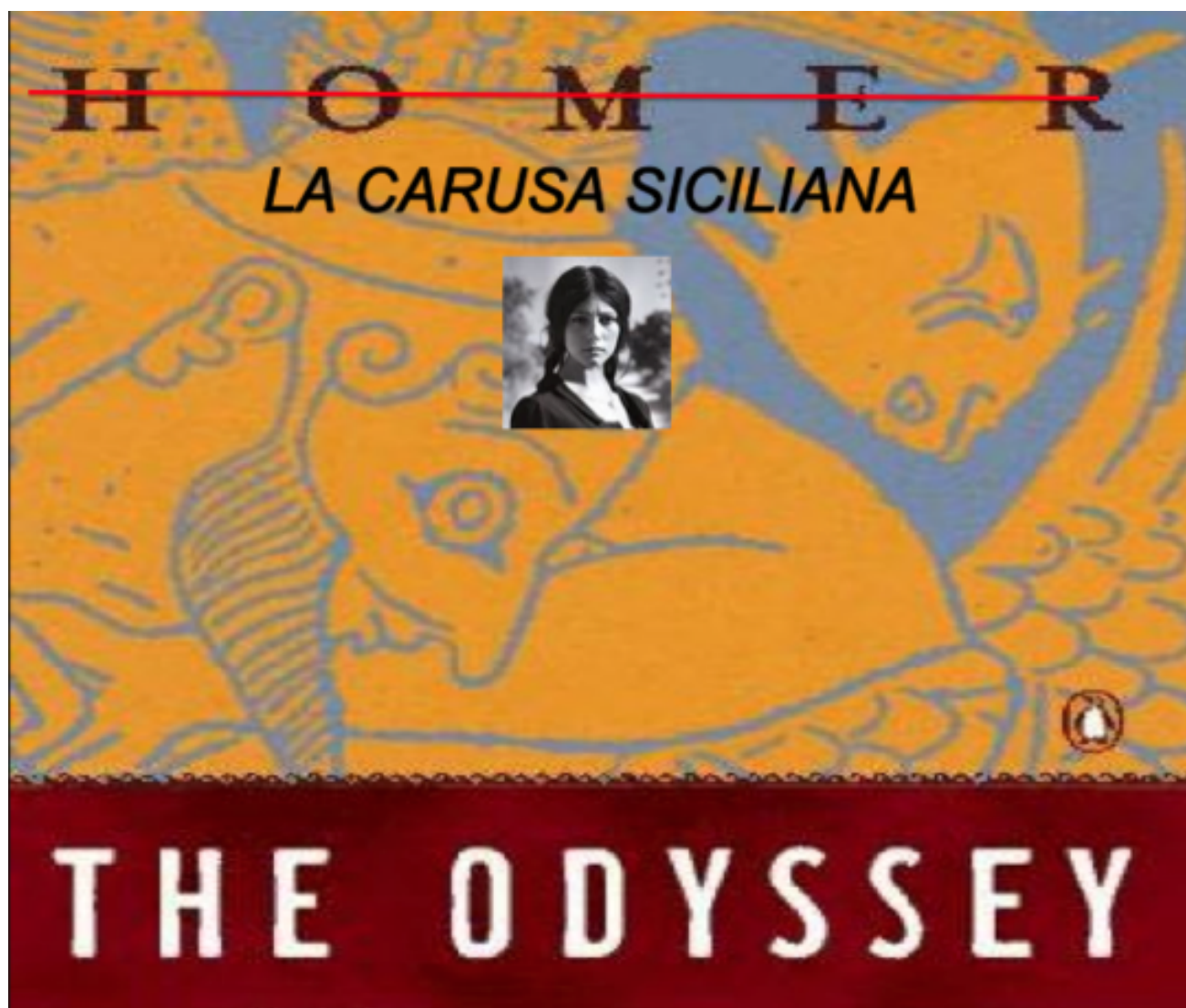




## **Step Aside Homer! "The Authoress of the Odyssey" is a Sicilian Girl from Trapani**

Tom Verso (April 30, 2013)



