

## The Cultural Wealth of Cyprus and the Role of Nature in Seferis's *Logbook III*

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### Abstract

In George Seferis's (1900-71) *Logbook III*, the place names are a recurrent phenomenon, especially in the titles of poems. As discussed in this paper, beyond the titles and other elements that denote Cyprus, Seferis refers to the island's cultural wealth and history in other ways. We examine how his description of natural elements like worms, leaves, trees and birds, and cultural heritage in general, suggests strong symbolism and even resists occupation and invasion. They react and rebel together to the threat of invaders and function as protectors of Cyprus's national identity and reminders of the island's Greek cultural character.

**Keywords:** Modern Greek poetry, Cyprus, culture, history, nature.

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### Introduction: The Title of the Collection

*Logbook III* includes the poems that Seferis wrote for Cyprus when the island was still a British colony. This is a crucial period of Cyprus's modern history, with the first action of the Ethniki Organosis Kypriou Agoniston (EOKA) (1955) and Makarios's exile (1956).<sup>1</sup> Although the poet initially titled the collection *Kolokes* and then *Cyprus Where It Was Decreed ...*, he settled on *Logbook III*. As Katerina Krikos-Davis notes, Seferis changed the initial title *Kolokes* because it would be difficult for the Athenian readers to understand. They would have been puzzled by this dialect word, which was not well-known in the Greek capital. But still, even discovering the meaning, they would consider it an 'unpoetic' choice.<sup>2</sup> Commenting on the title of the collection, Thanasis Agathou writes that while it circulated with the title *Cyprus Where It Was Decreed ...* in 1955, the poet changed it to *Logbook III* in 1962. In Cyprus, the poet saw the Greek drama and the fate of Hellenism. Cyprus was a school of language and Greek civilisation.<sup>3</sup>

According to Avi Sharon, *Logbook III* is a collection inspired by the poet's regular visits<sup>4</sup> to Cyprus and is dedicated to the island and its people. Seferis writes that, in the island, he experienced 'the revelation of a Hellenic world'. The second title, *Cyprus Where It Was Decreed*

<sup>1</sup> Φώτης Δημητρακόπουλος, *Σεφέρης, Κύπρος, Επιστολογραφικά και Άλλα* (Athens, 2000) 107.

<sup>2</sup> Katerina Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes: A Study of George Seferis' Logbook III (1953-1955)* (Amsterdam, 1994) vii.

<sup>3</sup> Thanasis Agathou. See Θανάση Αγαθού, '...Κύπρον ου μ' εθέσπισεν... το Ποιητικό Τοπίο του Σεφέρη στη Μεγάλη Οθόνη,' *Μανδραγόρας*, Τεύχος 51 (2015) 126-31. On the change of the title to *Logbook III*, see also Kostiou and Letsios who wrote about this second edition of the poems (Κατερίνα Κωστίου, Γιώργος Σεφέρης: *Ημερολόγιο Καταστρώματος Γ*, 'Κονδυλοφόρος' (2/2002) 247-263 and Βασίλης Λέτσιος, 'Στοχασμοί του Σεφέρη για το Ημερολόγιο Καταστρώματος Γ,' *Dictio* 5 (2012) 105-19).

<sup>4</sup> Demetrakopoulos mentions that the poet visited Cyprus with his wife three times: November-December 1953, September-October 1954 and September 1955 (Φ. Α. Δημητρακόπουλος, *Για τον Σεφέρη και για την Κύπρο* (Athens, 1992) 105). However, Georgis asserts that we are inclined to believe so only because these are Seferis's three longest visits, but that, in actual fact, he visited Cyprus six times (Γιώργος Γεωργής, *Ο Σεφέρης Περί των Κατά την Χώραν Κύπρον Σκαιών* (Athens, 1991) 174-77).

..., alludes to Euripides' Helen, in which Teucer, after his brother Ajax's suicide, announced the mandate to establish a second Salamis on the island to reinvent his former island home. As Sharon asserts, Seferis found in Cyprus a truer and richer Hellenism, more authentic than the rest of mainland Greece. The poet always sought for inspiration in the great monuments of classical antiquity and ancient tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, Seferis's decision to also change the second title is not without importance, especially if we bear in mind that the phrase 'Cyprus where it was decreed ...' is included at the beginning of the collection, under the title.<sup>6</sup> One could say that Seferis made this decision after thoughtful process. 'Logbook' constitutes the common title for two of his previous collections: *Logbook I* published in 1940 and *Logbook II* published in 1944. *Logbook I* was written during the years 1937-40, leading up to the Second World War. It was the era of the authoritarian regime of General Ioannis Metaxas. As Polina Tambakaki notes, 'The Last Day', a poem with historical context, was not included in the collection because of Metaxas's absolutism.<sup>7</sup> *Logbook II* revolves around the Second World War and the German occupation of Greece during these years. Interestingly, the poet's biographer, Roderick Beaton, writes that in April 1944 and when the poet was working on *Logbook II*, he suffered from insomnia.<sup>8</sup> Apparently, under this title, Seferis included the poems he wrote for two critical periods of Greece and Hellenism. David Mason explains that in his poetry Seferis deals with themes of exile, historical fragmentation and questions about identity, and this is expressed in a personal way.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the Cypriot poems show Seferis's personal agony for the island and its future, while at the same time, the poems embody all the cultural wealth of Cyprus as evidence of the island's Greek character. Consequently, the choice of the title was of vital importance for the poet, as he wanted to show that the Cypriot poems are the next stage of his earlier responses to Greek history and indeed part of Greek history.

