# Introduction

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> The man who has heard [the historian] thinks afterwards that he can see what is being said.[1]
>
> One picture is worth ten thousand words[2]

These two quotations, the first coming from the imperial Greek author Lucian and the second attributed to an American writing in the 1920s, illustrate two sides of the same coin – the relationship between words and visual images, and the ways that they communicate and appeal to their readers or viewers. While other famous phrases from antiquity, such as Simonides' maxim that 'painting is silent poetry and poetry voluble painting' or Horace's famous *ut pictura poesis* ('just like a picture, so too poetry'), focus on the similarities between words and images and the ways in which their modes of communication can be seen to be parallel or equivalent, my choice of quotes suggests instead an implicit competition between the two media.[3] In one the visual claims to surpass the verbal, while in the other the writer suggests that words can produce the vividness of sight, obviating the need for the visual arts.[4] Yet what happens when words and images are put together, when the image is accompanied by a text or a text is illustrated by an image? Do they complement one another, each reinforcing or clarifying the message of the other? Does one assert its primacy in guiding our interpretation of the whole? Or, can they instead lead us in diverse directions, throwing into question the possibility of any one 'correct' interpretation of the monument they constitute? This juxtaposition of words and images, and the questions it raises, forms the focus of this book.

[1] Lucian, *Hist. conscr.* 51, cf. Plut. *De glor. Ath.* 3.347a. For both the chief aim of the historian is to create vividness, *enargeia*, in his description of events.

[2] Attributed to Frederick R. Barnard, writing in the journal *Printers' Ink*, 10 March 1927. See Partington 1996: 53 and, for further discussion, Rees 1994: 23.

[3] Simonides quoted in Plut. *De glor. Ath.* 3.346f, just before the passage cited above; Hor. *Ars P.* 361.

[4] This sense of rivalry between words and images can be seen in a number of texts, especially from the Roman imperial period, such as Lucian, *De domo*, Dio Chrys. 12, and the preface to Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*. See Palm 1965–6: 156–60.

The texts discussed here range from brief identificatory labels to longer passages in prose or verse, and were rendered in paint and mosaic or incised in stone. All are inscriptions, written onto a material object which was originally used or displayed in a specific context, rather than circulating in multiple copies as literary texts. The objects themselves vary in date, size and material from archaic pottery vessels to Roman floor mosaics, paintings, reliefs and sculptural ensembles. Yet all the cases discussed here are ones where words and images were displayed alongside one another, challenging their viewers to make sense of the composite message that they presented. By focusing on the juxtaposition of words and images in specific contexts, these chapters are intended to contribute to the debate on the wider topic of the relationship between words and images in antiquity. This is a subject which has provoked a great deal of research in recent years, and it encompasses a vast range of topics, from verbal responses to art works at one end to visual responses to literature at the other.[5]

The ways in which literature responds to the visual arts can be approached in a number of ways. Those who come from literary fields often focus on the ways that verbal responses to visual images, especially *ecphraseis* (vivid descriptions which aim to recreate a visual scene in the mind's eye), develop as a literary device, and the purposes that they serve within their literary contexts.[6] Yet historians of classical art can also use such texts to construct a history of viewing, since they constitute representative examples of the modes of viewing in existence in antiquity.[7]

The opposite pole of the word–image relationship is provided by the focus on visual images and their relationship to texts. At the most extreme, this means the search for a specific literary text behind an image, a search which has long dominated many areas of art history, though recent works on classical art suggest that in many cases it may be misguided. Indeed, the recent books by Snodgrass and Small show that attempting to find illustrations of the Homeric poems and Greek tragedy on Athenian vases is, in most cases, to miss the point. Rather, they argue, artists and poets were both drawing on a common oral tradition of mythological tales which

[5] A range of these approaches is represented in the essays collected in two related volumes, Goldhill and Osborne 1994, Elsner 1996a. See also Rutter and Sparkes 2000.

[6] The bibliography on *ecphrasis* is extensive. See with further bibliography Webb 1999 and Elsner 2002, as well as Squire, Chapter 4, this volume. For other accounts of the relationship between words and images presented in literary texts see Palm 1965–6; Boeder 1996; Benediktson 2000.

