of the ancients and bringing them to life again. She knew everything about them—how they walked and talked in the market-place, how they latched their shoes, how they arranged the folds of their gowns when they arose from table, and what songs they sang,
and how they danced, and how they went to bed. I don’t know how she knew these things, but she did!”

How indeed! How did she know the things she did? What was her special brand of knowledge? How did she cultivate it, and how did she deploy it? What were her activities, practices, and techniques? The tribute expresses appreciation not only for Eva Palmer Sikelianos’s total mastery of a set of arcane matters (how the ancients walked, talked, latched their shoes, and so on) but also for her “strange power” of replicating unknowable processes and bringing them into present life.

Her “strangeness” was an integral part of her performance, and it caused in those who observed her wearing ancient Greek dress in her daily life a degree of “nervousness,” as Simon Goldhill observes. The importation of lost Greek ways into modern life signaled a distinct “untimeliness”—to borrow an idea used by Nietzsche to express the will to act “counter to our time by acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of our time.” Like Nietzsche, whom she read all her life, Palmer immersed herself in Greek traditions to try to develop an oppositional aspect. Like him, too, her oppositional stance via the Greeks placed her in familiar ideological currents of twentieth-century modernity. As an antimodernist who felt the spirit of the times diminished, she moved from individualism to collectivism, modernism to traditionalism, white Anglo-cosmopolitanism, anti-Semitism, and protofascism, to anticolonialism, antifascism, progressivism, internationalism, and possibly communism. With varying degrees of explicitness, she projected on the Greeks the dissonant perspectives of each succeeding decade. Whereas Nietzsche’s oppositional stance was an art of living expressed through ironic, philosophical critique, however, hers was a daily creative act. She worked physically to embody another self from a different temporal standpoint, and her daily staging of the Greek life was transgressive and deeply unsettling.

Life was the dominant medium of Eva Palmer Sikelianos’s work, and life writing is simply the most appropriate form to introduce her.

Life writing covers a wide range from autobiography to biography and the many creative and scholarly forms these may take. This book, a cultural biography, leans toward the scholarly. Based on life-historical research, it follows the trajectory of Eva Palmer Sikelianos’s adult life as she adopts ancient Greek models, simultaneously transforming them and being transformed by them. It puts her adaptations in a sociocultural context to pursue a set of questions. In much of the modern period in the
West, classical models offered precedents for personal constructions of dress, behavior, and identity in addition to cultural heritage. While ideas of Greece took monumental, seemingly timeless forms in many of their neoclassical manifestations, they were quite “liquid” in their passage through the lives of people. I ask: What new shapes did Greek textual and material fragments take when they inhabited Eva Palmer Sikelianos’s daily life? What became of both the ancient ruins and the modern person? How did she incorporate them in her daily activities? How did they script her life? What associations, memories, and meanings did they inspire? How did her intense investment in finding the latent life in ruins change over time to become increasingly an art of life? What extant works, recreations of ancient things, are the remnants of her art, and what is the history of their reception?

I consider the book’s biographical mode to be vital to its contribution. In relating the story of a woman whose work in Greece was fitted to the procrustean bed of patriarchal, nationalist, and heteronormative discourses, I honor several decades of biographical writing that studies the gaps in recent histories for clues of women invested personally in the study of Greece who had nontraditional careers. A few made inroads into men’s terrain. Some were even celebrated, such as Jane Harrison, a professor of classics at Newnham College, Cambridge. Most worked quietly, quite literally in the margins of the field, on archaeological excavations or philological puzzles. There they may have interacted with local populations, who treated ancient ruins as their national remains, and with craftsmen, poets, or artists such as Eva Palmer Sikelianos who offered alternative perspectives. They also connected with each other. The importance of this kind of recovery work for classical studies cannot be overstated. It expands the history of scholarship to include a cross-section of missing figures while bringing into view the impact that class and gender exclusion criteria have played in shaping the profession. It also highlights creative practices happening in contact zones where local inhabitants and nonexperts cultivated other ways of knowing. Moreover, it opens a space for a critical engagement with classical learning that considers how the field—through its complex layering of discourses of privilege, class, race, nation, sexuality, power, freedom, and resistance—empowered people to reinvent their place in the modern present even as it marginalized them.

