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Review of

Steven Lowenstam, *As Witnessed by Images*

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# The Trojan War in Greek and Etruscan art

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STEVEN LOWENSTAM, *AS WITNESSED BY IMAGES. THE TROJAN WAR TRADITION IN GREEK AND ETRUSCAN ART* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2008). Pp. xiii + 230, figs. 86. ISBN 978-0-8018-8775-8. \$50.

S. Lowenstam takes an uncommon point of view for a classicist: he treats images as equals of text at the same time that he maintains that there are many *Iliads* and many *Odysseys*.<sup>1</sup> While he certainly can demonstrate variant traditions in texts and images, he has by no means proven that images work independently from the texts, for someone can always claim that the pertinent text has not survived. He considers objects from roughly the 7th through the 4th c. B.C.

The core of the book is three chapters devoted to Greece, Megale Hellas (as he somewhat coyly labels South Italy), and Etruria. They are flanked by an introduction that focuses on methodology and a short conclusion. The introduction gives an excellent overview of Homeric scholarship and the problem of whose Homer we have and when it dates. He stresses (9) that Homer had no "special stature" before the 5th c. B.C. and even then was not canonical. He goes so far as to say (11) that "the word 'Homer' can be substituted for 'tradition'." This approach is refreshing, since he believes that the images do not have to illustrate texts; rather we see (11) an "evolution of tradition as witnessed by the images". He does not quite posit the idea of image and text as strophe and antistrophe, but he does see artists and writers responding to each other's works. I believe there may be less interaction not just because of the logistical difficulties of artists' obtaining texts, but also because what makes a good subject to write about may not make a good subject to illustrate.<sup>2</sup>

For each geographical area Lowenstam focuses on a small set of objects with scenes related to the Trojan War, often selected for their subjects' continuing appearance in the other two areas. He tends to discuss stories related to the *Odyssey* first, because he believes that the *Odyssey's* stories with its emphasis on traveling were popular earlier than those associated with the *Iliad*. Hence he begins with the blinding of Polyphemos, moving on to the François Vase and the Exekias amphora in the Vatican with Achilles and Ajax playing a game on one side and the return or departure of Castor and Pollux on the other. His lack of art-historical training sometimes results in misreadings of scenes. For example, he thinks "the colossal size of the birds" [i.e., the Sirens] on the London Attic red-figure stamnos is highly significant, but artists in that period were still less concerned about relative sizes and more interested in telling the story.<sup>3</sup> Similarly in the scene with the ransom of Hector on the Attic red-figure skyphos by the Brygos Painter in Vienna,<sup>4</sup> he speaks (53) of "the ribbons or slabs of meat that seem to stab into Hektor's body below". Yet at this time artists had no way of depicting true recession in space other than by stacking up items so that what is lowest is closest to the viewer. Hence the table with the meat is actually in front of the couch in front of which lies the body of Hector: the point is that, while we today may see the pieces of meat as stabbing Hector, an ancient viewer

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1 Sadly, the author died in 2003 before he was able to complete the book, but he was very fortunate in having T. H. Carpenter see the book into print (which included ordering the photographs and adding an occasional reference after 2002). Carpenter adds (xiii): "in whatever editing I have done I have been careful not to impose my own views, so the book remains in every way true to Steven's intentions. This is his book."

2 Years ago I discussed with A. K. Michels the possibility of Etrusco-Roman legends appearing in Etruscan art. She thought it would be wonderful to find an image of the Gauls attacking Rome and pulling on the beards of the elders seated in front of their homes. Passing over the fact that the Etruscans were not likely to represent a totally Roman story, I remember thinking at the time that such a scene was that of a movie, not a still photograph, and not likely to be depicted in art. See also my book, *The parallel worlds of classical art and text* (Cambridge 2003), which appeared too late for Lowenstam to consider.

