Myth-history: Venice, Crete and *Erotokritos**

Alfred Vincent
University of Sydney

In 1553 one of the most famous works of architecture in Venice was completed: the small building known as the Loggetta, in St Mark's Square, at the base of the bell-tower, opposite the Doge's palace and the basilica of Saint Mark. Its architect, Jacopo Sansovino, placed on its façade a series of sculptures. High in the centre, presiding over her world, sits Venice herself, represented as Justice, with her scales and sword. Below her, river gods represent Venice's mainland territories, around the rich plains of the Po, the Brenta and the Adige. On the left we see the island of Crete, protected by the strong arm of her own god, Jupiter, Zeus. On the right is Venus, Aphrodite, in the sea off Venice's other great island domain, Cyprus. Zeus and Aphrodite: symbols of power and peaceful fecundity.

Below this attic level are four bronze statues, representing the values that the patricians who met in the Loggetta were supposed to uphold. From left to right they are Minerva, the Greek Athena, goddess of wisdom, crafts and war; Apollo, standing for harmony – harmony in government, and harmony between the many social groupings in Venice's city and domains; next is Mercury or Hermes, the messenger of the gods, standing for diplomatic and political eloquence, no doubt also for commercial acumen; and finally Peace, in the act of destroying the machinery of war. Taken together the bronze statues and stone reliefs on the Loggetta express many aspects of the ideology often known now as the

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"myth of Venice".[1] The ancient deities are conscripted as signifiers of this powerful set of values, overseen by the stern but benign justice of the Serenissima.[2]

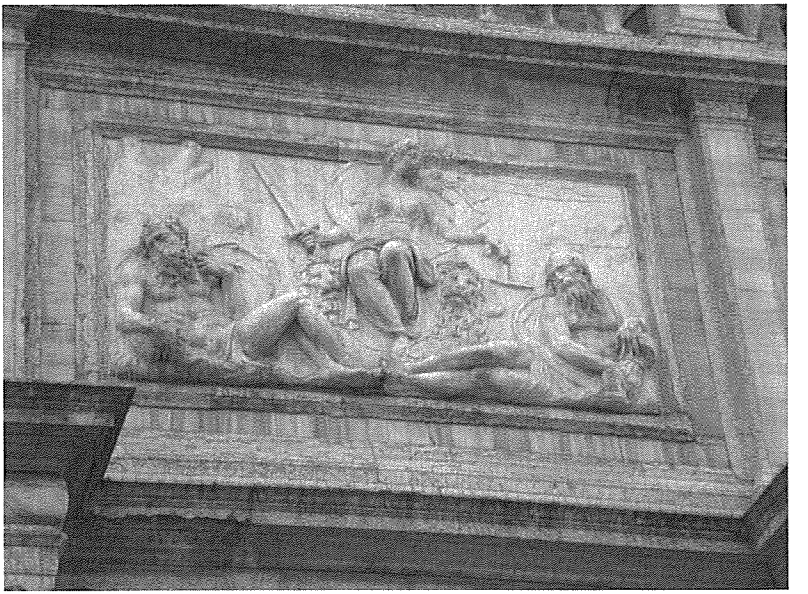

PLATE 1: Venice and river gods on the Loggetta

Our aim in this paper is to explore varieties of this myth, or ideology, which appear in Crete around the time of the composition of *Erotokritos*, and to try to see where Kornaros's poem stands in relation to them.[3] The underlying hypothesis is that

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[1] Bibliography on this topic is enormous. See now the extensive diachronic analysis of Raines (2006).

[2] Bibliography on the Loggetta is also, naturally, vast. See for example Fortini Brown 1996: 281, Wills 2001: 107-10, and Fenlon 2007: 104-10 (where, however, on p. 107 the captions for photographs 65 (Cyprus) and 66 (Crete) are reversed).

[3] This study does not presuppose a particular view on the date of *Erotokritos,* except that it is not likely to have been completed much before 1600. On this issue and the related one of the poet Vitsentzos

Erotokritos is not *simply* a love story, ποίημα ερωτικόν, as its first edition proclaimed on its title page. Kornaros himself, in both his introduction and his epilogue, invites his readers to find life-lessons in it. And, inevitably, such a vast work incorporates a world of values and ideas.

Our approach will take us into what for many may be an unfamiliar area, that of the writing in the Italian language by Cretans or others living in Crete. These texts were largely brought to the attention of scholars by the late Nikos Panagiotakis in the 1960s (Panagiotakis 1968), and they have still not been widely studied.[4] Nonetheless they are a significant part of the cultural background of Crete at the time Vitsentzos Kornaros was working on *Erotokritos*. Some of them address aspects of Crete's relations with Venice in a particularly direct and developed manner.

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An invaluable key to understanding the context of *Erotokritos* is the Italian poem *The most noble joust at Chania (La nobilissima barriera de la Canea),* written in 1594. The work, in over 2000 lines, claims to be an account of a joust performed in the Carnival of that year, on the harbourside in Chania, the chief town of western Crete. Preserved in three manuscripts, the poem was first published by Cristiano Luciani in 1994.[5] Its author gives his name as Gian Carlo Persio.[6] In a dedicatory letter, Persio indicates that he was in the service of the governor (*rettore*) of Chania, Francesco da Mosto (Persio 1994: 58). This implies he was not

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Kornaros, see Holton 1997: 261-2, 268-9 and Evangelatos 2011, for the majority and the minority view respectively.

[4] For a survey, see Vincent 1999. Since that date, several further works have been published; see for example Alexiou 2000, Pandimo 2003, Barozzi 2004, Papadopoli 2007 and 2012, Kaklamanis 2008 and 2011.