My ambition to make sense of Eva Palmer Sikelianos’s ongoing staging of the Greek life placed a subject at the center of my interest who bisected so many histories and operated in so many different communities that it offered a tactic for dealing with the abundant, diverse, and richly layered
twenty-first-century archives of modern receptions of Greco-Roman antiquity. These exist in countless sites. They relate to many institutions and occupy different languages. They touch on different classes of people and their activities. They accumulate in many media and materials. In the past three decades, they have taken additional, digital forms. While scholarly research on the afterlives of ancient literary or dramatic works tends to bring into focus a set of materials relating to a carefully circumscribed topic, researching Eva Palmer Sikelianos’s life became a way to sample a broader range of archives in order to tell a wider, richer, more complex story about Greece’s presence in the modern world.

Just as one artifact of her life—the Athens Kodak No. 1 snapshot—set me on my path of inquiry, so too the discovery of multiple collections containing her extant things extended the course of my research. The search started in the Benaki Museum Historical Archives in Kifissia, a suburb of Athens, where her possessions in Greece were deposited. Here was her official archive. To begin, I read the accounts of the papers’ archiving to develop a sense of what they were and why they existed together in that place. In her papers, I found correspondence from her many collaborators. I listed the correspondents and their letters’ dates. I scoured databases on the internet and sought out conversations with archivists and researchers who knew something about those people. I tracked down collections of their work. I visited houses, libraries, and repositories on two sides of the Atlantic. I found thousands of textual and material artifacts belonging to her and to people who knew her. I sought out the interconnections. I looked especially for understudied archival materials to unsettle the claims made on her memory by official sources. The archived items helped me trace not only her life and work but also the power, interests, and desires that shaped assumptions about her.

While life was the primary medium of her work, her response to Greek texts and materials manifested itself in different media. The proliferation of media in the archives is in tension with the singularity and immediacy of the Greek idea that she sometimes expressed, for instance, with her statuesque pose in a sleeveless white tunic in that 1906 snapshot. No doubt it seems problematic now, as it was then, for a wealthy white American woman to pose like a Greek statue amid people laboring in the streets of Athens. How perfectly representative of the Eurocentric appropriation of the Greeks that idealized the classical and made it a symbol of white northern European superiority and an excuse for domination of people everywhere, including modern Greece! Specific manifestations of her life performance may indeed reflect commonplace notions of the classical—
though they are rarely as simple as they first appear. Even her most reflexive notion of the Greeks was part of a lifelong effort to complicate Western constructions of Greek antiquity by introducing contrasting strains—non-Western musical traditions, for example—in order to make appreciable the vitality of lesser-known perspectives. Thus, she moved from one medium to the next or folded one into another. The multiformity of her body of work aligns with her effort to keep moving continually against the currents of modern time.

The chronology I created does the work of locating Eva Palmer Sikelianos on a temporal continuum. It maps her historical coordinates from birth to her death and burial followed by the contestation of her life’s remains. It also connects her to cultural currents and events and to people with whom she interacted. A cast of characters appears at the end of the book for ease of reference to the human players in the life story.

Each chapter is devoted to one medium or cluster of media and set of cultural artifacts containing traces of her activities and interactions, as the chapter titles denote. The focus on media and materials seems particularly appropriate for a subject who insisted so adamantly on materiality. The chapters cycle through her engagements with Sapphic performance, weaving and dress, music, revivals of Greek drama, and writing. In chapter 1, several unpublished photographs, a buried pile of letters, a newspaper story, and Barney’s play Equivoque locate Eva Palmer at the center of a performance revolution that turned Sappho into a cult figure and contributed to gay and lesbian reappraisals of the Greek past. In chapter 2, her loom, dresses, more letters and photographs, and a posthumously published lecture span the years from 1906 to the early 1920s, when Eva Palmer Sikelianos practiced weaving to shape her life in Greece and eventually to agitate for women’s emancipatory role in the Greek national body. Chapter 3 tracks her activities in a different performance medium, music. An organ named for her (Evion Panharmonium), records from a school of Byzantine music where she taught, two lectures, and more letters and photographs structure an inquiry into her collaboration with three subaltern musicians—Penelope Sikelianos, Konstantinos Psachos, and Khorshed Naoroji—and her patronage of non-Western traditions of music making to stave off the European instruments and sounds that were invading Greece. Chapter 4 uses letters, drawings, photographs, musical scores, and records of the Delphic Festivals and of her collaboration with Ted Shawn to relate Palmer Sikelianos’s direction of Greek drama from 1905 to 1939 to moments in the history of modern dance. Chapter 5 follows her life to its end. It reads the manuscript history of Upward Panic (a work
written by Eva Palmer Sikelianos between 1938 and April 1941 and published posthumously in 1993), personal correspondence, the published English translation of a poem of resistance to the Nazi occupation by Sikelianos, and hundreds of letters concerning American interventions in Greece to follow the political aspect of her oppositional stance.

