

EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES TO THE STEPS OF THEOFHILOS AND HOMER

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ABSTRACT

This study traces the works of the great folk painter Theophilos Hadjimichael of Lesvos, guided by the lights of history, literature, tradition, art and culture, especially in those paintings which place their source of inspiration in the epic poetry of Homer.

A story teller grandfather, a “magician”, who “knew how to use words to narrate and plain boards of wood to produce icons of saints”, becomes the origin where literature’s experimental approach takes flesh and blood in order to create masterpieces. These works of art had themes taken from grandfather’s stories which allowed the child’s mind to imagine heroes, fights and controversies. All these were later imprinted on the canvas of the popular painter. The association of Theophilos with the great epic poet Homer, outlines a tour in places, spaces, verses and paintings starting with the child’s experiences, hearings and readings.

The main purpose of the suggested tour being to prove the power of the pragmatic experience and to show an imaginary and scientific connection and correlation in the work of the two creators. The themes in several Theophilos’ paintings and the verses and intertextual events of the ancient poet seem to be relevant. The testimonies of the personal behavior and social appearance of the unconventional painter reinforce this hypothesis.

Keywords: *Experimental Approaches, Poet Homer, Painter Theophilos.*

In his attempt to describe the island of Lesvos and the art of painter Theophilos, Tsarouchis¹, (1965) said “We received our first impressions of light in a place where the sun light does not frolic. It creates stories of shading, even on slightly uneven surfaces, while at the same time

¹ Yannis Tsarouchis. Greek painter, revolutionary and classic, was born in 1910 in Piraeus “...where the light is silver and gold”

it can make a caricature out of the most successful visual fraud. If for Turner² the sun was only a god, for the Greek painter it is something more frightening: it is a constant prosecutor... The sun along with a spirit whose name I do not know, but whose stern voice I constantly hear, tease and ridicule the painter who tries to simplify the problem... Humble Theophilos though, in many of his works, gives a free lesson and even more, he gives a key, to those who would dare to depict the Greek landscape, avoiding been ridiculed and negatively criticized by the Greek sun and the unknown spirit of the Greek art"



Picture 1- The sun (detail) - Zemper Alta, District in Italy

The colors of the East gilded unbearably, as they emerged from the mountains of Asia Minor opposite Varia, Theophilos' home village, together with the sun and the other "unknown spirit". They were piercing and nestling in his eyes and heart, all through his childhood. The painter Theophilos Hadjimichael of Lesvos, has always been preparing the brushes and the images inside him, to paint everything, in a lifetime that did not last long. At the same time, life has not been generous to him at all. He had only been granted a great gift: The ability to paint and speak through his paintings. That is because Theofilos had not shown much of a need for conversation, since he was characterized as "different", in a very young age.

"First came into people's notice that he was left handed. He did not make a slight thought to get rid of this "bad habit", even after some mild or heavy "spanking". Not that he would care to try. Then he was a little stuttering. He also did not even attempt to eliminate that" (Elytis, 1996).

Furthermore, due to the behavior of his teacher, Theophilos has even been promoted higher in the scale of those out of the ordinary. The teacher was strict and old-fashioned with no understanding, no loving feelings, but equipped with a very fine ferula and lots of thick

² William Turner (1775 - 1851), British romantic painter of landscapes, whose art is said to have set the basis of Impressionism

insulting nouns and adverbs. It was all happening at the school of his village, where he used to attend, where he very early preferred to stop going. Later on, Theophilos proudly dressed in the old Greek soldier uniform, with the pleaded skirt, which is called “fustanella”, decided to never take that uniform off and live for the rest of his life as an old Greek soldier, “tsolias³”. Furthermore, most of the time he was followed by his village youngster group, dressed like Macedonian soldiers. After that all, he stood out as “different” even more. Much more.