[5] Edition: Persio 1994; see also studies by Vincent 2001b and 2012.

[6] Panagiotakis (1975) suggested that the name, in the form Gian Carolo Persio, was a pseudonym and an anagram for Pieros Giancarol, or Pietro Zancarolo, the name of a local nobleman. The hypothesis is attractive, but has not been confirmed.

necessarily a permanent resident of the city, but may have arrived there in the entourage of his employer.

It seems clear that, allowing for some poetical licence, Persio's poem is what it claims to be: an account of an event that actually took place. It was very much a public spectacle, watched, says Persio, by the whole city, men and women, young and old (2: 7-8),[7] clearly a colourful highlight of the Carnival of 1594. There are remarkable similarities with the joust described in Part Two of *Erotokritos,* together with some significant differences. We should note at the start that, in contrast to Kornaros's joust, the *barriera* at Chania was conceived as a *performance,* a theatrical show, rather than a violent and dangerous sport. Typically, in his letter to his patron, Persio uses the verb *rapresentare,* which often refers to a stage performance. Nonetheless, the programme did include competitive jousting, for which prizes were given.

The joust took place at a moment of crisis. Crete's capital, Candia (modern Iraklio/Heraklion), had been struck by an epidemic of plague, which killed thousands of its people and effectively cut the city off from the rest of the island. With numerous soldiers and officers struck down, the epidemic brought serious threats to security; enemies, whether internal or external (the Ottomans), might take advantage of the situation to mount an attack (see Marmareli-Drakaki 1995).

Persio's dedicatory letter indicates that the joust was initiated by da Mosto himself. At the beginning of the work, the poet explains that the committee of judges was comprised of three Venetian officials, headed by the *rettore,* with prominent locals as assistants (9: 1-6), and the actual combats were overseen by an Italian officer in Venetian service, Colonel Mario Gazzi (13: 1-8, cf. 212: 6, 220: 1-2). Venetian officials and military officers also appeared as participants, together with a few members of the local elite. So irrespective of the background, Italian or Cretan, of the author Persio, the fact remains that the Venetian administration

[7] References to this poem give the number of the relevant *ottava* (eight-line stanza) and of the line(s) referred to within it.

was the ultimate source or sanction for the messages conveyed by the joust and the poem.

The range of participants in the joust was itself symbolic. At this time of crisis, Da Mosto and his colleagues succeeded in bringing together members of a local nobility, both Catholic and Greek Orthodox, notorious for factional disputes (cf. Vincent 2001a). The joust exemplifies creative collaboration by this elite among themselves and with the civil and military authorities.

Participants appeared under a pseudonym, in the role of figures taken mostly from Greek mythology (Theseus, Peirithous, Palamedes, Typheus, Perseus, Proteus, Sisiphus), ancient history (Leonidas, Arion) or medieval and Renaissance literature (Argante, Palmerino, the White Knight, Don Falange). Two have Greek names, Filotimo and Irinopolemo, which seem to express the values they represented, like some of the names in *Erotokritos*. The manuscripts record both the role-name and the real name of each contestant. But the programme, as described by Persio, began with a series of nine brief, quasi-theatrical scenes, mainly performed on or around special carnival floats, and designed to introduce the competitors to the audience. The combatants appeared mostly in pairs, each pair featuring in one episode. The performance appears to have been largely without words, though occasionally a character makes a speech in Italian verse. At the end of each episode, the jousters' assistants (*padrini*) present them formally to the judges and audience. Some participants are introduced in brief verses read out by their *padrini.* I suspect that Persio himself had a major role in the composition of these texts, and indeed in the general organisation of the joust. These brief pieces of drama convey a series of messages about Venice and her relation to the island of Crete. Here are some examples.

The third scene features a replica of Venice's new fortress town of Palmanova in Friuli, an innovative piece of military architecture which also incorporated utopian ideas of the ideal city (*ottave* 42-5). Intended as a defence against the Habsburg Empire, it was begun the previous year, 1593. (An adviser on the project was the engineer Giulio Savorgnan, who some years earlier had

planned the extended fortifications of Candia as well as those of Nicosia in Cyprus.) The message is obviously about the diligence and technical expertise of the Serenissima in defending her possessions.

Another scene features a model of the Cretan Mount Ida, or Psiloritis, complete with trees, rocks, and shepherds, one of whom sings a song in Greek, the words of which are not preserved in the manuscripts (*ottave* 106-11). A fierce dragon – a well-known symbol for the Ottoman empire – suddenly rushes up and puts everyone on the mountain to flight. The god Apollo (remember Sansovino's loggetta!) now arrives, kills the dragon, and liberates two knights whom it was holding captive, so they can now take part in the jousting. We may compare the presence of the mountain as an Arcadian setting for Chortatsis's *Panoria,* Pandimo's *L'Amorosa fede (*discussed below), and of course the famous Charidimos episode in *Erotokritos,* Part Two (cf. Vincent 2001c).