[7] For the use of texts in constructing modes of viewing see especially Elsner 1995; also Newby 2002a, 2002b. On Lucian's attitude to art works see Maffei 1994.

admitted flexibility in the ways these were presented.[8] While the situation does seem to have changed in the increasingly scholarly atmosphere ushered in by the Hellenistic period, this is a useful warning against the age-old proclivity of art historians to 'keep eyes averted and fixed on a text'.[9]

Certainly some images were closely related to literary texts and often include labels or even excerpts from texts. The best examples are the Hellenistic relief bowls (the so-called 'Megarian' bowls) where scenes from epic cycles (especially the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) or Euripides' tragedies are accompanied by inscriptions giving information such as the title and author of the work, as well as labels to identify the protagonists and occasionally quotations.[10] Yet in many cases illustrations of literary texts are marked by their selectivity as well as by frequent mismatches between images and texts. A good example is the *Tabula Iliaca* in the Capitoline Museum in Rome, one of a series of small marble tablets which pair reliefs showing episodes from the Trojan war (taken from Homer and other epic cycles) with labelling inscriptions and short engraved texts (Fig. I.1).[11] Here the central panel representing the Fall of Troy is surrounded by scenes illustrating various episodes from the *Iliad* and a written summary of that text is given on a pilaster. The central scene is labelled as 'the Ilioupersis according to Stesichorus'. Yet despite Kurt Weitzmann's attempts to see in these pictorial scenes (and those of the relief bowls) echoes of a long tradition of illustrated manuscripts of epic poems, it is more likely, as Nicholas Horsfall has suggested, that the texts and images here were drawn from separate sources (epitomes of the poems and pattern books).[12] Indeed, Horsfall has convincingly shown that the central panel has more to do with *Aeneid* Book 2 and Roman art than with Stesichorus, and that in many cases the illustrations of Homeric scenes and the epitomes agree neither with one another nor, very closely, with Homer.[13]

[8] Snodgrass 1998; Small 2003: 37–78; see also Moret 1975. A greater role for literature is argued by Taplin 1993: esp. 21–7 and Giuliani 1996: esp. 85–6.

[9] Steinberg 1980: 210. As he notes, this tendency goes back to antiquity with Philostratus the Elder opening the first of his descriptions of paintings, *Imag.* 1.1.1, by urging his student to look away from the painting to see its source – a passage from Homer's *Iliad.* On changes ushered in by the Hellenistic period see Small 2003: 79–93.

[10] The crucial publication is U. Sinn 1979 with earlier literature. See also Brilliant 1984: 41–3; Small 2003: 80–2, 86–90.

[11] For a catalogue of the *Tabulae Iliacae* see Sadurska 1964 and 1966. Trojan scenes dominate, but others show scenes relating to Alexander the Great and Hercules.

[12] Weitzmann 1959: 34–50; 1970: 38–44 and passim; Horsfall 1979: 43–8.

[13] Horsfall 1979: 35–43, 45–6. Regarding the existence of illustrated literary texts in antiquity, forcefully argued for by Weitzmann 1959, 1970, see the reservations in Small 2003: 118–54.

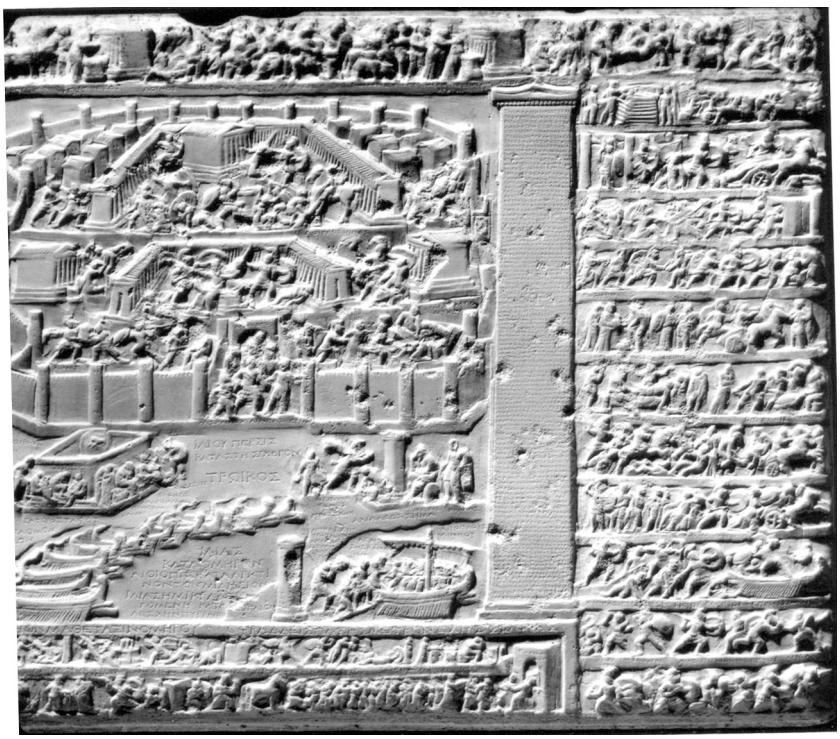

**Fig. I.1** *Tabula Iliaca.* Rome, Capitoline Museum.

A similar selectivity and adaptation of the narrative tempo of the *Odyssey* can be seen in the landscapes from the Esquiline hill, now in the Vatican.[14] The paintings privilege certain episodes, such as Odysseus' encounter with the Laestrygonians (*Od.* 10.80–132), while omitting others, and the figures are subordinated to a vast landscape which provides much of the impact of the painting. While the text to which they allude is certainly an important aspect of images like these, as well as of other Homeric friezes such as those in the House of the Cryptoporticus (I.6.2) and House of Octavius Quartio (II.2.2) at Pompeii, all these images have been carefully selected, framed and adapted to serve their new Roman contexts.[15] In many of these cases images refuse simply to stand in for texts, or repeat what they say; instead the two

Even if such texts did exist, the attempt to see direct reflections of them in all mythological imagery is surely misguided.

