

The following lecture was delivered by Prof. Emeritus Brian Sparkes (Southampton University) at a colloquium, 'The Ure Museum: a Retrospective', which celebrated the launch of the Ure Museums' renewed learning environment. It is published here with the kind permission of Prof. Sparkes.

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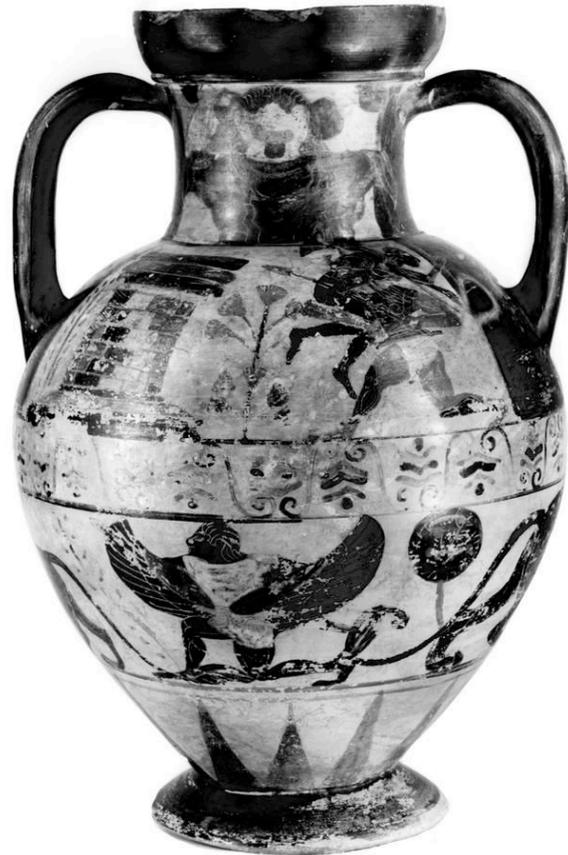
## Troilos in Tuscany

I am highly honoured to have been invited to speak at the re-opening of the Ure Museum. I had a close association with Nan (Annie) Ure for the last twenty years of her life, and my family and I remember many occasions when we visited her home and were very well fed by her cook Ethel – Ethel's roast lamb and onion sauce were without compare. The kitchen was not Nan's chosen habitat; classical sites and museums, the study and the library were her preferred stamping grounds. In the 1960s I was introduced to the then new museum, and I was a regular visitor to Reading University during Nan's lifetime and for a decade or so later when I helped my present Chairman, Professor Jane Gardner, re-organise some of the shelves and cupboards and bring some order into the museum after Nan's death. It is particularly pleasing that Bill Ure, Nan and Percy's son, is here today.

I am sure there are many in the audience today who are wondering whatever can be the attraction of Greek pottery that grown men and women devote their careers to the subject. Greek painted pottery is a curious phenomenon. Here is a supreme example in the back-figure technique made and decorated in Athens (sadly this is not in the Ure Museum) [**fig. 1**]. It combines a finely turned shape with a figured scene that shows the Greek hero Achilles slaying the Amazon Queen. This was not rare craftsmanship – thousands and thousands of painted pots were produced over many generations, though of course by no means all were of this quality. They were popular products, articles created for commercial reasons, and have been found all over the Mediterranean and beyond. They were not, as nowadays, put on exhibition as works of art; each had a use – for practical functions, for dedication to the gods, for burial with the dead. Some were signed, the majority not, but close study has shown how hands of anonymous painters can

often be detected. The Ure Museum has an extremely useful teaching collection which helpfully shows the range of ceramic quality from first class work such as we meet in art books to inferior products that major museums tend to hide away.

What I want to do in the next half hour is to take one vase from the collection in the Ure Museum and show you some of the ways in which a student of vase-painting might find him- or herself trying to come to grips with the problem of understanding and interpreting it. I have chosen not a Greek but an Etruscan vase which in terms of modern collecting of ancient pottery is the most valuable in the Museum [fig. 2, right]. It is certainly not an object of superlative quality; in fact, one might dignify it by calling it unprepossessing, but it has its own interest. The Ures bought it at a sale in 1947. They never had a great deal of money to spend, and the reason that they acquired it against likely opposition from many richer buyers was that it was poorly described in the catalogue and so did not attract the attention of their rivals, who failed to attend the auction. However, Percy Ure recognised it for what it was. It is valuable in today's absurd art market not for its quality but for its rarity.



