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1

What does it mean to illustrate a text?

What does it mean to illustrate text? Do the pictures have to physically accompany the text? Do the pictures, whether they are together with or apart from the text, have to agree with the story? What does such agreement entail? Do pictures agree, if they add details not in the story? Conversely, what about if they omit certain details? Are they still illustrating the story, if they contain elements that contradict what the story says? What role does literacy play? Can an illiterate artist illustrate a text? What about the nature of the tools available? Does it matter that for most of antiquity the dominant form for long texts was a roll and not a codex? If texts are used to understand pictures, can pictures be used to reconstruct texts? Does the relationship between text and picture change over time? These are basic questions, some of which have been considered from the beginning of modern art history, others of which have seldom been treated. Yet all are necessary for understanding how pictures and text work together and apart in classical antiquity.

Of the questions just asked, it is strange that one of them is rarely posed. With the exception of a handful of scruffy, incomplete papyri with literary texts and a similar handful of fragmentary technical treatises, no illustrations from antiquity are joined physically to any text. Even those scruffy, incomplete papyri are relatively late, since the earliest technical papyri date from the second century B.C. and the earliest extant illustrated literary papyri from the second century A.D. It is not just that the pictures do not physically accompany texts. The pictures were created independently of the texts. While today illustrations are sometimes created long after texts were first written, such as for new editions of Mark Twain, in antiquity, until the Hellenistic period, the common practice was for text and pictures to be made and sold independently of each other as totally distinct entities. In other words, no physical evidence, including statements in classical texts, indicates that the pictures we have are illustrations of texts. Even for the Hellenistic period and later, the evidence remains sparse.

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Objects like the Hellenistic relief bowls and the Iliac Tablets do combine text and pictures, but the sizes of the objects limit the amount of text to quotations.[1]

The task for the scholar of classical antiquity is compounded by one other factor that is well known and much discussed. So much has not survived that we are inevitably forced to draw conclusions sometimes based on slim evidence. Weitzmann, for example, believes that "any history that confines itself to extant material is a falsification, since the preserved material is only a fraction of what once existed, and its survival is due merely to chance." History should not be "distorted by restricted evidence."[2] To a limited extent, I think Weitzmann is right. Most scholars, including me, try to put together as full a picture as we can from the evidence. Nonetheless, I am concerned about where we should draw the line between plausible reconstructions and outright speculation. For example, elsewhere Weitzmann says: "Illustrations are physically bound to the text whose content the illustrator wants to clarify by pictorial means, and their understanding, therefore, depends on a clear comprehension of this relationship to the written word."[3] Despite the absence of extant evidence, he felt he could reasonably posit the existence of richly illustrated texts in classical antiquity without having to address the issue of the separation of texts from pictures in antiquity.

Yet medievalists have come to increasingly question the fidelity of picture to text for illuminated manuscripts, even though both appear together.[4] Lowden, in an excellent survey of surviving early manuscripts of the *Bible*, cautions about

> the dangers, even the impossibility, especially in these early centuries, of extrapolating accurate visual ideas of what we do not have from what has survived. The material is profoundly unpredictable. The use of later evidence as the basis for reconstructing images in lost early biblical manuscripts is equally questionable, and the results even more uncertain. Imagining the past can be instructive, but the pervasive element of fantasy that is inevitable must always be recognized and acknowledged.[5]

His conclusions are equally strong. He believes that

> Fundamental to this theory [of Weitzmann and his followers] is the tendency to assimilate narrative art in a simplistic fashion with the written word. . . . They imply a dominance of the word over the image, and of literate over visual modes. . . . [M]ost biblical manuscripts in the early period did *not* have images in them. . . . [T]he illustration of early biblical manuscripts developed late as a response to the ubiquitous presence of biblical imagery in other media, not vice versa. . . . [B]iblical manuscript illustration was a fifth- and sixth-century response to those changes [the appearance in public art of biblical cycles].[6]

The classical evidence needs to be re-examined in light of these conclusions.