3 London 1943.11-3.31. ARV<sup>2</sup> 289 no. 1. Both sides are illustrated by Lowenstam (48-49, figs. 21-22).

4 Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 3710; ARV<sup>2</sup> 380 no. 171; Lowenstam 59 fig. 28.

would not. He ends this chapter with an interesting consideration of Kabiric vases from the 5th c. B.C.

Lowenstam stresses the importance of knowing the relationship between the function of the object and its subject. As a result, it is reasonable for him to interpret a South Italian volute-krater with the arming of Achilles as being for a South Italian warrior who died young. On the other hand, for another South Italian volute-krater with the arrival of Paris and Helen in Troy he cannot possibly know that the vase commemorated (88) "a beautiful woman whose wedding heralded joy and fulfillment [who] dies instead in childbirth, the immediate consequence of marriage".<sup>5</sup> Such an interpretation is akin to treating scenes like Rorschach inkblots. When he discusses the depiction of a nestoris on a nestoris by the Dolon Painter, he writes (108-9): "there is something self-referential and self-conscious in showing a nestoris on a nestoris, and this same sense of self-absorption is basic to the Helen myth".<sup>6</sup> If the artist were truly so self-absorbed, then the scene on the depicted nestoris would match the scene on the actual nestoris, but it does not. Lowenstam is probably unaware of the fair number of depictions of shapes matching the vases on which they appear without such an interpretative tie between them.

Lowenstam chooses an unusual representation of the Judgement of Paris on a Lucanian red-figure calyx-krater by the Dolon Painter in the Cabinet des Médailles where the goddesses are putting the last-minute touches on themselves and their outfits before the actual judgement.<sup>7</sup> Here Athena, most unusually, has laid aside her shield and helmet while she washes her hands. Lowenstam concludes (107) that "the Dolon Painter brings myth down to a simpler and more prosaic level, where unattractive women primp". The first part of his conclusion is apt, but the idea that the goddesses are unattractive does not work. Aphrodite, in particular, was renowned for her allure. Furthermore, the attractive are much more likely to "primp" than the unattractive, who tend to avoid looking in mirrors, and so on. On the name-piece by the Dolon Painter showing the ambush of Dolon by Odysseus and Diomedes, Lowenstam (107) writes: "the crouching positions of Dolon and Diomedes are comical, possibly inspired by a comedy or satyr drama."<sup>8</sup> While their poses may be comical, they do not need a dramatic play for inspiration. Anyone in ambush wants to make themselves as small as possible to avoid notice and hence will crouch; Dolon, who is also trying to avoid notice, similarly crouches. What we have is another instance of good observation on the part of the Dolon Painter.

These problems of over-interpretation and lack of in-depth knowledge about how art works become more evident in chapt. 3 on Etruria than in the two chapters devoted to "Greek" representations. Again Lowenstam begins with a laudatory aim (127) of taking "a minimalist approach ... trying not to claim more than I believe the bare evidence warrants". Again he goes beyond the evidence. His section on the ambush of Troilos by Achilles is a good example of his method. He takes a controversial interpretation by E. Simon and runs away with it.<sup>9</sup> On an amphora attributed to the La Tolfa Group a fully armed warrior is in ambush on the right behind a fountain topped by an enigmatic nude male figure.<sup>10</sup> On the other side a youth on

5 Geneva, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, HR 44; Lowenstam 87 fig. 49; A. D. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou, *The red-figured vases of Apulia. Supplement 2* (BullInstClassStudLon Suppl. 60, 1991-92) II 135 no. 77.

6 London, British Museum F 175; A. D. Trendall, *The red-figured vases of Lucania, Campania and Sicily* (Oxford 1967) 103 no. 561; Lowenstam 109 fig. 59.

7 Paris, Cabinet des Médailles 422, Lucanian calyx-krater by the Dolon Painter; Lowenstam 104 fig. 56; Trendall *ibid.* 102 no. 532.