The last and most complex of the episodes begins with a speech by the god Hermes (following *ottava* 130) – another reminder of the Loggetta. He explains that the knights of Knossos were unable to take part. Knossos stands for the Venetian capital Candia; Persio's contemporaries were aware that its ancient site was just outside the modern town. The audience knew that the Candiots' absence was due to the plague. In place of the Candiots, says Hermes, King Minos himself will emerge from the underworld of the dead and bring to the joust a great warrior, the White Knight. Minos duly appears on his chariot, escorting his protégé. But before the White Knight can take part, he must first recover the weapons of Achilles, which have been hidden away in the White Mountains of western Crete. So the Knight goes to the White Mountains (depicted on a piece of scenery), and defeats in combat a Hydra, which was guarding the weapons, and then overpowers two Moors who were assisting it, and who now become his *scudieri,* "squires" (149: 7-8). Armed with the fabulous weapons, he is now ready to take part in the joust. Indeed it is the White Knight who is awarded first prize, just as Rotokritos, also arrayed in white, wins the prize in Kornaros's poem.

Characteristic of these episodes are the allusions to the "Cretan" god Zeus, and the appearance of his son, the king and lawgiver Minos, who became judge in the world of the dead. Episodes like that of Minos and the White Knight would be specially appreciated by spectators at the joust. Cretans knew of the cave on Mount Psiloritis where the baby Zeus was supposed to have been nurtured, and the so-called tomb of Zeus on Mount Giouchtas, near Iraklio – for the Cretan Zeus died and was resurrected every year. But above all they connected the name of Minos with a time that brought glory to their island. To quote one example, around the end of the sixteenth century the dramatist Georgios Chortatsis, in the Dedication of his tragedy *Erofili* to Ioannis Mormoris, speaks about the people of his own day whose learning, accomplishments and wealth (Chortatsis 1988: 90):

> τσι δόξες τση τσι πρωτινές τση πάλι
> τση δίδου με τσι χάρες τως, κι ως τον καιρό εκείνο
> τιμάται, απού 'χε αφέντη τζη το βασιλιό το Μίνω... (24-6)
>
> (confer on Crete once more her ancient glory
> through their accomplishments, so she is honoured
> as in that time when Minos was her king...)

But there is more to the White Knight episode in Persio's poem. The White Mountains, where the Knight has to fight for Achilles's armour and weapons, are in the wild, sparsely inhabited area of south-western Crete centred on the township of Sfakia, where the Venetians, and later the Ottomans, found it difficult to exercise close control. Lawlessness and clan feuding seemed endemic. Twice in the sixteenth century, when the Sfakiots' "disobedience" was deemed to require drastic action, the Venetian authorities had organised a military expedition against them, rounding up and executing the ringleaders, destroyed Sfakiot dwellings and sending a large part of the population into exile. Yet the more imaginative Venetian officials respected the

Sfakiots' military prowess and energy and tried to win them over for useful and honourable military employment.[8]

Something of this background seems to be reflected allegorically in the White Knight episode. He seems to symbolise the Venetians' determination to suppress the Hydra of "disobedience" in this intractable region so as to be able to exploit its valuable military potential (the arms of Achilles). As a protégé of the great Minos, son of Zeus, the Knight represents the Venetians' claim to be legitimate and worthy heirs to Minos's ancient kingdom. The authors of the joust exploit symbols from Greek and, in particular, Cretan myth to promote Venetian ideology.

There is just one scene that may be an exception. It involves a certain Zuanne Calergi, whose persona in the joust is Don Falange, who comes from the world of romances of chivalry.[9] His name recalls the φαλάγγι, the dangerous spider whose venom was thought to be an antidote for its bite. In a poem read out by his assistant, Don Falange claims a similar ability to give "life and death at will" ((75: 7). I have argued elsewhere that this message seems to express Calergi's own view of himself. He came from a vastly wealthy branch of the Calergi lineage with lands on the borders of the Sfakia region. He could no doubt summon at will a large force of warlike Sfakiot mountaineers. He seems to be saying that the Venetians would do well to keep him on side (Vincent 2001a: 219-21).

In view of the similarities, it seems very likely that Kornaros had either read Persio's poem or knew of the joust at Chania from some other source. In any case, he would very probably have seen similar jousts in or near the capital, Candia. Government-sponsored jousts, with prizes, had been introduced there in the 1570s by the reforming Provveditor General Giacomo Foscarini,

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[8] On the Sfakia issue, see Papadia-Lala 1983, Giannopoulos 1978: 29-31, 140-7, and Vincent 2001a.

[9] See for example *La sesta et ultima parte della Historia dell'invitissimo Principe Sferamundi di Grecia,* nuovamente [...] ridotta in lingua italiana per M. Mambrino Roseo da Fabbriano. Venice, c. 1564, ff. 345r, 461r, 463v, 472r, 477v.

as a form of military exercise for the feudal cavalry. Holders of feudal lands had been neglecting their obligation to take part personally in the regular cavalry reviews and had been sending instead untrained villagers, who were greeted by the bystanders with jeers and rotten fruit. Foscarini used the joust as a way of attaching some seriousness and prestige (and entertainment value) to this military exercise. To judge from the comments of the historian and poet Andrea Cornaro on a joust held in 1588, they had considerable success (Kaklamanis 2008: 210), with both local nobles and Italian officers taking part. As Rosemary Bancroft-Marcus has persuasively argued (2006: 326-7), "[t]his is surely the context in which we should view the military prowess of the heroes" of both *Erofili* and *Erotokritos*: "Jousting, which had degenerated in mainland Europe to a mere courtly spectacle, had in Crete assumed its original purpose as training for war."