Before looking more closely at the chosen vase, let me first set the scene. We need to take ourselves back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. At that time there were many centres of figured pottery production in the Greek area of the eastern Mediterranean [fig. 3, next page]: on the Greek mainland in districts such as Boeotia and Laconia, on the Cyclades, and in the Greek settlements on and off the western coast of Asia Minor. Around the year



600 BC Corinth was one of the two most productive centres, but by the middle of the century (ca. 550 BC) Athens had begun to take over from Corinth both in the quality and precision of her shaping and painting, in the variety of the scenes depicted and in the marketability of the products. Examples of their output reached the furthest corners of Greek trading, with Italy and Sicily as obvious destinations, including Etruria (modern Tuscany).

The figured decoration of the vases included scenes of everyday life (as here, sports race in armour) but centred mainly on mythological stories that the Greek poets had sung about for generations. Here Herakles is being introduced to his father, Zeus, by Athena [fig. 4]. There are also Perseus, Theseus and such, and of course battles of the Greeks against the Trojans. One popular story that was told about the Trojan War concerned the young Trojan prince Troilos, the youngest son of King Priam and Hecuba. We know that he featured in a lost epic poem, but there is little left of his story in Greek literature at all. You will also have to dismiss any notion of his tragedy that you may recall from later versions as in Chaucer or Shakespeare. We know more about the original story of the calamity that befell him from the visual images, mainly scenes on painted pottery.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC many vase-painters represented the episodes that led to Troilos' cruel death. He was allowed to escort his young sister Polyxena to fetch water from a fountain outside the walls of Troy, and there he was ambushed by the Greek hero

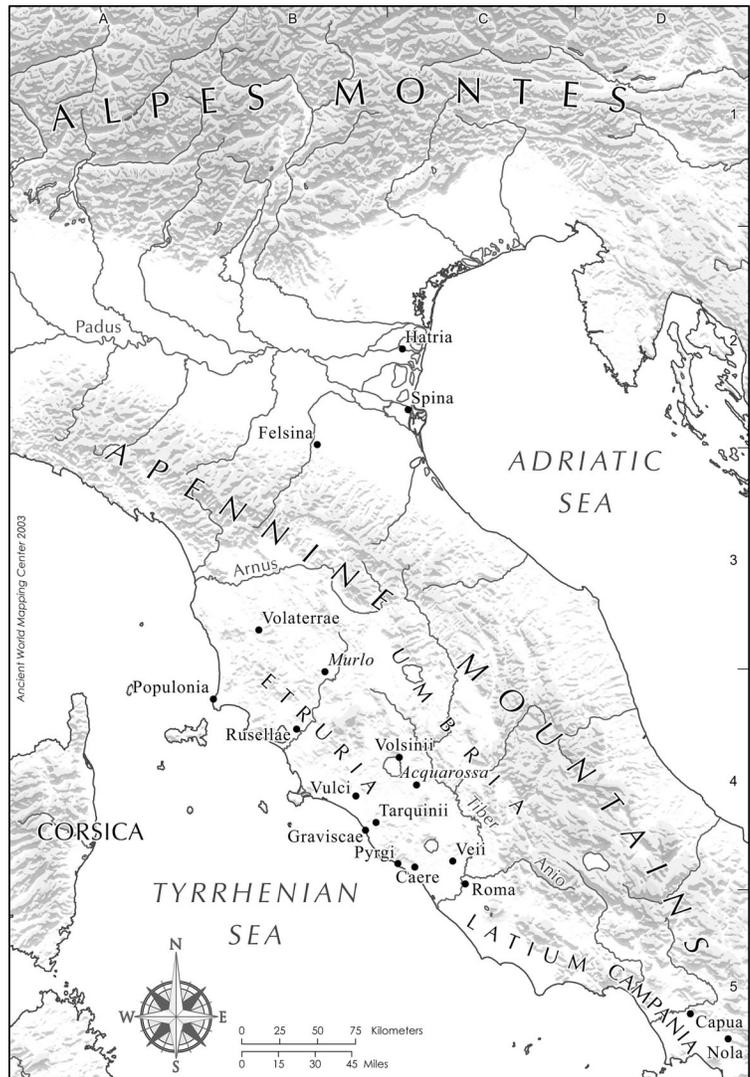
Achilles. Here is one naive version painted by a Spartan artist in the middle of the sixth century BC [fig. 5, below]. All the elements of this stage of the story are here: fountain house (very simply drawn), Polyxena with a water jar on her head, an unarmed Troilos on his horse and leading another, while over on the far right, the hero/villain of the piece, a