The chapters unfold not in a single narrative line, but as intertwining threads. One thread follows her life and the other, vital developments in the cultural-political arena. Lives are messy, moving targets, changing course according to day-to-day occurrences, adjusting fixed ideas. Eva Palmer Sikelianos was always on the move. Her mode of living depended on the people she attached herself to, and those people kept moving and changing. Thus, the narrative may circle several times around a single event—as, for example, Eva Palmer's entry into Greece or her direction of the Delphic Festivals—which the reader can view from different cultural perspectives. Each narrative loop follows a facet of Eva Palmer Sikelianos's pursuit of the Greek life and allows me to explore the many faces, voices, interactions, and currents running through her archival materials.

In the epilogue, an account of the contest over her belongings gives occasion for me to follow the highly politicized assemblage of her legacy. Relating my encounter with the archives, I reflect on gender asymmetries, nonspecialist cultures of reading, structures of power between Greece and the West, and reuses of ancient sources in the practice of life matter in contemporary reappraisals of the classical legacy.

To set the story in motion, I turn to two photographs in which Eva uses the camera pose as a mode of classical reception—a way of transferring classical learning to new audiences—to introduce the puzzle: how did she practice the Greek life before she came to Greece, when she was Eva Palmer, and after, when she became Eva Sikelianos. Consider the photograph in figure I.3. It may have been taken in London in 1903 to promote Eva Palmer's work in the theater. Her presentation of the Greeks is theatrical. The pleated tunic is a costume, the fluted Doric pedestal a prop, and both are signs of her temporary submission to a dramatic role outside her. The photograph reaches beyond the theater into the visual arts to borrow from the pictorial vocabulary of fin de siècle aestheticism. The pallid face, dilated eyes, enigmatic look, and attentively loosened hair recommend her for the part of a dreamy lover while also staring down years of British and French decadence. The photo shows that Eva Palmer was keen on playing the Greeks before she ever visited Greece.
Another photograph (figure I.4) taken almost fifty years later, in May 1952, when Eva Sikelianos made her last trip to Greece, represents persistence and change. It is the one I saw long ago in the last pages of the volume celebrating her life. It depicts Eva Sikelianos again in a Greek pose and tunic. This time she is offstage: a member of the audience, not the cast, resting her tired body in the seats of the theater of Delphi after viewing a performance. Her female companions, Greek friends of many years, shower her with concern, as if they were members of a chorus and she the tragic hero. Against their 1950s Western dress, her white tunic highlights her chronological cross-dressing, and their sharp features, dark hair, and medium-toned skin contrast with her pale face and faded hair. She is performing not a theatrical role but the role of a lifetime lived in dialogue with the Greeks, modern and ancient. Even more than her dress, her body language sets her temporally apart from her companions. The placement of her limbs, her slouched torso, her tilted head, the world-weary gaze of her eyes through the camera to a place infinitely beyond capture a spectral moment. A look of prophetic anticipation has replaced the lovelorn dreaminess of the youthful photograph. She might be reflect-
FIGURE I.4. Eva Sikelianos in May 1952 seated with Greek friends in the ancient theater of Delphi at one of four performances of *Prometheus Bound*, part of the “Greek Home-Coming Year” tourist campaign. Unknown source, reprinted in EOS, p. 384, with the caption “Mega Konitsa.”

ing back on her production at Delphi or looking ahead to the future that will unfold without her.

The comparison of the two images confirms her lifelong obsession with Greek ideas and hints at the story I will tell of how she made Greece a source of cultural value in her daily habits, seeking to master the practice of a Greek life. She needs an introduction for many reasons, not least of which is that for a tumultuous half century she was steely willed, talented, dedicated, and eccentric enough to strive to realize this untenable idea.