

EROFILI – AN EGYPTIAN SOFONISBA FROM CRETE



By Christian Høgel

The models of Georgios Chortatsis's play Erofili, written around 1590, were to a large extent Italian plays written a few generations earlier. Main plot elements were adopted from the Orbecche (1541) by Giovanni Battista Giraldi, with a tragic love story involving a princess and her secret marriage, whereas two of Chortatsis's choral odes included adapted translations from choral odes from Trissino's Sofonisba (published 1524). It is the aim of the present article to show that Chortatsis's choice of an African scene, Egypt as opposed to Persia in Orbecche, as well as new themes – not least meritocratic values and the social importance of rich and poor – can also be tied to themes in Trissino's historical drama Sofonisba. The present article therefore argues that Chortatsis was inspired by this play not only in the two choral odes, a connection that has been noted in earlier scholarship, but also more generally, in combining the family drama of the Orbecche with more societal values, which Chortatsis may have found inspiration for in Trissino's historical drama.

Introduction

Early modern Cretan theatre has left us three tragedies, of which the *Erofili* (written around 1590, also commonly transliterated as *Erophile*) is the most renowned.¹ It was written by Georgios Chortatsis, from whose hand we also have a pastoral play, *Panoria*, and a comedy, *Katzarapos*, as well as four so-called *intermedia* (interludes), which in certain versions accompany the *Erofili*.² For more than a century, scholars have been identifying the sources of the *Erofili*, primarily showing how Chortatsis and his contemporary

¹ For an overview of the *Erofili*, see Puchner 2017, 123-27 and Αλεξίου 2001, 11-83. On the little we know about the life and position of Georgios Chortatsis, see esp. Savoye 2009, 61-84. The exact date of composition (or staging) of the play is unknown, and the dating by modern scholars fall variously within the 1580s and 1590s, with Αλεξίου 2001, 49-50, opting for the year 1595.

² All these are now available in the edition by Rosemary E. Bancroft-Marcus, with English translation on facing pages, in Chortatsis 2013. On earlier editions, see Savoye 2009, 99-112.

playwrights heavily depended on the new Italian plays that since the first decades of the 1500s had been highly successful also elsewhere outside Italy.³ The island of Crete was at the time closely tied to the Italian sphere for it had been under Venetian rule ever since the fourth crusade in the early thirteenth century.⁴ Whereas administration worked through a combination of Greek and Italian, the theatrical stage of Crete was in Greek, in fact in the commonly spoken local Cretan dialect.⁵ Being to some degree free adaptations of Italian plays, and reflecting common motifs from Italian theatre, the Cretan plays mirrored plots, genre discussions, and even ideological stances coming from Italian theatre, sometimes downplaying controversial themes, in other cases further elaborating these.⁶ It is the aim of the present paper to give a more politically observant interpretation of the *Erofilí* than is normally given, primarily based on how Chortatsis chose to employ not only Giovanni Battista Giraldi's *Orbecche* (1541) as his primary model, but also to find inspiration in various aspects taken from Trissino's *Sofonisba* (first printed 1524).⁷ Former studies have shown how Chortatsis's *Erofilí* also reflected social or political problems through its presentation of a past Golden Age, without wars and prideful rulers and in which not least women were free to choose whom to marry. These ideas had been stated forcefully not long before Chortatsis's play in the *Aminta* (published 1580) by Tasso.⁸ But Chortatsis extended this notion of a Golden Age and combined elements into an even more societal drama. By including themes and elements stemming from the historical drama of *Sofonisba*, set in the proximity of ancient Carthage and drawing on ancient historical sources, Chortatsis converted the plot of the *Orbecche* – staged in an exotic and perverted faraway world – into an *Erofilí* engaged in issues of moral rectitude and in questions involving rich and poor, as well as social values such as fair reward for one's good deeds. In the end, the *Erofilí*, still a play on love, staged in a not-so-distant Egyptian setting, will in this light appear to be discussing meritocratic values and perhaps even including some notion of contemporary Ottoman Egypt. Drawing attention to these aspects of Chortatsis's play may further involve Cretan drama in

³ On Cretan drama, see Puchner 1991; Puchner 2017, esp. ch. 3 “Re-Inventing Theater: Renaissance and Baroque Crete under Venetian Rule (1500s–1600s)”; and Puchner 2018.

⁴ Maltezou 1991, Δετοράκης 1986.

⁵ On the linguistic and cultural mix, see Maltezou 1991, 32-35.

⁶ See esp. the study by Paschalis, primarily analysing Chortatsis' *intermedia* (interludes), Πασχάλης 2011a.

⁷ Edition of the *Orbecche*, with facing French translation, is found in Giraldi Cinzio 2018. Giraldi's name was Giovanni Battista Giraldi, to which he appended the nickname Cinzio (variously spelled); modern references shift between Giraldi and Cinzio.

⁸ Analysed in Πασχάλης 2011b, 353-57.

discussions of developments that European drama underwent in the age of the Counter-Reformation and Ottoman threat.

The plot: from Giraldis' *Orbecche* to Chortatsis's *Erofilí*

First, a small recap of the storyline in the *Erofilí* of Chortatsis. The plot of the *Erofilí* follows that of Giraldis' *Orbecche*, but with some important deviations.⁹ Also in the Greek play, we have a princess, Erofilí, now daughter of an Egyptian king of Memphis, who has secretly married her childhood friend, Panaretos. Panaretos – also a prince it turns out towards the end of the play – has been living at the Memphis court since early childhood, and as general of the king he has accomplished important victories over neighbouring enemies from Persia and a “Kingdom of the East”.¹⁰ But at the beginning of the play, he is now caught in an insecure position, having secretly married the king's daughter, without the king's knowledge. A joint delegation from those very countries that Panaretos fought against now arrives, with a marriage offer to Erofilí: She is free to marry either of the two princes from the enemy countries. Caught up in this constraint of royal marriages, Erofilí confesses her love for Panaretos to her nanny, whereas Panaretos finds a trustful ear with his friend Karpophoros, but to no avail. At a later stage in the drama, the ghost of the dead brother of the king appears on stage, announcing that revenge is imminent. For the king had, in order to rise to power, killed this brother as well as two nephews, and married the sister-in-law. She is the mother of Erofilí, and we now see what dreadful family horror lies behind her birth. Receiving reports about the relationship between Erofilí and Panaretos, the king is enraged. His advisor and Erofilí attempt to assuage him, but though seemingly softened, he has Panaretos caught, tortured, and executed. In the final scene, quite closely mirroring the fate of *Orbecche*, the king, father of Erofilí, offers her what he presents as a wedding gift, but which turns out to be the head, hand, and heart of the dismembered Panaretos in a bowl. In horror, Erofilí commits suicide but unlike *Orbecche*, who kills her father before her suicide, it is the chorus of local maidens who at the end of the *Erofilí* kill the king, after a maiden of the chorus has made him trip by pretending to want to kiss his feet.