But the Candia jousts were not *only* military exercises. Two poems by Andrea Cornaro, preserved in manuscript, suggest that these events had similar features to the joust at Chania. One poem was intended to be recited at a joust by an unnamed maiden, introducing a cavalier under the guise and pseudonym of "Argila", "whose wide domains extend / from the famous isles of Fortune / to where the Ganges pays its tribute to the sea" (!) (quoted by Luciani in his introduction to Persio 1994: 10-11). She begs the judges, "the illustrious heroes who control the reins / of ancient Crete with justice and with faith", to accept this foreign warrior among the participants. The second poem (ibid., 11-12) was composed "For another knight, who appeared similarly in another joust, inside a marble column, guided by Jove and Mars and by a queen representing Venice. This was the knight's own invention, and these verses are spoken by a marine nymph." Implied here are spectacular introductory episodes similar to those at Chania, with the Cretan Zeus and other ancient deities participating alongside the personification of Venice. As at Chania, the judges are Venetian officials. The second knight's introductory scenario was his own invention, but it would clearly have received the organisers' approval. Entertainment is combined with military

practice and patriotic messages under the overall control of the Venetian administration.

The 1594 joust was the product of an established tradition. The "maestro di campo" Mario Gazzi had taken part six years earlier in the joust at Candia, as had, probably, other officers participating in the Chania event (Vincent 2012: 169-70). Possibly they were influential in determining the format of the later spectacle. However, there were also Italian precedents. A major model for the Chania event was very probably a famous joust held to commemorate the marriage of Grand Duke Francesco of Tuscany to the Venetian lady Bianca Cappello, an account of which was published in an illustrated booklet (Gualterotti 1579).

But what is significant in *Erotokritos* is the way Kornaros transforms the joust from a vehicle conveying aspects of the "myth of Venice", tailored for Cretan consumption, into something very different and original. Set in Athens, as is most of the plot, it creates a symbolic panorama of the people and places which had formed part of the Venetian and Frankish Greek world after the Fourth Crusade. Integrated into this world are reminiscences of earlier stages of Greek civilisation, from ancient Crete (Charidimos was born at Gortyn, of royal descent), to Alexander's Macedonia and Pistoforos's Byzantium (see Alexiou, in Kornaros 1980: ογ΄-πα΄). The combination of chronologically disparate elements recalls the use of classical and post-classical symbols in the joust at Chania and in Sansovino's Loggetta, but the symbolic content, the signified, is quite different.

Venice is never mentioned directly in *Erotokritos* and might appear to be completely outside the work's orbit. But within the poem's mythical world, a link with Venice is suggested in a curious detail: the joust in Part Two is held on 25 April, the feast of Saint Mark, patron of the Serene Republic. Why would Kornaros choose this particular day unless he wanted to somehow connect his "ancient" Athens with contemporary Venice? Are there other hints at such an allegorical identification? David Holton has pointed out that the name of the King of Athens, Iraklis, recalls the name of Eraclea, the ancient city on the

northern Adriatic (Holton 2001). Eraclea was the most important city of the region in the seventh and part of the eighth centuries, and was the birthplace of the first Doge, Lucio Paolo Anafesto, elected in 697. Could it be that in *Erotokritos* "Athens" is a kind of allegorical equivalent of the Serenissima?

There is a precedent for Kornaros's choice of Athens as the scene of the action in the Greek version of Boccaccio's *Theseid* (Morgan 1960: 122-36). Generally, though, Athens does not have much of a role in earlier Byzantine and post-Byzantine narrative. Among other printed romances, the rhymed *Apollonios*, for example, has its hero wandering over much of the eastern Mediterranean, from Tarsus to Mytilene, without making a stop at Athens (text in Kechagioglou 2004, vol. II). Kornaros's choice of Athens was by no means "obvious" or conventional.

In the Renaissance and after, it is more often republican Florence that is described as a "new Athens". Nonetheless, the belief that Venice deserved this title was also current (Fortini Brown 1996: 104, 272). In the fifteenth century the influential George of Trebizond had developed the idea that Venice reflected the "mixed constitution" proposed in Plato's *Laws* (Syros 2010: 472-7). Parallels between Venice and Athens are discussed intensively by Venetian and Greek scholars after the fall of Constantinople (ibid., 494-8). In the preface to his play *L'Amorosa fede* (1619), the young Cretan Antonio Pandimo refers to the university city of Padova as "the new Athens" – and, of course, Padova was within Venetian territory (Pandimo 2003: 19, cf. Fortini Brown 1996: 148). If the topic was also discussed, as is likely, in Cretan intellectual circles, such a context might encourage Kornaros's readers to link his Athens with the Serenissima.

The implications of such an identification are interesting. It would suggest an allegorical interpretation, in which *Erotokritos*'s prioritising of worth over birth would presumably be a comment on current Venetian political issues. It may not be fortuitous that precisely in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, in the district of Siteia – home of the main Kornaros/Cornaro lineage

– there was a move to open up some of the privileges of the local nobility to a broader section of the population (Lambrinos 2011-12).

But there are problems. For a start, Kornaros's Athens is a kingdom, not a republic. Secondly, it appears to have nothing corresponding to Venice's sea-empire. Can we really assume that Kornaros's fleeting allusions and the intellectual context to which we have referred were sufficient to lead readers of *Erotokritos*, on hearing the mention of Athens, to conclude: "Ah, that must mean Venice"? For me, the question remains open.

