



# Troy Is Burning: Epic Archetypes

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*ILIOUPERSIS: A RESEARCH PROJECT  
AND A CIVIL EXPERIMENT IN THE FOOTSTEPS  
OF THE CLASSICI CONTRO*

Troy is burning. The fall of the city is a symbol that crosses time, history, cultures, and languages. Our imagery of the most inhuman violence of war begins with the end of Priam's city. It symbolizes the end of civilization, a warning, and food for thought.

Starting from Homer, the *Ilioupersis: Epic Archetypes* project investigates the *paradeigmata* of our way of thinking about the violence of war across different cultures and epochs of history in a perspective that is multidisciplinary and includes oral poetry, literature, history, art, theater, cinema, and sport.

The research laboratory experiments with new dimensions for the civil conscience and the collective memory of our societies, and it does that right in the cities and places that symbolize war and peace, not only with research work, lectures, and seminars in universities and schools but also with public actions in theaters, archaeological museums, and World War Museums.

Meetings, seminars, and conferences on *Ilioupersis* are scheduled with the involvement of Italian and foreign scholars. Particular attention is dedicated to younger scholars, students, PhD students, and PhDs with the participation of Aletheia, the Laboratory of Greek Literature of the Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

Among the activities of Aletheia Laboratory, the project includes a series of seminars and experimental meetings with a strong civil impact: a contribution to the construction of a shared historical-cultural awareness around the themes of war violence, starting with the archetypes of the fall of Troy. In several cities, symbolic places are chosen to present and discuss research results in front of a wider audience. The first experiment, as a scientific experience, concerns

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the archaeological museums for immediate contact between the texts, documents, objects, and artistic representations of *Ilioupersis* and war.

Public lectures are scheduled in the Museums of the two World Wars, as places where ancient ideas and images about war encounter the symbols and memories of contemporary history.

In collaboration with UNESCO, we have begun discussing the idea of bringing the results of research on *Ilioupersis* to Sarajevo on the 30th anniversary of the siege in a combined action with Venice. At the Siege Museum, the rebuilt Library, and the National Museum in the center of the city, amid the various communities still in conflict, the universality of this mythical archetype could contribute to peace, helping to resolve the tensions that have not yet found a solution.

The themes are centered on the polar opposition between peace and war. Knowing the evils of war is necessary to think about peace. Experiencing difficulties creates the awareness required to build a better future: to invent a civilization within the *civitas*, within the ideal and universal *polis* where differences become a resource, an added value, a source of beauty, an *agathon koinon*, an asset to be shared.

I. *The utopia of peace*. It consists of all the symbols required to build peace as the foundation of happiness and prosperity in the life of the *polis* and its men, starting from the representation of the city in peace in polar opposition to the city at war in the shield of Achilles of Homer's *Iliad*. Weddings, courts, and altars. A paradigm of art and poetry that becomes a paradigm of history.<sup>1</sup>

II. *War as the end of civilization*. When a war starts, the real consequences of its violence are impossible to predict, but it is undoubtedly the end of civilian life. To maintain a degree of humanity, other rules come into play, but the codes of honor, which are supposed to safeguard the respect for other humans, for the enemies, fail to be applied. They no longer have any meaning. When at war, only violence remains, blood that endlessly generates more violence and more blood.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 Hom., *Il.* 18.490–508. See Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, 213: “The blessings of ordered communal life are represented by weddings, which unite different families and bring festivities for all, and the peaceful settlement of a dispute over a man’s death by a city’s judicial institutions.” For the Homeric principle of human civilization see Ugo Foscolo, *Dei Sepolcri*, 119–21: “Dal dì che nozze e tribunali ed are / Diero alle umane belve esser pietose / Di sé stesse e d’altrui” (1807). The Homeric definition of the city of peace becomes a cultural paradigm for the ancient world and for our times.
- 2 On the motif of blood and massacre in the epic representation of the fall of Troy, see Barbaresco, “La terra e il sangue,” 323–39.

