

Katherine Dunbabin, Albert Henrichs, and Timothy O'Sullivan, whose papers provoked lively discussion and feedback. Albert's paper, "Does the Wine God Drink? Dionysos at the Symposium," was a tremendous hit at the panel, but it remains a work-in-progress, and so both he and I are very grateful to Luca Giuliani for stepping into the breach and offering the volume a paper of his own. I am similarly grateful to Dominic Oldman, at the British Museum, for agreeing to collaborate with Andrew Burnett in turning his paper into an article that gives equal weight to the challenge of the word/image dichotomy in the field of numismatics and to the pressures that digitization have imposed on museums in terms of accessibility and delivery of images and the way in which knowledge is acquired and deployed.

In addition to the contributors, who worked with unfailing patience on the creation of this book, I am profoundly grateful to Bettina Bergmann, whose expert attention to the chapters introducing and concluding it have improved them immeasurably. A mock-up of the cover illustration by Lucia Nhamo captured exactly what I had imagined but couldn't describe, and Joni Godlove converted it into the beautiful object that you are now holding in your hands. Ivy Livingston produced the volume impeccably and made the whole project fun; watching her create a work-around for some apparently irremediable inelegance in the layout demonstrated that humans still have the capacity to outwit technology. Roger Bagnall, Dee Clayman, Orla Mulholland, and Susanne Muth gave much-appreciated support. The librarians of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and the Harvard Library helped unfailingly at every turn.

The original panel was accompanied by a web site comprising tips for using images in teaching and publications, subsumed in Chapter 6 of this book, and a list of web sites containing downloadable digital images: <http://classicalstudies.org/publications-and-research/using-images-teaching-and-publications>. The list is arranged as follows: Sites and Artifacts; Textual Material; Coins; Maps; Museum and Archive Collections. As long as it is kept up to date, it should prove a useful complement to this volume. To this end, please send suggestions to me or to the Executive Director of the Society for Classical Studies. The material heritage of the ancient world lies within our grasp. I hope that this volume will encourage text-based scholars to explore that heritage, use it, and enjoy it.

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1

Approaching the Visual in Ancient Culture Principles

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THE DIGITAL AGE has given scholars unparalleled access to the visual record surviving from Antiquity; this book is about making use of it. It is not about *ekphrasis*, nor does it attempt to theorize about the relationship between text and image.¹ Its aims are far more modest: to acknowledge some of the challenges that images pose for text-based scholars, and to demonstrate some of the potential rewards. The conference panel from which this volume is derived was prompted by the awareness that, even today, philologists and historians frequently continue to rely on textual sources to the exclusion of iconography and material culture. Various reasons for this can be surmised: outside the third world, our generation is literate and our culture heavily textual, and although we are assaulted by images on all sides, we are not trained in visual literacy, and we are therefore largely unaware of the effect that images have on us and we tend to disregard them as a source of communicative value. Hence there is a tendency among text-based scholars to treat images as superfluous or superficial.

But images were a powerful means of communication in the ancient world. The extent of (textual) illiteracy in Antiquity, while highly disputed, means that for the majority of the ancient population—whether as high as 95% or a less dramatic but still very significant proportion—ideas were communicated by either iconographic or performative means (i.e., on stage).² The range of visual

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¹ The bibliography on *ekphrasis* is legion: for some influential contributions, see Fowler 1991; Heffernan 1993; Webb 2009. For a stimulating investigation of the relationship between text and image in various forms of art that carry inscriptions, see the papers in Newby and Leader-Newby 2007; for further references on the relationship between text and image, see Katherine Dunbabin's article below, at 39n1.

² A recent defense of the "pessimistic" estimate exemplified by William Harris, with a useful bibliography illustrating the debate (Harris 2014), responds in part to the "optimistic" estimate collectively expressed in the *kleine Schriften* of Mireille Corbier (Corbier 2006).

material in ancient culture is vast, some of it regularly accompanied by text (for instance, coin legends), some seldom (as is the case with most surviving floor mosaics). In the case of wall painting, the superimposition of graffiti—whether drawings or slogans—adds a fascinating twist to ancient perceptions of the visual field. Indeed, text, once it exists in written form, is a visible entity, perceptible, if not comprehensible, by even an illiterate viewer. For those who could not read the text of an inscription—either because it was too high up, or too small, or otherwise virtually invisible, or else because they could not read at all—the physical *appearance* of many monumental inscriptions, rather than their *content*, must have carried meaning. Text, under such circumstances, becomes image.

The present volume does not attempt to cover all the ways in which material evidence can be employed to help us understand the ancient Mediterranean world; it ignores such methods as statistical analysis, a fundamental tool of the economic historian. Rather, it is addressed to everyone who is primarily concerned with text, historians as well as philologists, to show that looking is an activity as demanding and productive as reading, and that non-textual evidence can tell us things that may sometimes dovetail with what we know from textual sources, but may also give us insight into attitudes and practices of which no textual traces survive. Certain features, admittedly, such as inner monologue, are much more easily conveyed in words than in images; but this does not mean that images are powerless to express such concepts. It does, however, mean that it is easy for us to misinterpret what we see.

The necessity for ancient historians, specifically, to take account of material evidence has recently been demonstrated in a series of telling case studies by Jonathan Hall. Each study focuses on such problems as the causes of the Persian sack of Eretria in 490 or the “historicity” of the archaic remains on the Palatine as confirmation of the Romulean legend of the origins of the city of Rome in the eighth century BC. In Hall’s eloquent summary of the symbiosis of textual and material sources, he emphasizes that neither category can be taken at face value and that the scholar dealing with either one is perforce engaged in an act of interpretation.³ The same applies to a literary scholar engaging with images. But a larger point is that to become “visually literate,” alongside knowing Greek and Latin, means much more than being able to connect a text with an image; it means that a dimension of ancient attitudes and behavior that may never surface in a text gets stitched into the tapestry that forms our understanding of the ancient world.