It is a common fact, that diversity having been established since ancient times, can still build high and charmless walls between people. Theophilos, understood the ugly meaning of the walls, having seen them since his childhood. He was left-handed and stuttering, but not blind. In fact, he had eyes outside and inside him. His perfect eyes, made him see every detail in the palette of God's creations and colors, the things in front and behind them, the beauty and the ugliness. He treasured and kept them all, not to talk about, but to paint on these walls at first opportunity. Because the walls of diversity that he saw, were ugly and very annoying.

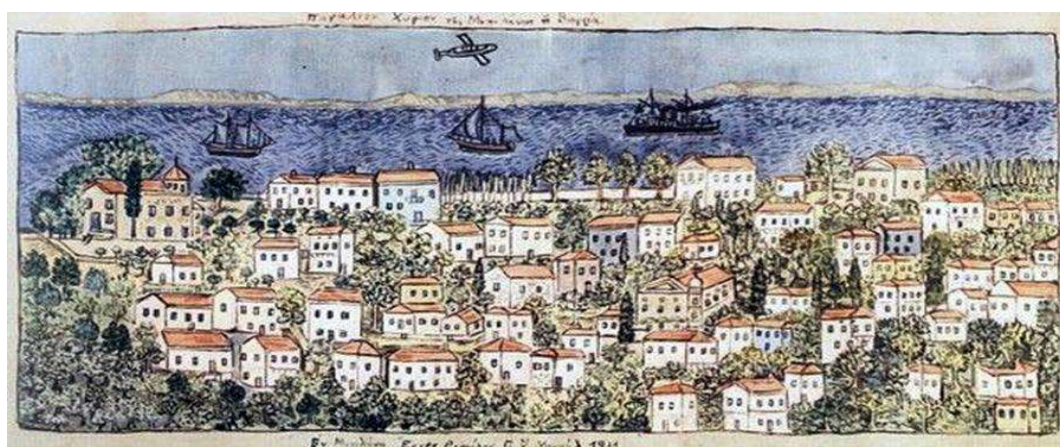
So, the son of the shoemaker Gabriel Kefala and Penelope Zografou, daughter of the hagiographer Michael who later became Hadji⁴ (Hadji-Michael), by visiting the Holy Land, started painting the nearby walls. Then, he painted trunks, wooden surfaces, cloth, tins, what he saw, wherever he saw in front of him. Furthermore he lived the rest of his life painting and wandering, like another Odysseus. He visited many places, in his real life and in his imaginary one. His imagination being strengthened by the popular books, the post cards he always collected, the fairy tales and the stories of others. His tours and trips included Smyrna and Thessaly, in the Greek Mainland. His roaming ended in Lesvos. Thus, at the last years of his life he returned to his island and loaded it with his own paintings. The themes of the paintings included everything, scenes from Paradise, the Gods of Olympus, Homer, Sappho, Pericles of the Golden Age, the legend of Alexander the Great, the Saints of the Orthodox Church, the Byzantine Emperors, the Ottoman Empire, the Enlightenment, the Greek Rebels, folk poetry, the Greek Revolution, the sufferings and the victories of the people in their daily struggles, Personalization of Freedom, all tied in and flavored by the living and warm Greek tradition.

³ **Tsolias** is known for his distinctive uniform, which evolved from the clothes worn by the “klepts” who fought the Ottoman occupation of Greece. The most visible item of this uniform is the fustanella, a kilt-like garment. The distinctive dress turned “tsolias” into a popular image for the Greek soldier, especially among foreigners

⁴ hagos meaning saint

Many themes came from his birthplace. She had given him many memories and impressions during the first years of his difficult and "uncomfortable" childhood.

Sure enough, Theofilos painted Varia, the village where he was born, in the year 1870, or so, when Lesvos was still under the Turkish occupation. Varia lies three to four kilometers far from the City of Mytilene. Theophilos has painted his hometown, spread out in her sea front terrain. He included the typical domestic towers and the beautiful two-storied houses, trees in the courtyards and the streets, churches and large buildings. A hydroplane, as he draws it in many of his works, flies in the middle of the sky. A large boat and two smaller ones across the strait, which has the absolute color, "Mytilene's blue", the one that the poets have praised. On the other side of the strait, the mountains of Asia Minor lie for years, going down to the water, getting wet and cool by the famous strait, the Sea of Archipelagos.