fully armed Achilles waits for his victim. Perhaps the painter wishes us to understand that Polyxena has already seen Achilles and is turning to warn her brother – certainly she is expressing some emotion. Troilos attempted to escape on his horse and was pursued by swift-footed Achilles. On an Athenian cup we see the pursuit in progress [fig. 6]. There is a more recognisable fountain on the left, Achilles at full speed, and the hapless Troilos riding his own horse along with the led horse. Over on the far right (the upper part is missing) there is Polyxena who has dropped her water jar (it is under Achilles) and has to make her own way on foot. There was no hope for the young lad and at the nearby altar of Apollo Achilles caught up with him and in some versions of the story not only killed him but also decapitated him. Help from the citadel of Troy came too late for Troilos, as we see on an Athenian jar [fig. 7]. The figures in the battle are named: Troilos lies partly hidden on the ground by the altar (*bomos*), his head is now on the point of Achilles' spear, his brother Hector leads the Trojan charge; while Athena and Hermes stand on the left, on the winning side. Jars of this shape and with this arrangement of decoration and the figured image on the shoulder were produced in Athens especially for the Etruscan

market in north Italy. It has been calculated that nearly 90% of such vases have been found in Etruria, an instance of Athens' market strategy.

So, it is now time to move to Italy and particularly to Etruria (modern Tuscany) where the Ure vase originated [fig. 8, right]. By the middle of the 6th century the Etruscans had been influenced by Greek ideas and stories, and they were increasingly significant importers of Greek goods, not least Athenian pottery. The Etruscans copied versions of Greek pottery shapes that they imported, and they adapted the Greek scenes they saw on the pots for the home market that had a penchant for illustrated stories. The end-products were idiosyncratic, a mixture of the various shapes, patterns and images that flooded their towns from different Greek areas.



The potter's shop on which we are about to descend was most likely located at Vulci, north of Rome. The workshop produced few vases, all for local distribution, and, as a working pottery, did not survive more than a generation or so, hence the rarity value of its output. The potters and decorators of the pottery were certainly not in the front rank. They failed to purify the clay they used, the pots often misfired, and the drawing is careless and feeble. Nor can we always be sure how we are to interpret the scenes. You have been warned.

Today, the best known Etruscan jar that was fashioned and decorated in this manner shows the story of the Judgement of Paris on Mount Ida [fig. 9]. The three goddesses are being led to Paris whose momentous decision precipitated the Trojan War. The scene is colourful, rather carefree, if not totally careless, certainly rather slapdash but with a certain charm and humour. In modern parlance the painter has been named the Paris Painter from this scene (we don't know his name). The goddesses, coloured white as was usual for women in painting, are escorted by Hermes with his caduceus and an old man whose identity is unknown, and they wear clinging garments, jaunty hats and pointed boots (Hera, the Queen of Heaven, Athena, the Warrior Goddess, and Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love who was the eventual winner and knows it, as she is already waving) [fig. 10]. On the other side is the goal to which they are moving and to whom Aphrodite is waving: the Trojan prince Paris, serving duty as a lowly herdsman with dog, cattle and tick-eating crow [fig. 11]. He too seems to be shown as waving to his visitors.

It has been suggested that a Greek painter who knew the stories had migrated to Etruria, set up his workshop there and taught the local artisans who later joined his business. The images that they painted were based on Greek legends and not always correctly understood, and it raises the particular question of what the Etruscans actually knew of these Greek stories and how they came to hear of the narratives that lay behind the images on the imported pots. They themselves were not Greek speakers, but there were many Greek residents in Etruscan territory. Bilingualism has always been an asset for traders, but accuracy in storytelling does not necessarily accompany it.