In the following section, “Concepts,” I shall consider some aspects of the conceptual challenge posed by the interpretation of images, grouped into pairs:

³ Hall 2014:209.

context and perspective; myth and history; naturalism and stylization; juxtaposition and disjunction. This is not meant to be an exhaustive catalogue of the concepts underpinning ancient visual culture, but a sample of some of the key features that may be unfamiliar to textual scholars and will, I hope, pique their interest. It should become clear that the challenge of interpreting these features is as pressing for art historians and classical archaeologists as it is for philologists, literary critics, and historians, and that, as scholarship progresses, so will our understanding of these concepts. The next section, “Polysemous Motifs,” illustrates the variety of functions that can be fulfilled by a single visual motif, depending upon the context in which it is deployed and the types of questions to which it can contribute; the example illustrates issues ranging from superstition to textual conjecture. The penultimate section, “Reading Text and Image Together,” introduces the case studies in the rest of the volume. A brief coda, “Images for the Future,” sketches the challenge of harnessing the full potential of the internet age, as set out by Dominic Oldman in the final contribution.

I. Concepts

I.1. Context and Perspective

The importance of actually *seeing* anything with a pictorial component—at least a photograph, if not the original artifact—is a principle well known to epigraphists. A brief example will make the point. The transcription in *CIL* of an inscription on a hexagonal stele from Ammaedara (modern Haïdra, in Tunisia) represents *in margine superiore* a symbol and the word *BARASIX* (*CIL* 8.11592; Fig. 1.1). This is, at least, more detailed than the original transcription by René Cagnat, who simply recorded *BARASIX* “sur la corniche,” without mentioning the symbol in front of it.⁴ But autopsy by Azedine Beschouch in the garden of the Bardo Museum in 1967 determined that the X is much smaller than the other letters, which suggests that it is not part of the preceding word but instead balances the symbol in front of it, which represents a millet stalk.⁵ Beschouch therefore concluded that the Barasi were one of the African *sodalitates* whose company “logo” combined a symbol with a numeral. Other *sodalitates* involved in the North African beast trade are represented by the millet stalk combined with other numerals, or by the numeral for “ten” (which appears no fewer than five times on the Ammaedara stele) combined with other symbols.⁶ Hence, in the grid that we might construct of these combinations, the Barasi fit where

⁴ Cagnat 1886:108 no. 195.

⁵ Beschouch 1977:488–492.

⁶ Beschouch 1966.

“ten” and the millet stalk intersect. The layout and relative dimensions of the symbols carved on the stone contribute to the meaning; without taking note of what this layout and these dimensions tell us, it is impossible to interpret the rest of the symbols—the text of the inscription—correctly.

Seeing an artifact, whether in a photograph or displayed in a museum, cannot, however, replicate the experience of viewing an item in its original context, and it is all too easy to distort its meaning by ignoring the perspective(s) of the ancient viewer. Our modern eyes are trained by photography, which is a very particular form of reproduction, selecting and framing what the viewer is to see. A photograph of a fresco, for example, detaches it from the context in which it was anchored, so that a person looking at the photo literally sees the fresco “de-contextualized.”⁷ Close-ups and magnification further unbalance the scale of the original. Tricks of photography and digitization may enable us to “unwrap” a vase painting to view it as a long strip, but an ancient symposiast would have seen the outside from one angle at a time. As for the inside, the symposiast’s action of raising a cup to his lips would have gradually revealed the interior image until it filled his entire field of vision—a radically different experience from the modern process of studying a vase painting, and more like watching a film than looking at a static image.⁸ Or, to take another example, a floor mosaic mounted on the wall of a museum offers the viewer a perspective entirely different from the oblique angle from which it would have been visible to the Romans who walked, sat, or reclined upon it. When, as frequently, the image on the floor represented three-dimensional space, people moving across it would have been teased by the perception of depth in the flat plane beneath their feet.⁹ They would also have seen the floor mosaic in a room covered with painting on all four walls and decoration on the ceiling, with furniture standing on the floor and light playing upon it in different ways at different times of the day or night. All these differences would affect the experience of viewing an image and, therefore, its interpretation.

Indeed, wall painting sometimes exploits the natural light-source in a room by replicating it in the highlights and shadows within the painting itself, such as the famous instance in the villa on the slopes of Mt. Vesuvius at Boscotrecase, where a room lit by a doorway on the south side shows Perseus and Andromeda on the east wall, with shadows thrown to the left of the painting (Fig. 1.2), and

polyphemus and Galatea on the west wall, with shadows thrown to the right (Fig. 1.3).¹⁰ Similarly, when three walls of a room are each painted with a view inside a frame, the fourth wall sometimes includes a window or doorway that “frames” a similar view—a real one, this time.¹¹ Whether the paintings and mosaics within a room were meant to complement each other or form a contrast, or whether they were viewed as discrete units without a reciprocal relationship, must also have affected the impression they made on the viewer. An ancient room almost never survives with the decoration on all six surfaces intact, but occasionally sufficient traces remain for a reconstruction to be attempted, which is a first step in evaluating the sensation of experiencing such a space. The basic methodological point is clear: while we cannot usually replicate the ancient viewer’s experience, we can at least be aware of this limitation, and that awareness should, in turn, make us understand that we are imposing our own perspective upon the material.