Picture 2 - Varia

Above Varia, the painter could see Troy, the theater of the fabled war which filled his mind with stories and pictures.

“Neither his physique nor his environment gave him much hope that one day he could carry out his plans for imaginative achievements. More and more he began to isolate himself, to give life to his readings, to believe for real what he used to keep in his mind until then” (Elytis, 1996).

In his imagination, Theofilos really saw a lot. First of all, he saw war and peace. Activities of the ancient world which have happened on Lesvos and a little further north, in

the sea strait opposite Varia. He saw the Trojan War in its tenth year, and the ten-year wanderings of Odysseus during his return to Ithaca, as they were all enclosed in the Epics, as Homer recounted them.

It was in search of adventure or escape when Theophilos, as a teenager, had left his island, for the cosmopolitan Smyrna, which is one of the nine cities that argue and boast about the poet. The French philhellene writer Satombrian wrote about Smyrna and its relationship to Homer in the book "Journey - Greece of 1806": "Homer's image was engraved in the coins of the Smyrnaeans, as if everyone in that city recognized this man of genius as their king who had glorified them so much" (Korovinis, 2006).

There, Theophilos starting his wandering life, self-appointed "kavassis"⁵ in the building of the Greek Community Headquarters, painted constantly and profited as little as to buy cheap materials for his art and a bite of food, if he would get lucky enough!

For Homer's epics, some scholars have claimed that they were product of the poet's imagination. But scientific research has shown that the Trojan War was a historical event which happened in the 12th century BC. Today, according to the oldest texts and the new findings, the whole archaeological community agrees, it has happened in the Terrain of Troy, across the island of Lesvos. The Epics of Homer have lasted through time and influenced literature and the complete spectrum of the arts, as few stories have. They still inspire writers and artists and guide researchers.

For many centuries Homer's poems have entertained and taught the Greeks during the festivities and official days, but they also have fed the daily series of action episodes, which a storyteller always had to tell. They were the main text for the courses of reading, writing, history, religion, geography, even psychology, before psychology itself acquiring its own name. Furthermore, in the dark years of Turkish occupation, the ancient poet's works would be taught in the Church Psalter of the "clandestine school". Homer would teach everyone, young and old. People would study the human characters in their "good" side, also in their less "attractive" one. Even today, young students in Greece and children almost all over the world are taught Homer's Epics.

⁵ Doorman



Picture 3- The Sheppard

Leafing through the book of *Odyssey*, which is taught in the first grade of junior high schools in Greece, in the 2nd decade of the 21st century, where the authors of the text book, often use images in a side illustration of the verses, one finds an imaginative and very successful illustration of the goddess Athena. She stands in front of Odysseus as a shepherd, painted by Theophilos' hand. The picture is a detail of one of his paintings.

The above illustration can guide to a small introduction of an imaginary connection between the popular painter and the ancient creator. The specific verse refers to the moment of Odysseus awakening in Ithaca. He did not realize at the time, that the "nostimon imar"⁶ had already arrived and that new fights with the suitors were in line for him. Goddess Athena was going to inform him but she preferred not to scare him by her presence. So she appears in a shepherd's figure.

Theophilos himself was taught *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by the widely read books and popular pamphlets, which he always carried with him, and which, after his death, were found in his precious, all painted personal box. Along with the overused books, his notes and drawings and a few essentials of his simple and unpretentious life were found. But of all readings Homer's Epics overwhelmed Theophilos, mainly by the many stories of his grandfather.

