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Book reviews

S. Langdon, *Art and identity in Dark Age Greece, 1100–700 B.C.E.*, Cambridge University Press 2008. 388 pp., 119 ill. (black-and-white photos), 4 tables. ISBN 978-0-521-51321-0.

This book proposes to analyse the visual expressions across what is still often called the Dark Age of Greece and into the beginning of the historical Greek polis world. The emphasis is on the pictorial paintings on pottery, since pottery was the most widespread medium for visual representation in early Greece and also since in those times it was the principal medium for figural scenes. Although the author focuses on mainland Greece, she also includes and evaluates evidence from other relevant regions like Crete, Cyprus, the Levant, and Italy. Langdon proposes that the best products of advanced craftsmanship of those days were objects made to order to serve as gifts or markings at important ceremonial events in the lives of households and communities: betrothals, marriages, funerals, festivals to the gods, maturation rites, etc. This means that they were integrated in a variety of social activities with potentially strong public participation. Among these activities, the gendered maturation rites for young men and women that was part of their socialization would have occupied an important place already at this early period, as we may gather from the archaeological record at hand. As all communal and collective venues were laden with claims and negotiations of social values with gender accents, the visual representations on objects that were used in those contexts would have been similarly laden, and they would not have been unaffected by social changes or incapable of influencing change.

In fact, putting her empirical material to work in a social rather than an aesthetic key, Langdon wants us to consider precisely “the role of visual representation in constructing a gendered society in the Early Iron Age”. In view of the different direction of practically all earlier, monographic treatments of Protogeometric and Geometric visual representation, Langdon’s book is both an original and an impressive achievement. With it, she sidesteps the efforts,

nowadays more or less exhausted, of interpreting the figures and scenes as well as one can from the visual record itself, helped out by the literary sources. Instead, she uses the functions of the objects with such representations—or, rather, what she can infer about those functions—and an associative reading of the representations as major sources for understanding the imagery and the society that gave rise to it.

As an approach, this is, of course, no novelty: it belongs very much to modern archaeology, like the object biography that is also targeted by Langdon. The point is that the study of early visual representation in Dark Age/Early Iron Age Greece was so much centred on iconography in its traditional pursuit of decoding meanings in a more narrow sense that other aspects of study were held back for a long time. What functions these representation-bearing objects performed within the fabric of society, and how the figural decoration was perceived by patrons, artists and viewers, were questions that did not get much attention. With Langdon and scholars of a similar disposition, the symbolic agency of the visual representations as a function of their particular cultural charge in local society has been brought to the fore and become extensively employed in the work of interpretation.

Irrespective of the precise objective of a study of visual representation, it is imperative to be attentive to the representations themselves. This entails probing the individual items, however well known, and discussing old research. Langdon moves reassuringly close to her physical material while at the same time endeavouring to access it through the theoretical planes of gender, maturation and historical process. How is this achieved?

After an introduction and a first chapter on the Geometric premises of visual production, the author starts out in Chapter 2 by approaching figurative representations that may be associated with the child and, in particular, with young males and their ritually embodied socialisation. In Chapters 3 and 4 the visualised maiden takes front stage, strongly propelled by the factual prominence of the young

woman/maiden in Geometric imagery and her usefulness as a witness to the contemporary shifts in society related to gendering. Chapter 5, finally, emphasises the man and warrior and what Langdon calls his domestication (term borrowed from another scholar), alluding to the attenuation of the strong warrior identity in favour of an increasing involvement with male/female partnership and family bonding—part of the building stones of the developed polis society.

Gender and age thus structure the book. The empirical material is taken on singly and along the way, as the analysis proceeds. The reader is thus offered a text that resembles a weave that grows richer with time, as more and more material is added. It takes a deft organiser and an excellent writer like Langdon to keep the whole together and reduce the sense of rupture that a detailed involvement in the concrete subject matter, or an occasional, extensive excursus, may produce. The difficulty, if any, is bound to affect the top level, i.e., the analysis aiming at broad, historical reconstruction. Here, Langdon's ambition seems to be to set gender into the highly creative perspective of a double maturation: that involving the socialization of the young and its modification with time, and that bearing on society at large and embodied in changed codes of behaviour and changed value systems of the nascent polis. Clearly, the former is more easily handled in the course of single chapters than the latter. Actually, we have to wait until the last chapter, with its exposition of imagery showing males and females in a more or less overt marital context, for the major implications of this side of the argument to emerge: a gradual transformation in male-female gendering that came along with and accompanied other advances, recognized by previous scholarship, towards a socio-politically broadened community.