Henry Gifford writes that *Logbook II* was written just before the end of his exile, while *Logbook III* was a dedication to the people of Cyprus for whom he had strong feelings. The poet explains that the Asia Minor disaster was the event that affected him strongly, as his country and people suffered after that. To him, Hellenism meant humanism and the survival of Hellenism was inseparable from the survival of civilisation. As Gifford also declares, *Thrush* and *Logbook III* constitute the final stage of his poetry and they deal with the war and the difficulties over Cyprus.<sup>10</sup>

Kostas Prousis asserts that *Logbook I* revolves around the expectation of the war, as Greece had yet to be involved. He sees the agony of expectation permeating the poems of the collection. In *Logbook II* we see the years of the war, the poet's exile and the places of his exile. Finally, the last logbook with the Cypriot poems shows that Seferis saw a strong Greek character in the island, a place full of symbols that inspired him to write patriotic poems.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Avi Sharon, 'From Asine to Engomi,' *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 20.2 (2012) 49-58. Salamis is an ancient Greek city-state near Famagusta in Cyprus.

<sup>6</sup> Γιώργος Σεφέρης, *Ποιήματα* (Athens, 1994) 231. See also Τάκης Λαγάκος, *Ο Σεφέρης και η Κύπρος* (Athens, 1984) 40-41.

<sup>7</sup> Polina Tambakaki, 'A Modern Poet Reads Ancient War Texts: Politics, Life and Death in George Seferis' "The Last Day," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 32.2 (2008) 218-36.

<sup>8</sup> See Roderick Beaton on the years 1943-44 in *George Seferis, Waiting for the Angel: A Biography* (London: Yale UP, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> David Mason, 'Reading Greece,' *The Hudson Review* 55.3 (2002) 431-41.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Gifford, 'George Seferis During the War,' *Grand Street* 5.2 (1986) 175-86. See also Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης,' 247-63.

<sup>11</sup> Κώστας Προυσίας, 'Ο Ποιητής Γιώργος Σεφέρης,' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens, 2004) 171-97.

According to David Ricks, in *Logbooks* the poet engages with current events, while his appointment at the diplomatic service as ambassador coincided with the efforts to resolve the future of the island.<sup>12</sup> Seamus Heaney claims that in some of his poems Seferis speaks about the war and the way his country is affected by the disasters and the new vendettas of a civil war.<sup>13</sup> Katerina Kostiou also declares that the repeated title, *Logbook*, embodies all the travels of Seferis's heroes.<sup>14</sup> In any case, we could assume that Seferis's *Logbooks* deal with certain events of Modern Greek history.

### Seferis's Hellenism and Love for Cyprus

For Seferis, Cyprus was the revelation of a new world that he could only imagine before. Since the 1930s he had sought a new national identity beyond geographical zones. He looked at the Second World War and the Civil War.<sup>15</sup> As Anthony Dracopoulos declares, Seferis's geographical landscape is the Greek world with certain references from the ancient Greek world particularly, while there is 'the other' which is Europe.<sup>16</sup> Cyprus could be seen as a new Greece that Seferis began to discover. In a letter to his sister Ioanna, Seferis wrote not only about his love for Cyprus and the Cypriot people, but also about the fact that he saw in the island elements of the Greek tradition that he could not see in other parts of Greece:

I've fallen in love with this place. Maybe because I've found there things still living, that have been lost in that other Greece ... perhaps because I feel that this people has need of all our love and all our support.<sup>17</sup>

Chrysanthis argues that Seferis's Cypriot poems show characteristics of remarkable poetry, while his words 'in Cyprus every stone says a tale' from his personal notes show that he really loved Cyprus.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, as John Rexine writes, while his poetry was influenced to a great extent by modern, historical and literary events, Seferis was well aware of the literary and cultural past. Seferis was principally a Greek poet who knew the Greek classics very well. He studied Aeschylus, Homer and Sophocles, and his philosophy of life was in accordance with his classical heritage. Several of the ideas expressed in his poetry allude to classical authors and meanings of order, peace and justice.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Seferis wrote many essays, among them a major essay on the sixteenth-century poem *Erotocritos*.<sup>20</sup> Seferis also admired Makryannis; although an illiterate,

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<sup>12</sup> David Ricks, 'Seferis's Three Secret Poems,' *Harvard Review* 30 (2006) 66-69.

<sup>13</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'Homage to Seferis,' *Harvard Review* 20 (2001) 33-38.

<sup>14</sup> Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης,' 248-249.

<sup>15</sup> Λέτσιος, 'Στοχασμοί του Σεφέρη,' 107-108.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Dracopoulos, 'Identity and Difference: Hellenism in the Works of G. Seferis and C.P. Cavafy,' *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* 11 (2015) 114-130.

<sup>17</sup> Beaton, *George Seferis* 310.