III. *The fall of the city, or the latest violence.* It starts with *Ilioupersis*, which, for us, is the first archetype of limitless violence. When it comes to the siege and the fall of a city, there is a qualitative leap in the violence of war. All the rules are canceled, there are no human feelings, and a feral or, better still, monstrous dimension guides the winners' actions. But *hybris*, the violence of the assailants who destroy the city, is at the origin of the ruin of those who believe they are the winners.<sup>3</sup>

IV. *Sport is a principle of civilization that removes and denies war.* Sport allows the construction of life and peace together with others, even the adversary, the enemy. Confrontation and struggle are part of human life, but the most ancient archetypes show that sport changes the symbol of hostility into a symbol of peace.<sup>4</sup> It is a cognitive question, a logical structure that has become part of our thinking and behavior. In sports, the opponent becomes a friend through mutual recognition, precisely in competition, confrontation, and cooperation. Starting with Homer, the *athloi* are a symbol of civilization, of peace, of hospitality. Sport is a symbol of a happy utopian society aware of the limits and difficulties of human life – a positive symbol in search of prosperity and beauty, which immediately suspends all hostilities. *Ekecheiria* is born around Olympia: it is the inviolable suspension of every act of war.<sup>5</sup> It is the return of civilization and life.

The first experiments were as follows.

I. We started from Venice, in Piazza San Marco, on 3 March 2022, at the National Archaeological Museum with the action "Death in the Eyes," staged in front of the Hellenistic statues of the Galatians. A long series of actions and seminars ensued.

II. "Women and the Fall of Troy," on 8 March in Vicenza, at the Gallerie d'Italia – Palazzo Leoni Montanari, among the bas-reliefs of the battles of the *Iliad* and the medallions of Homeric heroes, and then

3 There is no triumph, no certainty. This is the epic story of mortals, we know what awaits the victors next. This is also the effect of the narration of the *Iliou Halosis* of Triphiodorus, see Miguélez-Cavero, *Triphiodorus: The Sack of Troy*, 394: "His readers should therefore anticipate the punishment of the Achaeans when they finish reading his poem, with the departure of the Greek ships from Troy."

4 On sport as a sign of peace in the archaic Epics and in particular among the Phaeacians, see Camerotto, "Utopici Feaci," 23: "l'eccellenza (*Od.* 8.244, ἡμετέρης ἀρετῆς) è quella delle gare sportive, ma con una ben chiara precisazione, ossia con l'esclusione degli sport violenti, il pugilato e la lotta."

5 See Lämmer, "La cosiddetta 'pace olimpica,'" 129–31.

at the Natural History and Archaeological Museum, with the great mosaic of Meleager.

III. “The Wolf, or the Enemy,” Adria, National Archaeological Museum (16 March 2022).

IV. “*Ilioupersis*: Epic Archetypes,” Seminar at the University of Palermo (24 March 2022).

V. “Women on the Trojan Stage,” Treviso, Teatro Comunale Mario del Monaco (13 April 2022).

VI. “*Ilioupersis*: How and Why Should We Tell the Story of the Fall of Troy,” Seminar at the University of Salerno (27 April 2022).

VII. “The City under Siege,” Cagliari, at the National Archaeological Museum, in front of the giants of Mont’e Prama, at the Pinacoteca and at the Liceo Dettori (4–5 May 2022).

VIII. “Lysistrata: Women against War,” Venice, Teatro Santa Margherita Ca’ Foscari (12 May 2022).

IX. “The Death of Achilles,” Este, Museo Nazionale Atestino (14 May 2022).

X. “The City is Burning: *Ilioupersis* under Mount Pasubio,” Schio, Sala Turbine – Exhibition Space of the Lanificio Conte (1 June 2022).

Then came two large scholarly meetings, in the Museum of the Battle, a Memorial for the First World War in Vittorio Veneto: with laboratories, educational seminars, and with the participation and the work of 400 students in each meeting.

XI. “*Il cielo è rosso*: The sky is red at the Museum of the Battle of Vittorio Veneto; The myth of the fall of Troy to learn about war and imagine peace” (Museo Della Battaglia, Aula Civica, San Paoletto, Teatro Lorenzo Da Ponte – Vittorio Veneto, 27–29 October 2022).

XII. “*Ilioupersis*: *Inventare la pace al Museo della Battaglia di Vittorio Veneto*; Inventing peace at the Museum of the Battle of Vittorio Veneto; Epic archetypes and collective memory to understand war and build peace” (Museo della Battaglia, Teatro del Seminario, Vittorio Veneto, 26–27 October 2023).