The perspective *within* an image can distort the analysis, too. How close the Greeks and Romans came to recognizing a common vanishing point upon which all receding parallel lines in an image converge is disputed. Frequently a single image contains multiple vanishing points, each independent of the rest, as is famously illustrated in the architectural trompe l’oeil paintings from the area around Vesuvius (Fig. 1.4).¹² Already in Antiquity the representation of perspective was debated, both as a practical issue especially relevant to optics and as a philosophical problem connected with the difference between appearance and reality.¹³ One of the ways in which perspective (or its absence) presents an interpretive challenge is in terms of visual narrative: on the François Vase, for instance, an example of archaic Greek vase painting, figures are shown in superimposed zones, without any difference in size to show who is in the foreground and who in the background (Fig. 1.5).¹⁴ Understandably, such conventions have an unsettling effect on a viewer who is not used to them. Working with images is all about perception, both our perception and the perception of their original creator; ways of seeing are culturally and historically determined.

⁷ Cf. Berger 1972:19–20, discussing photographic reproduction of paintings.

⁸ Vividly demonstrated by experimenting in a reclining posture with a replica of an ancient cup, supported authentically with one hand beneath the foot, at the Winkelman-Institut, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, by courtesy of Susanne Muth.

⁹ The popular motif of the labyrinth, and the Minotaur lurking within it, on the floor of Roman bath buildings is a vivid example of destabilization of the lived space, interpreted as forging a connection between the story on the floor and the activity that takes place in the room by Molholt 2011.

¹⁰ First demonstrated, for the mythological paintings in the Roman villa at Boscotrecase, by von Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990:5 and 12.

¹¹ Bergmann 1999:102.

¹² For a reproduction of Fig. 1.4—a panel from the west wall of *cubiculum* M from the villa of P. Fannius Synistor—on which multiple vanishing points have been superimposed, see Richter 1970: Fig. 210. For another example, combining frontal view with aerial perspective, see Fig. 1.7.

¹³ Plato, *Rep.* 10.598, *Sophist* 236, *Laws* 663 b–c; Eucl. *Optics*, Theorems 4, 8, 10–12, 22; Lucr. 4.426–431 (the columns of a portico converging in the distance like a cone); Vitruv. 1.2.2; 7 *praef.* 2; Sen. *Ben.* 7.1.5, *NQ* 1.3.9; Sext. *Emp. Pyrr.* 1.118; Procl. *ad* Eucl. 1.40.10; Richter 1970:58–61. A recent study of theories of linear perspective in Euclid, Lucretius, Vitruvius, and Ptolemy concludes that they were based on the study of objects in mirrors, rather than on optics and the workings of the human eye: Sinisgalli 2012.

¹⁴ Richter 1970:19–20, Figs. 54 and 60.

1.2. Myth and History

The narratives of ancient art are predominantly the stories of mythology. The boundary between myth and history is, of course, extremely difficult to pin down, but if we accept as historical an incident from (say) the Persian wars, as recounted by Herodotus, then the absence of pictorial renderings of any such incident in Greek art of the archaic period is striking. Representations of Greeks fighting Persians on archaic vases show meticulous attention to details of armor and weapons, but the conflicts themselves are generalized rather than specific. It is almost as though no contemporary exploit could equal the heroism of the mythical past, nor the democratic spirit accommodate a public tribute to an individual; representations were idealized, and individual commemoration was strictly confined to the private realm.¹⁵

Equally striking is the virtually total absence of historical themes in both painting and drama of the fifth century. If, as is generally believed, the Alexander mosaic is a copy of a Hellenistic painting—perhaps that by Philoxenos praised by the elder Pliny (*NH* 35.110)—its depiction of a personalized encounter between Alexander and Darius illustrates the emergence of historical painting, as it is understood today, in the changed political circumstances and forms of artistic patronage in the Hellenistic age.¹⁶ The lack of recognizable reference to contemporary events in the painting of the archaic and classical periods can be bewildering; but it seems to reflect a fundamental aspect of the function of myth in organizing and explaining the world in which the inhabitants of archaic and classical Greece found themselves.

A related question concerns the preservation of “historical memory” in the representation of stories from the distant past. The controversy surrounding the so-called “Dipylon shields” on vases excavated from the necropolis in front of the Dipylon Gate in the Kerameikos at Athens are a test case for this concept (Fig. 1.6). Their distinctive shape comprises a large circle, reduced by a smaller circle cut out on either side, so that the result resembles one umbrella, balanced the right way up, on top of another, lying upside down. No such shield is preserved in the archaeological record, and it was therefore famously argued by T. B. L. Webster more than fifty years ago that these shields preserve a memory of the figure-of-eight shields attested in Minoan civilization down to the thirteenth century BC.¹⁷ This identification has, however, proven controversial. Critics argue that the archaeological lacuna is not significant, since one would in any case hardly expect a leather shield to survive, and it is therefore a fallacy to

assume that such shields were not part of the artist’s world. In general, however stylized, the protagonists of myth on Greek vases are depicted wearing contemporary clothing and carrying contemporary equipment, a feature that reflects the essentially ahistorical nature of myth.¹⁸ As stories of perpetual relevance to the human condition, myths were not perceived as belonging to an alien past; rather, their depiction in contemporary dress underlines the continuity in human behavior and experience that these stories illustrate.