Chapter 1 serves as a paradigm of the process of analysis. The centrepiece of the discussion is the well-known Attic Late Geometric II, broad-rimmed, spouted bowl in London (c. 735 BC) featuring on one side a ship with rowers and alongside it a couple on the verge of entering it and so departing, on the other side two chariots and a rider. The man grips the woman by the wrist, thereby making it clear that she is his, whether abducted by force or not. The abduction, Langdon contends, may be an early example of the marriage symbolism that we know from later Greek ceramic representations. As for the shape of the vessel, it is unusual and so not easily determined as to function, but Langdon, following some other scholars, opts for a louterion, a washing basin, thereby allowing for its association with the bridal bath. This means being in use at the marriage, a social event of the greatest weight to the elites: a) it was the principal maturation rite in the life of a woman

of high standing b) it meant social identification of the groom c) it drew attention to the families involved because of its public exposure. "As the medium of purification, the bowl would have been a ceremonial showpiece, a role well in keeping with its impressive size, execution, and innovative qualities." (p. 31). Langdon adds that it could have accompanied a bride as a wedding present to her new home, where the heroically connoted man, the ship and the equine entourage would have been themes appropriate to the elite menfolk.

What induces us to connect this remarkable piece of Geometric pottery with ritual, more specifically marriage ritual, is, thus, the combination of its unusual shape (possibly a louterion serving for the prenuptial bath), unusual theme (abduction *qua* marriage) and unusual quality of execution. It is certainly a question of art made to order, as Langdon points out, and not for everyday use—it is a "significant object" (term put forward by Langdon) that may be tapped for meanings originating from the artist and the patron.

The problem, as always, is that such meanings are hard to retrieve for us moderns, however much we strive. Yet we should, of course, not give up trying. The good thing about Langdon's method is that while the elements deployed for eliciting meaning may be more or less unclear taken one by one and thus difficult to interpret (in the present case, the shape is not functionally transparent), they may give more of an inkling when added together. How far the reconstruction of the circumstances once surrounding the handling of the actual object can be taken is a further matter on which scholars may disagree.

Langdon is at her best when her empirical material is plentiful, even to the point of allowing systematic treatment by more or less homogeneous groups of artefacts. The maturation of boys, dealt with in Chapter 2, has little to offer Langdon in terms of physical objects from the period of 1100 to 700 BC. Therefore, she throws her net all the wider so as to encompass a multitude of themes and cultural areas that could conceivably bear upon the matter, some serving as an introduction to the book as a whole: material representations of childhood and gender; initiation and identity; boys' rites of passage; trial as heroic paradigm valid for elite manhood; monsters as males' opponents; and mentors/*kourotrophoi* in initiatory concepts. All these are viewed in an enlarged cultural and chronological framework. The *pièce de résistance* is a group of very unusual objects from a votive deposit at Tiryns of c. 700 BC, viz. a terracotta shield carrying painted figural decoration on the outside as well as the inside—an Amazonomachy and a hunting centaur, respectively—and several terracotta gorgon masks. These artefacts definitely belong to Langdon's

category of “significant objects”. Even if their exact significance when used at Tiryns around 700 BC cannot be recovered, Langdon does much to suggest their significance on a general plane by proposing how the figural themes of amazons, centaurs and gorgons could have been implemented in young boys’ initiation rites. The section on early centaurs and gorgons and their relationships to the young is very useful and stands well by itself.