Three books were born from this project:

1. Alberto Camerotto, *Troia brucia: Come e perché raccontare l'Ilioupersis* (Milan: Mimesis, 2022), *Classici Contro* n. 20.
2. Alberto Camerotto, Katia Barbaresco, and Valeria Melis (eds.), *Il grido di Andromaca: Voci di donne contro la guerra* (Vittorio Veneto: De Bastiani Editore, 2022), *Paradoxa* n. 1.
3. Alberto Camerotto, *Ilioupersis: La caduta di Troia in quattro atti, con un prologo, un epilogo e qualche nota di commento (sulle tracce epiche di Trifiodoro)* (Vittorio Veneto: De Bastiani Editore, 2023), *Paradoxa* n. 2.

Obviously, images of our world also emerge here and there, from the aberrations of the wars of these days, as for Iryna in Mariupol, or the yellow room in Dnipro, the young musicians Khrystyna and Svitlana killed in Zaporizhzhia, the devastation of the Odessa Cathedral, the grain silos on the bank of the Danube. Daily images. All normal images of peace and happiness are contaminated by weapons and death.<sup>6</sup> We look at them with fear: there is the tension of ancient ideas that tell us something to be able to resist in the face of horror. Even with the sense of testimony. It is the experiment of a *rhesis*, a civil discourse, a different thought from the world of Classics and Ancient Literature. Sometimes it is a good thing for research, philology and literature: to speak. This is our *parrhesia*.<sup>7</sup> Through ancient thoughts.

From all these works, we propose here a simple example through the analysis of the images of the Pithos of Mykonos, so close to Homer's poems and to the time of the epic narratives of the fall of Troy.

## THE FALL OF TROY: EPIC ARCHETYPES AT THE END OF CIVILIZATION

This is the first great iconographic testimony of *Ilioupersis*: it comes from the second quarter of the 7th century, between 675 and 670 BC, not far from the times of Homer and our most ancient epic songs. It may well belong to the lifespan of the same generation of men.<sup>8</sup>

6 On the contamination of codes in the *Ilioupersis* see Scheijnen, *Quintus of Smyrna's Posthomerica*, 278–80, Avlami, “Contextualizing Quintus,” 172–3.

7 On *parrhesia* and *Classici contro*, see Camerotto, “*Parrhesia*: Una parola,” 51–63.

8 See Ervin, “A Relief Pithos from Mykonos”; Ervin Caskey, “Notes on Relief Pithoi of the Tenian-Boiotian Group”; Anderson, *The Fall of Troy in Early Greek Poetry and Art*, 182–90.

It is a large vase, a *pithos*, from an island in the center of the Aegean Sea, Mykonos, near the sanctuaries of Apollo in Delos. The vase and the images were created to be seen by everyone on festive occasions, in public situations, just like the songs of rhapsodes were meant to be heard by everybody. At the top of the *pithos*, on its neck and so in a position of prominence, is depicted the wooden horse. This may well be the most beautiful image in the entire history of art. There are all the necessary elements: it is a large, impressive wooden horse that contains many armed men, and seven Achaean warriors with weapons, who appear in seven windows on the horse's body and neck. They let the weapons dangle from the windows above: we might say that the warriors are showing their weapons, a large helmet, a shield, and two swords ready to be drawn from their leather sheaths. They take pride in them, but this is also an authentic gesture: a simple and safe action before the last battle. Everything has been carefully prepared. This is what will resolve the war.<sup>9</sup>

As we can see, the wheels are applied to the horse's legs, a notable detail.<sup>10</sup> This element suggests the function, thus allowing us to identify the *equus Troianus* and the myth of *Ilioupersis*.<sup>11</sup> The horse must enter the city. Indeed, at this point of the story, the horse is already in the citadel: above and around, there are warriors in action.<sup>12</sup>