[14] For discussions of the frieze see von Blanckenhagen 1963 and, most recently, Biering 1995 who shows that it is an adaptation, rather than a strict copy, of Greek models.

[15] For a discussion of the ways these images present their Homeric narratives, see Brilliant 1984: 54–65.

can be complementary or contradictory, demanding to be read with and against one another.

Looking at how literature responds to art, and how art responds to literature are thus the two poles of the art and text/word and image debate. A third area of study turns instead to the ways in which both words and images function as signs, bearers of meaning to the viewer or audience who interprets them.[16] The situation is complicated further by the fact that words can be both visual and verbal signifiers depending on whether they are written down or spoken aloud.[17] The blurring between words and images is often suggested in Greek literature by puns upon the word *graphē* – which can mean both painting and writing.[18] Yet it can also be suggested by visual means, when words take the place of other forms of decoration, as on some of the vases discussed by Osborne and Pappas here.

These three approaches to the relationship of word and images – looking at the words behind an image, the words that an image can provoke, and the parallel, yet separate, ways in which word and image communicate – all feature in this book.[19] Here, however, we seek to explore these issues through a closer focus on the ways that words and images could be combined and juxtaposed in antiquity. All the chapters here examine monuments, spaces or art works where visual images appear in combination with painted or inscribed texts. As with any collection on a particular theme, these discussions are only a selection of the multitude of topics that could be discussed under the rubric of 'Art and Inscriptions in the Ancient World' and there are necessarily some gaps which this introduction is designed to fill. Yet despite their different topics a number of unified themes and ideas run throughout the essays collected here.

## Art and inscriptions in the ancient world

Before moving on to the chapters themselves, I wish to fill in some of the areas not covered in them by a brief sketch of the many ways in which visual

[16] On the ways in which images present narratives which are analogous to those of written texts see Brilliant 1984: esp. 15–20. For a brief introduction to different ways of looking at the word–image opposition see W. J. T. Mitchell 1996 with further bibliography.

[17] The contrast between the oral/aural and the visual often appears as a refinement of the wider word–image opposition, as in Lucian's *De domo* where the debate focuses on whether sound (of the orator's speech) is more or less powerful than visual effect (the hall's visual beauty). See Newby 2002b with further bibliography.

[18] See for example, the preface to Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* where the sight of a painting inspires the narrator ἀντιγράψαι τῇ γραφῇ, 'to write an account of the painting'.

[19] For an analysis of recent approaches to the relationship between words and images, see Bal 1991: 25–59.

images and verbal texts were juxtaposed in antiquity. Indeed by making a separation between 'art' and 'inscription' we may be guilty of making a false distinction which makes little sense when applied to the monuments themselves. Though commonly presented to us as written texts in a corpus of inscriptions, ancient inscriptions were as much monuments as texts, designed to make a visual as well as a verbal impact, and utilising visual techniques such as a larger script to highlight headings or important phrases.[20] They are regularly found as part of larger monuments which also incorporated visual images, as we often see in funerary monuments.[21] Art works such as statues were regularly viewed together with their inscribed bases, which could identify the person shown, indicate the reasons for dedication (whether votive or honorific) or even speak for the statue itself.[22] While the disappearance of most of the statues leads us to make a distinction between the lost statue and its surviving base, in antiquity both would have been viewed together as a distinct whole, although as Shear and Platt show here, there could also have been dissonances between the information presented by each.

In a discussion of advertising imagery Roland Barthes has identified the linguistic element provided by a label or title as helping to anchor the meaning of a polyvalent image by fixing its identity and guiding the reader/viewer through a number of different possible associations.[23] This identificatory power of inscriptions has a long history in ancient art, where such texts can vary from brief labels identifying protagonists to lengthier texts celebrating the individual honoured with a statue or buried in a sarcophagus. A number of the essays collected here examine this controlling power of the word, and also the discrepancies with the images accompanying it. Sometimes, the artist draws on a repertory of standardised imagery which is then made particular and specific by the inscription. However, specificity is not only the domain of words. In many cases it can also be achieved by visual means; for example, by adding the portrait features of a particular individual to a representation of a personification or mythological figure. Sometimes the identifications offered by words are challenged by the visual characteristics of the image itself. In other cases the texts added to images can represent

[20] See e.g. Elsner 1996b on the monumental quality of Augustus' *Res Gestae*.