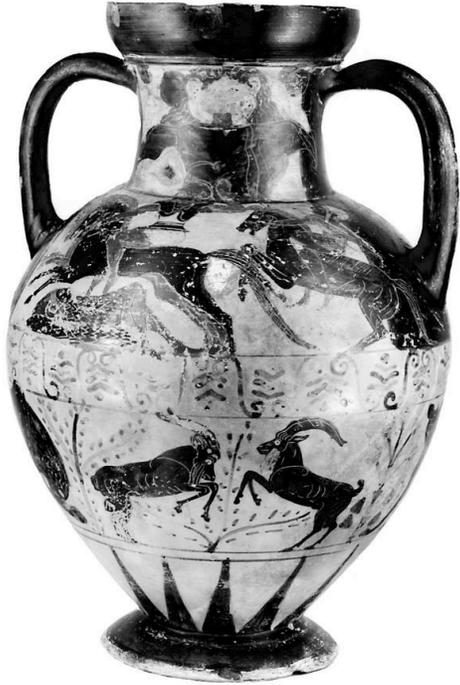
None of the apprentices of the Paris Painter equalled their master. One of these was a craftsman we now call the Silen Painter. He was fond of images of the god Dionysos and banqueting and has one illustration of Troilos [fig. 12]. Sexually excited satyrs and their female companions enjoy a jolly romp below the main frieze, while above there is serious business afoot. Achilles is pursuing Troilos (still with his extra horse), with an exotic fountain to the left. There are no names by the characters, but the story is clear.



And this brings us back to the Reading jar, which is attributed to another painter now called the Tityos Painter [fig. 2]. We have no information about its findspot, but a tomb near Vulci seems its likeliest provenance. With this pot it is difficult to say which is side A and which side B; but both are unique. Let us start with what is usually termed side B: it is a little easier to understand. On the shoulder of the vase, there is an altar on the left and on the right there is a warrior, clad in plumed helmet, breastplate and greaves and holding a spear in his left hand, and he is carrying a young man towards the altar [fig. 13, above]. Percy Ure, who published an article on it soon after acquiring the vase for the Museum, took this for Achilles forcibly carting Troilos towards the altar to kill him there.<sup>1</sup> This would be a calculated act of impiety. The Greek version always had Troilos racing to the sanctuary for asylum and being caught and killed there by Achilles. That was a bad enough act of sacrilege, but here Achilles has caught him before he has reached the altar and is deliberately carrying him there. Troilos has no horse and there are no

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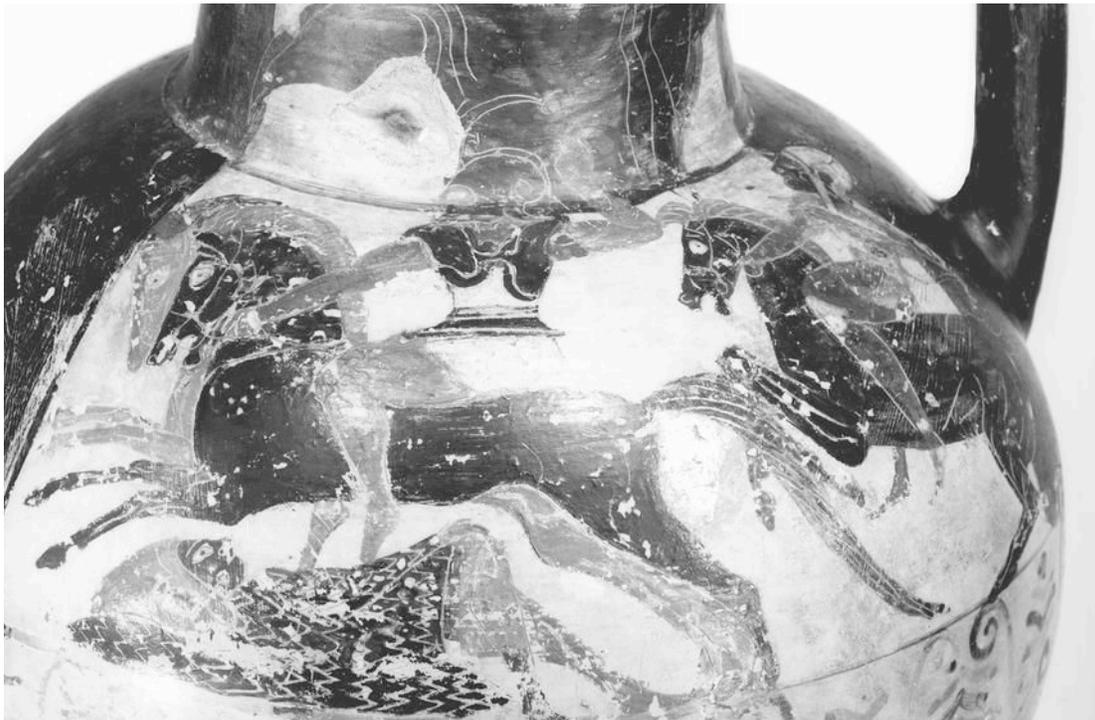
<sup>1</sup> P.N. Ure, 'A New Pontic Amphora' in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 71 (1951) 198-202



Trojans coming to assist the young lad. Odd though this interpretation may seem, no one has suggested a reasonable alternative.

