



Fig. 2. The Gemma Stosch. Five heroes from the Seven Against Thebes. Etruscan cornelian scarab, early fifth century BCE. Berlin, Antikensammlung SMB, FG194. Photo: Johannes Laurentius © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

by Filippo Buonarroti's posthumous publication of Thomas Dempster's *De Etruria Regali* (1720-26) and Anton Francesco Gori's numerous publications, not least the *Museum Etruscum* (1737). It is likely that Stosch had already acquired Etruscan gems while still in Rome, where the major collectors and dealers of the period could be found, some of whose Etruscan gems are mentioned in the *Museum Etruscum*. But when Stosch settled in Florence his interest in these particular gems increased, culminating in two significant acquisitions which he made towards the end of his life, in the mid-1750s. At one of the famous *Notti Coritane* sessions of the Accademia Etrusca at Cortona, Stosch came into possession of a striking ringstone, actually a scarab gem with its backside sawed off, depicting five of the heroes in the Seven Against Thebes tale, named in the stone's curious inscription as *tute* (Tydeus), *qulnice* (Polyneikes), *amphiare* (Amphiaraos), *atresθe* (Adrastos) and *parθanapaes* (Parthenopaios) (Figs. 2, 4). The stone was said to have been found in the region of Perugia in the early 1740s, and was a gift from another academician, Count Vincenzo Ansidei. The *Gemma Ansidei*, as it was called at the time, was already well-known in antiquarian circles, having

been published twice by Gori in *Diffesa dell'antico alfabeto de' Toscani* (1742) and *Storia antiquaria etrusca* (1749), and discussed in the local *Giornale de' Letterati*. It now became known as *Gemma Stosch* and was republished by another Florentine antiquary, Carlo Antonioli, in *Spiegazione di una insigne antichissima gemma del museo Stoschiano* and *Antica gemma etrusca spiegata ed illustrata con due dissertazioni* (both 1757). Both Gori and Antonioli were of the opinion that the stone was Etruscan. Stosch, who was initially inclined to view the inscription as Pelasgian or Greek, later confessed to a friend, with whom he discussed the stone in great detail, that it did not matter much to him whether it was Pelasgian, Greek or Etruscan: the main thing was that it was correctly understood as “uno de' più rimarcabili intagli che sinora si è visto, e di antichissimo lavoro” (Letter to G. Bianchi 18 Dec. 1756. Stosch 1871, 30 no. xvi.). A little earlier, Stosch, who had studied Gori's publications carefully and knew the gem well, had recognized one of the names from its inscription, *tute*, inscribed on another scarab gem depicting a single nude figure that was then for sale from a Florentine dealer (Fig. 4). Acquiring both works for his own collection, Stosch commissioned his house-artist Johann Adam Schweickart (1722-1787) to make engravings of them to be circulated among his correspondents (Figs. 3-4). Already well-known in antiquarian circles, these two miniature masterpieces were to become even more widely admired as a result of Winckelmann's specific interest in them—especially after Winckelmann selected Schweickart's image of the *Gemma Stosch* for the frontispiece of his celebrated *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764).

Winckelmann was already well-acquainted with Stosch's famous book on signed gems, having studied it carefully while still in Dresden. Arriving in Rome in 1755, it was only a matter of months before he made contact with his illustrious compatriot, sending him a flattering letter along with “une petite brochure qui concerne les Arts dont Vous êtes le plus grand Connoisseur et le Juge competent” (Winckelmann 1952, 227, no. 146.). This ‘brochure’ was of course the *Gedancken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauerkunst* (1755). The two struck up a correspondence, and Winckelmann, who considered Stosch to be the greatest connoisseur of ancient art of his time, now found himself somewhat surprised at the master's apparent lack of interest in aesthetic aspects, and even found some of his views on classical sculpture disturbing (Winckelmann 1968, 214; 1952, nos. 253-260). Winckelmann had expressed a wish to visit Stosch in Florence and Stosch in return had expressed the wish that Winckelmann should publish his gem collection. For various reasons the journey was postponed and could not take place until 1758. In the meantime Stosch had died, but the invitation was renewed by his heir, Wilhelm Muzell von Stosch, who wanted a summary catalogue of the gems published as soon as possible in order to advertise their imminent sale. Winckelmann had initially not expected to stay in Florence for