- 9 As we can see in Hom., *Od.* 492–5, the horse is essential from the point of view of the story, nothing else is needed. From here the *persis* begins, with this special space reserved for the construction of the wooden horse. The will is that of Athena. The objectives, the idea, the project are the *metis* of the goddess. The builder is Epeios, who is at work by divine inspiration. See de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary*, 215: "Odysseus' description of the song which he requests resembles an epic poem ... the Wooden Horse will lead to the fall of Troy." Of course, the famous theme of the song is "ἵππου κόσμον ... / δουρατέου" (*Od.* 8.492–93).
- 10 On the wheels of the horse, which are part of Epeios' project, cf. Quintus Smyrnaeus 12.424–27, Triphiodorus 100. For a different perspective, with the wheels applied by the Trojans, cf. Verg., *Aen.* 2.235–36. See Cadario, "Il cavallo di Troia," 224: "Alla presenza di ruote potrebbe forse alludere già il verbo usato da Demodoco nell'*Odisea* (8.504, ἐρύσαντο) per descrivere gli spostamenti del Cavallo all'interno della città."
- 11 The construction of the horse is widely narrated in the *Posthomerica* of Quintus Smyrnaeus (12.104–56) and in Triphiodorus' *Halosis Iliou* (62–102). See Campbell, *A Commentary on Quintus Smyrnaeus*, 46–48, Miguélez-Cavero, *Triphiodorus: The Sack of Troy*, 156–66.
- 12 Hom., *Od.* 514–15, "ἦειδεν δ' ὥς ἄστυ διέπραθον νῆες Ἀχαιῶν / ἰππόθεν ἐκχύμενοι, κοῖλον λόχον ἐκπρολιπόντες." It is the beginning of the action of *persis*, a new section of the song (ἦειδεν).

Immediately below the top representation on the neck of the vase, there are three bands divided into metopes, the tableaux of the story, and we immediately move on to the final events of the *persis*. The narrative gap, the logical leap, is impressive: the beginning and the end are in sequence, in contact. We will see what this means straight away.<sup>13</sup>

The wooden horse immediately declares the traditional tale of the fall of Troy. But what we see below is not the hard fighting nor the heroic scenes of the conquest that we would expect. Ultimately, this is not the Homeric αἰνότατον πόλεμον, “the most terrible battle” mentioned in Demodocus’ song (Hom. *Od.* 8.519). At the end of his *Ilioupersis*, the formidable singer of Scheria narrates the deeds of Odysseus amid the battle for the city, in Deiphobus’ home.<sup>14</sup> Demodocus’ song presents the signs of an *aristeia*: it recounts the final fight against the last defender, against the last husband of Helen, who thus also inherits the guilt of Paris and the role of the last target of the revenge of the Achaeans.

On the other hand, the images in relief on the large body of the vase are the scariest, most horrifying ones. Their sight is unbearable, no one would want to see scenes like these, neither the losers nor the winners. Even the old Argives say so at the return of Agamemnon’s army, two centuries later in a tragedy by Aeschylus: it is the refusal of the *persis*, and so it even becomes impossible to think of the heroic attribute πολυπόροθης, “destroyer of cities,” because of its meaning, because of what we see on this vase with our eyes:

μήτ’ εἶην πολυπόροθης  
μήτ’ οὖν αὐτὸς ἀλοὺς ὑπ’ ἄλ-  
λων βίον κατίδοιμι.

13 Anderson, *Fall of Troy*, 182: “The upper panel narrates an early stage of the attack, while the lower group follows with later chapters of the same story. This progression may be described with more precision as preparation and execution, the ruse of the horse above forming a prelude to the murder and enslavement below.”

14 Hom., *Od.* 8.517 “πρὸτὶ δώματα Δηϊφόβοιο.” Cf. Quintus Smyrnaeus 13.355 “Δηϊφοβὸν κατέπεφνε,” Triph. 627 “Δηϊφοβὸν κατέμαρψε.” See Verg., *Aen.* 6.494–97 “Atque hic Priamiden laniatum corpore toto / Deiphobum videt et lacerum crudeliter ora, / ora manusque ambas, populataque tempora raptis / auribus et truncas inhoneste vulnere naris.” On the death of Deiphobus see Renker, *A Commentary on Quintus of Smyrna*, 226–27.

may I neither be a sacker of cities,  
nor myself be captured and see  
my life subjected to another.<sup>15</sup>

Metope after metope, in a repetitive and interminable sequence, we see an Achaean warrior with a sword. He is not facing an equally strong and well-armed opponent, another warrior in a memorable battle that will be told in epic songs forever and depicted on so many vases: in front of each Achaean warrior stands a woman with a child. Desperate gestures, pleas, cries, useless tears against the power of weapons, against the enemy's violence. It is absurd and embarrassing; there is simply something wrong with the image. This is not a heroic myth. According to the rules of warfare, the rigid and heroic rules of war, fights can only happen between warriors and their equals. The war narrative is straightforward, even banal, but this is the only one still acceptable for those who believe in illusions and those who believe in mystifications. Here is an example. A duel is not possible between a young and strong fighter and a man who has become too old to bear arms.<sup>16</sup> It would be a shame; there could be no glory; it would be an ambiguous, degenerate *kleos*. The epic codes make it clear. So surely a duel between a warrior in his splendid armor on one side and a helpless woman and child on the other is inconceivable. By definition, women and children have nothing to do with war. They know nothing about war and weapons.<sup>17</sup> A helmet and a child do not go together; weapons are always awful.