"Pathological seems to have been the love that little Theophilos always showed for this grandfather, the magician, who knew how to tell in words but also to use plain boards of wood to produce icons of saints. He sat near him for hours, watching him at work. And the old man who knew how to tell stories, not only with his paintings but also with his words, took

⁶ day of returning to one's home

him every night on his knees and there in front of his fireplace began old stories, about Achilles and Hector, about Alexander the Great, about Erotokritos". (Elytis, 1996).



Picture 4 - Rhapsodist, Reading Homer

In the painting of Theofilos, which himself signed and next to his signature he wrote "A Rhapsodist and reading of Homer", the theme is exactly what the title says. The listening of the assembled five persons is accompanied by a lyre, while everyone seems to be listening to the rhapsodies with great attention and pleasure and everyone rejoices, just as the painter must have felt in similar moments. The artist Giannis Tsarouchis has written about Theofilos feelings:

"His painting comes out naked through his narration. He becomes a painter out of enthusiasm for the subject. He does not paint objects, but he paints the enthusiasm they give him" (Tsarouchis, 1965).

Theofilos did not paint himself totally absorbed by his grandfather's stories, at the time of "Homer's" narration, but he painted an ecstatic group at an ancient era. Among the audience, one can see a young and an older man and a woman. Theofilos has in mind his female compatriots. He knows the extroversion and philomathy of the women of Lesbos. It is well known to him, that his island's women, first of all in their time, participated in politics, as

well as in the cultural and social becoming. With the first of their well-known representative the lyric poetess Sappho. She has also been painted by Theophilos to recite Homer's rhapsodies or her own lyric poems.

"Characteristic of the social life of Mytilene is the persecution of the exiled poet Sappho, due to her involvement in politics, which certifies the female participation in the political becoming of the ancient world in Lesvos." (Archontidou, Achilara, 1999).



Picture 5 - Sappho and Alcaeus

The women of the Aeolian land, fought with visible weapons and their invisible ones, encouraged others, resisted in every war front, every threat and danger, but also they proudly raised their beauty on the podium and walked in the first "Beauty Contests". That was to confirm the opinion that among their other virtues there should have beauty and attractiveness. As the first appearance of the "Beauty Contests" in Lesvos had occurred, the initial connection of the "Homeric" themes of Theophilos Hadjimichael with the gods and heroes can be made. It was after a beauty contest, where very high personalities had participated, that the whole storming activity of the Trojan War began. Competing, were three goddesses of Olympus.

"Some of the leading German classical philologists of the 19th century, such as Preller and Gruppe had expressed the view that some beauty contests, according to those held in

Lesvos in the sanctuary of "Messon", must have been the model which had led to the formation of the mythical "divine competition" known as the "Paris' Crisis" (Vlachos, 2016).

Poet Alkaios⁷ informs us about the annual celebrations and the beauty pageants which were held in Lesvos. The people of Lesvos established altars in the worship of the Lesbian Trinity in the sanctuary at Messon⁸. The area belongs today to region of Agia Paraskevi, and since it is located in the middle, the center of the island, it got its name, "Messon".

"In Lesvos, all twelve of the Olympian gods were worshiped with the epithets they had in the regions from which, according to tradition, the Aeolians had come to the island. Particular importance was rendered to the Lesbian cult triad, focused on the panlesbian sanctuary at Messa, according to the Lesbian poet Alcaeus. The triad consisted of the deities of "Zeus Antaios", that is the Suppliant. "Aeolian Mistress famed mother of all", who is identified with Hera the patroness "par excellence" of the Aeolian clans and "Kemelian Dionysus, Omophage" who is associated with orgiastic dances, and the consumption of the raw flesh of a savaged animal. Of the three deities, Dionysus seems to have represented the local element, while Hera and Zeus are reminders of the origin of the island's most important clans. Celebrations other than those associated with the Lesbian triad, were held for both Zeus and Dionysus ". (Archontidou, Achilara, 1999).

Thus, since the actual story of the Homeric epics begins at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis with the presence of divine figures, especially goddesses, the follow up of Theophilos of Lesvos in his own "Homeric tour" begins similarly.