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By the time of Persio's poem, 1594, a number of Cretan writers had developed their own variants of the "myth of Venice". One of the pioneers was Antonio Calergi, a member of the same broad lineage as the Zuanne who took part in the joust, although they were not closely related and Antonio belonged to an earlier generation. By about 1550 this young Cretan intellectual had set out to write a history of his island in Italian, *Commentarii delle cose di Candia fatte dentro et fuori,* beginning in mythical times (Panagiotakis 1968: 47-8, Kaklamanis 2005: 41-2 and note 118, Vincent, forthcoming). Unfortunately Calergi died young, in 1555, and only managed to complete his narrative up to the year 1303. But the direction of his project is clear. For Calergi, the ancient "Cretan Republic", as he calls it, was an ideal aristocratic polity. It was the model for Sparta and Rome, and hence, ultimately, for Venice. This is truly a Cretan version of the myth of Venice. Calergi's enormous pride in his island and its ancient glory is a trait repeated again and again in later writers. His history circulated in manuscript form, and was never printed; nonetheless, it was studied, and several decades later it became a model and source for the Cretan historian Andrea Cornaro.

Calergi's personal position was interesting, as branches of the Calergi were the only Cretans enjoying the title of Venetian Noble. The Calergi in fact claimed descent from the Byzantine

imperial family of Phocas. Although Antonio's loyalty to Venice is unquestioned, he tries to balance it with sympathy for his fellow Orthodox Cretans. How, for example, was he going to deal with the awkward question of the Venetian occupation of Crete in the early thirteenth century, which led to the marginalisation or dispossession of many formerly powerful Orthodox magnates? He avoids giving details, but notes that the Venetians had to consider "the fierce pride and the character of those people, who, being descended from that lineage which was more used to ruling others than to being ruled *by* others, could easily be moved to disobedience" (Marc. Ital. VI 1551 [5801], p. 727).

Soon after Antonio Calergi's death, some of the themes of his *Commentarii* were taken up by another young Cretan intellectual, Francesco Barozzi, who was later to make his name as a cosmologist and mathematician at the University of Padova – and as a dabbler in the magic arts, for which he was convicted and punished by the Inquisition. In 1562 Barozzi founded an Academy, a literary and intellectual society on the Italian model, in his home town of Rethymno. In his inaugural oration (Barozzi 2004: 350), he speaks of how Crete was once "the most populated, most noble and most wealthy part of Greece". Echoing Calergi, Barozzi goes on to mention how "she had the best government of all the other republics in her time, which is affirmed by Aristotle in the second book of his *Politics,* where he never tires of praising the laws of the Cretans, and by Plato in his own book of *Laws.*"

Fifteen years later, in 1577/8, Barozzi took up again the theme of homage to his island by writing a *Descrittione dell'isola di Creta* (edited by Stefanos Kaklamanis in Barozzi 2004), in which he lists the "hundred cities" mentioned by ancient writers and describes the surviving antiquities. He also wrote poetry in Latin and Italian, and used his skill to praise or flatter Venetian officials.

Barozzi was of noble Venetian descent, and could speak and write Italian perfectly as well as knowing Greek. He would never have described himself as a "Greco" because that word was mostly used in the sense of "Orthodox" as opposed to "Roman

Catholic". Nonetheless he identifies Crete as his "patria", his homeland, and recognises that it is part of Greece.

Several ideas and projects developed by Calergi and Barozzi were taken up by a younger writer, Andrea Cornaro. Cornaro is of special interest, as most scholars now believe that his brother Vincenzo can be identified with the Vitsentzos Kornaros who was the poet of *Erotokritos*. Born in 1548, Andrea lived until 1616-17. Although towards the end of his life he spent much time on compiling a history of his island, this was only one part of his cultural activity. He also composed hundreds of Italian poems in neo-Petrarchan, mannerist style, most of which are known only from manuscripts and remain unpublished. He followed Barozzi's lead by founding an Academy in Candia, the Accademia degli Stravaganti, which was active over a number of years and attracted into its ranks Cretan intellectuals as well as educated military personnel and other temporary residents or settlers (Panagiotakis and Vincent 1970). Like Barozzi's Vivi, the Stravaganti were concerned with promoting Italian culture among the Cretan elite (cf. Pilidis 2009, Paschalis forthcoming).

In his *History of Crete (Istoria Candiana)*, Andrea Cornaro aimed at completing Calergi's unfinished project, and he did in fact succeed in extending it, at least in draft, up to his own day (Panagiotakis 1968: 58-72; Kaklamanis 2008). He took over Calergi's concept of the Cretan precedent for the Venetian constitution. Often he copies Calergi word for word, with minor modifications which he developed further in a later draft. But Andrea Cornaro's attitudes are not the same as Calergi's. He is more prepared to support Venice's repressive policies towards her unruly subjects. Hence, for example, he approves of the brutal reprisals organised by the Venetian governor Girolamo Cornaro against the Sfakiots in the 1520s. Cornaro makes a point of expressing his contempt for the local Greek dialect, which he says is "corrupt and full of Italian words, themselves altered and corrupted" (Vincent 1999: 140 and Vincent, forthcoming).

Nonetheless, I do not think it would be correct to describe Andrea Cornaro as anti-Greek. Like Calergi, he is immensely

proud of the Cretan homeland adopted by his ancestors. He had good relations with Orthodox Cretan churchmen and intellectuals, such as the monk and writer Agapios Landos, who as a young man had worked as his secretary. Cornaro welcomed Greek Orthodox Cretans into his circle of literary friends and correspondents, and into the Accademia degli Stravaganti. In his will, which has been published, he presents himself as a kind if paternalistic feudal lord, sharing out largesse among his friends, household servants and estate workers, many of whom of course were Orthodox Cretans (Spanakis 1955).