Now we must turn to the other, more difficult side [fig. 14, left]. If the image on the shoulder here is also part of the Troilos story, in narrative terms it must precede what we have just seen. There are two riders, neither very well drawn. On the right a horse rears up with a rider wearing non-Greek costume and a foreign cap; he holds a bow in his right arm (again not the standard weapon of a Greek fighter) [fig. 15, below]. In front of him on the left another rider is mounted on a horse and leads a second one. This rider

is in armour (breastplate and horned helmet) and is leaping over a supine figure on the ground. Is it possible that both these riders are Trojans going to Troilos' rescue on the



other side of the jar? But this would not explain the led horse which is usually associated with Troilos himself. Or is the right-hand bowman a Trojan pursuing Achilles who has jumped on to the led horse and unhorsed Troilos from the other? This is what Percy Ure surmised. Then, strangest of all, who is the person on the ground beneath the two horses? It is certainly a very strange figure in an equally strange position. Can this really be Troilos, as Percy Ure surmised? Has he only just fallen? The figure on the ground must be male because of the black face; therefore the suggestion that she is his young sister Polyxena carries no weight. But whatever is the male figure wearing? A short tunic with a zigzag pattern on it and a domed hat not unlike the one the right-hand rider is wearing; it is certainly not a helmet. Then he is lying on something also zigzagged. Is it part of his cloak or is it some sort of mattress? The painter has not been very helpful. He has carried the lines of zigzags across both the material below and above, but that may be for speed of composition. Supine figures under galloping horses are quite common in Etruscan art; a good example of the same time is the silver-electrum panel now in the British Museum, with two horsemen riding over a fallen comrade [fig. 16, below]. So it may be that this Troilos scene, as others, has been contaminated with a common Etruscan composition.



But the question arises: must this be a scene connected with Troilos? There is no imperative that forces both sides of a pot to cover the same story, and some scholars have tried to remove the scene from the Troilos narrative altogether. The foreign costume of the supine figure calls to mind such non-Greek combatants as the Phrygians and Thracians who lived to the north-east of Greece. The Thracians were especially noted for their patterned cloaks and their equestrian ability, but one has to admit that Greek painters were never quite reliable in the way they characterised foreign peoples. In the following century some Athenian vase-painters started to show Troilos himself in a Thracian outfit, but there is no evidence that he was so represented in the 6<sup>th</sup> century [fig. 17, right]. Has one to assume that the Etruscan painter invented the notion himself?



One suggestion for our scene is that it illustrates a myth that concerned the Thracians at the time of the Trojan War. Rhesus was the king of Thrace who came with his famous horses to help the Trojans, and the story was that in a night raid on his camp, the Greek

warriors, Odysseus and Diomedes, killed him and his men while they slept, and stole their horses. I know of only one archaic painted image that shows the story: it is on a jar made in Southern Italy about the same time as ours [fig. 18]. This has the advantage of inscriptions that name the protagonists: here Diomedes is killing Rhesus, while the horses are waiting to be driven off. I do not myself find this a persuasive interpretation for our scene but it persuades us, in today's popular phrase, to think outside the box.

We are constantly faced with the problem of not being sure how intelligent the Etruscans were when it came to recasting imported stories. Did they have original ideas or did they just muddle the ones that have arrived with the Greek imports? That they were clear about the ambush of Troilos is most strikingly evident in a scene on a contemporary Etruscan tomb-painting at nearby Tarquinia with a magnificent version of the story **[fig. 19]**. From the right Troilos, riding a magnificent horse, approaches the splendid fountain, while Achilles is already dashing forward to attack his victim. But, as we have seen, the Etruscan painters were less clear when it came to the other stages in his tragedy.

I have shown you curious images and spoken of disputed interpretations; these are what one meets in looking at and trying to interpret painted pottery from the classical world. Some, like the Ure jar, still hold their secrets. Let us hope that future students and scholars who use the newly arranged Museum will provide us with some of the answers.

