11/10/2020

Theophano: A Byzantine Tale, the MUST read comic with the most beautiful illustrations



A beautifully illustrated story by Chrysavgi Sakellaropoulou and Spyros Theocharis has brought the East Roman Empire, or more commonly known as the Byzantine Empire, to life with vivid imagery that captures the imagination.

Theophano: A Byzantine Tale, is the story of a common girl who managed to become one of the most powerful women of 10th century medieval Europe.

Greek City Times spoke with both Sakellaropoulou, who prefers the name Chrysa Sakel, and Theocharis, the two who brought this amazing story to life.

Although Chrsa Sakel studied Chemistry, she told Greek City Times that “my passion has always been art. I have been taking painting lessons since childhood and I have created many classical artworks. Some years ago, I began experimenting with digital art. This is how I got involved in the project about Theophano.”

As for Theocharis, he said that he has always been a big fan of historical fan fiction and a comic book fan, but studied English and literature at university.

“For both of us, Theophano is a debut effort on the graphic novel scene,” they said.

Theocharis told Greek City Times that writing the comic book was not so difficult, but the most challenging part was all the hours of historical research “behind every page.” This has ensured that the story is as authentic as can be to 10th century medieval East Rome.

For Chrysa, her greatest challenge was the “transition from classical arts to digital art and comic book art” as it took a while for her to develop her own style. “But, having the basic skills from the many years of drawing in traditional medium, it only required a little research and experimentation to manage to finish a project like that.”

The two said they always enjoyed watching medieval themed movies and series like Game of Thrones, Vikings and The Lord of the Rings, but Theocharis “always wondered why the Byzantine East never features in fictional shows.”

“Byzantine history is full of stories which could easily become a series or movies. So, having read a lot of books about Byzantium, I was determined to create a story for a genre which could visually depict the Byzantine world. Details such as the clothes, the architecture, the lavish style of the Byzantine court can now be actually seen in the pages of our graphic novel as we depict them according to our history research. One example is the famous Cathedral of Hagia Sophia. Many people would think that its interior resembled that of a typical Orthodox church’s. From our research we found out that there were major differences according to the descriptions in the primary sources,” he explained.

Chrysa also added in her thoughts, saying that “series like Game of Thrones gave us the motivation to start thinking about our own medieval story, since some parts

in the series reminded us a lot of what happened in Byzantine history. We watched kings being poisoned, rebel generals raising the banners to claim the throne, noble families allying and betraying each other, eunuchs plotting according to their own interests and ambitious women using unconventional means to climb the ladder of power. Spyros already knew these things, but for me it was something unexpected to read about the story of Theophano and the period she lived in, and find out that it has so many exciting elements that are movie-worthy."

When asked whether Theophano was loosely based on a true story, Theocharis said "the story is mostly based on historical facts with some fictional additions to serve the cohesion of the narration."

"Theophano, the protagonist of the story was a real historical personality who may not feature as one of the highlighted personalities of the Byzantine era, but her actions affected the course of Byzantine history. In the primary sources, I found a lot of contradictory accounts about her deeds and about her family background. This was actually beneficial for me since I had the flexibility to alter the story without the need to stray from the historical facts," he told Greek City Times, adding that "within the plot, the reader will stumble upon more recognizable historical characters such as Nikephoros Phokas or John Tzimiskes. There is also a character beyond the Byzantine world who features in the second chapter and is known in countries like Ukraine and Russia. I am speaking of Olga of Kiev, the famous saint. There has been hours of historical research involved, combined with some parts where I took the initiative to improvise a little bit so as to create a narrative that could balance an interesting story combined with actual historical events."

Theocharis also explained that they chose this particularly time period because it's the point where the Byzantine Empire reaches its medieval peak in terms of wealth, territorial expansion and culture.

"Many Byzantine artifacts which are hosted around museums all over the world, were made during the 10th century. Many ancient Greek manuscripts were saved from oblivion during that time. We must remember that there was no printing press during that time and books were rare. They had to be copied constantly in order to survive the test of time.," he said.

He also gave a vivid recount on just how rich and powerful the East Roman Empire was during this period.

"The Imperial palace was adorned with golden mosaics, there were at least two

throne rooms and the emperors did not have only one crown, but many crowns which they used according to each ceremonial occasion. All these indicate the splendor and the extravagance of an empire which collectively has become known for its decline and backwardness. We wanted to change that view and show how advanced the Byzantine world was in the 10th century," he added.

Chrysa also revealed to Greek City Times that they have plans to produce more graphic novels set in the Byzantine world.

"Right now we focus on Theophano and if this project is successful then we are planning to produce a sequel. My dream is to someday have enough time and produce a comic book script about the Alexiad. It's a catchy story which involves the crusaders and it is more familiar to a western audience. I hope that the readers embrace this effort so that we can have the means to continue with future project," she said.

With such beautiful illustrations and untold hours of research, why would you not want to read Theophano?

You can purchase the comic on Amazon as paperback or on Kindle ***here***, as well as on Comixology ***here***.

Visit the website ***here***.


THEOPHANO
SPYROS THEOCHARIS
CHRYSA SAKEL
A BYZANTINE TALE

Source