Let us recall the story: When for the famous wedding, the goddess of jealousy, hatred and quarrel Eris, did not receive an invitation, she, very angry, threw an all-gold apple between Athena, Hera and Aphrodite. The apple read "to the most beautiful". The three goddesses zealously claimed the apple. The quarrel between them broke out. There was not any "grandeur" at all, even though it was happening at a royal wedding. Even though it involved goddesses. Zeus, wanting to put an end to the unrest that was created, asked Paris, the son of the king of Troy, to give the apple to the most beautiful. The goddesses promised gifts to please the judge, before his judgement. Athena's present was spiritual wisdom. Hera

⁷ 7th century B.C.

⁸ "Messon" also called "Messa" means Middle

guaranteed a throne. And Aphrodite promised to give him as wife the beautiful Helen of Sparta.



Picture 6 - Hera



Picture 7 - Aphrodite

Paris gave the golden apple to Aphrodite and this decision set the path to the beginning of the Trojan War, after Prince Paris' success story of stealing Queen Helen of Sparta and upsetting the entire Panhellenic.

So Theophilos painted the three goddesses, whose acts together with the abduction of Helen, which follows the "crisis of Paris", give the cause for the rise of the Trojan War. It is though very well known, that the fertile lands of Aeolis and the Achaeans' desire to acquire them was the real cause of the War.



Αθηνά και Άρτεμις

Picture 8 – Athena and Artemis

In addition to the three goddesses, Theophilos also paints Artemis, next to Athena. Artemis did not participate in the quarrel, but she is the painter's favorite. Something which is well expected. How could Artemis not be Theophilos' favorite, since his island is all covered by trees, forests and all kinds of vegetation and the goddess herself is the pre-eminent goddess protector of the "wild nature"? Impossible. Artemis has also been painted next to Mars, since the painter often repeats his favorite themes, in various scenes and set ups.

Mars, manned, impetuous and enthusiastic, is beautifully pictured by Theophilos. As a major god, Mars or Aris represents the impulsive nature of war and that is a main issue of the story. Mars was on the side of the Trojans, while Athena favored the Achaeans.

As evidenced by excavations, in Troy or Ilion, the city with the two names and the nine layers, having been built nine times after various disasters, there were brave men and heroes on both sides of the battlefield. Every loss of a man gives emotion and sadness to the public, feeling sympathetic to both the Trojans and the Achaeans. Many writers and scholars have referred to the kinship of these two people, considering and paralleling the religion, language and customs of the warriors. Strabo says: "... when the Trojans came from Crete]".



Picture 9 - Mars and Artemis

Another point of view, from the "Great Encyclopedia of Youth - Haris Patsis" says: "Relatives of those who conquered Greece, were the Trojans, who built and inhabited the sixth in a row Troy. Probably they spoke the same language with others"^[2]. From the most recent excavation, which began in 1988, we know that the layer "Troy VIh" is the one that corresponds to the attack of the 1,187 ships of the Achaeans, dating to around 1300 BC. The upper ancient layer, the "Troy VIIa", corresponds to a later final fall and holocaust, dating to 1190 to 1180 BC.

As if the painter Theofilos knew all this. He painted them alike, having the same uniforms and characteristics in the forms of the two gladiators in front of the Shady Gates of the castle of Troy. Most of the soldiers were standing far away, while Priam, Hecabe and Andromache follow the duel scene, by heart and eye, standing in a distance by the walls.



Picture 10 - The fight by Achilles and Hector

“Humans like lions don’t give oaths of faith,
Like wolves and lamps, they don’t get together,
And they fight only to harm each other
Love oaths don’t have place to me and you
Wishing to feed Mars with blood,
After they take each other’s lives”.⁹

⁹ Iliad, (X, 263-268) from the translated by Psychountakis, G.