Prof. Emeritus Brian Sparkes  
Department of Classics  
University of Southampton

## Illustrations

1. Athenian black-figured amphora, by Exekias, ca. 540-530 BC, found at Vulci (Etruria). Achilles killing the Amazon Queen Penthesilea. London British Museum 1836.2-24.127 (Vase B 210).  
[http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass/ixbin/hixclient.exe?%7BUPPER%7D%3Av2\\_free\\_text\\_tindex=B+210& IXDB =compass& IXSPFX =graphical%2Fsummary%2F& IXFPFX =graphical%2Ffull%2F& IXNOMATCHES =graphical%2Fo\\_matches.html&%24+%28with+v2\\_searchable\\_index%29+sort=.& IXsearchterm=B%2520210&submit-button=summary](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass/ixbin/hixclient.exe?%7BUPPER%7D%3Av2_free_text_tindex=B+210& IXDB =compass& IXSPFX =graphical%2Fsummary%2F& IXFPFX =graphical%2Ffull%2F& IXNOMATCHES =graphical%2Fo_matches.html&%24+%28with+v2_searchable_index%29+sort=.& IXsearchterm=B%2520210&submit-button=summary)
2. Etruscan black-figured amphora, akin to the Tityos Painter, ca. 550 BC. Reading, Ure Museum 47.6.1 (inset). <http://lkws1.rdg.ac.uk/cgi-bin/ure/uredb.cgi?rec=47.6.1>
3. Map of central and eastern Mediterranean (inset).
4. Attic black-figure amphora showing the introduction of Herakles to Olympos. Philadelphia, University Museum MS3441. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/image?lookup=1991.07.0802>

5. Louvre E 662. Detail (inset) after Pipili, *Laconian Iconography of the Sixth Century BC*, fig. 44.
6. Attic black-figure Siana cup, showing Achilles pursuing Troilos. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 01.8.6. Search vase no. 300381 on the Beazley Archive at <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/XDB/ASP/default.asp>
7. Attic black-figure "Tyrrhenian" amphora, showing Achilles and Hektor over Troilos. Munich, Antikensammlungen 1426. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/image?lookup=Perseus:image:1990.34.0043>
8. Map of ancient Etruria and the Po Valley, courtesy of the Ancient World Mapping Centre (inset): <http://www.unc.edu/awmc/awmcmmap20.html>
9. Etruscan black-figured amphora showing the judgment of Paris. Munich, Antikensammlungen 837. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/image?lookup=Perseus:image:1993.01.0165>
10. Detail of side B of the vase shown in fig. 11. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/image?lookup=Perseus:image:1993.01.0161>
11. Detail of side A of the vase shown in fig. 11. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/image?lookup=Perseus:image:1993.01.0160>
12. Shoulder of Louvre E 703. See CVA Louvre 24 (France 35) pl. 20.
13. Detail of side B of vase shown in fig. 2 (inset). Achilles with Troilos.
14. Side A of vase shown in fig. 2 (inset).
15. Detail of side A of vase shown in fig. 2 (inset). Two riders.
16. Silver panel from a chariot or furniture, found in Castel San Marino, now in the British Museum. Drawing (inset) by A.C. Smith.
17. Fragment of an Attic red-figure vase in a private collection. Drawing (inset) by A.C. Smith after *Arch. Anzeiger* 1965, 398
18. South Italian black-figure amphora showing Diomedes and Odysseus. Malibu, Getty Villa 96.AE.1. <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=15204>
19. Painting from the Tomb of the Bulls, Tarquinia, showing Troilos behind the fountain. <http://www.wisc.edu/arth/ah301/15-etruscan/22.image.html>

### Further Reading

For a general introduction to the Etruscans, see Sybille Haynes, *Etruscan Civilization: A Cultural History* (London, 2000).

For a comprehensive treatment of Etruscan art, see Otto Brendel, *Etruscan Art* (New Haven, 1995).

On Etruscan painted pottery, see Marina Martelli (ed.), *La Ceramica degli Etruschi: La Pittura Vascolare* (Novara, 1987). On 'Pontic' vases, see Lisa Hannestad, *The Paris Painter: an Etruscan Vase Painter* (Copenhagen, 1974) and *The Followers of the Paris Painter* (Copenhagen, 1976).

On the story of Troilos, see Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore, 1993) 597-601.

On Greek myths in Etruscan contexts, see Roland Hampe and Erika Simon, *Griechische Sagen in der frühen etruskischen Kunst* (Mainz, 1964).