<sup>18</sup> Φώτης Δημητρακόπουλος (ed.) *Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης και οι Γάτες τ' Αη Νικόλα* (Athens, 1995) 52-53. My translation.

<sup>19</sup> John E. Rexine, 'The Diaries of George Seferis as a Revelation of His Art,' *World Literature Today* 61.2, *The Diary as Art* (1987) 220-23.

<sup>20</sup> Avi Sharon, 'Touching Words: Finding Tradition through Translation among Seferis, Eliot, and Keats,' *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 11.3 (2004) 47-82.

he produced a notable memoir.<sup>21</sup> According to the poet's words, Makryannis is the most important prose writer in Modern Greek literature.<sup>22</sup>

For Bibhu Padhi, Seferis is one of those poets who did not use any meaningless abstractions, while his poems embody enriched images of history and personal myth. He frequently alludes to 'the details of the Greek landscape', as he does with Cyprus. What makes Seferis a 'national poet' is his love of and intimacy with humanity in general which features in his poetry.<sup>23</sup> Padhi also explains that in his poems Seferis depicts the sun of Greece and the Aegean, while his rhythm suggests a Mediterranean wave. The sea colours the lyric and symbolic landscape of his poetry, while the memories of his native Greece are a common theme.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Seferis's Hellenism permeates the whole of his poetic corpus and *Logbook III* is such an expression of Hellenism. Seferis claims that Greek cultural heritage is boundless, and anyone could take a lesson of great value. A Greek folk song could enlighten even Homer and Aeschylus, and this is something unique.<sup>25</sup>

According to Rexine, when Seferis was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1963, he saw it not as a prize for himself but rather as a tribute to Greece. Seferis is a representative poet of Greece, as the Greek tradition appears in several of his poems. Moreover, the tragedy of humanity is a common theme in his poetry,<sup>26</sup> and this is the case in *Logbook III* and Cyprus. Besides, Seferis is Greek in experience, choice of theme and sense of history. His poetry teaches us the wisdom of an ancient tradition and how to be human.<sup>27</sup>

Edmund Keeley declares that Seferis is one of those poets of the mid-thirties and the end of the Second World War who saw the violence and misfortune in their country. It is then that Seferis expressed his mature poetic voice by echoing contemporary states in combination with the Homeric tradition. In his poetry, he shows the current historical moment through certain images of his tradition, like in the poem 'Helen'. So, Greek history, mythology and landscape are basic themes of his poetic oeuvre.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Cypriot Thematology of the Poems**

Krikos-Davis separates the poems of *Logbook III* into three categories according to their theme. There are ancient Greek themes: 'In the Goddess Name I Summon You ...', 'Helen', 'Pentheus' and 'Euripides the Athenian'; Medieval themes: 'Agianapa II', 'Neophytos Enkleistos Speaks', 'The Demon of Fornication' and 'Three Mules'; and themes on contemporary Cyprus: 'Agianapa I', 'Details on Cyprus', 'In the Kyrenia District', 'Salamis of Cyprus' and 'Engomi'.<sup>29</sup>

*Logbook III* is characterised by the deep nostalgia of Greece, while certain poems, like 'Memory I', are 'full of Cyprus'.<sup>30</sup> In a number of poems the title clearly denotes Cyprus, as we

<sup>21</sup> Gifford, 'George Seferis During the War' 179.

<sup>22</sup> George Seferis, 'Makryannis,' *On the Greek Style*, Trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos. Intro. Rex Warner (Evia: Harvey, 2000) 23-65.

<sup>23</sup> Bibhu Padhi, 'Carvings of a Humble Art: The Poetry of George Seferis,' *Interpretations*, 13.1 (1981) 73-79.

<sup>24</sup> Padhi, 'Carvings of a Humble Art' 76-77.

<sup>25</sup> George Seferis, 'Theophilos,' *On the Greek Style*, Trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos. Intro. Rex Warner (Evia: Harvey, 2000) 1-11.

<sup>26</sup> John E. Rexine, 'Seferis,' *Books Abroad* 41.1 (1967) 37-38.

<sup>27</sup> Rodis Roufos, 'George Seferis,' *Transition* 12 (1964) 31-32.

<sup>28</sup> Edmund Keeley, 'Four Greek Poets,' *Chicago Review* 14.1 (1960) 77-88.

<sup>29</sup> Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes*. See also *Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης*, 60.

<sup>30</sup> Kostas Taktis, 'My Short Life With Seferis,' *Grand Street* 5.2 (1986) 187-200.

see several Cypriot place names: ‘Agianapa I’, ‘Agianapa II’, ‘Details on Cyprus’, ‘In the Kyrenia District’, ‘Salamina of Cyprus’ and ‘Engomi’, while the resort Platres appears four times in the poem ‘Helen’.<sup>31</sup> Certain poems of the collection clearly identify a setting when highlighting history and mythology, while Seferis makes use of legendary or historical sources.<sup>32</sup>