15 Aeschyl., *Ag.* 472–74; translation by Alan H. Sommerstein. On the epic epithet *πολιπορθος* and its metonymic meaning see Camerotto, *Troia brucia*, 21–26.

16 On the epic values and infamy of the duel between Neoptolemus and Priamus, see Tanozzi, “L'antiduello,” 430–37.

17 Being a paradigm of weakness and terror, women and children incarnate the opposite of the qualities that make a good warrior; Hom., *Il.* 2.289–90: “ὥς τε γὰρ ἢ παῖδες νεαροὶ χῆραί τε γυναῖκες / ἀλλήλοισιν ὀδύρονται οἶκον δὲ νέεσθαι,” 7.235–36: “μὴ τί μιν ἦντε παιδὸς ἀφανροῦ περὶ ῥήτιζε / ἢ γυναικός, ἢ οὐκ οἶδεν πολεμῆϊα ἔργα.” The formula “πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει” (*Il.* 6.492, 20.137) is famous, also for its parodic re-uses in the comedy. See Graf, “Women, War, and Warlike Divinities,” 245: “πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει,” is the counsel Hector gives to Andromache – Lysistrata will repeat it, in quite another vein; γυνή στρατηγεῖ and γυνή στρατοπεδεύεται are proverbs used ἐπὶ τῶν παραδόξων. Women did not fight.” Loman, “No Woman No War,” Rousseau, “War, Speech, and the Bow”; Farioli, “Le dita tagliate delle donne greche,” 157s. The motif of children unaware of war will tragically return at the beginning of the *persis* in Quintus Smyrnaeus 13.123: “νηπιάρχους τῶν οὐ πω ἐπίστατο κήδεα θυμός,” Women and children are symbols of peace, they are the opposite of war: see



This is the *persis*: no rules or respect for gods or men exist. Before our eyes, we see the formidable deeds of the Achaeans. On the body of the vase, in a position of prominence, maybe even too prominent, is the violence against women, the slaughter of infants, and warfare of the most ferocious, ruthless, and unacceptable kind. We could even say that it is repugnant. A sword pierces a child in the arms of his mother; another one is caught between his mother and the warrior, who impales him. His blood flows like a river, and it can be touched on the relief of the terracotta. Another child in a lower metope is smashed on the ground: this is the same way Astyanax is killed, it seems to become a pattern<sup>18</sup> for prefigurations.<sup>19</sup>

Bigai, "Nausicaa e lo straniero," 146, and Consoloni, "Le donne di Troia: fondamenta della città in pace," 67–69.