1.3. Naturalism and Stylization

Granted that Greek vase painting is rather stylized, much of the rest of ancient art, especially from the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, looks very naturalistic.¹⁹ This means that it is a great temptation to assume that a visual narrative rendered in a naturalistic style must be true. Coupled with the Elder Pliny’s emphasis on naturalism as one criterion of artistic excellence (although not the only one),²⁰ the apparent veracity of Roman portraiture, with its unsparing depiction of the lines and wrinkles that bespeak the qualities of a virtuous Roman, might trick the unwary into approaching narrative images such as historical reliefs as a transparent and unadorned record of events. Scholars still sometimes try to reconstruct the events of the Dacian wars from the reliefs on Trajan’s Column, although the work of Tonio Hölscher over the last thirty years has helped us to understand the discrete motifs as visual “grammar and syntax,” a standardized and hence instantly recognizable system inherited from Hellenistic art that could be re-arranged to convey particular effects.²¹ For example, the suicide of the Dacian leader, Decebalus, and the abduction of his sons appear prominently on the Column. But these motifs had already been employed in the paintings displayed at Pompey’s triumph depicting the capture of Mithradates. They were therefore stock features to be appreciated for their drama and pathos, rather than interpreted as a literal reflection of what actually happened.²² Recognizable schemes constitute their own “visual language.”

Like all branches of scholarship, art history is dominated by different theories at different times. Explanations for “naturalism” in Roman art is a good example. In the nineteen-sixties, the Marxist art historian, Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, developed the concept of “arte plebea,” as opposed to “arte aulica,”

¹⁸ Giuliani 2010, with bibliography for both sides of the debate at 36n4.

¹⁹ A less loaded term than “realistic.”

²⁰ The primacy of realism—and, hence, illusionism—as the overriding principle in Pliny’s aesthetic is now understood to have been tempered by other qualities, including *gratia* (perhaps best rendered as “viewer-appeal”): see Perry 2000.

²¹ Hölscher 2004 (German edition 1987).

²² Hölscher 2004:41–43.

¹⁵ Hölscher 1973:199–214 (summary).

¹⁶ Hölscher 1973:218–222 (summary).

¹⁷ Webster 1955; Giuliani, below, 23–24n12.

to identify a stylistic tendency in Roman art distinct from the classicizing character inherited from the Greeks.²³ His main source was relief sculpture exhibiting certain features that he identified as characteristic of “arte plebea”: correlation between the size of figures and their place in the social hierarchy; frontality; axial symmetry; composition based on juxtaposition of individual elements rather than overlapping scenes; and a plethora of realistic detail. A remarkable circus scene on a funerary relief in the Vatican provides a signal example (Fig. 1.7).²⁴

Bianchi Bandinelli’s theory initially proved very influential, but in recent decades it has been questioned, most recently in a contribution by Tonio Hölscher (once again) in an edited volume examining the relationship between style and society in Roman art. Hölscher demonstrates that the stylistic elements that Bianchi Bandinelli identified as “plebeian” can be present in works of both “high” and “low” art (or, indeed, absent from either) and do not correlate neatly with social class. Hölscher argues instead for a distinction between art that reflects socialized norms or tendencies (what he calls “präsentativer Stil,” i.e., *habitus*, as conceived by the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu) and art that communicates a specific message in specific circumstances (“repräsentativer Stil”). As an analogy he takes Trimalchio’s tombstone, in which it is the combination of unsuitable pictorial elements, such as the juxtaposition of Trimalchio’s honorific wreaths with a gladiatorial contest, that betrays him as an upstart, and not the stylistic features of the monument. This means that we have to be much more careful about guessing the social context in which a particular item was produced, since we can no longer assume a neat correlation between such features as frontality and plebeian taste.

Complementary to Hölscher’s work on Roman art as “language,” a recent study of the battle scenes on Roman reliefs from both victory monuments and sarcophagi of the second and early third centuries AD by Stephan Faust focuses on the “rhetoric” of their narrative technique. A seminal example is Trajan’s Column, the design of which encapsulates a fundamental paradox: its twenty-three continuously ascending spirals unfurl a complex and detailed narrative that no contemporary viewer would ever have been able to read. Starting from the viewer’s point of view (both his physical line of sight and his basic knowledge of Trajan’s exploits), Salvatore Settis in the nineteen-eighties plotted vertical correspondences among the reliefs to show that key scenes, visible from a single vantage point, are flanked by other scenes that either contribute anecdotal color or repeat material found elsewhere, so that everything combines to

convey a persistent impression of victory.²⁵ Building upon Settis’ work, Faust demonstrates that the Column relied on a minutely calibrated distribution of the discrete parts of an individual scene on either side of a vertical axis (itself in tension with the spiral arrangement), cramped together when the chaos of battle is to be conveyed, more spaciouly distributed to convey a lull in the fighting.²⁶ Even if the reliefs were rendered more visible by being rubricated (i.e., painted red), it is still the case that the upper registers would have been very hard to see without binoculars or a telescope. *But the record was there*, albeit a record carefully arranged to convey a specific message. No image is ever transparent, and the ancient artist employed formal techniques of design and execution to control the viewer’s response.

1.4. Juxtaposition and Disjunction

If we are troubled by the likelihood that the creators of a monument as elaborate as Trajan’s Column knew that nobody was likely ever to see it properly, we will also probably be bothered by monuments that exhibit a singular lack of cohesion in their decorative program. The so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus, also known as the Paris–Munich reliefs from the provenance of its separate elements, shows on the three sides displayed in Munich a flowing relief in an exuberant Hellenistic style, carved out of East Greek marble, that depicts the marriage of Neptune and Amphitrite, attended by nereids, tritons, hippocampi, and erotes (Fig. 1.8). But the fourth side, which is displayed in Paris, is not only made of different marble (Fig. 1.9). It is also utterly unlike the other three sides in the style and content of its reliefs: on the left is a civic scene in which an official record is apparently being inscribed on a tablet by a seated togate figure in the presence of other togate figures, with the ceremony of the *suovetaurilia* depicted in the middle beside a figure of Mars, and soldiers in attendance on the right.²⁷ Whether or not the sea-thiasos in honor of Neptune and Amphitrite was originally carved for a Hellenistic monument, the lack of overt correspondence between the first three sides and the fourth attests to an eclecticism in Roman taste, an unselfconscious accommodation of the mythological beside the actual, and an aesthetic that was not trammled by a preoccupation with making everything match.