Amazing Sicily! ---- Samuel Butler's book "The Authoress of the Odyssey", proving that locations depicted in the Odyssey were in fact descriptions of Trapani and other places in or around Sicily, is just another example of Sicily's mystic. Adding to that, he goes on to argue that the author of the Odyssey was a Trapani girl, which in turn had a major influence on James Joyce's immortal "Ulysses". Further, renowned Canterbury classical scholar L.G. Pocock concurs with and expands on Butler's Sicilian origin of the Odyssey thesis. ---- Also, classical scholars A. J. Toynbee and Ettote Pais



established beyond reasonable doubt that Elymian Sicilians from the Trapani region were the first colonist of the northern Italian La Spezia area. Further, Toynbee, extrapolating a mountain of evidence, posits the Elymian Sicilians were likely the original founders of Rome ---- Also, all societies have crime but only the Sicilians have a Mafia; an international organization that baffled all forms of government and police organizations on two continents for 150 years, and has given rise to a virtual industry of scholarly, fictional and media publications and productions. ---- Also, Professor Joseph Privitera demonstrated that Sicilian is not an Italian dialect but the "first Romance language." ---- By any humanities/social science category of study, the 3,000 year history and culture of Sicily is nothing less than profound. ---- And, yet, the Italian American literati, blinded by their Renaissance love and Little Italy nostalgia treat Sicily as quaint backwater of the 150 year old Piedmontese Italian State. ---- Go Figure!

### Introduction

Samuel Butler, a classical scholar and translator of the Iliad and Odyssey, in his 1897 book *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, argued that a Sicilian girl residing in what has come to be present day Trapani wrote the Odyssey. Further, most of the places cited throughout the poem are in fact locations in or around Sicily; for example references in the poem to "Ithaca" and "Scheria" are in fact descriptions of Trapani.

Butler's book is a challenging read. He was a classically trained scholar with extraordinary wide-ranging intellectual interest. Further, he wrote in what I call the Victorian upper middle-class English idiom characterized by long sentences linking many parenthetical phrases, pluperfect tenses, etc. Also, he wrote in a polemical style essentially carrying on a 'running debate' with scholars who rejected his theories in previous publications. In short, his book is not for "reading at the beach", so to speak.

Fortunately, some sixty years later, another classical scholar, of no small reputation and Odyssey authority, L. G. Pocock, in his book *The Sicilian Origin of the Odyssey*, wrote an explication and elaboration of one aspect of Butler's theory. Pocock's book is written in an excellent pedagogic form and may be used as a text for students studying Sicilian history and culture. Also, the 1986 edition comes with an Italian translation by Nina e Nat Scammacca, and can be used in advanced Italian language courses by teachers who want students to read something other than Dante and Monzoni.

### Women and the Odyssey

While Pocock absolutely embraces Butler's theory that "the Odyssey was not in fact an eastern Mediterranean work, but a poem of Trapani in north-west Sicily..." (Origin p. 7), and agrees that the author was someone other than Homer, he seemingly does not accept Butler's theory of female authorship. He tacitly communicates his disagreement about a female author of the Odyssey by referring to the author with masculine pronouns (he, him). This points to the fact Butler's book actually develops two separate Odyssey theories: one historiographic and the other literary criticism.

The historiographic question, having to do with the actual historic locations of places referred to in the poem (e.g. Ithaca, Scheria, etc.), is argued objectively, in the manner of historians, based on geographic topography, maps and documents.

The gender of the author, on the other hand, falls under the aegis literary criticism; accordingly entails a degree subjective value judgment.