- 18 Cf. Anderson, *The Fall of Troy*, 188; Morris, "The Sacrifice of Astyanax: Near Eastern Contributions to the Siege of Troy." The image of the killing of Astyanax can be represented among the panels of the *Pithos of Mykonos* (met. 17) according to the *Ilias Parva*, where it is Neoptolemus that kills the boy (*Ilias Parv.* fr. 21.3–5): "παῖδα δ' ἑλὼν ἐκ κόλπου ἐνπλοκάμοιο τιθήνης / ῥίψε ποδὸς τεταγῶν ἀπὸ πύργου, τὸν δὲ πεσόντα / ἔλλαβε πορφύρεος θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταῖη." Of course, in the collective massacre, this motif does not need to be further specified and can have many applications. Cf. Andromache's premonitory image in *Il.* 24.734–36: "ἦ τις Ἀχαιῶν / ῥίψει χειρὸς ἑλὼν ἀπὸ πύργου λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον / χωόμενος." In the iconography, Astyanax's body can become a weapon wielded in the scene of Priam's killing, a superimposition of two scenes of the *persis*. When Odysseus is the protagonist, the δίσκημα recalls his launch during the Phaeacians games in the *Odyssey* (8.183–96). We find the juxtaposition of the images of the competition with that of the *persis* in Euripides, as a contamination of incongruent codes.
- 19 This image is anticipated by Priamus in the definition of the *persis* scenes in *Il.* 22.63s: "καὶ νήπια τέκνα / βαλλόμενα προτὶ γαίῃ ἐν αἰνῇ δηϊοτήτι." Similarly, in the image suggested by the epic word κυβιστήσαντα (*Triph.* 644), we find the traces of happy categories of party, dance, and sport (*Il.* 18.605, *Od.* 4.18), but above all there is the sign of their distortion, and so of mockery and death (*Il.* 16.745, 16.749, 16.750, 21.354). The image of Astyanax's killing returns in Arctinus's *Ilioupersis*, *Procl. Chrest.* p. 92, 268 Severyns = *Il. Exc. arg.* p. 89, 20 B: "καὶ Ὀδυσσεὺς Ἀστυνάκτα ἀνελόντος." Cf. Stesichorus (fr. 107 Davies-Finglass), according to schol. Eur. *Andr.* 10: "Στησίχορον μὲν γὰρ ἰστορεῖν ὅτι τεθνήκοι καὶ τὸν τὴν Πέρσιδα συντεταχότα κυκλικὸν ποιητὴν ὅτι καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ τείχους ῥιφθεῖ· ᾧ ἠκολουθηκέναι Εὐριπίδην." Cf. Paus. 10.25.9 = *Il. Parv.* fr. 21 (11) B: "γέγραπται μὲν Ἀνδρομάχῃ, καὶ ὁ παῖς οἱ προσέστηκεν ἐλόμενος τοῦ μαστοῦ –τοῦτ' ὡς Δέσχεως ῥιφθέντι ἀπὸ τοῦ πύργου συμβῆναι λέγει τὴν τελευταίην· οὐ μὴν ὑπὸ δόγματός γε Ἑλλήνων, ἀλλ' ἰδίᾳ Νεοπτόλεμον αὐτόχειρα ἐθελῆσαι γενέσθαι."

All the other scenes are similar to these; they are variations on a theme.<sup>20</sup>

Among the panels of the first higher band, we perhaps see Helen appearing in front of Menelaus – an educated guess. Helen would be among the victims, among the women and the prisoners of war.<sup>21</sup> Judging by their gestures, this is probably the depiction of the first attempt at reconciliation between husband and wife. There is also a fallen warrior. It could be Deiphobus, as a paradigm or metonymy of the Trojan defenders: the symbol of the last, vain defense.<sup>22</sup> But he could also stand as a just victim of the revenge of the Achaeans and Menelaus. A symbolic function that is useful to everyone.<sup>23</sup> But their names do not matter; identifications are helpful for the story but not essential. These images are valid for the entire city, these are necessarily unidentified images of the collective massacre and horror. As we well know, this is the war code of Agamemnon, the Achaeans' commander-in-chief (Hom., *Il.* 6.57–60):

τῶν μὴ τις ὑπεκφύγοι αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον  
 χεῖράς θ' ἡμετέρας, μηδ' ὄν τινα γαστέρι μήτηρ  
 κοῦρον ἔοντα φέροι, μηδ' ὅς φύγοι, ἀλλ' ἅμα πάντες  
 Ἴλίου ἔξαπολοίαιτ' ἀκήδεστοι καὶ ἄφαντοι.

Of them let not one escape sheer destruction and our hands, not even the boy whom his mother carries in her womb; let not even him escape, but let all perish together from Ilios, unmourned and unseen.<sup>24</sup>

20 Cf. Quintus Smyrnaeus 13.100–23, Triph. 547–58. See Camerotto, *Ilioupersis: La caduta di Troia in quattro atti*, 109–13.

21 On the representation of Helen in the *Ilioupersis* see Brillante, “Elena nella notte della presa di Troia,” 109–10.

22 It is less probable that this might be Echion, the first Achaean warrior to die falling from the Trojan horse, forgetting to use a rope; his death somehow recalls that of Elpenor.

23 Anderson, *Fall of Troy*, 186: “But the massacre on the pithos need not be limited to a single family, and the multiplication of scenes may be read as an attempt to represent all the women and children of the city. Like the Achaeans of epic poetry, the warriors on the pithos are determined to eradicate the entire race of Trojans.”