As we see, this plot in many ways follows that of Giraldis' *Orbecche*, a fact that was noticed already in 1870.¹¹ Some important differences, however, set the two plots apart. As noted already, in the *Erofilí* it is the chorus – not the protagonist Erofilí – who at the end kills the king (and father). Furthermore, the whole tragic family story is in certain ways simplified in the

⁹ On this, see Πασχάλης 2008; Savoye 2009, 443-69.

¹⁰ τὸ βασιλιὸ τσ' Ἀνατολῆς, II.384.

¹¹ In an article by C. Bursian, see Πασχάλης 2008, 265-66.

Erofilí when compared to the Italian model. In the Italian play, Orbecche's father had, as background to the drama on stage, not killed his brother but his wife and oldest son, due to their incestuous relation, and in this play it is therefore the ghost of the killed wife, Orbecche's mother, who appears on stage to enact revenge. And her culprit is not primarily her husband but her daughter, Orbecche, who had revealed the incestuous connection and thereby set in motion the retribution of the husband/father. The sequence of some of these elements also come in a different order in the *Erofilí*, where the ghost of the murdered brother appears in act three (III.243-332; with a final curse III.361-72), whereas the murdered wife appears already in act one (I.131-219) of the *Orbecche*. The role of the counsellors/confidants of the protagonists is also remodelled, and, more importantly, Panaretos, the secret husband of *Erofilí*, now plays a much more prominent role in the *Erofilí* than does his model character, Oronte, in the *Orbecche*.

If we look alone at these changes, we may state that Chortatsis has mainly downplayed the perverted family relations, changing the incestuous story by Geraldí into a more dynastic story in the *Erofilí*. It is out of dynastic ambitions that Philogonos, the king and father of *Erofilí*, has killed his brother and nephews. Dynastic ambitions, of course, also played a role in the *Orbecche*, not least in the king's wish to have his daughter married to an enemy prince – which is closely paralleled in the *Erofilí* – but in the *Orbecche* the king also kills the two children that Orbecche has secretly given birth to (in the *Erofilí*, the young couple have produced no children); and the final execution of Oronte/Panaretos comes with different connotations in the two plays. In the *Orbecche*, king Sulmone's execution of Oronte may be seen as yet another act of destruction directed towards his own family, a kind of self-destruction in terms of procreation, whereas Philogonos in the *Erofilí*, has Panaretos butchered as a general, who has first of all proved disloyal in a courtly-societal way by falling in love with and secretly marrying his daughter.¹²

This very aspect of incest/family destruction (*Orbecche*) as opposed to disloyalty with catastrophic implications for the family (*Erofilí*) is a central divide between the two plays, and in studying and analysing the way that Chortatsis reshaped his main model – the *Orbecche* – into a new dramatic play, it becomes clear that he not only worked away from incest but also towards more societal and political aspects. The main theme of love is retained, but the new thematic twists of Chortatsis made the *Erofilí* a more socially engaged play, with some broad themes about societal merits (or even meritocracy), about rich and poor, but also – as we shall see – about the

¹² On the *Erofilí* as primarily a play on love involved in marriage politics, see Markaki 2015.

geographical placement of Crete in a larger context. The figure of Panaretos – whose speaking name means ‘all-virtuous’ or ‘completely virtuous’ – is the main carrier of the meritocratic theme, being a military man who has made his way up to the highest military position of general solely through his martial deeds. And as a model of virtue, he feels most guilty about his one and only fault: He has fallen in love and married the king’s daughter without the king’s knowing. The young couple are both keenly aware of this trespassing, but no incestuous past or hidden children burden their conscience. It is only love that has a hard time in the kingdom of Philogonos, reflected in the dynastic killings that paved the way for his rise to power and in the name of his daughter, Ero-fili, ‘lover of love’, whose tragic end we are to encounter. Here we may also deliberate on the king’s name, for Philogonos means ‘lover of offspring’. Is this an ironic/sarcastic denomination of a father who is not able to accept love even when it concerns his daughter? Or does the name carry tragic implications by indicating a person who is so concerned with dynastic matters – including securing the kingdom for himself through his own marriage to his sister-in-law and the diplomatically arranged marriage of his daughter in the hope of legitimate offspring – that he in the end precludes the success of just that? No easy answer offers itself for this.

But when searching for the models of these dynastic/meritocratic themes in Chortatsis’s play and for the geographical reorientation, it turns out – as we shall see – that this is largely due to the inspiration that Chortatsis found in Trissino’s tragedy *Sofonisba*.¹³ This play, whose tragic protagonist also gives the play its title, stages a clearly political complication behind the tragic end of its heroine. Based on the historical accounts of Roman authors such as Livy (and possibly also that of Greek historiographers), the story of Sofonisba as told by Trissino depicts her as caught up in shifting allegiances that involve highly placed persons in Carthage just as the Romans, led by the Roman general Scipio, are approaching to conquer the city.¹⁴ Sofonisba, after being betrothed to one local leader, is forced to marry another, and falls victim to these complications of political and military loyalty. The situation of *Sofonisba* is therefore quite different – both dramatically and in terms of a clear historical setting, based on ancient sources – than that of *Erofilí*, and yet there are some resemblances that may also contribute to explaining why Chortatsis chose to translate and adapt large parts of two choral songs from Trissino’s *Sofonisba* as well as a number of other features into his *Erofilí*. We shall first explore the choral adaptations from Trissino’s *Sofonisba* into

¹³ The edition of the *Sofonisba* used here is Trissino 1975.

¹⁴ Corrigan 1975, 8-15.