One of the unconscious prejudices that get in the way of our understanding of Roman art—and, indeed, literature—is the priority that we ascribe to radical originality, which is far different from the concept of *mimēsis* in Antiquity, whose basic principles can be reduced to five: the original must be worthy of

²³ This theory, expounded in a series of works, is distilled in Bianchi Bandinelli 1967.

²⁴ Kleiner 1992:236–237; Stewart 2003:104–108.

²⁵ Settis 1988.

²⁶ Faust 2012.

²⁷ Kleiner 1992:49–51; Kleiner 2007:51–52.

imitation; the imitation should reproduce the spirit of the original, rather than the letter; the imitation should be recognizable, rather than disguised, so that it can be appreciated; it should bear distinctive traces of the author (or artist) who has appropriated it; the imitator should compete with the originator.²⁸ One of the most prominent ancient monuments in Rome, the Arch of Constantine, has long been recognized as incorporating *spolia* from the monuments of Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius (Fig. 1.10). This apparent eclecticism used to be taken as evidence of the impoverishment of the imperial coffers in the fourth century and a general decline in energy and aesthetic standards. More recently, however, it has been recognized as a deliberate strategy to associate Constantine with his “golden” predecessors, even though few viewers would presumably have known where the *spolia* came from and hence would not have made the connection for which Constantine hoped.²⁹

Another type of juxtaposition can also pose an interpretive challenge, in that the conventions governing different media create what at first sight may appear to be radical contradictions in attitude between text and image concerning the same situation. In Roman funerary commemoration, while epitaphs tend to emphasize women’s domestic virtues, their depiction on sarcophagi dwells instead on their beauty and their erotic appeal. It has recently been suggested that this difference should not be seen as a contradiction, but as evidence of the propriety attaching to different realms: text in the funerary realm is for ideals, image for emotions.³⁰ Exceptions are rare, but I know of at least one striking instance where the separation between these realms is breached. This is the verse epitaph for Allia Potestas, variously dated within the first three centuries AD.³¹ Its jarring combination of conventional virtues and erotic detail can perhaps be usefully compared with an equally jarring trend in funerary statuary, where women’s facial features are reproduced with unsparing veracity, while their bodies are represented in idealized nudity.

Allia epitomizes the feminine virtues of a frugal, innocent, and loyal housewife (*tenax, insons, fidissima custos*, 8), famous for being neat, attracting no gossip, getting up early and going to bed late, working wool tirelessly, second to none in deference and decent morals, content with her humble station in life.³² Immediately after this litany of virtues, the erotic aspect of her appeal is

²⁸ As summarized by Russell 1979:16.

²⁹ Kleiner 2007:294–296.

³⁰ Muth 2011:334–337.

³¹ CIL 6.37965. On the range of proposed dates, see Horsfall 1985:252–253. For photographs, Gordon 1983: Pl. 65 and the images available at the Epigraphik-Datenbank Claus-Slaby, <http://www.manfredclaus.de>.

³² Lines 9–16: *munda domi sat munda foras notissima uolgo | sola erat ut posset factis occurrere cunctis. | exiguo sermone inreprehensa manebat. | prima toro delapsa fuit eadem ultima lecto | se tulit ad quietem*

candidly expressed and, even more remarkably, she is apparently said to have lived with two (male) lovers simultaneously. No image attaches to this inscription, and the text effectively takes over the role of funerary iconography with an explicit description of Allia’s face and body—her eyes, hair, and complexion, her breasts, her legs, her posture, her depilated skin.³³ Since a woman’s legs—let alone her breasts—would never be seen in public, Allia’s epitaph bears interesting comparison with the iconographic category in which these features are displayed. Putting the realistic portrait head of an ageing matron, with her grandiose Flavian hairstyle, on top of the nude and voluptuous body of Venus may seem embarrassingly incongruous today (Fig. 1.11); but it may be a frank expression of the same divergent qualities that are expressed in Allia’s epitaph: moral worth combined with an alluring sexuality that bespeaks fertility and, ultimately, the continuity of the family line.³⁴

II. Polysemous Motifs

The catastrophe that overtook Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae has exponentially increased our inventory of works of Roman art and material culture that have a secure provenance. Even allowing for the Minoan sites at Knossos and Thera, nothing from the Greek world survives on a comparable scale. Before the age of formally documented archaeological excavation, little was known about the provenance of a large proportion of the art works and material remains surviving from Antiquity, with the exception of architectural remains *in situ*. Hence, as a recent study has reminded us, our ignorance of any verifiable facts about some of the best known works of ancient art means that it is

positis ex ordine rebus. | lana cui e manibus nunquam sine caus(s)a recessit | opsequioque prior nulla moresque salubres. | haec sibi non placuit numquam sibi libera uisa (“She was very neat at home, as out of doors, and was (for this) most well-known at large | To a unique degree, so that she could cope with all tasks. | She was uncensured because she attracted little gossip, | She was the first to slip from her bed; she was likewise the last there | To return to rest when affairs had been set in order. | The wool never left her hands without a cause; | No-one was before her in deference or in salubriousness of morals. | She never had a high opinion of herself, she never fancied herself a free woman,” trans. Horsfall).