Matters of the truth or falsity of historic fact can be judged objectively based on material evidence. **Subjective judgments** of literary critics are just that, subjective. However, even subjective judgments are evaluated in terms of some factual and logical basis. Thus, Butler posits chapters of textual analysis of the poem as the basis of his logically inferred conclusion about authorship. In short, debate about the who wrote the poem does not come down to simply "I think" and "you think". The scholar is obliged to demonstrate the textual and logical basis of "why" s/he thinks as s/he does. In this regard, Butler does not come up short; his argument for the female author of the Odyssey is rigorous and will be explored in some detail in a later posting on this site. However, regardless of what conclusion one reaches about the author's gender, the overall gender characteristics of the Odyssey are significant and Butler has done a great service not only for the study of the poem per se; but, more generally Sicilian culture in the first millennium B.C. Increasingly literary critics are coming to appreciate the profoundly different gender characteristics



of the Iliad and Odyssey, which Butler documented and discussed in great detail. For example, Helene Whittaker of Tromsø University in Norway writes:

"...in the Iliad women are seen fairly infrequently and are not as a rule the focus of interest, in the Odyssey, on the other hand, they are everywhere and have major roles in the action; this allows for a clearer conception of gender roles to be developed than would have been possible from the Iliad." ("Gender roles in the Odyssey", see <http://www.gvssd.org/cms/lib02/PA01001045/Centricity/Domain/559/Gender%20roles%20in%20the%20Odyssey.pdf>)

While there will always be doubt about the gender of the Odyssey's author, there is no doubt that the poem's author presented women in the Odyssey quantitatively and qualitatively in profoundly different ways than women appearing in the Iliad.

#### "The Sicilian Origin of the Odyssey"

As noted above, Butler's book is challenging and the research for it was done in the early 1890s. Whereas Pocock's book, "The Sicilian Origins of the Odyssey", is a clearer presentation of Butler's historiographic theory and benefits from Pocock's augmenting research. Keeping in mind that Pocock is in almost perfect agreement with Butler's theory of the historic Sicilian character of the Odyssey. Where he differs it is clearly noted and generally meant to improve on Butler's work, not to challenge it.

[note: Pocock status as a classical scholar, apart from publications is indicated by New Zealand's "L G Pocock Prize in Classics" established in 1991 on the initiative of Professor Ernst Badian of Harvard University, who studied under Professor Pocock at the University of Canterbury. The prize shall be awarded for the best essay on Ancient History, either Roman or Greek, from the Archaic Period ca. 750 B.C. to the death of Constantine the Great 337 A.D."]

Professor Pocock begins his book with the following:

"Butler's book *The Authoress of the Odyssey* met with a reception so unfavorable that classical scholarship has never given any serious consideration to what was valuable in it. Nevertheless the theory of the Trapanese origin turns out, in my opinion, to be right." (p. 7)

And, he ends his book with the following:

"I shall conclude by saying firmly that the Odyssey is not a poem of the Aegean, or Anatolia, or the Outer Seas or Fairyland, but quite definitely and clearly a tale of Sicily and the western Mediterranean, the product of a western not an eastern mind.

"...the misunderstanding of the poem in antiquity and ever since has had, it seems, a regrettable effect on subsequent European literature...

"The discovery by Butler... makes the idea that the Odyssey was composed by Homer quite untenable: and it opens a vista in the history of the Western Greeks" (p103 emp. +)

By "Western Greeks" of course he means Sicilians.

Would that the Italian American literati could see that "vista in the history of [Sicily]" and bring their students and the Italian American people generally to see it.

Also notice that while he does not embrace Butler's theory of a female author, he categorically accepts the idea that someone other than Homer was the author.

The indubitableness with which Pocock writes derives from the comprehensiveness of the empirical factual basis of his and Butler's conclusions. These are not subjective aesthetic conclusions that can be dismissed as the opinion of the writers to be treated equally with opinions of others. The comprehensiveness of the factual basis of the argument is such that the burden of proof shifts to those who disagree that the Odyssey is a poem about Sicily and the Western Mediterranean and written by someone other than Homer.

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Future articles on this site will present the factual details and logic of the conclusions that Sicily is the origin of the Odyssey, and the discuss the profound role Sicilian women play in the poem.

Next

Odyssey's fictional Ithaca and Scheria is historical Trapani – Absolutely No Doubt: "Take it to the bank!"



odyssey-sicilian-girl-trapani

### **Links**

[1] <http://newsite.iltaly.org/files/35926odysegirl1366740199png>