Kostiou writes that *Logbook III* signifies a return to light and this is a result of the poet’s Cypriot experience. An example of this theme of light can be found in the poem ‘Agianapa I’.<sup>33</sup> Takis Lagakos sees a similar climate focusing on ‘Agianapa I’ and ‘In the Kyrenia District’, in which the autumn sun of Cyprus is the prevalent topic.<sup>34</sup> In addition, ‘Agianapa I’ could be seen as Seferis’s attempt to speak through tradition. The image from the poem recalls the blood-offering of Odysseus in the eleventh book of *The Odyssey*.<sup>35</sup> In Seferis’s words, Cyprus is the place where miracles still happen and, as Kostiou asserts, the poems of the collection give answers to the central problem of *nostos* (return to the homeland) we see in his previous poetry and of course in *The Odyssey*.<sup>36</sup>

The *Chronicle of Machairas* is the obvious source for two of the poems in the collection: ‘Three Mules’ and ‘The Demon of Fornication’.<sup>37</sup> Krikos-Davis writes that, according to G.P. Savidis, the latter is a Shakespearian poem at the height of Seferis’s poetic art, as he applies his experience and vision. Krikos-Davis also asserts that, while ‘The Demon of Fornication’ reminds us of the poetic elements of another important Modern Greek poet, Cavafy, Seferis uses a similar linguistic idiom to that of the chronicle. ‘Three Mules’ is also inspired by the Cypriot narrative.<sup>38</sup> Besides, there is evidence in the poet’s correspondence with Chrysanthis that he did, indeed, study the chronicle.<sup>39</sup>

Focusing on the poem ‘Engomi’,<sup>40</sup> Sharon declares that, as with ‘The King of Asine’<sup>41</sup> from *Logbook I*, we have a Mycenaean site but two different responses to them. While in ‘Asine’ the reader sees the Homeric element, in ‘Engomi’ we see the poet’s revelation through the extensive quotation from the apocryphal gospel of James: after settling Mary in a cave in Bethlehem, Joseph goes to find a midwife, but finally he has a vision of the world in freeze-frame.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Chrysanthis gives a full list with all the Cypriot place names and names in the collection. Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης, 56.

<sup>32</sup> Edmund Keeley, ‘Seferis and the “Mythical Method,”’ *Comparative Literature Studies* 6.2 (1969) 109-25.

<sup>33</sup> Κωστίου, ‘Γιώργος Σεφέρης,’ 248-49.

<sup>34</sup> Λαγάκος, *Ο Σεφέρης και η Κύπρος*, 42. The poem on Kyrenia, according to Charalambidou, gives the clear scenography of a traditional village in Kyrenia’s outskirts (Νάτια Χααραλαμπίδου, ‘Κύπρος και Σεφέρης: «Στα περίχωρα της Κερύνειας»,’ *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens, 2004) 263-321).

<sup>35</sup> Sharon, ‘Touching Words’ 65-66.

<sup>36</sup> Κωστίου, ‘Γιώργος Σεφέρης’ 254.

<sup>37</sup> See the poems in Σεφέρης, *Ποιήματα*, 247, 256 and in English translation in George Seferis, *Complete Poems*, Trans. and Eds. and Intro. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2013) 182, 185.

<sup>38</sup> Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 84, 89.

<sup>39</sup> In a letter on 18 April 1954 by Chrysanthis to Seferis (Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης 34).

<sup>40</sup> Seferis, *Complete Poems* 194.

<sup>41</sup> Seferis, *Complete Poems* 134.

<sup>42</sup> Sharon, ‘From Asine to Engomi’ 55. It is also interesting to note that as Argyros writes, ‘The King of Asine’ was written two years after the poet visited the ruins of the fortress of Asine near the village of Toros, ‘while the body of the poem is an extended reflection on the ontological status of this artefact’ (Alexander Argyros, ‘The Hollow King: a Heideggerian Approach to George Seferis’s “The King of Asini,”’ *Boundary 2* 15.1/2 (1986-1987) 305-321).

This Protevangelium of James became one of the most important and popular of the unofficial doctrines in Orthodoxy, and Seferis considered it a ‘demotic’ gospel and part of another Hellenism he began to explore. Generally in his poetry, Seferis attempted to keep human memory and recover the living voice of the stone relics, and this is what the poet does in ‘Engomi’. Consequently, the poem could be seen as an *engkomion* (praise) of a fragile and vital tradition. As Sharon also writes, it was during his visit to the Bronze Age site of Engomi that the poet had this epiphany of his Cypriot experience.<sup>43</sup>

Heaney asserts that ‘Engomi’ is a mysterious poem in between the actuality of life and the vision of the Apocrypha. The poem is relevant to another poem set in Cyprus: ‘Helen’,<sup>44</sup> which is an expression of suffering and devastations of war.<sup>45</sup> Focusing on ‘Helen’, Maronitis sees the strong shade of Euripides, which permeates the whole collection, while Teucer is a Seferis persona.<sup>46</sup> Another poem with a similar setting is ‘Euripides the Athenian’,<sup>47</sup> which embodies much more than a selection of facts or events from the Euripidean world. The poem is enriched by the poet’s Cypriot experience<sup>48</sup> and revolves around the political conditions in Cyprus in 1954-55.<sup>49</sup>