Chortatsis's *Erofilí*, before looking into some more general resemblances, namely the geographical setting and the theme of meritocracy.

The choruses of the *Erofilí*

As noted already early by scholars, Chortatsis's *Erofilí* only finds inspiration in the choruses of *Orbecche* in the loosest sense.¹⁵ Whereas much of the plot and the dramatic themes and events find close parallels in Giraldi's *Orbecche*, Chortatsis hardly took the choral songs of his Italian model into consideration and instead constructed wholly new and different choral songs for his *Erofilí*. Here inspiration comes from elsewhere, and at least two of these choral songs have passages that are fairly close translations of parts of choral songs from Trissino's *Sophonisba*, with additions.¹⁶

The choral song at the end of act one in the *Erofilí*, in the beginning listing the power and achievements of Eros, almost directly reproduces Trissino's choral song at the end of act three (v. 1417-49).¹⁷ As noted above, the love motive is stronger in the plot of *Erofilí* than in the *Orbecche*, and a choral song of love of course does much to enhance the speaking name of *Erofilí*. But the first choral song in *Orbecche* (I.220-87) was actually already a love song, a chorus's prayer directed to Venus, including what amounts to a creation story of all that nature consists of, but finally mentioning "the two poor lovers" (*questi due miseri amanti* I.276), who "burn with your flame" (*ardon de la tua fiamma* I.278). Chortatsis clearly saw no attraction in taking this as inspiration, but choosing to make his chorus sing of the same theme he instead looked to a choral song from Trissino's *Sophonisba* as model. The close verbal resemblance between Trissino's Italian original and Chortatsis's Greek was studied by Pecoraro, showing that the 32 verses of Trissino (1417-49) have evolved into 46 verses in Chortatsis's play (I.585-631). In his choral song, Trissino is much more attentive to the world of human love than was Giraldi, and this must have been what made Chortatsis turn to his text as a model. But Chortatsis enhances the love theme further by adding verses on pagan Zeus and how the arrows of Eros reach even him (I.603-7), as well as on the working of nature and how also this depends on the power of Eros

¹⁵ Pecoraro 1969 gives an overview, much more in detail in Πασχάλης 2011b, 343-48.

¹⁶ See Pecoraro 1969, who presents the Italian and Greek texts in parallel columns, and Πασχάλης 2011b, who underlines the importance of transition from a chorus with little dramatic involvement in Giraldi (based on the Senecan tradition) to a much more involved chorus in Chortatsis, 343-349. I here follow the act division normally found in the editions of Trissino's *Sophonisba*. In the edition of Corrigan (1975), the division diverges from this, but the verse numbers are the same.

¹⁷ The closest analysis of this choral song is found in Πασχάλης 2011b, 349-51. See also Pecoraro 1969, 374-75, who also notes the Sophoclean loans, which thus went via Italian translations back into the Greek drama of Chortatsis; see also Πασχάλης 2011b, 343-45.

(I.611-15). So, instead of Giraldi's *amor* involved in controlling all natural developments, Chortatsis – on the basis of Trissino – presents an *Erotas* (Eros) in full command of human and even divine desire. And the brief second expansion in Chortatsis' text, which inserts a description of Eros's control of nature, may be seen as retaining just a bit of the original idea from Giraldi's choral song in *Orbecche*. After this passage where Chortatsis closely follows Trissino (from v. 1450 in *Sofonisba*, I.631 in *Erofilí*), the two choruses diverge, that of Trissino wishing well for Sofonisba, that of Chortatsis uttering prayers for Panaretos, that he may keep his secret wife (Erofilí), and expressing its (unfounded, it turns out) dread that Erofilí may accept marriage proposals from foreign princes. In the end, in finding inspiration in Trissino's *Sofonisba*, the choral song of Chortatsis further stresses the theme of love, gently redirecting our attention to the male lover, Panaretos. Chortatsis thus makes us aware of the attention we need to pay to Panaretos as an important figure.

A similar reuse of material from a choral song from Trissino's *Sofonisba* comes in the fourth choral song of Chortatsis's *Erofilí*.¹⁸ If compared, the two choral songs have the same theme, with both choruses directing prayers to the Sun, who seem to be thought of as a sort of pagan god, as the deities addressed in several other choral songs. But whereas Trissino has his chorus sing of the Sun (v. 596ff.) in attempt to encompass the dire worries after Massinissa's promise to Sofonisba of not handing her over to the Romans, Chortatsis has his choir pray to the Sun while the catastrophe is taking place. Chortatsis's choral song to the Sun comes at a late stage in the drama: Panaretos has just, in vain, tried to convince the king of his loyalty and of his royal and therefore equal origin, and he is subsequently (during the choral song) executed in his cell. This we discover after the choral song, with the arrival of the messenger who offers us the details of the gruesome execution. In the *Sofonisba* the Sun was addressed because he sees and knows everything, including the sentiments of the chorus: "Tu sai con qual dolore/D'un mal ne l'altro varco" (v. 612-13), (You know with which pain I pass from one misfortune to the next).¹⁹ And at the same time past and future suffering is described and announced. In the choral song of Chortatsis's *Erofilí*, the reason for addressing the Sun is to ask him to lower his light and stop the king's killing:

Ἥλιε-μου, το λοιπό, στα κλάηματά-μας
λυπητερό το φώς-σου ας σκοτεινιάσει,
γη εις άλλα μέρη στείλε-το μακρά-μας.

¹⁸ Again, the closest analysis is found in Πασχάλης 2011b, 351-53.

¹⁹ All English translations of Trissino's *Sofonisba* are mine.

Νέφος σκοτεινιασμένο ας σε σκεπάσει,
κι αστροπελέκι ας πέσει θυμωμένο,
και τούτο το παλάτιν ας χαλάσει. (Chortatsis, *Erofilí*, IV.109-20)

Therefore, O Sun, at these our cries,
Darken your light in sympathy,
Or send it to remoter regions.
May pitch-black clouds obscure your face;
Let fall an angry thunderbolt
To strike this Palace, and destroy it! (trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

As we see, Chortatsis's chorus implicates the Sun as a possible agent in the plot, being no longer just a witness but a possible helper (in allowing no light into the palace) and avenger (in letting a thunderbolt come instead and destroy the palace). In these reuses from Trissino's play, we see Chortatsis as an able redactor, transposing textual elements from one section to another, to enhance dramatic effects.

