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Review of Joachim Latacz's *Troy and Homer: Towards a Solution of an Old
Mystery*

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Abstract: In this book, a translation of a German bestseller, the most vigorous proponent of the view that the *Iliad* is a reliable source of information about the city of Troy in the Late Bronze Age, presents the evidence from two very different fields: archaeology and linguistics/philology. Though especially sympathetic to the idea that certain significant details in Homer reflect society as it was long before the eighth century B.C., in a shared Greco-Anatolian setting, this reviewer, a linguist/philologist, is nevertheless dismayed by Latacz's presentation of the evidence. To take just one egregious example of bias disguised as fact—a “fact” that certain colleagues are unfortunately already citing as gospel—there is, *pace* Latacz and Frank Starke, *no evidence* for the claim that an actual Hittite document reveals as a forebear of the king of Ahhiyawa (~ Achaia) a man by the name of *Kadmos*.

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Troy and Homer: Towards a Solution of an Old Mystery. By JOACHIM LATA CZ. Translated from the German by KEVIN WINDLE and ROSH IRELAND. Oxford: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2004. Pp. xix + 342, illus. \$45.

Jaán Puhvel's 1991 pamphlet *Homer and Hittite*—one of many relevant works that the author of *Troy and Homer* does not cite—ends with the words, “Homer is too important to be left to single-track hellenists”¹; similarly, of course, Troy is too important to be left to Anatolian archaeologists. Joachim Latacz, a specialist in Homer, has for many years been a particularly vigorous proponent of the view that the eighth-century B.C. Greek epic known as the *Iliad* is a reliable source of information about the city of Troy (modern Hisarlık) and its environs in the Troad in the Late Bronze Age. Understandably enthusiastic about archaeological and epigraphic finds from the past 15 years and giddy over the resulting reassessments of the history of the eastern Mediterranean that bring the worlds of Greece and Asia Minor ever closer together (while also bringing a new academic Trojan War to the dinner table throughout German-speaking Europe), Latacz in 2001 published *Troia und Homer: Der Weg zur Lösung eines alten Rätsels*, of which the present book is an updated translation.² Against what is probably the standard line in Anglophone scholarship today (see, e.g., Ian Morris's influential and, indeed, finely argued paper “The Use and Abuse of Homer” [*Classical Antiquity* 5 (1986): 81-138]—also uncited), I am in substantial agreement with Latacz that certain significant details in Homer reflect society as it was long before the eighth century, in a shared Greco-Anatolian setting (think of the bond of guest-friendship between the Trojan Glaukos and the Greek Diomedes described in Book 6 of the *Iliad*), and I strongly urge both Classicist colleagues and the readers of *JAOS* to (re-)acquaint themselves with the indubitably very interesting interdisciplinary matters at stake. That said, it is not so easy to recommend Latacz's book, which is repetitive (the more something is said, the more it is taken as fact in his “logical” schemes), pompous (all the more so in English), and positively hagiographic in its advancement of the ideas of a very few scholars but inattentive to the work of many others.

The primary evidence that Latacz presents comes from two very different fields: archaeology and linguistics/philology. I am not knowledgeable enough about the former to be able to comment critically on the conclusions that Manfred Korfmann, the indefatigable professor of archaeology at Tübingen, has reached in the course of his ongoing excavations at Troy. By all accounts, though, his work is meticulous and deserving of the highest praise, and he certainly has shown that Troy around 1200 B.C. was not just Schliemann's citadel, but a substantial, fortified city, complete with a set of underground waterworks. This is a place Homer's Achaeans might well have spent ten years trying to sack.

¹ Jaán Puhvel, *Homer and Hittite* (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 1991), at 29; reprinted (for the most part) in *Epilecta Indoeuropaea: opuscula selecta annis 1978-2001 excusa imprimis ad res Anatolicas attinentia* (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachen und Literaturen der Universität Innsbruck, 2002), 157-77, at 177.

² Joachim Latacz, *Troia und Homer: Der Weg zur Lösung eines alten Rätsels* (Munich: Koehler & Amelang, 2001); three editions appeared between March and July 2001 (it has been usual to cite the third), and a fifth edition was published in 2005 (*non vidi*).

The Hittite and Luvian textual sources and the linguistic arguments that Latacz adduces to show that Homer somehow really did know of Troy are, however, much less secure. Most readers of this review will be aware of the longstanding controversies over a few would-be Greco-Anatolian onomastic links, most famously and seductively between the toponyms Ἰλίος (Ἰλίος) ‘Troy’ (cf. *Iliad*, literally “(Poem) of (W)Ilios”) and *Wiluš(iy)a* and between the *ethnicon* Ἀχαιοί ‘Achaeans (i.e., Mycenaean Greeks)’ and the toponym *Aḫḫiyawā/Āḫḫiyā*. I have no doubt but that many of the most potentially significant connections—others include Τροίη (the other Homeric name of Troy) ~ *Tarwiša* and Μίλητος ~ *Millawanda*—are real, but Latacz will not win lasting converts by simply repeating, without critical engagement, the claims of a handful of researchers he happens to respect. A very important, if sometimes in my view overly skeptical, account of the linguistic material is now available in (especially the first half of) Ivo Hajnal’s *Troia aus sprachwissenschaftlicher Sicht: Die Struktur einer Argumentation* (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachen und Literaturen der Universität Innsbruck, 2003), which should be mandatory reading for anyone interested in the historicity of Homer’s Troy.