8 London, British Museum F 157; Lowenstam 108 fig. 58; Trendall *ibid.* 102 no. 533.

9 E. Simon, "Die Tomba dei Tori und der etruskische Apollonkult," *Jdl* 88 (1973) 27-42.

10 Vatican 35708; Lowenstam 142 fig. 72. Lowenstam has less familiarity with Etruscan art than with mainland Greek or even South Italian art, which leads him to make minor errors but sometimes confusing ones for the reader. For example, he refers to this amphora as Pontic, when the La Tolfa Group consists of a separate group of painters. He refers to a Praenestine cista as an urn. He misreads (152, 154) the inscriptions on a mirror with Odysseus in the Underworld. His "y" is actually a "th" for Odysseus (Uthuze) and "hinthial Teriasals". The line drawing (155 fig. 79) comes from Gerhard,

horseback moves to the left while leading a second horse and looking back. He is preceded by a small man with both hands raised and a bough in his left. The overall interpretation of the side with the warrior as Achilles waiting in ambush is plausible, even if the other side is somewhat anomalous. Simon's interpretation of the enigmatic figure as Apollo Lykeios, however, does not make sense. As Lowenstam himself notes, the ambush took place in the sanctuary of Apollo Thymbraios. Second, Apollo Lykeios is generally represented as totally human. Third, the figure's head does not resemble that of a wolf, because his head seems to be a combination of an animal with large pointed ears, somewhat like a jackal, but with a beak for a mouth.<sup>11</sup> The real issue, however, is that Lowenstam does not follow his own stated aim of a "minimalist approach", but instead creates an Achilles Lykeios. An Attic red-figure kylix clearly portrays Achilles killing Troilos, because both figures are named on the vase.<sup>12</sup> In addition, LYKOS is written on the vase. If it referred to Achilles, it would probably be in the form of *Lykeios*. I see no reason not to follow the standard interpretation of LYKOS as a *kalos*-name that refers to a predatory male, much the way we would use the term "wolf" today. Lowenstam ends up not just combining Apollo Lykeios with Apollo Thymbraios on the Etruscan end, but also postulating an Achilles Lykeios which garbles the story of who is on whose side and mixes and matches evidence between cultures in different periods (archaic and classical). And do keep in mind that this interpretation is based on the shaky identification of the enigmatic figure on top of the fountain house as Apollo Lykeios.<sup>13</sup>

Because my expectations were high based on Lowenstam's introduction that outlined an approach I believe is correct, I was disappointed to find the examples he uses often to be over-interpreted and fraught with problems. Moreover, from his past work, which I have found rigorous and quite useful, I feel that, if Lowenstam had only been granted more time, he would have been more judicious in his use of the evidence. Finally, the Johns Hopkins University Press has done the book a major disservice in printing the text and photographs on a pale matte buff stock that reduces the contrast in the photographs, which frequently are not sharp.

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*Etruskische Spiegel*. He writes (170) that late Etruscan funerary urns are "engraved" when they are sculpted or mould-made.

- 11 For a decent detail of this figure, see K. Schauenburg, "Zu griechischen Mythen in der etruskischen Kunst," *JdI* 85 (1970) 71 fig. 39; he calls (69) the creature's mouth "schnabelartiger". See now S. Woodford, "An Etruscan twist to the story of Troilos," in *Teaching with objects: the curatorial legacy of David Gordon Mitten* (Harvard Art Museums 2009), which contains photographs of this figure on two other Etruscan vases that clearly show the figure has a beak. Woodford interprets the figure as an Etruscan death demon (I am grateful to her for sharing the manuscript with me in advance of publication).
- 12 Perugia, Museo Civico 89; Beazley Archive Database 203224. Signed by Euphronios as potter. It is not illustrated by Lowenstam, but the Beazley Archive Database has a photograph. Note that both Achilles and Troilos are named on the vase and LYKOS is classified as a *kalos*-name in the Beazley Archive Database entry. I wish to thank D. Clayman and J. Tatum for discussing LYKOS with me.
- 13 In the same chapter Lowenstam also considers the Pania cista, the Monteleone chariot, and the sacrifice of the Trojan captives.