The two choral songs are the only parts of Trissino's drama that Chortatsis reused in this manner, obvious to a person who has read or seen the two plays. Chortatsis may have counted on the ability to discern this from certain people in the audience, but it seems safe to conclude that he was primarily searching for dramatic effects noticeable to all. And here the choral songs in Giraldi's *Orbecche*, his prime model for the plot, did not serve his purpose, and instead, as we have seen, Trissino offered useful material for two of his choral songs. But, as we will show now, more inspiration came from Trissino's play, though in less obvious ways. These concern the geographical setting and certain societal themes of the *Erofilí*.

The geographical setting of Chortatsis's *Erofilí*

At first view, the *Erofilí* follows the central plot elements of the *Orbecche*, its main model, and is similarly set in a foreign and somewhat timeless kingdom, *Orbecche* in Persia, *Erofilí* in Egypt. Neither ruling kings nor any other information from the texts allows us to infer any known reign or historical period as the setting of either play, though references to pagan gods possibly backdate the presented events in both dramas to some remote ancient past. In terms of geography, however, there is a difference. The prologue in Giraldi's *Orbecche*, speaking on behalf of the poet, reveals his intention of transporting the audience to Susa in Persia:

Vi troverete in uno instante, in Susa,
Città nobile di Persia, antica stanza
Già di felici Re, com' hor d'affanno
Et di calamitadi è crudo albergo. (Giraldi, *Orbecche*, v. 65-68)

In an instance, you will find yourselves in Susa,
the noble city of Persia, the ancient dwelling
until now of Kings, but from now on it is
the cruel home of worries and sorrows.²⁰

After offering glimpses of the city of Susa and rhetorically asking the audience why they do not avoid this horrible place, the speaker of the prologue then reveals that the audience, whether they want it or not, are now there, in Susa, and adds that the return to get back home will be long:

Egli è pur vero, et già ne sete in Susa,
Et nel tornar v'accorgerete bene
Quanti mar, quanti monti, et quanti fiumi
Havarete à varcar, prima che giunti
Ne siate tutti à la cittade vostra.
Che non vi farà agevole la via
Il poeta al tornar, com' hora ha fatto. (Giraldi, *Orbecche*, v. 80-86)

But it is true, you are now in Susa,
and at your return you will well realise
how many seas, how many mountains, and how many rivers,
you will have to cross before
you are all back in your city.
But the poet will not make the return
an easy travel, as he has done now.

So, the poet, dwelling on how the audience enters his fictitious scene, insists that the place is distant and difficult to return from. He does so just before seeing, as he says himself, the goddess of revenge, Nemesis, approaching, and passes the word to her. In Chortatsis's Greek play, the poet's prologue and the horrible divinity of fate have merged into one person, Charos, personified Death.²¹ Also he tells the audience of how they will be transported to Memphis in Egypt:

Λύπη ανιμένετε λοιπό να πάρετε όλοι τώρα,
με δάκρυα να γυρίσετε στην εδική-σας χώρα·
λέγω στη χώρα-σας, γιατί δεν είστε, ωσά θαρρείτε,
στην Κρήτη πλιο, μα τσ' Αίγυπτος τώρα τη γή πατείτε.
Τουτή 'ναι η Μέμφη η ξακουστή, τόσα νοματισμένη
για τς άξες-τη Πυράμιδες σ' όλη την Οικουμένη·
κι εδώ ξαφνίδια νά 'ρθετε σας έκαμεν η χάρη
του Ζευς, ξομπλι πασέννας-σας για να μπορεί να πάρει
στις έξοδες του Φιλόγονου, περίσσα να φαβάται

²⁰ All English translations of Giraldi's *Orbecche* are mine.

²¹ On the prologues, see Πασχάλης 2008, 269-70; Savoye 2009, 175-234.

τ' άδικο· κι όσο δύνεστε πάντοτε να μισάτε
μεγάλοι ν' απομένετε με των αλλώ τον κόπο,
βλέποντας την ασυστασά τση τύχης των ανθρώπω!

(Chortatsis, *Erofilí*, Prologue v. 109-20)

Prepare, then, to feel pity, all of you,
And to return with tears to your own country.
I say this, for you're not, as you suppose,
In Crete now, but you tread the earth of Egypt.
This is the famous Memphis, so renowned
For her great Pyramids throughout Creation;
And you've been suddenly transported here
By grace of Zeus, to witness the misfortunes
Of king Philogonos, and to be warned
By his example to abhor injustice,
That is, becoming great by others' toil,
Seeing how fluctuating are men's fortunes.

(trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

Closely copying the idea of Giraldi's prologue, a similar kind of transportation of the audience is now also taking place in Chortatsis's, now announced more grimly by Charos (Death). But the place of arrival is no longer described as distant, for no mention is made of the difficult home journey, or of the seas, mountains, and rivers that separates home and the setting of the play. Instead, we soon hear of the king of the country, Philogonos, and are told to avoid his vice, that of taking advantage of others' effort: "να μισάτε / μεγάλοι ν' απομένετε με των αλλώ τον κόπο" (v. 119-20; to abhor injustice / That is, becoming great by others' toil). Already here we hear a first announcement of the theme of right reward for good deeds, to which we shall return below.

But comparing the two "transportations" of the audience, we noticed that Chortatsis made the distance substantially shorter. Giraldi's *Orbecche* was set in faraway Persia. Travelling to Persia from Italy would involve a long land journey or crossing both sea and land, and Italian involvement with contemporaneous (Safavid) Persia was not very extensive.²² From the Cretan perspective of Chortatsis, however, Egypt was not far away. From Crete, it is among the closest mainland areas (together with modern-day Greece, Turkey, and Libya), and trade and other communication with Egypt was extensive.²³

²² Those Italian most likely to have Safavid contacts would probably be Venetians, see Guliyev 2022, 3-4, stressing trade and diplomatic relations.

²³ On Cretan trade with Egypt, see Maltezou 1991, 29-32. Maltezou (p. 31) describes Crete as a "transit station for Venetian trade ... for the East", also exporting local wood-carvings for Cairo and Sinai. On the export of manuscripts, see surprising number of liturgical books, produced in Crete and ending up in Sinai, in the list in Troelsgård 2021, 71.