Theophilus draws Hector standing on the right side of the picture, showing the lion's head carved on the elaborate side of his shield, while Achilles with the famous heavily ornate shield of the nine concentric circles that Hephaestus forged, is pictured on its left so that only the back of it is visible. So the painter avoids rendering the well-known shield, which would be very difficult to paint the details. The tough battle is underway. Achilles raising his pole is ready to hit Hector in the neck and finally throw him to the ground. The picture in Theophilus mind, probably from grandfather's stories, is very vivid.

A special composition, one of the best of the Homeric inspiration of Theophilus Hadjimichael, is that of Avlis, the place where the Greeks were gathered before their sailing to Troy. Thus, before the story of the Trojan War makes its own progress, before the losses of the warriors begin, before "fair wind" blows to signal the Mycenaean fleet and the ships of other Greek cities start for Troy, her great sacrifice had to be made. She was the daughter of the Supreme Commander Agamemnon of Mycenae. As the prophet priest Kalka's prophesied the wind would blow, only after her superior act. The scene "the sacrifice of Iphigenia" was depicted with much vivacity, many times by Theophilus. There were small variations each time, but always there was the same enthusiasm and fullness in its content.



*Picture 11 - Odysseus bringing Iphigeneia,
Agamemnon's daughter to Kalchas, Apollo's priest in the Sanctuary*

It is possible that people asked Theophilos to paint this scene again and again. But it is also quite certain that the subject of “the sacrifice” gave a special emotion to the painter. Such an atmosphere is created with the composition and the detail of it, as if someone is present at the scene, as if the artist himself has been watching it. The fleet is ready, small animals are going to get aboard, the blind prophet explains the dramatic situation, Artemis’ (Diane) fawn waits patiently by the altar. Odysseus almost holding Iphigenia’s hand while she looks unaware of her situation.



Picture 12 – The Sacrifice of Iphigenia

One of the places where Theophilos painted the "Sacrifice of Iphigenia" is the wall of a cafe in Agiassos, the beautiful mountain village of Lesvos. There, the painter Alekos Fassianos also saw the wall painting and says about it:

“I discovered in a cafe, which had no roof at all, a mural by Theophilos represented the sacrifice of Iphigenia. In blue colors, a nice representation, with the ancient soldiers and Iphigenia being lead to sacrifice. Below the scene, the painter had written: Theophilos Hadjimichael's work. I put a transparent paper on the wall and started copying it, drawing it first. As I was drawing, an old woman came and sat on the cafe's top doorstep and started breaking nuts while eating them. Then I caught up with her and she told me: “I, have met Theophilos. He was short with blue eyes and he spoke with a lisp. He even was limping because some children had pushed him down the stairs and he was hurt. He was filthy and

you couldn't approach him in one meter because he stank. He wore a dirty ancient soldier's skirt, so hard that you could sharpen knives on". Then she told me that he asked Theophilos what he was painting in this mural I copied. And Theophilos told her: "In this work this woman sacrificed her life for the salvation of Greece". Of course, he meant Iphigenia. So, luck favored me. I heard these words from the mouth of this old woman, in the same place where she saw Theophilos painting this great sacrifice. And I was happy, as if I had met Theophilos himself "(Fassianos, 2011).

A similar scenic arrangement has the image inscribed: "Odysseus leading the Daughter of Chrysis, the Priest of God Apollo". Here, the feeling differs though. There is the characteristic movement of the welcoming joy, accompanying the return of the priest's daughter.



Picture 13- Odysseus bringing back the daughter of Chrysis

Among the war spoils, gained after the sieges and conquests in the areas around Troy, seven beautiful women from the island of Lesbos, were enslaved as well. Two of them were renowned: Chryssis, daughter of the Apollonian priest Chrysis, who Agamemnon kept as his concubine, and Vrissyis, held by the conqueror King Achilles, whom he stole from the Temple of Dionysus (Bacchus) in Vrissa¹⁰. When Chryssis' father visited Agamemnon with gifts, begging to get his daughter back, Agamemnon refused and behaved disrespectfully. The priest then asked God to punish Agamemnon. God Apollo threw a plague on the camp.