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Weitzmann's approach goes back to the nineteenth century, when the common opinion held that the scenes on classical objects represented the stories told in literary texts.[7] Such a tight nexus between text and picture meant that the pictures could be used to reconstruct the plots of lost works, especially the plays of the three great Athenian dramatists. While some scholars, like Carl Robert, were skeptical, the major reaction to this premise did not occur until the second half of the twentieth century, although even now all three possible positions are espoused.[8] Giuliani labels the two extremes as the "philodramatists" – those who see tragedy inspiring the scenes – and the "iconocentrics" – those who believe the artistic tradition goes its own way. Giuliani himself takes the middle road.[9] Artists depend on an amalgam of textual and pictorial traditions. As reasonable as that idea sounds, Snodgrass in his study of the effect of Homer on artists from the Geometric through the Archaic periods in Greece, convincingly concludes otherwise. After considering virtually every object with a scene attributed to Homeric influence, he believes that "one per cent or less of the surviving legendary scenes in early Greek art are likely to have a direct Homeric inspiration."[10] Giuliani, however, treats later objects – South Italian vases from the fourth century B.C. Therefore, the two scholars are not necessarily contradicting each other's conclusion.

This disparity in views demonstrates that there is great value in considering the evidence not just from one period, but from the whole of antiquity in chronological order, beginning with the Archaic period in Greek art through the Late Antique in Roman art. By chronological order I do not mean to imply that the conventional sequence of literary genres is reflected in art. Tradition and the extant literary evidence puts epic first with Homer at the very beginning, followed by lyric, tragedy, and history.[11] Yet once a particular tale enters the culture, no matter what its original literary or oral form, it can appear on an object. Furthermore, as time passes all the genres co-exist in texts for the artist to draw upon. In other words, just because the age of composing epic, for example, has passed, it does not follow that no more pictures of stories told in epic will appear. On the contrary, it means that the artist can have recourse to both epic *and* tragedy. The wealth of sources available to the classical artist inevitably complicates the scholar's task. The later the object the more complex the artist's sources *may* be.

I omit only two major sets of objects: the Geometric evidence so well covered by Snodgrass and most Etruscan art. The latter muddies the situation, because divergences from the text are generally explained as another culture's misunderstanding. I tend not to credit that explanation, because I think that the Etruscans were the equals of the Romans in their knowledge of Greek culture, but they consciously pursued their own goals. More importantly for

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the current study, however, is that the scholarly dispute about picture and text centers not on Etruscan art, but on the Greek and Roman evidence. Because the amount of material is so vast, I limit my discussion, for the most part, to case studies of examples that have been much debated in recent scholarly literature. I do not propose new interpretations of objects, since I might be thought to have skewed individual interpretations to fit my theories. I focus narrowly on the issue of whether artists were dependent on texts for their scenes and, if so, how they were dependent. Do artists, for example, have a copy of the text readily available that they check, as they design their scenes? More to the point, how available were texts? If the ease of obtaining texts changes over time – and it does – does that fact affect artists? Does an increase in general literacy over time result in different relations between picture and text? What happens at the end of the Roman era when both picture and text appear physically integrated in one object, the codex? Are the pictures consequently more faithful to the text? Does the complexity of the scene affect the relationship between text and picture? In other words, are simple stories with few elements less diagnostic than more complicated tales for determining whether artists are paying attention to the text?