Furthermore, an Egyptian setting could easily have made a local Cretan audience think of recent wars fought with the Ottomans, the fourth Veneto-Turkish war (1570-71), with atrocities also witnessed on the island of Crete, being fresh in mind.²⁴ Such recollections could in no way arise in the minds of an Italian audience, when hearing of Persia. This shift from distant, exotic, and incestuous Persia to a more politically unruly Egypt opens up for a reading of the Cretan play as also involving a political dimension. But before expanding on this, we will have a look at some echoes in the *Erofilí* from Trissino's *Sofonisba*, again based on the impression of how Chortatsis turned the features he found in Giraldi's *Orbecche* into a play with a very different thematic orientation.

In Giraldi's play, the suitor of Orbecche was Selim, king of the Parthians (*Orbecche* II.61-62). In Chortatsis's play, Erofilí is courted by two princes, one a son of the king of Persia (a possible reference to the homeland of Orbecche) and the other a son of the less identifiable "Eastern Kingdom". So, while suitors to Erofilí may come from as far away as does Orbecche, all the local characters of our *Erofilí* are in fact relatively close in terms of geography to Chortatsis's Crete, and they in fact all have Greek names. And while the beloved of Orbecche, Oronte, is an Armenian prince, as we discover during the play, Erofilí's secret husband, Panaretos, turns out to be prince of Tzirtza (Τζίρτζα; *Erofilí*, I.154 and IV.676). This geographic denomination has not previously been securely identified, though it has been suggested that it refers to Georgia.²⁵ Much more likely, however, is the possibility that Chortatsis is here sticking to an African geography and reusing the stage location of Trissino's *Sophonisba*. By Tzirtza Chortatsis is probably referring to the city of Cirta, capital of the ancient kingdom of Numidia, in Trissino's Italian referred to as Cirta first time in v. 17 of the play.²⁶ Greek Tzirtza (or Tsertsá) comes close to reproducing the sound of Italian Cirta and may, in fact, reflect a local pronunciation. If this identification is accepted – and I see no other obvious solution – Chortatsis chose to include a reference to the homeland of Sofonisba and to the setting of the *Sophonisba*. It is as if Chortatsis, through geographical references, is creating a composite African world and bridging between Trissino's *Sophonisba* and his own complete retake of the plotline of Giraldi's *Orbecche*.

²⁴ Maltezou 1991, 18.

²⁵ Savoye 2009, 116.

²⁶ In the edition of the Greek text by Αλεξίου & Αποσκήτη 2001, I.152 and IV.676 (reprinted in Savoye 2009, 363-901), the name is spelled differently but still very close to the Italian Cirta: Τσέρτσα. I have unfortunately not had access to any of the two manuscripts of the *Erofilí* written in Latin characters: Athens, Historical and Ethnological Society Θ 62 [16] and Birmingham University Library ms 742, see Lampaki 2014.

And more references to Trissino's African setting may actually be found in Chortatsis's play. Already in the prologue to the *Erofilí*, Charos mentions Carthage among the glorious cities of the golden past, with no other apparent aim than to widen the geographical scope of his argument about the fall of cities that were once glorious:

Πού 'ν των Ελλήνων οι βασιλείες; Πού 'ν τω Ρωμιών οι τόσες
πλούσες και μπορεζάμενες χώρες; Πού 'ν τόσες γνώσες
και τέχνες; Πού 'ναι οι δόξες-τως; Πού σήμερα είναι εκείνες
στ' άρματα κι εις τά γράμματα οι ξακουστές Αθήνες;
Πού 'ναι η Καρτάγω η δυνατή, κι οι πολεμάρχοι οι άξιοι
τση Ρώμης; Πού 'ν τα κέρδητα τά 'χασιν αποτάξει;

(*Erofilí*, prologue, v. 23-28)

Where are the kingdoms of the Greeks, the rich
and great Byzantine towns, with all their knowledge
And skills? Where is their glory? Where, today,
Is Athens, once renowned for arms and letters?
Where's mighty Carthage? Where, the doughty lords
Of Roman wars? Where are the spoils they garnered?

(trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

Charos takes the responsibility, or in fact the honour, for the downfall of all these cities. But his list of great places is intriguing. Greek and Byzantine (or *Romios*, in the original) points to Chortatsis's own sphere, whereas Rome and Carthage do not really belong here or in the setting of the play in a narrow sense. But Chortatsis is transporting the plot of the *Orbecche* from a distant realm to his closer and more familiar setting of *Erofilí* in Egypt. He is thinking in terms of a (North-)African setting, and Carthage (referred to in its Latinized form, not with the traditional Greek name form, *Karchedon*) fits his image. His *Erofilí* is transposed to a setting similar to that of Trissino's *Sofonisba*, from which it is now borrowing a North-African geography, both in using Cirta as place of origin of Panaretos and in mentioning Carthage – and of course in placing the whole drama in Egypt.

It therefore seems reasonable to argue that Chortatsis found inspiration for his African setting of the *Erofilí* in Trissino's *Sofonisba*, though Chortatsis never reaches Trissino's level of African self-conscience. In v. 320 of Trissino's play, Sofonisba speaks of *il mio terreno* "my land", and in v. 412-13 she proclaims that, as a Carthaginian, she prefers to become the wife *D'un nostro, nato in Africa, com'io / Che d'un esterno, nato in altra parte* (of one of ours, born in Africa like myself, rather than a foreigner, born somewhere else). Chortatsis did not go as far as to include such expressions of national pride, but he did work on making the society of his play have a societal or even political aspect. Such attention to politics can of course have come from

many places, from the possible administrative profession of Chortatsis, from local discussions, and from reading other literature with a political aim.²⁷ Important aspects of these he drew from contemporary discussions in Italy about the place of desire within society. In some passages, Chortatsis clearly drew on Tasso's *Aminta*, in arguing that at least in a past (and ideal) Golden Age, women had been free to choose whom to marry.²⁸ This is in a sense the core dramatic issue in the *Erofilí*, and the reference to the Golden Age, the theme of the choral song at the end of act two, thus presents an ideal past in marked opposition to what is going to happen to Erofilí and Panaretos. Still, Chortatsis took these images of a just and ideal past further and introduced a more developed idea of justice, involving meritocratic values. He thereby suggested additional values needed for a fair functioning of society, and presents it as something that has been functioning in the Egypt of king Philogonos. In his kingdom, even a foreigner as Panaretos has actually been able to make a career, to enjoy – as we shall see – the fair recompense for his contributions to upholding society.