In the next chapter (3), on girls’ maturation, there is much more to go on. While boys and youths are not readily visible through funerary material in the 8th century, girls benefit from gradually richer grave gifts showing gender distinctions. Langdon starts the discussion by presenting such material. Being plentiful, it allows a list (Table 3.1), whereby the reader can easily follow the repertoire, tomb by tomb, from Protogeometric down into Late Geometric IIA (Attica, Lefkandi, Skyros, Corinth, Naxos). This effective starter leads to the major theme of the maiden dance. It is exposed in all breadth and details, following the regions where it occurred as a frequent visual motif on pottery (Argos, Attica, other regions), occasionally even following the workshops which embraced it (Attica), and again using lists for a good overview. As a “real-life” event, this dance, like its follow-up, the chorus of Archaic times, should be seen as part of the ritual maturation of young girls. Being preparatory to the central rite of marriage and womanhood, it exposed the girls as female collectives (whether they danced alone or mixed with young men) and as nubile, at festive occasions, in front of those assembled. That some of the finds of such dance iconography were made in sanctuaries, especially sanctuaries of Artemis and Hera, as shown in another informative list (Table 3.4), is an indication that some, if not all, of these festivities were indeed associated with divine cult. On the basis of a few sherds of such provenience which have slightly diverging details, Langdon even tries to pinpoint the 8th-century festival occasion (putting forward, in one case, the proto-Heraia of Argos).

The new arrival of the motif of the maiden dance in the Late Geometric period, along with the visibility of the young woman in the funerary sphere in the same period, is a strong witness to the upgrading of the young girl and her virginity as a social asset. With the *parthenos*, a cultural construct emerges connoted by “ripeness, vulnerability and ... claims on fertility” (p. 196)—and the risk of abduction. Very aptly, abduction is the theme of Langdon’s next chapter. Here she returns to the London bowl with which she set the stage in Chapter 2. She shows further how the motif, itself a novelty at this time, ties in with the dancing maiden motif (Attic kantharos in Copenhagen, gold bands/diadems from Attic tombs). From the perspective of the girl,

abduction means an interference with the maiden status. Yet at the same time it means the prelude to marriage, the goal and haven of all *parthenai*; and the London bowl clarifies that it is this theme which is the overriding one, turning the motif already at this early epoch to the symbol of marriage that it would retain in later Attic vase-painting.

Abduction by centaur is a variant that needs explanation. Marriage could have been the metaphoric issue here, too, if only as a distorted replica: Langdon argues that the centaurs’ assaults “help to define by opposition what marriage is: an orderly exchange among men that depends on reciprocity, the fundamental machinery of civilization”. Less sophisticatedly, the motif may have worked within the sphere of wildlife itself. Hunting is the prime occupation of the centaurs, consonant with their roving life in the wilderness, and although wild game is their normal target, their sexuality may prod them to go for human women as well. Among men, however, hunting in the woods is a secondary occupation and naturally is directed only towards animal prey, yet it is commendable as it requires valour and confers renown in the case of large prey. On the Tiryns shield, with its coupled motifs of amazons and centaur, the centaur is portrayed as a protagonist in a scene of hunting and wildlife with clearly narrative overtones. The multiple, carefully depicted game—some adult deer, some fawns; some of female, some of male sex; some live, some killed—in my view actually defines the centaur in the picture: they set him off as a hunter in the first place, whatever kouroutrophic resources he might have (Langdon proposes that he be identified as Cheiron). According to this hypothesis, the two images could have been chosen because each in mythical terms alluded to a skill that was possibly to be sought by the young elite male already at this early period, and could be elaborated in contexts of initiation—that of fighting and of hunting. Likewise, hunting as an activity shared by young men and centaurs to my mind could well be the main reference of an image that joins together a human figure with a centaur and equips both with a “centauric” accessory (branch) while reserving the human outdoor outfit (hat) to the human figure (Attic LG II amphora in Copenhagen).

Abduction imagery, as Langdon rightly stresses, is situated not in female but in male visual surroundings (p. 233). This means that its allied symbolism of marriage pertains to the world of men rather than that of women: it portrays young women as valuables to be acquired for households dominated by men. In her next and final chapter (5), the author pursues the theme by stepping inside the households, the *oikoi*. The first object that she discusses, an Attic conical stand of the early 7th century BC in Munich, is, again, a “significant object”, and again one that intrigues its

students (among whom this reviewer) for its seeming lack of parallels for the complex unity of its decoration. Of the three different but adjoining motifs, the two extended, multi-figured ones depict four warriors fighting and two male-female couples in an encounter involving weapons, respectively; the third one comprises a single, human huntsman (hat on head) carrying his prey. As for the scene with the two couples, Langdon takes it to represent engagement (*engue*), i.e., an agreement between two men, one the father of the bride-to-be, the other the bridegroom. This accounts well for the position of the two men who stand opposite each other in the centre, one holding a staff that may be a badge of power (sceptre). But all the rest remains opaque, even the two women. Which one of them is the bride, if either? The statuesque, even matronly, woman on the left-hand side whom Langdon picks out is not a convincing option. Some details of hands and weapons make me think (like some before me) that the painter may have had a particular (mythic) story in mind here rather than a generic family event.