The interplay between literacy and orality forms a background and sometimes the foreground to the entire discussion.[12] Milman Parry revolutionized not only the study of Homer in the early twentieth century, but also prompted consideration of issues of orality for literary studies of later authors such as Herodotus. Quintilian, writing in the first century A.D., still recommends composing whole sections in one's head before writing anything down – a practice that Pliny the Younger followed.[13] Thus, oral methods continued throughout antiquity and should have affected how picture and text worked. At the very minimum, the logistics of literacy must have had a great impact on artists. If reliable texts were not easily obtainable in the fifth century B.C. by the wealthiest like Alcibiades, then the far poorer craftsman, who painted vases, must have had an even harder time finding texts.[14] If texts are not readily at hand, and the vase painter has to remember what he has read, then the fidelity to that text may of necessity be less than good. At the same time the situation becomes seemingly more complicated with the rise of tragedy. Can we tell whether an artist is illustrating the text of a play or recalling a performance? Does it make a difference in the result? Actually this problem is present from the start, which is why I used "seemingly" in my statement. Much of what was written was not read but heard in oral performance. Homer, for instance, was regularly recited by professional rhapsodes.[15] Herodotus was known for giving public readings.[16] If an artist heard one of these works recited, is the effect the same as seeing a performance of a play? What if artists' memories are

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like that of John Dean? Neisser made the landmark study, when he compared John Dean's testimony before the Senate in the Watergate Hearings with the actual tapes of White House conversations made by Nixon. Neisser concluded that

> Given the numerous errors in his reports of conversations, what did he [John Dean] tell the truth about? ... John Dean did not misrepresent this theme [Nixon's own view of Watergate] in his testimony; he just dramatized it. In memory experiments, subjects often recall the gist of a sentence but express it in different words. Dean's consistency was deeper; he recalled the theme of a whole series of conversations and expressed it in different events. Nixon hoped that the transcripts would undermine Dean's testimony by showing that he had been wrong. They did not have this effect because he was wrong only in terms of isolated episodes. Episodes are not the only kinds of facts.[17]

In other words, how do we assess the work of an artist who has an excellent memory for gist and a crummy one for details?

The questions I have been posing are modern ones, in part because of our own relation to antiquity. While so very much has survived, even more has been lost. Here I am thinking not only of artifacts, including objects and texts, but also of the larger fabric of life in general that constitutes any culture. Consider, for instance, how many people today get the news only from television and radio, oral resources that are similar to getting the news by word of mouth in earlier times. If no videotapes or newspapers exist, then only the events that some historian, for instance, decides to record will be preserved. Hence only two one-line references exist today to the fact that Lars Porsenna of Chiusi captured Rome in the sixth century B.C.; all other sources say that Rome was never taken by the Etruscans.[18] Consequently, when we study classical times, we are of necessity forced to judge texts as more important than they actually were, because they comprise one of our best bodies of evidence.

I do not mean to slight the pictorial evidence, but it is important to realize that pictures without text to explain them can easily be misinterpreted. Take a modern example from the week in which I wrote this chapter:

> The *WSJ* [*Wall Street Journal*] runs a commentary by one of the paper's editors concerning a miscaptioned picture from the Mideast turmoil that recently appeared in the *NYT* [*New York Times*] and *Boston Globe*. The picture shows an Israeli cop in the background, yelling and holding up a baton, and in the foreground, on his knees, a bleeding young man initially identified as a "wounded Palestinian." It turns out that he was in fact a young American Jew who wasn't hurt by the baton-wielding officer but rather had been pulled from a taxi by a mob of Palestinian Arabs, then beaten and stabbed. The editor suspects media bias fed this mistake – he argues that in the minds of many journalists covering the conflict, the Palestinians are oppressed innocents, not people who could

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> gratuitously inflict the depicted injuries on an uninvolved civilian. Ditto, he argues, for the idea that the Israeli officer might have been trying to save a life, not take one.[19]