Social values and meritocracy: from *Sofonisba* to *Erofilí*

A central theme that comes up in the *Erofilí* is a sort of meritocracy, or at least some voices in the drama declare that those who serve the state or kingdom are – or should be – well rewarded. First to introduce the theme is Karpophoros, the trusted friend of Panaretos. Also his name is a speaking name, Karpo-phoros meaning ‘fruit-bearing’ or ‘reward-bringing’. In his first speech, which Panaretos eavesdrops on, he states:

Τῶν ἀρετῶ τὰ παρὶκά παντὰ ἔναι μυρισμένα.
κι ὅλοι οἱ ἀθρώποι τὰ ἔχουσι πολλὰ πεθυμημένα.
Δεν εἶν κιανεῖς νὰ μην ποθεῖ νὰ ἔχει τιμές και πλούτη,
κι ἀπ' ὅλους μεγαλύτερος νὰ ἔναι στην Γῆν ετούτη.
Μα μόνο με την πεθυμιά μηδεκιανεῖς δε φτάνει
ἔς τόπο μεγάλο και ψηλό τα πόδια-του νὰ βάνει·
μα εἶναι μεσίτης τση τιμῆς η προθυμιά και οἱ κόποι,
κι ὄχι ποτέ το Ριζικό, σαν κρίνουν οἱ ἀθρώποι.
Τον Ἥλιο και τον Ορανό, τ' ἀστρη και το φεγγάρι,
τη γῆ, τ' ἀγέρι, το γιालό, μας ἔδωκεν η χάρη
του Ζεύς κοινά, κι ὅποιος κοπιά και εἰς το καλό σπουδάξει,
τον εμαυτό-ντου σε τιμές και δόξες ανεβάζει·

²⁷ On Chortatsis's identity and possible profession, see Αλεξίου 2001, 40-50.

²⁸ Πασχάλης 2011b, 353-57. Paschalis furthermore shows how the debate involves the new genre of tragicomedy, which Chortatsis also contributed to with his *Panoria*, in which close textual parallels concerning a Golden Age may be found. Paschalis also believes that Chortatsis drew for his *Erofilí* on the *Pastor fido* (1590) by Guarini, but this depends on a late (but possible) dating of the *Erofilí*.

και πάλι, αφού `ναι ανάμελος δεν πρέπει ν' ανιμένει
παρά απου πάντα από κακό `ς χειρότερο να πηαίνει!

(*Erofilí*, I.41-54)

The fruits of virtue breathe so sweet a scent
That all men are desirous to possess them.
No man does not have dreams of rank and wealth,
Of being of all men on Earth the greatest.
But no one can contrive, by mere desire,
To step into a great and high position;
For honour's agents are hard work and zeal,
Not Destiny alone, as men would have it.
The sun, the firmament, the stars and moon,
The earth, the air, the sea, we hold in common
By gracious gift of Zeus, and he who works
And strives for good, will rise in rank and honour;
Whereas the lazy cannot hope for much,
except to go from bad to worse forever! (trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

The words of Karpophoros ring somewhat naïve, given the fate of Panaretos that we are about to witness. But they do seem to reflect how things have been in the kingdom until now. Everybody seeks virtues (*aretō*), says Karpophoros (thus reflecting on the name of Pan-*aretos*), but also rank and wealth. And for the latter, hard work and zeal (*kopoi*, *prothymia*) are needed. In fact, Karpophoros can summarise his meritocratic views in this way (v. 51-52): κι όποιος κοπιά κι εις το καλό σπουδάξει, / τον εμαυτό-ντου σε τιμές και δόξεις ανεβάξει (he who works / And strives for good, will rise in rank and honour). And shortly after, he points out Panaretos as a prime example:

Τούτο το λέγω μοναχάς, γιατί κρατούσιν άλλοι,
βλέποντας τον Πανάρετο `ς τόσην τιμή μεγάλη,
πως Μοίρα τον επήλωσε, κι όχι οι καλές-του διάξεις,
κι οι κόποι-του οι καθημερινοί, κι οι αρετές-του οι άξεις.
Στο σπίτι τοι εγύρεψα, κι έμαθα, πρίχου αρχίσει
Άυγερινός τσ' Ανατολής τα μέρη να στολίσει,
με προθυμιά εσηκώθηκε, σαν έ συνηθισμένος
κι εις τ' Αφεντός τη δούλεψην ένα κατεβασμένος. (*Erofilí*, I.57-64)

I make this point because some people think,
Seeing Panaretos so greatly honoured,
That Fortune raised him, not his sterling deeds,
His constant labours, and his worthy virtues.
Asking for him at home, I learnt he rose
Before the East was brightened by the Day-star,
And eagerly went down, as is his wont,
To set about the service of his master. (trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

Some are jealous of Panaretos's rise to glory, but Karpophoros argues that his success is purely the result of the recognition of his achievements. This thematic concern with what we could call a fair reward, or meritocracy, does not come out of Chortatsis's prime model, Giraldis *Orbecche*. As stated above, there may be other sources for it, but at least an important trait of the theme grows out of dialogues in Trissino's *Sofonisba*. In a dialogue between Sofonisba and her foster-sister, Erminia, it becomes clear how Sofonisba is of high social standing, whereas Erminia is of low. And yet they are like sisters and deeply care for each other. Sofonisba even expresses a wish that she had been like Erminia:

O che felice stato
E 'l tuo; che quello i' chiamo esser felice,
Che vive quieto senz'alcuna alteza. (Trissino, *Sofonisba*, v. 134-36)

O the happy state
is yours, for that person I call happy
who lives quietly without any highness.

Later Erminia explains how good and bad fortune are blended by the Creator:

Di quell sommo fattor che 'l ciel governa,
Appresso ciascun piede un vaso surge,
L'un pien di male, e l'altro pien di bene,
E d'indi or gioja, or pene
Trae mescolando insieme, e a noi le porge.
(Trissino, *Sofonisba*, v. 156-60)

a vessel arises at each foot
of that supreme Creator who governs heaven,
one full of evil, and the other full of good,
and now from joy, now from pain he takes
mixing together, and hands them to us.