‘Helen’ and ‘Salamis in Cyprus’<sup>50</sup> are the obvious sources for Mikelidis’s short film, ‘Κύπρον ου μ’ εθέσπισεν’. Agathou analyses how certain meanings of the poems are reflected in Mikelidis’s film. ‘Salamis in Cyprus’ is depicted through a strong imagery of Hellenism, as the film shows relics of a previous civilisation and the foundations of the Byzantine Church of Saint Epiphanius. We can also see the images of a *kouros*, the colours of the sea and the focus on wheels, which is a lively image implying the attempts by the British to keep the island under control. The depiction of ‘Helen’ starts with a part from Euripides’ tragedy and then images of a young couple, concentration camps and other scenes. In any case, this is a rather cinematographic interpretation of the poems and, as Agathou writes, it does not reflect the actual content of the poems. Nevertheless, Mikelidis’s documentary film shows the Cypriot tragedy clearly, as Cyprus becomes a symbol of suffering. In that way, Seferis’s poems gain a new dimension through Mikelidis’s film and material.<sup>51</sup>

A reading of the two poems can show that Agathou’s commentary on Mikelidis’s representations is reasonable, as Seferis primarily wants to comment on the events in Cyprus during the British occupation. In ‘Salamis in Cyprus’ we can see that when the poet writes ‘earth has no handles for them to shoulder her and carry her off’,<sup>52</sup> he comments on the obvious fact that a country cannot be moved from its natural place, and Cyprus’s natural place cannot be somewhere else, far from the Mediterranean Sea. Even if the British ‘gather tools’ to change this state, according to the poem, it seems that the nature and character of Cyprus remains unchanged. In

<sup>43</sup> Sharon, ‘From Asine to Engomi’ 55-56.

<sup>44</sup> Seferis, *Complete Poems* 177.

<sup>45</sup> Heaney, ‘Homage to Seferis’ 36-38.

<sup>46</sup> Δ. Ν. Μαρωνίτης, ‘Μύθος και Ιστορία στο Ημερολόγιο Καταστρώματος Γ,’ *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens, 2004) 153-169.

<sup>47</sup> Seferis, *Complete Poems* 193.

<sup>48</sup> George P. Savidis, ‘The Tragic Vision of Seferis’ *Grand Street* 5.2 (1986) 153-74.

<sup>49</sup> Κωστίου, ‘Γιώργος Σεφέρης’ 254.

<sup>50</sup> Seferis, *Complete Poems* 190.

<sup>51</sup> Αγαθού, ‘...Κύπρον ου μ’ εθέσπισεν...’ 126-28.

<sup>52</sup> For all the quotations of the poems, I use the translation from George Seferis, *Complete Poems*, Trans. and Eds. and Intro. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (London, 2013).

‘Helen’, the repetition of ‘the nightingales won’t let you sleep in Platres’ is not just a refrain. Seferis intends to show nature’s complaint and unease with the current state. The birds of the poem are the voice of protest against the invaders. As Kranidiotis writes in his letter to Seferis, this is a strong poem full of love, truth and freedom.<sup>53</sup>

The invader is not the British in the poem ‘Agianapa II’,<sup>54</sup> but Reynald de Châtillon. The reader sees the date ‘Spring 1156’: this is when the French adventurer, who is made Prince of Antioch through marriage, invaded the island and caused widespread calamity to crops, houses, herds, monasteries and churches, while women were raped and many people died. Those who survived went to the coast and were set free only after they had agreed to buy back their cattle and ransom themselves. The Duke of Cyprus, John Comnenus, his lieutenant, Michael Branias, and other prominent people were carried off by the departing invaders as hostages until their ransom amounts were paid.<sup>55</sup> In that way, the poet takes us back to another critical period for Cyprus with a different invader: the poet invites the reader to become part of the events of 1156. With the indication of the actual year (1156), the poet gives a clear setting and invites the reader to become part of the events. It could also be seen as an attempt by the poet to show how history repeats itself and how, before British occupation, Cyprus survived Reynald’s calamities.

The phrase ‘under the ageing sycamore’ appears three times: in the first, third and sixth stanzas. The old sycamore tree is a specific tree at the Venetian monastery in Agianapa; Seferis kept a photo of this tree in his diary depicting his wife (Maro) and Louizos (a friend) next to this tree.<sup>56</sup> The fact that the old sycamore tree of the poem is the one that the poet saw during his visit to the Venetian monastery is also mentioned by Krikos-Davis, who suggests that the repeated references to the old sycamore tree unmistakably imply that the setting of the poem is the ruins of the sixteenth-century monastery standing at the west entrance.<sup>57</sup> One could say that the Venetian monastery stands as a distinct specimen of Western civilisation, threatening the Greek Orthodox character of the island. Nevertheless, it is also an indication of the diversity one sees in Cyprus.