Since we cannot question classical man about what the pictures mean, we naturally look to the texts we have. I stress "we have," because even here the extant sources are very far from complete, as I discuss for Attic tragedy in Chapter 3. Yet without texts we could not interpret many of the scenes on the objects. The result is that, because we can never be free of the texts and must consult them first and the pictures second, we assume that in antiquity the artists worked in the same order. First comes the text, then the picture. Yet that scenario ignores the role of oral culture. Stories, especially folk tales like Little Red Riding Hood, generally begin as oral tales. Even though at various times they may be fixed in text, they continue to circulate orally. So it was in classical antiquity. Hence I propose a minor change in the wording about how artists work that will have a major effect on how we view their activities. *Artists were illustrating stories, not texts.* These stories were available from a number of sources: other artists, actual objects, performances of plays, oral tellings, and, to be sure, texts. Because the evidence that has survived is often not the evidence we have wanted, this new approach allows us to abandon the practice of reconstructing lost works of literature and to focus on understanding the material that we do have.

Classical literary sources rarely refer to illustrations, and even then those citations are in texts produced in the Roman era. Pliny the Elder, for example, mentions Varro's biographical sketches of notable figures accompanied by portraits – a subject I discuss in Chapter 5. Not until the late Antique period do we have comparatively well preserved "books" with pictures. Technical treatises, however, do have a long history of including pictures that goes back to Near Eastern and Egyptian examples. In Chapter 2, I consider what the Greek artist knew about writing and when he knew it. While all the chapters are concerned with methodology, it is especially important in this chapter, which considers general principles for judging the degree of accord between texts and pictures. Because most scholarly attention has been devoted to Attic and South Italian vases, my study reflects that imbalance with Chapter 3 focusing on possible illustrations of Greek tragedy and satyr plays. For similar reasons I do not consider much sculpture. Architectural sculpture tends not to be a player. Roman sarcophagi do not offer significantly different information from that of wall painting, which I discuss in Chapter 4 in connection with Ovid and Euripides. I do look at length at the unprepossessing, but significant relief bowls with pictures and texts from the Hellenistic period not just for

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their evidence but for the role they have played in modern scholarship. I end Chapter 5 with an analysis of a transitional work, the Vatican Vergil, a Late Antique manuscript that physically combines text and picture in one whole. The last chapter returns to the issues raised here about the sources the artists used and how they used them. There I propose a new model – that of "oral" transmission – for the sources that classical artists used to make their pictures.

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2

The Evidence from Archaic and Early Classical Greek Art

The first extant examples of pictures with full texts and not quotations do not appear until the second century B.C. for technical treatises and not until the second century A.D. for literature in the broad sense of the term. (I discuss this material in Chapter 5). Nonetheless, artists may be illustrating texts at a much earlier date. They may read the texts and separately produce pictures that follow those texts. The question, then, is how can we tell when an artist is illustrating a specific text or "merely" representing the same story? Since this question does not have a single answer for all classical antiquity, the evidence needs to be considered chronologically.

In this chapter I focus on material primarily from the Archaic and early Classical periods in Greek art. I begin with a consideration of the role that literacy plays in determining what story is represented in scenes composed of stock elements. That study, in turn, makes it clear that criteria have to be established to determine when a picture is faithful to a text. Knowing what constitutes a match and what does not is especially important for early Greek art, when all the objects were designed and functioned independently of texts. To establish critical guidelines, I examine a modern illustrated text. Next I apply those principles to a consideration of three diverse sets of evidence with different methodological problems: (1) pictures that contradict the texts in details the artists could have known and depicted; (2) the role of the salient detail in determining faithfulness to a text; and finally (3) an analysis of a single scene for one artist's working methods. Before beginning the discussion proper, it is useful to distinguish an "illustration" from a "representation." I use "illustration" only for pictures that match (or should match) the text in the way that Sir John Tenniel's engravings fit Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. A representation has only a loose connection with the text. The covers of cheap paperback editions of mysteries may contain the elements of the story, but

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not quite put together in the way they are in the story. Three synonyms for representation are depiction, image, and picture.