It is clear that Chortatsis found inspiration in this passage for composing the words of king Philogonos's counsellor in the *Erofilí*:

Μ' απείτις κάποιο Ριζικό τον κόσμο ανεκατώνει,
και πλούσιους ρίχνει χαμηλά κι ανήμπορους σηκώνει,
δεν πρέπει, πρίχου δει κιανεις το τέλος, να παινεσει
στις αρχές ποτέ καλομοιριά τ' ανθρώπου, γη στη μέση·
γιατι όσο πλιά τονε θωρεί στα ύψη πως καθίζει
τση Τύχης, και με την κορφή στον Ορανό πως γγίζει,
τόσα θα γδέχεται να δει πεσμένη την τιμήν-ντου,
κι οπού 'σανε τα πόδια-του, ριμμένη την κορφή-ντου·
κι όσο τονε στοχάζεται βασανισμένο πάλι
με πλήσαν κακοριζικιά και με φτωχειά μεγάλη,
θέλει ν' ολπίζει σε ψηλό σκαλέρι καθισμένο

να τονε δεί, χαιράμενο και κάλοκαρδισμένο. (*Erofilí*, I.567-78)

But since Fate mixes up the social ranks,
Casting the wealthy down, raising the humble,
No one, before he sees the end, should praise
A man's good fortune at its start or middle;
Because the higher we now see him sit
On Fortune's wheel, his head touching the Heavens,
The lower should we soon expect to see
Him fall head over heels, sunk and dishonoured!
And then again, the more we see him racked
With grinding poverty and deep misfortune,
The sooner should we hope to see him perched
Upon a lofty seat, thriving and cheerful.

(trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

It is likely that the quoted passages from Trissino were in the mind of Chortatsis when writing his text, even if similar expressions are commonly in descriptions of the trickeries of fate. At least the Creator's mixing of evil and good (*mescolando insieme* v. 160) of the *Sophonisba* strongly resembles Fate's mixing of social ranks in the *Erofilí* (Ριζικό του κόσμου ανεκατώνει I.567). But it is Chortatsis's own initiative to combine this description of uncertain fate with the issue of poverty and richness. And this thematic blending of the general machinations of fate with the more specific of poverty and low origin (in opposition to nobility) continues throughout Chortatsis's drama. A little later, also *Erofilí*'s nurse tells how rich and poor are equally the subject of Fortune (τση Τύχης αποκατωθιό, *Erofilí* II.198). In II.305, Panaretos mirrors the words of Karpophoros, saying:

Γείσ απου την πλουσότητα δεν έχει γνωρισμένη,
με τη φτωχειά περνά ζωή καλή κι αναπαημένη· (*Erofilí* II.305-6)

A man without experience of great wealth,
Though poor, can live a life of glad contentment;

(trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

This leads to Panaretos expressing the wish that he had been poor (II.337). The theme is soon picked up by the chorus at the end of the act two, who in continuation of this speaks of a golden age when no hard labour was needed (II.467-502), and by the chorus at the end of act three, lauding blessed poverty:

Φτωχειά χαριτωμένη, και με πόση
γλυκότη προσκαλείς και σιργουλίσεις
στην κλίνη-σου τον Ύπνο να σιμώσει!
Πόσες πολλές ανάπαυες χαρίζεις
δυώ αγαφτικώ πιστώ, και πόσα πλήσα

το νού και την καρδιά-ντωνε δρισίζεις!
”Τούτος δεν είναι ωσάν εμέναν ίσα”
δε λέσιν οι φτωχοί· ”Το νιόν αυτόνο
μεγάλοι βασιλιοί δεν εγεννήσα”·
μα εκείνα παρευτύς που ο Πόθος μόνο
τς όρεξες προξενά, κι η πεθυμιά-τως,
ζητού γιαμιά και παίρνου, δίχως πόνο. (*Erofilí* III.397-408)

O blessed Poverty, with what
Sweet blandishment you summon Sleep
Close to your couch, to bring you slumber!
How many comforts you bestow
On faithful lovers! With what bliss
You soothe their fevered minds and bodies!
The poor would never say ‘This man
Is not my match in rank; this youth
Does not descend from mighty monarchs!’;
Instead, those boons that lovers crave,
Induced by Love, their hearts’ desires,
They simply ask for, and are given. (trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

Social rank is a matter of no significance to the poor and to lovers. Chortatsis’s chorus here paints the ideal version of what his play thematises, the need to look beyond jealousy and to see that love offers such ability. All these thematic repetitions lead up to three last occurrences of the theme, in the words of Erofilí, the king’s counsellor, and Panaretos. First comes the combined attempt of Erofilí and the king’s advisor to persuade the king to solve the problem of Panaretos’s seemingly low origin and lack of wealth by simply raising him to his own level. Erofilí tells her father:

Μπορείς, α θές, Αφέντη-μου – γιατί παιδί κιανένα
δεν έχοντας τη σήμερα στον Κόσμο παρα μένα –
να τον αφήσεις καταπώς τον έχω καμωμένο,
με την ευκή-σου, ταίρι-μου· και τότες μπορεμένο,
πλούσο κι αδυνατότατο, και βασιλιό μεγάλο
θες τονε κάμει να γενεί παρά κιανέναν άλλο. (*Erofilí* IV.335-40)

You could, Sire, if you wish – since in this world
You have no other child but me, your daughter –
Allow him to remain as he is now,
My husband, with your blessing; then you’ll make him
Powerful, wealthy, and invincible,
A mighty king unmatched by any other!

(trans. R.E. Bancroft-Marcus)

And the king’s counsellor restates the argument with other words, insisting that the king can solve the problem by rewarding the young man with what

he deserves (IV.551-64). This is, in a sense, the central morale of the story. Philogonos could have saved them all from calamity, had he allowed Panaretos to take the last step up the social ladder. But all to no avail, even when Panaretos reveals his true identity as son of the king of Tzirtza (IV.675-76), king Philogonos is still caught up in the shame he feels (see especially IV.155-62) and insists on punishing and crushing Panaretos.