The key to understanding Cornaro's attitudes is indeed the fact that, like Antonio Calergi, he was a great landowner with vast wealth and local power, and a leading member of the Veneto-Cretan elite. Much of his literary and intellectual activity would tend to bolster the prestige and ultimately the privileges of his class. The Cretan elites, despite their wealth and their titles of Nobile Veneto, Nobile Cretese or Cittadino, had only limited power to influence policy in Venice; even in the local administration, all the really important posts were held by Venetians appointed from the metropolis. Venice's rulers tended to look down on these local elites as benighted provincials. In other words, there was an image problem, which the Accademia could help to address. Hence its members organised farewell ceremonies for Venetian officials at the end of their terms of duty, with flattering speeches and Italian poems, which might be presented to the official in a beautiful manuscript (see Kaklamanis 2011). This is not to suggest that all Cornaro's cultural activity was consciously directed towards an ideological programme; but it was imbued, consciously or not, with the values and attitudes of those in his position.

Perhaps the most intriguing of the Italian-language works by Cretans is the pastoral tragicomedy *L'Amorosa fede* (*Faithfulness in love*), written by a seventeen-year-old student at the University of Padova, Antonio Pandimo (2003). Antonio was the son of a prosperous lawyer, and grandson of an Orthodox priest from Rethymno. His play was printed in 1620 in a luxury small-format

edition, with fine engravings, including a portrait of the author. It shows all the weaknesses one might expect in a very long work by a talented and ambitious but inexperienced writer. Its plot is based closely on the famous play *Il Pastor fido* (*The faithful shepherd*), by Giambattista Guarini. Pandimo was learning the playwright's craft though the classical technique of imitation.

One point where Pandimo departs from his model is in the setting. Whereas Guarini's work is set in a mythologised, ancient Arcadia, far from any contemporary reality, Pandimo locates the action on the slopes of the Cretan mountain range of Psiloritis, within sight of the city of Candia, which is also the setting of Chortatsis's pastoral play *Panoria,* and of episodes in Persio's poem and in *Erotokritos* (Vincent 2001c). What's more, Pandimo builds into the plot a retelling of the story of Theseus and the Minotaur. His version of the tale is interesting: the monster is killed, not by an Athenian prince, but by a local hero, a young man from Mount Psiloritis.

The odes recited or sung by Pandimo's chorus between Acts of the play speak of the tyranny which is the plague of their times. They include a stirring plea for liberation (Pandimo 2003: 51-2, Act I, lines 867-79:

> Perhaps the day will come (but when?)
> for gracious Crete, accustomed to liberty,
> to celebrate in triumph
> her ancient name, made precious by her glory;
> The arms and forces which, in warlike strength
> she now prepares for battle,
> to defend others from their enemies' attacks,
> perhaps the day will come for her to prepare them
> for herself alone, to triumph
> in wars which she will ignite through her own valour,
> conquering cities, peoples, fortresses,
> for she deserves supremacy in Greece,
> since she was crowned queen of the wide ocean.

The first scholar to comment on this passage was Konstantinos Sathas, writing in the 1870s, after repeated Cretan revolts

against Ottoman rule. Naturally he interpreted it in terms of nineteenth-century national irredentism, as a call in fact for Cretan liberation. That is, of course, anachronistic. It is difficult to assess just how far the chorus's words should be taken at face value; nonetheless, the text does seem to invite some kind of political interpretation. The idea that Crete was "defending others from their enemies' attacks" does not correspond to anything in the plot of the play, but it does connect with the historical situation in Pandimo's time. In the years before 1620, Cretans had been pressured into contributing men and money to Venice's war effort in her struggle with the Austrian Empire, the so-called War of Gradisca. The play seems to reflect a desire by members of the Cretan elite for, at the least, a greater share in the running of their own affairs (cf. Vincent, in Pandimo 2003: xlvii-lv).

L'Amorosa fede is dedicated to the wedding of two Cretan aristocrats, Francesco Querini and Calerga Calergi, which took place in 1619 (Vincent, in Pandimo 2003: xli-xlvi). The fathers of both bride and bridegroom were immensely rich landowners with the title of Venetian Noble, both of whom had contributed personal resources to the service of Venice but had fallen foul of the Venetian authorities. Calerga's father is the same Zuanne Calergi who appears in the *Joust at Chania* as Don Falange, with his provocative message. Some time before the wedding, Zuanne had been convicted of complicity in a politically motivated homicide attempt and had been exiled from his home region of Chania (Vincent 2001). As for the bridegroom's father, Benetto Querini, in 1597 he had been awarded the title of Count for his services to the Serenissima. The title was intended as purely honorific, but Benetto treated it as a license to act as a law unto himself within the boundaries of his estates, and to organise unauthorised meetings of nobles in his house. Attitudes of the elder Querini and Calergi seem to have been conveyed to the young poet, who, probably with guidance from an experienced mentor, incorporated them into his work under the veil of his mythical setting and story. The chorus's ode is, at the least, a reminder that Cretan elites did

not necessarily accept passively the roles assigned them by the Serenissima.

* * *

Apart from Athens, the places represented by the most prominent combatants in Kornaros's joust are Constantinople, Cyprus and Crete. The Prince of Byzantium, Pistoforos, is the combatant with the largest retinue and the most sumptuous turnout, for which indeed he gets a prize; although, as David Holton has pointed out (2001: 130-1), his actual performance is not distinguished. Pistoforos represents, allegorically, the decline of Byzantium, with lots of show but little substance. The remaining two are Venice's prize possessions, the two great islands which we saw depicted on Sansovino's loggetta, one of which, Cyprus, had been lost to the Ottomans a few decades before the completion of *Erotokritos*. As for Crete, Kornaros shares his contemporaries' pride in his island. He doesn't fail to mention that his Cretan prince Charidimos is of "royal" descent, and that his seat was the ancient city of Gortyn, the island's capital in the first Byzantine period. Some in his original audience may have been aware that learned writers had used the name Gortyn for the later capital, Candia. The Cretan Charidimos – dressed in black like Don Falange in Persio's poem – is not defeated by anyone in the joust, but is eliminated by lot out of the three candidates for the final combat.