The Munich stand introduces an extended discussion of the adult man: how “the freewheeling warrior” is brought “into the control and hierarchy of the evolving state structure” and how the *oikos* thereby becomes the principal arena of his dominance and his efforts of social positioning among high-standing equals (which includes competition for high-ranked brides). This discussion is based in part on modern theoretical work on masculinity but also avails itself of Geometric “manhood iconography” and funerary and domestic archaeology. This forms a good foil for examining male-female and marriage imagery. Here Langdon is careful when trying to sort out Eastern models from Greek ones, Bronze Age prototypes from Iron Age ones, and divine images from profane ones. This is undoubtedly a very complex web where much has to remain hidden from our knowledge. It is, however, clear that male-female-couple imagery, like *parthenos* imagery, is a phenomenon of the 8th/early 7th century, and that at least part of it is to be seen as an expression of the dynamic move towards the polis community.

In this survey I have paid proportionally much attention to the “significant objects” presented by the author. Of course, these do not carry the whole weight of Langdon’s central arguments on the connection of Geometric art with social identity; alongside them, Langdon uses a wide array of materials and functions, contexts and backgrounds, and theoretical viewpoints. Yet these objects, the way they are used for introducing the interpretive framework of the ideal gender types—the young man, the young woman and, finally, the adult man and the male-female interrelation of marriage—occupy a foreground position. This puts

much pressure on them, perhaps a little more than they can sustain. Their painted scenes are a troublesome lot—they both tease and thwart the modern viewer. Indeed, if the highlighting of these paintings by Langdon should result in their receiving more scholarly attention, all the better. The “significant objects”, from the Dipylon vases to the items treated by Langdon, surely meant much as backings for the paintings, yet pictorial painting of this type was an asset on its own merits. The multi-figure and diversified scene formed a more emphatic unit than the single figure: the ability of the former to dissociate or emancipate itself from the clay surface was larger. In some cases, like the Munich stand, one can feel very concretely how the grand design competes with a rotating and restraining clay surface! Thus, while still a novelty, the multi-figure scene is likely to have triggered the viewer to take a more intense look, and thereby to consider more actively what was shown. Its essence was discursive presentation¹, whether mainly descriptive or narrative; the discourse was about the world, the “real-life” one or the divine/heroic one. The development is to be ascribed to new communicative needs among patrons, a thing that merits analysis on its own account.

EVA RYSTEDT

V. Karageorghis, *A lifetime in the archaeology of Cyprus. The memoirs of Vassos Karageorghis*, Stockholm: Medelhavsmuseet 2007. xvi + 226 pp., 187 figs. ISBN 91-89242-14-9.

Three years ago, in 2007, the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm published the memoirs of Vassos Karageorghis, the doyen of Cypriot archaeology. The book is entitled *A lifetime in the archaeology of Cyprus*. That Karageorghis would at some point take the step of writing his memoirs comes as no surprise considering his many achievements and experiences over the years in the world of Mediterranean archaeology, his wide-ranging contacts with the international scholarly community and his flair for communication. What could perhaps not be foreseen were only when he would write them and who would be the publisher. The question of when has now been answered. As for the choice of publisher (Medelhavsmuseet), the solid and durable link between Cyprus and Sweden in the domain of archaeology going all the way back to the Swedish Cyprus Expedition (1927–1931)

¹ See E. Rystedt, ‘Pictorial matter, pictorial form. A view from Mycenae towards Athens’, in *Pictorial pursuits: figurative painting on Mycenaean and Geometric pottery: papers from two seminars at the Swedish Institute at Athens in 1999 and 2001* (ActaAth-4^o, 53), eds. E. Rystedt & B. Wells, Stockholm 2006, 245.