¹⁰ Place on the island of Lesbos

The oracle said that Chryssyis had to go back home for the plague to stop. Agamemnon was forced to let her return, but he demanded Vrissyis from Achilles. That was one of the reasons which made the young king from Thessaly angry. "Achilles' wrath" is one of the most important episodes of the Iliad epic.

The two women from two distinguished temples in Lesvos, guide us to the appearance of the third person of the Lesbian triad, who is the local god "Vrisaios" Dionysos. Dionysos (Bacchus) is connected, according to archaeological findings, with the village of Vrissa, east of the Gulf of Kalloni.

Another view, which Ioannis-Andreas G. Vlachos supports, says, that Chryssi, the village where the temple of Apollo was, is also geographically located on the island of Lesvos: "And yet, not only there is really a place in Lesvos that can be identified with Homeric Chryssi, but its location and that of ancient Vrissa, are the two parts of the island where people worshiped Apollo in the one and Dionysus in the other. They are located exactly at the same distance from the entrance of the bay of Kalloni. As if these two competing gods had equally shared the control of access to its interior, in the very heart of prehistoric Lesvos", (Vlachos, 2016).



God Dionysus (Bacchus), who was worshiped at the Cape of Vrissa since ancient times, took the names "Vrissagenis" and "Vrisaios", as Stefanos the Byzantine mentions: "I found the ends of Lesvos in which Dionysos Vrisaios is founded".

Picture 14 - «Bacchus God of Wine. God of the Aeoleans», says Theophilos' inscription.

The last image painted by Theophilos, in the Iliad themes, has been inspired by the last day of the war, the blaze and the catastrophe of the City of Troy. It does not show the sunlight and its shadows. It is dark. It depicts the victorious night of the Achaeans which followed a peaceful day. It is the burning and destruction of Troy. The End.

The beautiful City of Troy, famous for its robust walls is pictured in the "Conquest of Troy"

*"It looked like the flames were eating up
The high towers of Troy from bottom to top."¹¹*

It is a multifaceted painting in the dark colors of the night and the brightness of the surrounding fire. Inside the walls, in the center, one can see the Trojan horse, the wooden construction inspired by Odysseus, looking very real as the poor painter from Lesvos has imagined it. The King of Ithaca managed to deceive the Trojans and make them accept it as a gift and a sign of Achaeans' goodwill and their desire for peace. The image has "movement", it shows soldiers running disorderly, the imposing fortification walls and towers of the city, the residential area, bright colors, all in a great detail.



Η ΑΛΩΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΤΡΟΙΑΣ

Picture 15- The Conquest of Troy

After the conquest of Troy by the Achaeans, massacres followed, complete destruction of the city and desecration of the sanctuaries. The gods became very angry and

¹¹ X 409-410, From the ancient text by Maronitis

they were seeking for revenge on many of the Achaean kings. Thus, very few of them managed to continue their lives peacefully in their homelands. Odysseus, the great and resourceful winner, is one of the few. His adventurous trip to his island Ithaca is the theme of *Odyssey*. Painter Theophilos though, has not drawn many scenes out of the *Odyssey* epic. One possible reason for this shortage being his childhood story memories. He was probably more impressed by heroism in the battlefields, and less by the cardinal struggle for survival. Another reason being the place of action, which now is not centered on his home island or near it. So, there is only one painting, from the cave of Cyclops Polyphemus. It depicts the morning when the sheep herd are put out to pasture, departing from the cave. Odysseus escapes tied under a big, fat sheep.



Picture 16 - Odysseus escaping from the cave of Cyclops Polyphemus

So a “different” child from Lesbos, who was called Theophilos Hadjimichael saw Homer’s epics, under the sun and the shadows of light, at great, heroic moments. He painted what he saw. He behaved and remained forever “different”, and some people called him “achmaki”, which means naif. Also an unknown spirit of Greek painting, mentioned by Tsarouchis, the one which mocks and ridicules painters who do not use light and shadow well, loved this child and supported him, while most people constantly teased and made fun him.