³³ Lines 17–23: *candida luminibus pulchris aurata capillis | et nitor in facie permansit eburneus illae | qualem mortalem nullam habuisse ferunt | pectore et in niueo brevis illi forma papillae | quid crura Atalantes status illi comicus ipse | anxia non mansit sed corpore pulchra benigno | leuia membra tulit pilus illi quaesitus ubique* (“She was beautiful with lovely eyes, was golden-haired, | There was an ivory gleam in her face | Such as they say no mortal had, | And on her snow-white breasts the shape of her (?)nipples was small. | What about her legs? She had quite the pose of Atalanta on the comic stage. | She was not sparing, but generous with her lovely body. | She kept her limbs smooth and the hair was sought out everywhere,” trans. Horsfall).

³⁴ On the necessity of emphasizing the childbearing potential of women’s bodies in a society where women frequently re-married after the death of an older husband, see D’Ambra 1996.

impossible to establish who made them, for whom, and why; sometimes, when and where they were made can be conjectured on stylistic grounds, but even these hypotheses are far from secure.³⁵ The result is comparable to working with unattributed literary fragments; it is very difficult to assign them to the correct context.

A related difficulty is the problem of assuming that an iconographic motif carries the same meaning wherever it appears. Some years ago, one of the contributors to this volume, Katherine Dunbabin, published an article on footprints on Greek and Roman monuments that provides an excellent blueprint for identifying from visual sources a set of cultural practices and beliefs, some of which are well attested in literature, some hardly at all. She demonstrates that many representations of footprints are an attempt to guarantee good fortune, a preoccupation that is ubiquitous in the iconographic record and therefore furnishes an instructive complement to textual evidence for the same concern. In the relative health and security enjoyed by modern western society, it is hard to appreciate how fragile and unpredictable life must have seemed in Antiquity. Coming in and going out were actions fraught with hazard: stumbling over a threshold was very bad luck, and the concept of starting out on the right (or wrong) foot gave rise to the adjectives *καλο-/κακοπόδιος*³⁶ and phrases like *dextro/sinistro pede*.³⁷ These expressions seem far from clichés when they are seen in the context of the plethora of apotropaic emblems and good luck symbols attending ancient doorways, which include the representation of footprints or sandals, the visual equivalent of *dextro pede*.

As Katherine Dunbabin goes on to show, however, not every ancient representation of a footprint or a sandal was a good luck symbol; like words, images change their meaning according to context. Some depictions of footprints may have had a very practical function: the frequent representation of sandals in baths, for example, may have been meant to warn bathers to wear *soleae balneares* as a precaution against scalding their feet on the heated floor.³⁸ Footprints in sanctuaries, on the other hand, seem to represent variously the feet of the deity or those of the dedicant.³⁹ Sometimes these footprints are inlaid in a different material from the base in which they are embedded; this phenomenon may support a variant reading in a passage by Apuleius describing the veneration of the goddess Isis on the steps of her temple at the end of a festival (*Met.* 11.17.4):

³⁵ Marlowe 2013.

³⁶ Robert 1960:356–361.

³⁷ *TLL* 10/1.1904.73–1905.13 (Holmes), supplementing Dunbabin 1990:106n93.

³⁸ Dunbabin 1990:99.

³⁹ Dunbabin 1990:86–90.

exin gaudio delibuti populares thallos, uerbenas, corollas ferentes, exosculatis uestigiis deae, quae gradibus haerebant (*codex Lipsianus*: haerebat F) argento formata, ad suos discedunt lares.

After that, smothered in joy, the people brought leafy boughs, branches, and garlands and kissed the footprints of the goddess that, shaped in silver, were stamped on the steps, and then they all went home.

The *uestigia* here are usually taken to be the feet of a silver statue of the goddess that is presumed to have been displayed on the temple steps, but no statue has been mentioned in the episode; instead, *simulacra spirantia* are explicitly said to have been placed *intra cubiculum deae*. By drawing an analogy with instances of metal footprints—or even actual bronze sandals—embedded in the pavements of sanctuaries, Dunbabin lends support to the suggestion made more than 400 years ago by the Flemish scholar Pieter Colve (better known by the Latinized form of his name, Petrus Colvius), but subsequently dismissed, namely that the crowd described by Apuleius were venerating silver footprints laid in the temple steps as a manifestation of the presence of the goddess.⁴⁰

Footprints etched in stone may be sufficiently distant from contemporary experience for us to realize that, without very careful enquiry, we have no hope of uncovering what they mean; difference breeds caution. A superficial similarity with our contemporary surroundings, on the other hand, is dangerous. A seductive likeness between classes of object in Antiquity and those of today can mislead us into assuming that their purposes were identical. This methodological trap has recently been demonstrated for the terracotta statuettes found in houses and gardens at Pompeii, which are usually interpreted as toys, ornaments, or—even though they are not found in tombs or sanctuaries—devotional objects (Fig. 1.12). Relative to the size of Pompeii, which probably numbered approximately 20,000 inhabitants before it was destroyed, these objects (approximately 300) are not numerous—a reminder of the gulf between the materialistic culture in the modern western world and the far sparser households of Antiquity. Taken together with book 14 of the epigrams of Martial (*Apophoreta*, “Gifts to Take Away”), which juxtapose cheap and expensive items, including statuettes of terracotta and precious metal, it has recently been argued that the items from Pompeii, while inexpensive, had high symbolic value as tokens of good wishes, and were therefore kept in the house as mementoes and guarantors of good fortune.⁴¹ This is not necessarily the connection that we would make today; it is easy to join the wrong dots, or to fail to join any dots at all.

⁴⁰ Dunbabin 1990:94–96, with n56.

⁴¹ Langner 2013.