An especially egregious example of bias presented as fact comes on pages 243f.: Latacz describes, with no footnotes, no references aside from the mention of a “preliminary report” (p. 243) in a popular magazine,³ and no further commentary, how the Anatolianist Frank Starke in August 2003 “was able to present the first cuneiform letter in Hittite to be sent not from east to west ... but from west to east” (p. 243), specifically, according to Starke, from the king of Ahhiyawa to his Hittite counterpart, probably Hattusili II. Furthermore, the “king of Ahḫijawā argues from *history* ...: he explains that a forebear of his had given his daughter in marriage to the then king of Assuwa [~ Ἀσ(φ)ῖᾱ ?] ... and that consequently the islands [discussed in the letter] had come into the possession of Ahḫijawā. As luck would have it this forebear is named in the letter: his name is *Kadmos*” (p. 244). As luck would have it—and yet this is simply false. While Starke has not yet formally written up his conclusions, his ideas have been the subject of much discussion among specialists—the letter in question, *KUB 26.91 (CTH 183)*, a fragmentary cuneiform tablet from Boğazköy that is generally said to be *from* a Hittite king (actually Muwatalli II ?) and *to* an Ahhiyawan ruler,⁴ was published over 75 years ago and so is in the public domain—and there just does not seem to be any way to read the Greek name of the mythical founder of Thebes, Kadmos, in the critical line: *n]u-za Ka-ga-mu-na-aš-za-kán A-BA A-BA A-B[I-YA xxxxx (Ro. 8)*. Starke emends <GA> to <TA> (to be sure, the two signs are similar), thereby restoring as the object of some verb an accusative *Kad'mun* ... *A-BA A-BA A-BI-YA* ‘my forefather Kadmos’, and apparently further takes the subject of the sentence to be the enclitic pronoun *-aš* ‘he (sc. the king of Assuwa)’, which is grammatically impossible (as Andrew Garrett [see esp. “Hittite Enclitic Subjects and Transitive Verbs,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 42 (1990, publ. 1991): 227-42] has shown, building on an observation of Calvert Watkins).⁵

³ Klaus-Dieter Linsmeier, “Troia—umkämpfter Wächter über die Dardanellen,” *Spektrum der Wissenschaft* (October 2003): 22-25; just below the title of this piece in the German edition of *Scientific American* are the words, “Ein alter Brief in neuer Interpretation wirft ein überraschendes Licht auf die realen Hintergründe der Berichte in Homers ‘Ilias’” (p. 22).

⁴ See, however, Oliver R. Gurney, “The Authorship of the Tawagalawas Letter,” in *Silva Anatolica: Anatolian Studies presented to Maciej Popko on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. Piotr Taracha (Warsaw: Agade, 2002), 133-41, at 135f.

⁵ The classic treatment of *KUB 26.91* (Bo. 1485) is in Ferdinand Sommer, *Die Ahḫijawā-Urkunden* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1932), 268-274. See most recently, and with

Also problematic are, for example, Latacz's pronouncement that alphabetic writing is "the most advanced [*sic*] so far developed, with its principle of 'one sound—one symbol' [*sic*]" (p. 53), his nuance-less lumping together of the Canaanite "Hittite" tribesmen in *Genesis* (the "sons of Heth") with the evidently much more powerful "Hittites" in 2 *Kings* 7:6 (p. 55; see Trevor Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], at 389-91), and his lack of acknowledgment in the section titled "When Was the Tale of Troy Conceived?" (pp. 213-49) that the essence of some Trojan scenes—real themes in the *Iliad* rather than purely formal touches like meter—in fact goes back, in one form or other, to material that long antedates any putative Trojan War (see, e.g., Stephanie W. Jamison, "Draupadī on the Walls of Troy: *Iliad* 3 from an Indic Perspective," *Classical Antiquity* 13 [1994]: 5-16⁶). And then there are his many remarks about a historical Homer, which show that his modest embrace of "Oral Theory" (see esp. pp. 252-59) has not displaced a romanticized view of Archaic Greek poetic biography: to quote just two, Latacz tells us that "on the one hand [Homer's technique] remains firmly within the oral tradition . . . , while on the other it already displays features of linguistic, intellectual, and structuralist compression such as can only have appeared with the deployment of writing" (p. 151) and "Homer may have wandered among these [Trojan] ruins, just as the modern archaeologist may do, but with one difference: as he walked he had the whole of the orally-transmitted tale of Troy in his head, not the *Iliad*, which he had yet to create, in his hand" (p. 170). Presumably this "particularly gifted individual" (p. 151) was not (yet) blind.

It would be wrong not to end with praise: the maps and figures are excellent, there are not many typographical errors (and the only systematically awkward problem with the translation is the rendering of "Wissenschaft" as "science" when a much better choice would usually have been "scholarship"), and of course I want to believe in most of the things in which Latacz believes. I do not see how anyone could dispute that a full understanding of the *Iliad* requires knowledge of both its pre-Greek ("Proto-Indo-European") background some thousands of years before Homer and its status as story and text in eighth-century B.C. Greece and later. I am also becoming ever more convinced that a full understanding requires knowledge of the actual Greco-Anatolian interactions in the second half of the second millennium B.C., that is, the historical material in the middle, of which Homer is in all likelihood availing himself. Latacz's book is a substantial contribution to this latter subject.

copious references, Piotr Taracha, "Mycenaeans, Ahhiyawa and Hittite Imperial Policy in the West: A Note on KUB 26.91," in *Kulturgeschichte: Altorientalistische Studien für Volkert Haas zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Thomas Richter, Doris Prechel, & Jörg Klinger (Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 2001), 417-22.

⁶ See also my paper "The Indo-European Context," in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. John Miles Foley (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 20-30, esp. at 27f.