Another element in Kornaros's world are the Βλάχοι, who invade Athenian territory in Part Four, led by their king, Vladistratos (see Vincent 2011). Their role is that of the honourable enemy, rather like the Trojans in the *Iliad*. For Kornaros's contemporaries, especially in Crete, the ethnic term Βλάχοι and the name of their country, Βλαχιά, must have referred to the area, Wallachia in English, which is now the southern part of Romania. Wallachia was in Kornaros's day an autonomous principality or voivodate, under Ottoman overlordship. Between 1594 and 1601 its ruler, Michael the Brave, had launched a series of spectacular

revolts and attacks on Ottoman territory, with somewhat unreliable backing from the Habsburg Empire. In the end he was assassinated, apparently on the orders of the imperial general George Basta.

Since all theories on the date of *Erotokritos* put its completion around or after this time, we can assume that Kornaros knew of these events. So in view of Kornaros's obvious anti-Ottoman sentiments, why would he want to choose these people to be enemies of Rotokritos's Athens? The answer may lie in Venetian international relations: the Venetians generally wanted to preserve peace with the Ottomans, and did not actively support Michael's campaigns. Nor did they have particularly good relations with Michael's Austrian allies.

The available space here does not allow for an investigation of the attitudes towards Venice and its myth expressed in the Greek literature of Crete. Obvious to all readers, though, is the intensely proud Cretan patriotism which is as prominent in Greek as in Italian-language writing. As we have seen in the case of Chortatsis, it may be expressed there too through Cretan symbols such as King Minos.[10] But this passionate patriotism is far from a modern nationalist or irredentist ideology. Just as the Venetian noble Barozzi identifies Crete as his "patria", so Greek-language writers from Chortatsis to Foskolos see no problem in combining lavish praise of their island and city with expressions of devotion to the Serenissima (cf. Foskolos 1980: 10 [Prologue to *Fortounatos*, lines 89-116]).

* * *

The "myth of Venice" involved a patrician ideology, promoting the ideal of a broad ruling elite of men devoted to their Republic, plotting a middle course between monarchy on the one hand and

[10] However, there is still much discussion of the nature of the ideological content of *Erofili*. For a survey and a new interpretation, see Paschalis 2011.

extreme democracy on the other (cf. Raines 2006). How does *Erotokritos* relate to this aspect of the myth?

The whole plot of Kornaros's poem revolves around the vast social distance separating the hero Rotokritos from Princess Aretousa. Characters in the poem emphasise that Rotokritos and his family are μικροί, "little" or "insignificant" people, whereas Aretousa and her family are among the great, "μεγάλοι" (e.g. I 218, III 903-4). Rotokritos is not a prince down on his luck, like the heroes of the romances *Imberios* and *Apollonios,* or a prince whose identity has been suppressed, like Panaretos in Chortatsis's tragedy *Erofili.* He has absolutely no claim to royal blood. It is true that the same could be said of Paris, the hero of the western romance *Paris et Vienne* which was Kornaros's main source (Alexiou 1980: ξβ′); but the fact that a feature was taken over from an earlier work does not affect its significance in the context of *Erotokritos.* Kornaros does not imitate slavishly, and could easily have changed this detail if he had wished.

But we should not be misled by the terms used to categorise Rotokritos. Our hero is not exactly a "man of the people". He has attributes of birth and wealth that are associated with an aristocratic courtier. As well as their mansion in town with its garden-house, his family own lands in the countryside. As a son approaching adulthood, Rotokritos is expected to help with the running of these rural estates, though because of his preoccupation with Aretousa he has been neglecting his duty. His father admonishes him:

> Θωρείς με πούρι, καλογιέ, γέροντας είμαι τώρα,
> και να μακρύνω δε μπορώ πλιον όξω απού τη χώρα,
> κι είναι οι δουλειές μας στα χωριά, καθημερνό πληθαίνου,
> και σα δεν πας, ακάμωτες, παιδάκι μου, απομένου. (I 795-8)

> Just look at me, my son; you see I'm old
> and I can't venture now outside the city;
> we've work to do in the villages, more each day;
> if you don't go, dear boy, it won't get done.

Note the pronoun in "είναι οι δουλειές μας στα χωριά", literally "*our* work is in the villages"; Pezostratos is not talking about his personal duties as a member of the king's court, but about family holdings.

After falling in love with the princess, in order to distract himself and convince his parents that nothing is wrong, Rotokritos tries to immerse himself in his usual "pleasures" (ξεφάντωσες) or "pastimes":

επήρε φίλους κι εδικούς να πα να ξεφαντώσει.
Σύρνει γεράκια και σκυλιά με συντροφιά μεγάλη (I 816-17)

He took his friends and relatives for sport;
took hawks, dogs and a large party with him...

Both in medieval Italy and in Crete, hunting with falcons and dogs was the sport of the rich, and in particular of prosperous landowners. Indeed Crete was famous for its trained falcons; we even hear of an official of the Ottoman Sultan who came to Crete to buy 60 of them for his master, at 3 gold ducats each (Siakotos 2006: 187, 193-5). The local nobility on the island would hold lavish hunting parties for Venetian officials, in the hope of winning their support. In the seventeenth century hunting with firearms was normal, though some Cretans still kept falcons. More humble individuals might also go hunting with guns or traps, though if they were on a feudal estate they were expected to surrender part of their bag to the landowner (Siakotos 2006: 171).