As a final dramatic use of the meritocratic theme, closely attached to that of (virtuous) poverty, Chortatsis makes us hear the posthumous words of Panaretos, repeated by a messenger in V.83: Δεν εθάρρου / τούτη από σένα οι κόποι-μου την πληρωμή να πάρου (I never thought / that you'd reward me thus for my endeavours). At his final hour, Panaretos expresses his dejection and thereby expresses the central idea in Chortatsis's use of meritocracy as a theme: In the golden days of Philogonos's reign, one could expect fair reward for deeds; but then love came in between.

Conclusion

It is hard to know what ideas Chortatsis had about his contemporary Ottoman Egypt, and whether this went into his depiction of Erofilí as belonging to an Egyptian world. The Ottoman world constituted a military threat, and the names of the characters in the *Erofilí* are all Greek, assimilating them thereby somewhat to a Greek context, just as the mention of pagan gods backdates the events to a more or less ancient context. But the state of king Philogonos, regardless of what time we are dealing with, has been able to assure a meritocratic system, where the positions of rich and poor were not fixed but could be transgressed, as seems to be the case of Panaretos's rise to general due to his military success. His noble origin, probably from neighbouring north African Sirte as suggested here, is only revealed to the king at a late stage — and in vain. The tragedy of Panaretos and Erofilí follows the course of Giraldi's *Orbecche*, but the setting and characters have changed, enhancing social themes of meritocracy, and reducing the incestuous complications. In the end, the role of Panaretos becomes more central, since he is the carrier of both the love theme, so central in both *Orbecche* and *Erofilí*, and the example of a virtuous character who has been led to believe in just rewards for good deeds. It has been the aim of the present analysis to show that these features in Chortatsis's play go back to his reading of Trissino's *Sofonisba*, and that this drama contributed with much more than the two choral songs to the way that Chortatsis combined a tragic love story with societal ideas, now staged on the neighbouring African continent.

Bibliography

- Αλεξίου, Στυλιανός 2001, "Εισαγωγή", στη *Γεωργίου Χορτάτση Ερωφίλη*, επιμέλεια Στυλιανός Αλεξίου & Μάρθα Αποσκήτη, τρίτη έκδοση, Αθήνα.
- Chortatsis, Georgios 2013, *Plays of the Veneto-Cretan Renaissance: a bilingual Greek-English edition in two volumes with introduction, commentary, apparatus criticus, and glossary*, vol. 1: Texts and translations, ed.: Rosemary E. Bancroft-Marcus, Oxford.
- Corrigan, Beatrice 1975, "Introduction", *Two Renaissance Plays: edited and introduced with notes and vocabulary by Beatrice Corrigan*, Manchester.
- Δετοράκης, Θεοχάρης Ε. 1986, *Ιστορία της Κρήτης [History of Crete]*, Athens.
- Giraldi Cinzio, Giambattista 2018, *Orbecche: tragédie, édition bilingue italien-français, introduction, notes et traduction de Jean-Laurent Savoye*, Paris.
- Guliyev, Ahmad 2022, *Safavids in Venetian and European Sources*, Venice.
- Holton, David 1991, "The Cretan Renaissance", *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed.: D. Holton, Cambridge, 1-16.
- Lampaki, Elena, *A Comparative Study of the Manuscripts and Early Printed Editions of the Cretan Tragedy «Erofilí» and its Interludes*, PhD Dissertation Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge 2014.
- Maltezou, Chryssa 1991, "The Cretan Renaissance", *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed.: D. Holton, Cambridge, 17-48.
- Markaki, Argiro 2015, "The Politics of Marriage and Liebestod in Chortatsis' *Erophile*", *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 1, 81-110.
- Πασχάλης, Μιχαήλ 2008 "Άπό την Orbecche στην Έρωφίλη. Αναζητώντας τους λόγιους «συνομιλητές» του Χορτάτση", *Παιδεία και Πολιτισμός στην Κρητή: Βυζάντιο – Βενετοκρατία*, ed.: Ι. Βάσσης, Σ. Κακλαμάνης & Μ. Λουκάκη, Iraklio.
- Πασχάλης, Μιχαήλ 2011a "Η ιδεολογία των ιντερμεδίων της Ερωφίλης και η συνάφειά τους με την τραγωδία του Χορτάτση", *Κρητικά Χρονικά* 31, 163-82.
- Πασχάλης, Μιχαήλ 2011b "Τα ιταλικά διακειμενικά συμφραζόμενα των χορικών της Ερωφίλης" [The Italian Intertexts of Erophili's Choral Songs], *Πεπραγμένα του 1' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου (Χανιά, 1-8 Οκτωβρίου 2006)*, Chania (vol. B3) 343-361.
- Pecoraro, Vincenzo 1969, "Le fonti dei cori della Ερωφίλη," *Ελληνικά* 22, 370-6.
- Puchner, Walter 1991, "Tragedy", *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed.: D. Holton, Cambridge, 129-58.

- Puchner, Walter 2017, *Greek Theatre between Antiquity and Independence: A History of Reinvention from the Third Century BC to 1830*, Cambridge.
- Puchner, Walter 2018, *Ausgewählte Studien zur Theaterwissenschaft Griechenlands und Südosteuropas*. Hollitzer, Ottomania 7, Wien.
- Savoye, Jean-Laurent 2009, *Érophili de Georges Chortatsis, une tragédie de la Renaissance européenne*, Thèse dirigée par Madame Marie-Paule Masson, soutenue le 15 décembre 2009, Montpellier, 2 vols.
- Trissino, Giangiorgio 1975, “Sofonisba”, *Two Renaissance Plays: edited and introduced with notes and vocabulary by Beatrice Corrigan*, Manchester.
- Troelsgård, Christian 2021, “Ioannes Plousiadenos, Bessarion and Byzantine music. Tracing Aspects of Byzantine Chant Traditions in the Later Part of Fifteenth Century along the Axis Constantinople – Crete – Venice”, *Bessarion and Music: Concepts, theoretical sources and styles*, Antiquae Musicae Libri, ed. S. Tessari, Venice, vol. 2, pp. 51-73.
- Χορτάτσης, Γεώργιος, *Ερωφιλή*, επιμέλεια Στυλιανός Αλεξίου & Μάρθα Αποσκίτη, τρίτη έκδοση, Αθήνα 2001.