In the second stanza, the poet welcomes the ‘breath of the soul’ by saying, ‘do come in, do drink in your fill of our desire.’ This is the *pothos* (desire) of the poetic ego and the Cypriot people for freedom, and the people’s call for this freedom. Yet, by saying ‘this is no Palm Sunday wind no wind of the Resurrection but a wind of fire, a wind of smoke, a wind of joyless life’, the poet means the attacks in Cyprus by its invaders in 1156 and the battles that followed. This is not the wind the poet and the Cypriots expected, but a hostile wind that caused disasters. George Georgis also connects the old sycamore tree of the poem – which suggests strong imagery – with Seferis’s notes, while he explains that the wind in the poem is a symbol for the date ‘Spring 1156’ and the attacks on the island.<sup>58</sup>

We see, again, strong symbolism in the last two lines of the poem, something that has also been noted by previous critics: ‘reeking of florins everywhere, and bartered us for gold’. According to Kostiou, in Seferis’s poetry money and commercial actions in general constitute

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<sup>53</sup> Δημητρακόπουλος, *Σεφέρης, Κύπρος, Επιστολογραφικά και Άλλα* 204.

<sup>54</sup> Seferis, *Complete Poems* 267.

<sup>55</sup> Information given by Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 68-69.

<sup>56</sup> Γιώργος Σεφέρης, *Μέρες Στ’*: 20 Απρίλη 1951 – 4 Αυγούστου 1956, ed. Παναγιώτης Μέρμυγκας (Athens, 1986) 102.

<sup>57</sup> Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 64.

<sup>58</sup> Γεωργής, *Ο Σεφέρης Περί των Κατά την Χώραν Κύπρον Σκαιών* 51-52.

symbols of death, betrayal and opportunism.<sup>59</sup> In these lines, the poet shows such a commercial action through the sale of Cyprus by its invaders.

Krikos-Davis informs us that in 1191, Richard the Lionheart defeated Isaac Ducas Comnenus and became master of the island. After a short-lived rule, he sold Cyprus to the Orders of the Templars for 100,000 gold dinars, of which he received 40,000. Later, Cyprus passed into the possession of Guy de Lusignan. The Knights Templar held the island for about a year. Their tyrannical ways and exploitation led to a rebellion in Nicosia. They then proceeded to massacre and destroy villages. After such a catastrophe, the country was no longer of interest to them, and they asked Richard to cancel the sale. Finally, 'Guy de Lusignan reimbursed them for the 40,000 dinars, assumed responsibility for the 60,000 still owed, and took possession of the island.'<sup>60</sup> The events of the years 1191-92 are implied in the poem and, together with the year 1156 (after the title), create a strong historical background.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, an interesting point is Seferis's choice to return to strict verse. As Kostiou says, this return to metre suggests a rather ironic contradiction between the light style of a song and the tragic moments of the time.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the poet sets the phrase 'verses for music' under the title and the date 'Spring 1156', indicating that the poem is written in song form. Krikos-Davis mentions that 'Agianapa II' echoes the tradition of folk songs, while at the same time she refers to Savidis's opinion that the poem has certain analogies with Maniot and Akritic songs.<sup>63</sup>

The poem 'Details on Cyprus'<sup>64</sup> shows Seferis's relation with tradition.<sup>65</sup> Similarly to the previous poem, Seferis gives certain information under the title: this time we have a dedication to the Cypriot artist Diamantis, with whom Seferis maintained correspondence until the end of his life.<sup>66</sup> In addition, we know from the poet's personal notes that he met the Cypriot artist during his visits to Cyprus, at least on six occasions: on 6 and 27 November 1953, on 19 September 1954, on 3 and 17 October 1954 and finally, on 27 August 1955.<sup>67</sup>

Some words in the poem reveal Seferis's Cypriot experience. For example, a local craft uses dried *koloka* (gourd) to make receptacles, while *alakatin* (well-wheel) is also accompanied by the common Greek word for the well-wheel. By using these idiomatic words from the Cypriot idiom, Seferis introduces the reader to Cypriot art and traditional life. It is interesting to note that Seferis kept photos of *kolokes* decorated with scenes from the Greek revolution of 1821 in his notes about Cyprus.<sup>68</sup> Commenting on the poem, Sharon observes that the poet puts together different snapshots of Cyprus's folk character. Such an example is the well-wheel. The word *alakatin* belongs to both the local dialect and ancient Greek too.<sup>69</sup> Rexine also notes Seferis's love for the Greek language in general;<sup>70</sup> we could assume that he was not indifferent to the dialect of

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<sup>59</sup> Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης' 257.

<sup>60</sup> Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 70.

<sup>61</sup> Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 70-71.

<sup>62</sup> Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης' 255.

<sup>63</sup> Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 64-65.

<sup>64</sup> Seferis, *Complete Poems* 175.

<sup>65</sup> Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης' 253-254.

<sup>66</sup> Beaton, *George Seferis* 310.

<sup>67</sup> Σεφέρης, *Μέρες Στ'* 94, 97, 137, 148, 156, 181.

<sup>68</sup> Σεφέρης, *Μέρες Στ'* 150-151.

<sup>69</sup> Sharon, 'From Asine to Engomi' 54.

<sup>70</sup> , exine, 'The Diaries of George Seferis' 222.