III. Reading Text and Image Together

It is, of course, of particular interest to text-based scholars to examine the relationship between texts and images that tell the same story. But this presupposes a clear distinction between an image that tells a specific story and one that does not. In the absence of distinguishing attributes or identifying labels, however, it can be hard to tell whether an image represents a specific narrative. Luca Giuliani tackled this problem with reference to vase painting in an influential book, first published in 2003, that has since been translated into English.⁴² His contribution below provides a distillation of that argument. In one of his signature moves, he starts with canvases from the sixteenth and eighteenth century, in order to argue that the distinction that is often drawn between images illustrating myth and images illustrating life (or “genre”) does not work for the ancient world. Instead, he advocates a distinction between narrative and description, arguing that description turns into narrative when it contains an extra element that needs a story to account for it—a story that is already known to the beholder.

When confronted by a work of ancient art representing a subject familiar from literary sources, many scholars succumb to the temptation of assuming a direct connection between material object and textual account. They therefore look at the image as an illustration, more or less close, of the original text, or they assume that the artists, or their patrons, must have had the text in mind while designing the image. But the relationship is much more complex, and the art work needs always to be considered first and foremost as an object in itself, embedded in its own context and created with a wide spectrum of potential references. These references may include allusion to a literary text, but even the allusion itself can conflict with it. Katherine Dunbabin’s paper below examines problems of interpretation raised by the numerous representations of scenes from epic in Roman art, especially mosaics, of the later Empire, whose ultimate origins lie in the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid*. She discusses three instances: the mosaic of Ulysses and the Cyclops from the early fourth-century villa at Piazza Armerina in Sicily; a mosaic of two warriors fighting from Cabezón de Pisuergra near Valladolid in Spain that is accompanied by two fragmentary inscriptions identifying the scene as the encounter between Diomedes and Glaukos; and a recently discovered mosaic from a villa at Alter do Chão in Portugal that contains a previously unparalleled scene of the final duel between Aeneas and Turnus in the *Aeneid*, a work seldom illustrated outside the manuscript tradition. Her discussion reveals the complexity of the relationship between the visual and literary traditions and the multiple functions that mythology could serve.

⁴² Giuliani 2013.

As we saw above in Section II, beliefs and practices that are fleetingly visible in textual accounts may have generated images as well, and a single motif may have multiple functions, depending upon the context in which it is employed. Trying to re-think oneself into the physical context of the ancient world can reveal these fleeting clues. Simply being aware of the degree of decoration in a relatively affluent Roman household, for example, can help us to understand a preoccupation shared by many ancient authors, for whom the coffered ceiling, luxuriously gilded, was the ultimate symbol of conspicuous consumption in the Roman home. In grand public buildings across the Mediterranean, coffered ceilings were a standard and commonly accepted feature, but their importation to the elite Roman town house and villa triggered anxiety as to whether such grandeur was appropriate for a private setting. By examining the textual and visual evidence together in his contribution to this volume, Timothy O’Sullivan concludes from a combination of written sources—primarily philosophical—and actual remains that there is an additional element to this anxiety that has not yet been fully appreciated. He demonstrates that, for some critics, such ceilings were not only a waste of time and labor; they were also a poor substitute for the sky itself, which, with its planets and stars, would be the proper concern of an educated upper-class Roman. Yet, as he goes on to demonstrate, many Roman elites persisted in employing these decorative schemes, even though they were soaked in philosophical literature and culture and therefore well placed to appreciate the paradoxical symbolism of coffered ceilings. They simply ignored the double standard whereby a star-studded ceiling could simultaneously represent, in O’Sullivan’s words, “both moral decline and spiritual elevation.”⁴³

The paintings and mosaics discussed by Luca Giuliani, Katherine Dunbabin, and Timothy O’Sullivan comprise relatively capacious dimensions by comparison with an object as small as a coin. Coins, being the most widely disseminated type of visual evidence surviving from Antiquity, have the capacity to intersect with most of the themes that concern historians, and with many that concern philologists, too. Furthermore, their combination of numismatic legend and representation manifests a very particular relationship between text and image. But the highly specialized discipline of numismatics presents a daunting challenge of interpretation to all but professional numismatists, so that the evidence of coins remains sadly under-exploited. In his contribution below, Andrew Burnett first takes the wellworn theme of images of Augustus to show that Augustus’ claim to have restored the Republic is expressed on coins from the moment of the “first Augustan settlement” of 28–27 BC, pre-dating any other evidence, either literary or epigraphic. He then goes on to demonstrate that

⁴³ O’Sullivan, this volume, 87.

coins provide crucial assistance in dating Augustus' portraits, so that it is possible to trace the so-called "Actium type" (otherwise known as the "Alcudia type") all the way back to the immediate aftermath of the eponymous battle: coins can help art historians, too. The notorious Warren Cup, of contested authenticity, supplies Burnett with a concluding example, its alleged provenance in Judaea being shown to cohere with the Romanizing tastes of the court of Agrippa I, as manifested in the coins minted during his reign.

IV. Images for the Future

The numismatic part of Andrew Burnett's article is paired with a contribution by his colleague at the British Museum, Dominic Oldman, who addresses the opportunities and challenges presented by the digital age to museums and the users of their collections. Starting from the collections of the British Museum itself and the ambitions of its original benefactor, Sir Hans Sloane, Oldman shows how a radical re-imagining of the potential of digitization could revolutionize the way scholars identify, access, and use visual material to make connections across vastly different swathes of human experience and productivity. His approach is different from those in the rest of this book, but it addresses the same fundamental issue: how can text-based scholars learn to use images with expertise and discrimination, both now and in the future? His vision is breathtaking in its scope, and more than a little challenging for those of us who feel more comfortable with texts and commentaries than with hypertext and the Semantic Web; it is a provocative vision with which to conclude the discussions in this volume. Some practical suggestions of a more immediately applicable nature will follow, providing closure by means of the ring-composition beloved of philologists.