Similarly, Rotokritos's participation in the joust singles him out as a member of the upper classes. The sport was way beyond the means of ordinary men. You had to own horses, armour and appropriate weapons. As we have mentioned, jousts were promoted by the authorities in the 1570s to encourage the feudal landowners to practice equestrian skills, so as to be able to serve effectively in the special cavalry, which was one of their obligations.

Through his family background Rotokritos has much in common with the ideal "courtier" outlined in Castiglione's famous book, *Il Cortigiano.* Castiglione's courtier is an accom-

plished man, generally of noble background, devoted to the service of a prince. In his personal qualities as well as his background, as the late Michalis Lassithiotakis (2008) pointed out, Rotokritos meets the criteria for Castiglione's perfect courtier. He has a good education and a thirst for knowledge and experience; because of his father's position, he is able to frequent the king's palace and learn from the conversation of older courtiers; he is an accomplished artist, poet and musician; he is a skilled and valiant warrior. In the joust he is generally polite and unassuming, in contrast to the uncouth Karamanite (the Turk Spitholiondas) and the rough, boastful soldier from Dalmatia, Tripolemos. Rotokritos accepts Tripolemos's insults with cool sarcasm.

Yet despite the lofty status of Castiglione's courtier in his society, there is a great divide between him and the ruler he serves. It is this divide that Rotokritos eventually succeeds in bridging.

Castiglione's model courtier is rather different from the traditional image of the great families of republican Venice, which of course had no hereditary prince and no princely court. The Serenissima, however, did have its dominant families, who had acquired vast wealth by trade and had evolved into a patrician oligarchy, almost impenetrable to outsiders in normal times. But in the sixteenth century this image had changed significantly. Venice had lost most of its eastern possessions to the Ottomans, and its seaborn trade had suffered from competition from western and northern Europe. The ancient patrician families were turning more and more to investments in land in Venice's mainland territories. But power still remained in the hands of this republican patriciate, or to be more precise, with an elite group within it.

In both his background and his accomplishments, Rotokritos is portrayed as an idealised version of the kind of individual that nobles such as Antonio Calergi and Andrea Cornaro aspired to be. Many of the Cretan nobility had served as commanders in military action, as did both Calergi and Cornaro in their youth. Many had some at least of the educational and cultural qualifications of Castiglione's courtier, although few perhaps had the exceptional

accomplishments of Calergi and Cornaro. Such men were ready and able to take on the administrative offices open to them in Crete (Papadaki 1986). And yet, despite their wealth and accomplishments, the political power of the island's nobility was very limited. All the really important offices, from the Provveditor Generale to the Grand Chancellor, were men appointed from outside, sent to Crete from Venice for a period between about two and six years. Although most upper-class Cretans did not indulge in provocative actions like Zuanne Calergi and Giacomo Querini, many would have shared the desire for a greater role in decision-making. If we wish to read *Erotokritos* in terms of political allegory, it would not be unrealistic to see it as supporting the claims of this local elite.

And yet there is a hint in *Erotokritos* that we should not understand our hero to have quite the same exalted background as, say, Andrea Cornaro: the hint is the name of his father, Pezostratos. Like "Erotokritos" and "Aretousa", it is presumably intended as a symbolic, "speaking" name. The second element in it suggests a military connection, while the first links its owner to the category of foot-soldiers, πεζοί, πεζολάτες, as opposed to mounted knights. The distinction between the two military groups was fundamental in Cretan society from the beginning of the Venetian period, when settlers on the island were divided into *milites* and *pedites,* "knights" and "foot-soldiers" (Detorakis 1986: 167). Service in the cavalry was the privilege and duty of feudal landlords, whether Nobili Veneti like Andrea Cornaro or merely *feudati*, members of non-noble families that had acquired feudal lands. Pezostratos's name seems to imply that he did not belong to this most privileged group. Perhaps we should see him as a commoner who has acquired his position as a counsellor through his education and talent, and who, like many non-noble Cretans, owned or acquired large rural landholdings and to some extent shared the way of life of the noble families. The lawyer Marco Pandimo, father of the playwright Antonio, is an example that comes to mind (Vincent in Pandimo 2003: xxxi). By choosing this

name, then, Kornaros seems to be suggesting once more that a person's worth is not dependent on their birth.

In the final lines of *Erotokritos,* our hero marries his princess, ascends to the throne as king, and all live happily ever after. This is obviously not the triumph of Venetian-style republicanism; that would not be consistent with the conventions of romance, a genre to which, for all its innovative features, *Erotokritos* closely conforms.[11] But the happy ending is the ultimate reinforcement of the principle that ancestry is not the only criterion of a person's fitness to rule.

The purpose of our discussion was to explore rather than to arrive at secure conclusions. It should be clear, though, that basic values consistent with Venetian ideology are incorporated into *Erotokritos.* But the most striking and imaginative contribution of Kornaros to the debate about Venice's relations with Crete continues to be his creation of an idealised panorama of Frankish Greece: a world which belonged to the past, though which no doubt Kornaros and others would have liked to be able to recreate; a world which was both Venetian and Greek.

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[11] While noting the arguments of Paschalis (2012) on *Erotokritos*'s relation to Ariosto's *Orlando furioso,* we should also probably view it as a late adaptation of the medieval Greek romance tradition; cf. Beaton 1996: 204-6.

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