Cyprus. Lagakos also notes that Seferis spoke with local people and saw that certain Homeric words survived in the Cypriot idiom.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, at the beginning of the poem, there is a reference to a church of Saint Mamas: ‘the little owl was always there perched on the doorkey to St Máma’. As Krikos-Davis notes, there are several churches in Cyprus dedicated to Saint Mamas. Nevertheless, the poet refers to a specific church located in the village of Dali, near Nicosia. Her argument is based on the poet’s reference to the wooden handle of the church’s door which is decorated with an owl. Such a surmise is correct, as there is a very detailed description of the handle by the poet.<sup>72</sup>

Another useful piece of information appears in the next lines: ‘angels unwound the heavens and a stone figure with arched eyebrows stared idly from a corner of the roof’. Again, Seferis’s photographic material helps to enlighten the poem, as this reference to the stone figure alludes to a kind of decoration with faces on the outside wall of Saint Marinas’s church, in Pera Chorio.<sup>73</sup> Georgis also connects the poem with the two churches as two realistic depictions of memory; thus the lines of poem are ‘photographic’ and connect to the poet’s notes.<sup>74</sup>

In the second half of the poem, the reader sees a strong symbolism: ‘and at the bottom, almost hidden, the sleepless worm’. The sleepless worm could be seen as a symbol of the permanent desire for freedom: although hidden and weak at the moment, it will grow stronger and one day will be ready for revolution. The worm is a reminder of the national identity and is the seed of rebellion. The symbolism of the poem is reinforced in the following lines, in which we see the ‘wooden *alakatin*’ to be ‘half in the earth and half in the water’. This is a rather vivid description that the reader can almost see. The wooden well-wheel emerges from the land of the island as an ancient relic to reveal the living tradition of Cyprus. The question, ‘why did you try to wake it?’ sounds like a warning by the poet to the invaders who will soon face the consequences, as the *alakatin* now moaned.

Also, the poet refers to ‘that cry, brought forth from the wood’s ancient nerves’, suggesting that even objects have a voice in this island. This is a voice of reaction calling for fight and justice. The ancient nerves of the wood denote that this wood is not just any wood: it is the ancient Greek tradition that still lives in Cyprus. This is the voice of the country that recalls the ‘Greekness’ of the Cypriot culture. Interestingly, Dracopoulos declares that Europe and the West constitute a threat for the Greek identity in Seferis’s poetry,<sup>75</sup> while Lagakos also explained this cry of the wood as the voice of the Cypriot land. This is a *de profundis* heroic voice which suggests a national consciousness and patriotism.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, Seferis asserted that European civilisation is an offspring of Hellenism and its values. Nevertheless, while European Hellenism was created, the ‘Greek Hellenism’ has not been created and has not yet discovered its tradition. What is needed is many great works, and many

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<sup>71</sup> Λαγάκος, *Ο Σεφέρης και η Κύπρος* 43. Again, Chrysanthi gives a full list with all the Cypriot words that Seferis uses in the Cypriot poems (*Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης*, 56).

<sup>72</sup> Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 116.

<sup>73</sup> Σεφέρης, *Μέρες Στ’* 114.

<sup>74</sup> Γεωργής, *Ο Σεφέρης Περί των Κατά την Χώραν Κύπρον Σκαιών* 73-74.

<sup>75</sup> Dracopoulos, ‘Identity and Difference’ 119-20.

<sup>76</sup> Λαγάκος, *Ο Σεφέρης και η Κύπρος* 49.

great humans have to work and struggle to achieve this. Seferis believed that when Greece gained a strong intellectual character, Hellenism would show its real face.<sup>77</sup>

The glory of an ancient Hellenism prevails in the poem 'In the Goddess's Name I Summon You ...'<sup>78</sup> which has been characterised as an internal monologue.<sup>79</sup> As Krikos-Davis notes, the poem refers to an ancient custom recorded by Herodotus. According to this custom, every Babylonian woman should prostitute herself once with a stranger, in honour of the goddess Mylitta, whom Herodotus identifies with the Cypriot goddess Aphrodite. The offer depended on each individual, and after intercourse women paid their respects to the goddess. However, the most interesting part of the story is Herodotus's declaration that an identical custom appeared in Cyprus.<sup>80</sup> As Georgis writes, apart from the fact that Seferis read Herodotus's writing on Cyprus, the poem was written after Seferis's visit to the temple of Aphrodite; the part from Herodotus's text and the poet's comments in his diary constitute the basis of the poem.<sup>81</sup>

Further elements showing Cyprus's cultural identity appear in the following lines. In the first stanza we read, 'oil on limbs, maybe a rancid smell as on the chapel's oil-press here, as on the rough pores of the unturning stone'. Here we see the description of a small church with an oil-press. As Krikos-Davis states, this style of church is widespread in the whole island and mainly in villages.<sup>82</sup>

In the second stanza the poet writes, 'and statuettes offering small breasts with their fingers'. In these lines, Seferis speaks about figurines which represent women offering their breasts, holding them in their hands. In his diary Seferis kept a photo of such a figurine. Consequently, we could identify the local Cypriot art, with the figurine of the poem.<sup>83</sup> G.P. Savidis identifies this kind of Cypriot idol as the goddess Aphrodite, dating to 700-500 B.C.<sup>84</sup>

The threat of invasion appears in the third stanza of the poem in which the poet presents nature terrified by the foreigner's presence: 'the leaves shuddered when the stranger stopped'. The leaves, as do other natural elements in the other poems, react to 'the other' who is the invader. Again, nature constitutes the voice of reaction and protest, while the relics, the churches and the cultural wealth of the island in general, denote its Greek character. Even if the invaders treat the island as an object of commerce (similarly to 'Agianapa II'), nature resists invasion and any change to the island's cultural character.