24 Translation by A. T. Murray and William F. Wyatt. These are the words that Agamemnon addresses to Menelaus in battle. They serve as a rule of conduct, this is the ideology of war. See Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, 161: “the phrase, not elsewhere, has a threateningly legalistic ring”; Graziosi-Haubold, *Homer: Iliad, Book 6*, 90: “Both ancient and modern readers have expressed shock at his harshness, and at the poet’s apparent endorsement of it.” And then see Camerotto, “I giorni del sangue,” 65–67.



Fig. 1 – Ilioupersis, Relief Pithos from Mykonos, Detail  
(Archaeological Museum Mykonos, inv. 2240)

When the story is a *persis*, then one can observe the impotence of the women and the mothers whose children are being massacred in their arms, in front of their eyes; there is desperation and blood, and slavery. It is the time of the *doulion emar* (see Figure 1).

Why these images? Why does the artist choose to depict precisely these scenes, these images, and these motifs to narrate the *persis*? Such questions arise almost automatically. Even if these images were made for the public of the Hellenes, the context cannot be festive. It may be impressive, but it is not celebratory. There is nothing heroic about raping a woman; there is nothing great about killing a child, about massacring children without mercy before the eyes of their mothers. This cannot be the celebration of the winners. Why, then, do the Greeks of Homer's time represent and want to see the slaughter of infants, something that Euripides will call an ignominy, a shame for Hellas?<sup>25</sup>

The vase is certainly not a heroic celebration of victory over enemies. There is no sign of triumph. After the spectacular scene of the horse, we see the Achaeans immediately below: not even a single duel between heroes can be seen, and this is impressive since they are so frequent in many later representations of ceramics. The duel with the two warriors in arms facing each other becomes one of the most popular epic and iconographic themes. The structure is the same as that of the duel, but the variation is problematic, creating embarrassing and certainly terrible results. With the strength of their bodies, with the violence of their gestures, with the great weapons in the foreground, the Achaean heroes face the weakest, the helpless, in a literal sense. Women and children cannot be the protagonists of a duel. This is a massacre, but there exists a more precise term: it is genocide because the goal is the death of those who could become the

25 Cf. Eur., *Tro.* 1190s: "Τὸν παῖδα τόνδ' ἔκτειναν Ἀργεῖοί ποτε / δέισαντες; αἰσχρὸν τοῦπίγραμμά γ' Ἑλλάδι." Thus, the killing of Astyanax becomes the paradigm of cruelty and the end of civilization: Eur., *Tro.* 764s: "ὦ βάρβαρ' ἐξευρόντες Ἑλληνες κακά, / τί τόνδε παῖδα κτείνετ' οὐδὲν αἴτιον." The reasons are aberrant, this is the legitimacy of the extermination of the lineage, to avoid any possibilities of rebirth (Eur., *Tro.* 1160s: "μὴ Τροίαν ποτὲ / πεσοῦσαν ὀρθώσειεν;"), any possible return: Eur., *Hec.* 1138s (Polimestor about the killing of Polydorus): "ἔδεισα μὴ σοι πολέμιος λειφθεῖς ὁ παῖς / Τροίαν ἀθροίσῃ καὶ ξυνοικήσῃ πάλιν." Cf. this series of barbaric and monstrous comparisons, Sen., *Tro.* 1104–109: "Quis Colchus hoc, quis sedis incertae Scythia / commisit, aut quae Caspium tangens mare / gens iuris expers ausa? non Busiridis / puerilis aras sanguis aspersit ferī, / nec parva gregibus membra Diomedes suis / epulanda posuit."

future of the city.<sup>26</sup> So, if heroic values reside in face-to-face fighting against an equally strong opponent, then here we have the complete opposite.<sup>27</sup> Narrating the *persis*, then, is precisely narrating the violence. When the massacre of innocents becomes the dominant motif, the one that occupies the whole narrative, the one that is put in greatest prominence in the broader space of the scene of the *pithos*, then there can be no misunderstandings, no ambiguities. The artist's goal, the desired effect, is in what we see with our eyes.

The tale of *Ilioupersis* is the testimony of the true nature of war, not of the memorable actions of heroes. Their glory is cursed, as we well know. Telling the *persis* shows the desperation in the eyes of women, their gestures, the tremendous emotions, the words, and the cries of their voices.<sup>28</sup>

We can see in these images the end of Troy through the eyes of Priamus, Hecabe, and Andromache: before our eyes, we see death, devastation, fire, pain, and blood. The representations, images, and songs become collective consciousness, essential because of this effect.