LITERACY, LABELS, AND STOCK COMPONENTS

Although Greek art and literature often shared the same subjects, as only to be expected, the correspondence between the two media for choice of subject is far from exact. Even where they do overlap and tell the same story, the renderings differ. Most frequently scholars have interpreted this situation as a gap in the knowledge of the texts by either us or the artist. Paradoxically, we are both more and less likely to know texts than they: more, because we know all sorts of obscure variants preserved for us by later ancient scholars, which are more easily retrievable today; less, because we often miss knowing the obvious that never made it into a written text or was merely not preserved.[1] Our very dependence, however, on preserved texts has led to an overemphasis on texts for art, not just in our need for the literary sources to help us identify and interpret scenes, but also in the very way that we approach art.[2] *We assume that, because we need the texts, classical artists must have also.* The idea rarely occurs that artists might depend more on other artists than on texts for their sources. Even less often considered is the idea that artists do not depend on texts at all, or, at best, only indirectly.

I begin with two critical questions. How do artists fit into the orality/literacy continuum, and how does that position affect their product?[3] It is necessary to distinguish between words that occur within an oral context and ones that occur within a written context. In an oral society both artists and storytellers may have heard the same story from the same source. Since the oral rendition is inevitably lost to us, we cannot tell. Once text appears, it is possible to compare the artistic renderings with the literary ones and to determine whether there are differences, and, if so, of what they consist.

Today we think of pictures and writing as separate but coordinated elements, each with its own place. You do not write over pictures, unless they are in subway cars or displayed as posters, and, even then, you risk arrest. Today we expect that dedications, titles, and artists' names will have their own space, generally on the base of a statue, in a bottom corner of a painting, on a tag attached to the object, or totally separated on a nearby plaque. Knowing where the writing is makes it more accessible, because it reduces the time taken by the viewer to find it. We also have certain expectations about what information belongs in, for example, a title, a caption, or a museum label. Our particular understanding of how writing and art work together took

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a long time to develop, for at first text and picture were not consistently segregated.

Consider sculpture. If a statue carried a dedicatory inscription, it sometimes did so literally, on the body. Among the earliest Greek inscriptions is a dedication by Mantiklos that is written on the thighs of a seventh century B.C. bronze statuette.[4] The inscription did not identify the statuette in the third person, as is done today, but instead spoke directly to the recipient: "Mantiklos dedicated me to the far-darter [god] of the silver bow from the tithe./Do you, Phoebus [Apollo], give something gracious back."[5] The location of a written dedication on the statue itself continued sporadically through the Roman Empire.[6]

In Greece from the Archaic period on another arrangement of text and figure coexisted with that on the Mantiklos statuette: the figure was separated from its inscription, which was written on its base. The base of a mid-sixth century B.C. statue of a kore, a young woman known as Phrasikleia, carries an inscription that has the statue speak in the first person like the Mantiklos statuette:

> The tomb-marker [σῆμα] of Phrasikleia.
> Maiden [κούρη] I will always be called
> Since instead of marriage this is what the gods have allotted me.
> Aristion of Paros made it.[7]

Related to these objects that directly address the viewer are the rare classical depictions of figures speaking within a figured scene. The best known example appears on an Attic red-figure vase that dates to ca. 510/500 B.C.[8] [Figure 1] As three figures look up and point to a bird flying off to the right, each comments. The young man seated on the left says, "Look, a swallow." The youth standing on the right agrees, "There it is." The man between them explains, "Yes, by Herakles, spring is here." The same method of floating the words by the speaking figure appears in Egyptian art, as well as in a late Roman mosaic from the fourth century A.D.[9] This is a "natural" method for displaying speech that does not prove direct influence from the Egyptian to the Greek to the Roman. In any case, it was never popular in classical art. Cartoons today use either captions or balloons, associated with each speaker in a manner quite similar to medieval representations where the speakers literally hold their conversation in their hands.[10]

The other significant thing about the inscription on the statue of Phrasikleia is the identification of the artist. The naming of the artist does not necessarily mean that the artist literally signed the piece, because we do not know if the carver of the inscription and the carver of the statue are the same person.

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