## Conclusion

The genuine symbolism of Seferis's poetry is a significant contribution to Modern Greek literature, while his deep insight into human suffering gave Modern Greek literature further recognition.<sup>85</sup> Seferis is an important poet of Modern Greek literature who also has a prominent position in European literature. According to George Thaniel, Seferis is 'not simply an established

<sup>77</sup> George Seferis, 'Dialogue on Poetry: What is Meant by Hellenism?' *On the Greek Style*, Trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos. Intro. Rex Warner (Evia: Harvey, 2000) 73-97.

<sup>78</sup> Seferis, *Complete Poems* 176.

<sup>79</sup> Κωστίου, 'Γιώργος Σεφέρης' 254.

<sup>80</sup> Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 35.

<sup>81</sup> Γεωργής, *Ο Σεφέρης Περί των Κατά την Χώραν Κύπρον Σκαιών* 38-39.

<sup>82</sup> Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 38.

<sup>83</sup> Σεφέρης, *Μέρες Στ'* 96.

<sup>84</sup> Krikos-Davis, *Kolokes* 37.

<sup>85</sup> Rexine, 'Seferis' 38.

Greek poet, as recognized by his Nobel Prize for literature in 1963, but a fully integrated member of the Western intellectual community'.<sup>86</sup> His poetry is well-known and became influential in Greece and the rest of the world.<sup>87</sup>

In his poetry, we see the wealth and richness of Greek culture, as these are themes manifested in his poems. *Logbook III* is not any different. It is a poetic collection that revolves around the drama of his country, since Cyprus was seen by the poet as an extension of Greece. Cyprus is another Greece where someone can still find these values that the rest of Greece did not keep; and, to a certain extent, one could say that some of the poems in the collection are at the limits of propaganda. In a letter to Katsimpalis, the poet writes of the possibility of Cyprus becoming officially part of Greece. Also, in the same letter, Seferis explains that this poetic collection is also a voice of love to his English friends for the tragedy taking place in Cyprus.<sup>88</sup> Seferis's visits to Cyprus and the Cypriot poems could be characterised as an expression of patriotism.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, we should note that Seferis saw the junta's actions (1967-74) and predicted its negative consequences for the island. He also saw Grivas's and EOKA II's actions (1971-74) for union not only with scepticism, but as the prelude for a following disaster. Georgis also assumes that the poet intended to come to Cyprus and support Makarios's attempts against Grivas, EOKA II and Turkey, but he fell ill and subsequently died (1971).<sup>90</sup> Even in his correspondence with friends, one can see that Seferis knew the natural difficulties for a union of Cyprus with Greece.<sup>91</sup>

In fact, Seferis said that the Cyprus dispute or issue was a political matter for which everyone was allowed to have his personal beliefs. But his Cypriot poems have nothing to do with that. In contrast, the poems revolve around Cyprus, its glorious culture and the drama of people living on the island.<sup>92</sup> Chrysanthis referred to internal and external 'Cypriot elements' in the collection. Place names and names constitute the external elements, while the history, myth and narrative are the internal Cypriot elements.<sup>93</sup> These elements compose the 'Greekness' of the island and could be seen as indication that Seferis saw and described Cyprus as an island with a strong Greek character. In conclusion, Seferis gives a wide range of information in order to show the cultural wealth of Cyprus and its Greek character. *Logbook III* embodies not only references to Cyprus's history, but it is also a successful portrayal of the island's cultural heritage and 'Greekness'.

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<sup>86</sup> George Thaniel, 'George Seferis' "Thrush" and the Poetry of Ezra Pound,' *Comparative Literature Studies* 11.4 (Dec. 1974) 326-336.

<sup>87</sup> Rex Warner, 'Introduction' in Seferis' *On the Greek Style* v-x.

<sup>88</sup> Λέτσιος, 'Στοχασμοί του Σεφέρη' 112-113.

<sup>89</sup> Λαγάκος, *Ο Σεφέρης και η Κύπρος* 47-48.

<sup>90</sup> Γεωργής, *Ο Σεφέρης Περί των Κατά την Χώραν Κύπρον Σκαιών* 182-192. As Pieris also writes, Seferis and Makarios had correspondence (Μιχάλης Πιερής, 'Συμβολή στο Θέμα της Κυπριακής Εμπειρίας του Γιώργου Σεφέρη,' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens, 2004) 65-102).

<sup>91</sup> See the letter to Alekos on 8.2.54 (Δημητρακόπουλος, *Σεφέρης, Κύπρος, Επιστολογραφικά και Άλλα*, 147-148). Besides, Seferis's text on 28 March 1969 was a public reaction against the dictatorship; see Σάββας Παύλου, 'Η Δήλωση του Σεφέρη Εναντίον της Δικτατορίας,' *Ο Σεφέρης στην Πύλη της Αμμοχώστου* (Athens, 2004) 199-262.

<sup>92</sup> Δημητρακόπουλος, *Για τον Σεφέρη και για την Κύπρο* 62.

<sup>93</sup> Γιώργος Σεφέρης-Κύπρος Χρυσάνθης 56.

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