Picture 17 - Photograph of Theofilos

“The children at school teased and insulted him. Deep down they felt he was not like them and that annoyed them. It was not long before they came up with his nickname and called him "achmaki", which would mean "naif", "daffy", “goofy” and "slow" (Elytis, 1996).

EPILOGUE - CONCLUSIONS

Although very little educated, he had only gone through Elementary School (Sventzouri), painter Theofilos, seems to have been well acquainted with Homer's literature, by his readings and the stories of his grandfather. Experiential learning has a catalytic effect on his work. Our research has shown that nine of his paintings are related to episodes of the Iliad and the Odyssey, where gods and goddesses are pictured in six of them.

Naked appears his art, emerging from his narration. He becomes a painter out of his enthusiasm for the theme. He does not paint objects, but the enthusiasm they give him. According to Odysseus Elytis (1996): “He remained in history as the virgin student of the senses who gave a visual expression to our true face and managed to arouse the interest of the intellectuals of the time, as a pioneer of this popular naive style”. His full of light paintings show simplicity, wisdom, vivacity and kindness. These were the virtues that accompanied him since the time of his childhood hearings in the fairy tales. He succeeded in gaining the interest

and admiration of important and famous people, even of those holding the Nobel Prize. Poet George Seferis in his speech about "General Makrygiannis" in Alexandria, in 1943, referred to the popular folk painter as an example by saying that "Folk, unformal education not only means to teach people, but also to be taught by them".

In short, the paintings related to Homer's Epics are as follows:

1. Rhapsodist and reading of Homer
2. Sappho with Alcaeus reciting Homer's rhapsodies or her own lyric poems
3. Gods and Goddesses: Hera, Aphrodite, Athina, Artemis, Mars, Dionysus
4. Duel Achilles and Hector face of Shadow Gates of the castle of Troy
5. Odysseus bringing Iphigeneia, Agamemnon's daughter to Kalchas, Apollo's priest in the Sanctuary
6. The Sacrifice of Iphigeneia
7. Odysseus bringing back the daughter of Chryssis, the Priest of God Apollo
8. The Conquest of Troy
9. Odysseus escaping from the cave of Cyclops Polyphemus.

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1. Zemper Alta, District in Italy, 1928 – (detail) (<https://bit.ly/2GXuG4c>)
2. Varia – Mytilene (<http://gym-pamfila.weebly.com/uploads/4/4/9/1/44916201/>)
3. The Sheppard - Athena's and Ulysses meeting (detail) (<https://bit.ly/3isu4Bw>).
4. Rapsodist, Reading Homer (<https://bit.ly/2FAuhnn>)
5. Sappho and Alcaeus (<https://bit.ly/3mkV9sq>)
6. Goddess Hera (<https://bit.ly/3mhglzA>)
7. Venus (<https://bit.ly/3ka6IXd>)
8. Athena and Diane (<https://bit.ly/3isNfuK>)
9. Mars and Artemis (Diane) (<https://bit.ly/3mbsdmK>)
10. The fight by Achilles and Hector (<https://bit.ly/3hs52Rq>)
11. Iphigenia, Ulysses and Kalka 1927 (<https://bit.ly/35wf8i0>)
12. Iphigenia's Sacrifice 1933 (<https://bit.ly/3menYa6>)
13. Book «Theophilos» (inner cover pages), Commercial Bank of Greece Edition - Athens
14. Bachus (<https://bit.ly/3mh8gLp>)
15. The conquest of Troy (<https://bit.ly/2FwV302>)
16. Cyclops Polyphemus checking his sheep (<https://bit.ly/3msfBbc>)
17. Photograph of Theophilos (<https://bit.ly/3mhh5ES>)

All of the above pictures are common property due to the date of death of the artist.