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Fig. 1.1: Hexagonal stele from Ammaedara, Tunisia, *CIL* 8.11592.
Drawing by Zoie Lafis.



Fig. 1.2: Boscotrecase, villa, room 19, east wall, fresco, Perseus rescuing Andromeda from the Cetus. Before AD 79. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1920, inv. 20.192.16. www.metmuseum.org.



Fig. 1.3: Boscotrecase, villa, room 19, west wall, fresco, Polyphemus serenading Galatea. Before AD 79. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1920, inv. 20.192.17. www.metmuseum.org.

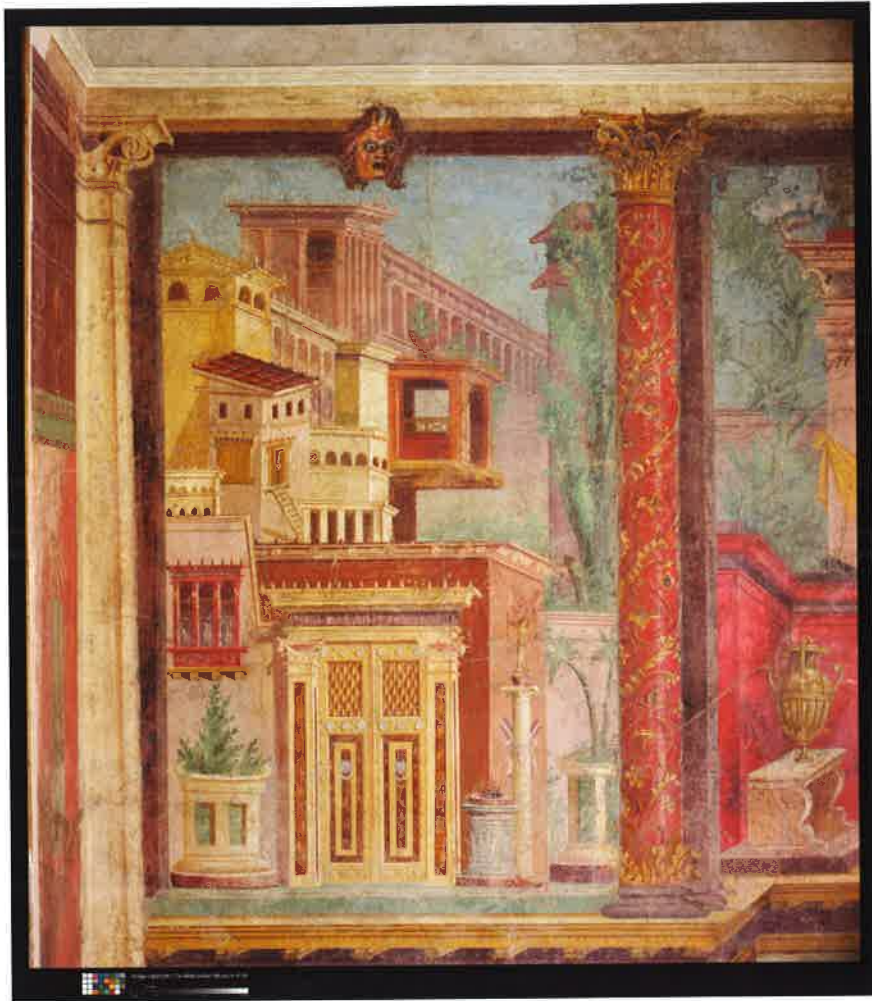


Fig. 1.4: Boscoreale, villa of P. Fannius Synistor, *cubiculum* M, east wall, trompe l'oeil architectural fresco. Before AD 79.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1903, inv. 03.14.13a–g.



Fig. 1.5: François Vase, From Fonte Rotella, near Chiusi. Ca. 570/560 BC.
Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze, 4209. Photo courtesy of the
Soprintendenza Archeologia della Toscana – Firenze.



Fig. 1.6: Geometric krater from Attica attributed to the Hirschfeld Workshop, showing soldiers carrying Dipylon shields. Ca. 750–735 BC. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1914, inv. 14.130.14. www.metmuseum.org.



Fig. 1.7: Funerary relief depicting a chariot race in the Circus Maximus, frontal view combined with aerial perspective. A togate figure (left) stands beside a statue of (probably) his deceased wife, their hands (now damaged) clasped in the gesture of *dextrarum iunctio*. Perhaps from Ostia. Early 2nd century AD. Rome, Musei Vaticani, Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. 9556. Photo © Vatican Museums. All rights reserved.



Fig. 1.8: Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus, frieze of wedding procession of Neptune and Amphitrite, detail, Rome, late 2nd/early 1st century BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek München, 239.
Photo by Renate Kühling.



Fig. 1.9: Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus, frieze of civic scene, detail of *suovetaurilia* ceremony with soldiers in attendance, Rome, late 2nd/early 1st century BC, Musée du Louvre, MA975. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.
Photo by Hervé Lewandowski.



Fig. 1.10: Arch of Constantine, Rome. The statues on the attic (in yellow) are Trajanic, and the rectangular reliefs between each pair (in blue) are Antonine. The tondi above the small arches (in pink) are Hadrianic. Drawing by Margarete Schützenberger.



Fig. 1.11: Matron depicted as Venus. Rome, late 1st century AD. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, IN 0711. Photo by Ole Haupt.



Fig. 1.12: Togate statuette. Pompeii, 1st century AD.
Akademisches Kunstmuseum, Bonn, D 273. Height: 17 cm.



Fig. 2.1: Annibale Carracci, *Boy Drinking*. Oil on canvas, 1580s.
Oxford, Christ Church Picture Gallery.
By permission of the Governing Body of Christ Church, Oxford.