There are at least two perspectives. It is good to show everything: works of art have the necessary detachment and *enargeia*. This is the goal of the artist of this vase. We must have the courage to show the tragedy on stage before the people. As we know, this is also the aim and effect of Demodocus' song.

It is good to see, understand, and remember. The evil of war must be seen. We must never forget what war means. This becomes a warning shared by everyone, winners and losers. The ruin of

26 The goal of the winners is clear and tremendous: Hom., *Il.* 9.592–94 “κήδε’, ὅσ’ ἀνθρώποισι πέλει τῶν ἄστυ ἀλώη· / ἄνδρας μὲν κτείνουσι, πόλιν δέ τε πῦρ ἀμαθύνει, / τέκνα δέ τ’ ἄλλοι ἄγουσι βαθυζώνους τε γυναῖκας.” See Camerotto, *Troia brucia*, 67: “Si uccidono tutti i maschi adulti, quelli che hanno il ruolo di difensori. Diventano il nemico demonizzato su cui inferire nella maniera più spaventosa, più oltraggiosa. Ma al contempo, se non prima ancora, entra in opera il massacro delle vittime innocenti, inermi. Si uccidono i vecchi, che sono la coscienza e la testimonianza della storia della città. Si ammazzano i bambini, anche quelli nel ventre delle madri, perché sono la speranza delle generazioni future e della rinascita.”

27 For the meaning, the rules of duel and confrontation according to the codes of heroic epic, see Camerotto, “Il duello e l’agone,” 9–12, and now Tanozzi, “L’antiduello,” 427–30.

28 On women’s crying and its value as testimony see Leandro, “Piangere Troia,” 39: “È l’esito di una volontà programmatica di sterminio, oltre che un gesto simbolicamente mostruoso; non riguarda solo la resa della città, ma la rimozione totale della sua memoria collettiva.” The women see and mourn the horror of the fall of Troy.

*persis* affects everybody. The story of *Ilioupersis*, with its words and images, could make us understand that the horror of war is always present.

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## ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the Italian project on “Ilioupersis: Epic Archetypes,” which delves into the multifaceted concept of war violence across cultures and history, exploring its representation in various disciplines like literature, art, and cinema. Through seminars, conferences, and public actions, the project aims to enhance civil consciousness and collective memory, particularly focusing on the fall of Troy as a universal symbol of violence and its consequences. With a strong emphasis on engaging younger scholars and involving communities, the project seeks to foster a shared historical and cultural awareness around war violence themes. Moreover, it explores the transformative power of sport as a symbol of peace and cooperation, drawing parallels between ancient athletic ideals and contemporary societal values. Collaborations with institutions like UNESCO aim to extend these discussions to conflict-affected areas, promoting peace-building efforts through cultural understanding and dialogue. Ultimately, the project advocates for a civilization that values peace, understanding, and cooperation over violence and conflict.

KEYWORDS: Troy, *Iliad*, epic, archetypes, Quintus of Smyrna, war

## Troja gori: Epski arhetipi

### IZVLEČEK

Članek obravnava italijanski projekt "Ilioupersis: Epski arhetipi," ki raziskuje večplastni koncept vojnega nasilja v različnih kulturah v zgodovini ter raziskuje njegovo predstavitev v različnih sferah umetnosti, kot so literatura, likovna umetnost in film. S seminarji, konferencami in javnimi nastopi želi projekt okrepiti državljansko zavest in kolektivni spomin, zlasti s poudarkom na padcu Troje kot univerzalnem simbolu nasilja in njegovih posledic. Z velikim poudarkom na vključevanju mlajših raziskovalcev in vključevanju skupnosti si projekt prizadeva spodbujati skupno zgodovinsko in kulturno zavest o temah vojnega nasilja. Poleg tega raziskuje transformativno moč športa kot simbola miru in sodelovanja ter išče vzporednice med antičnimi športnimi ideali in sodobnimi družbenimi vrednotami. Cilj sodelovanja z ustanovami, kot je UNESCO, je razširiti te razprave na območja, ki so jih prizadeli konflikti, ter s kulturnim razumevanjem in dialogom spodbujati prizadevanja za gradnjo miru. Končno se projekt zavzema za civilizacijo, ki med vrednote postavlja mir, razumevanje in sodelovanje namesto nasilja in konfliktov.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Troja, *Iliada*, epika, arhetipi, Kvint iz Smirne, vojna