[21] See e.g. Koortbojian 1996; Hope 2001: esp. 7–8, 15; and Davies, Chapter 2, this volume.

[22] See Ma, Shear and Platt (Chapters, 8, 9, 10), this volume. For an example of the ways inscriptions can be used to reconstruct the contexts of ancient statues see Alföldy 1984. Lahusen 1983 also uses epigraphical evidence in his discussion of Roman honorific statues, but less systematically. On speaking statues see Svenbro 1993 and Steiner 2001: esp. 255–9.

[23] Barthes 1964: 43–5.

a viewer's response to the image, in the guise of an ecphrastic epigram, or can help to bring the scene to life by supplying the words and thoughts of the figures represented. In order to set into context the examples discussed in this volume, I will give first a brief historical account of some of the different ways that texts and images were displayed together in the ancient world.

## Archaic and classical Greek art

During the archaic period the combination of images and writing generally appears in one of two contexts, as inscriptions on pottery vases or as texts accompanying votive dedications or funerary monuments. Often in these early inscriptions the text speaks in the first person, purporting to be the words of the object itself. A good example is provided by the Nicandre *korē* found in the sanctuary of Artemis at Delos and dated to around the mid-seventh century BC. Here the inscription runs along the left leg of the figure and proudly declares 'Nicandre dedicated me to the goddess, far shooter of arrows.'[24]

The inscriptions can also indicate how the object should be used or interpreted. The graffito on the famous eighth-century 'Nestor's cup' declares 'I am Nestor's cup, good to drink from. Whoever drinks from this cup may desire of fair-crowned Aphrodite to seize him', a clear sign that the cup is to be used within a sympotic context.[25] Similar directions to the viewer occur in the texts which accompanied funerary monuments. A base from Anavyssos in Attica usually associated with the archaic *kouros* also found here, urges the passer-by to 'stay and mourn at the tomb of dead Croesus whom raging Ares destroyed one day as he was fighting in the foremost ranks'.[26] The information which this inscription gives us about the deceased can be paralleled in a number of other archaic funerary monuments, though it is unusual in telling us the circumstances of his death.[27] A well-known example is the inscription on the base of the *korē* of Phrasicleia, discovered in Merenda in Attica. This reads 'Tomb of Phrasicleia. Maiden (*korē*) I will

[24] Athens, National Museum 1; Richter 1968: 26, no. 1 gives the text of the inscription, which goes on to identify Nicandre in relation to her father, brother and husband.

[25] See Murray 1994. See also Osborne and Pappas, Chapter 5, this volume, p. 134 on the performative nature of this inscription.

[26] Athens, National Museum 4754; *SEG* X.461. The *kouros* is NM 3851. For the text see Jeffrey 1962: 143–4, no. 57.

[27] For an analysis of archaic epigrams see Clairmont 1970: 3–37.

always be called since instead of marriage this is what the gods have allotted me.'[28] The inscription leaves it unclear whether it is Phrasicleia herself who speaks, from beyond the grave, or the statue which represents her, though the identification between the two is encouraged by the fact that Phrasicleia will always remain a maiden, that is, just as the statue represents her here.[29]

The inscriptions in these cases supplement the information provided by the visual characteristics of the statues by telling us the names of those who have died. The statues which accompany them are both youthful, agreeing with the identification of those they commemorate as a warrior in the prime of life and nubile maiden. The pathos evoked by their inscriptions is echoed by the beauty of the figures, and the self-assertiveness of the images matches the direct address of the inscriptions. Both are equally important in celebrating the memory of these flowers of Athenian youth. While the use of statues in the round as funerary markers dies out after the archaic period in Attica, as a result of Themistocles' restrictions on funerary display, similar combinations of text and image can be seen later in the statues dedicated in sanctuaries or set up as honorific monuments. Here too the text helped to personalise the image, identifying it as the gift of a specific individual to a particular god, or even as a representation of that individual, as in the case of athletic victory statues which were as much an honour for the athlete depicted as for the god in whose sanctuary they were erected. Such statues provide tangible proof of the nobility or *aretē* of those depicted, and the web of honour and recognition which lay behind their erection.[30]

The pairing of text and image in funerary contexts continues in the classical period, especially on grave reliefs which often combine a pictorial scene with an epigram mourning the deceased and celebrating their qualities. The correlation of image and text on classical gravestones was comprehensively studied by Christoph Clairmont, who concluded that although exact correlation between text and image is very rare (one exceptional example being the product of a Phoenician mentality),[31] nevertheless the epigrams do widen the scope of the pictorial representations by providing the name of the deceased, who can thus be identified with a figure in the depiction, or by providing details of their profession which may also be alluded to

[28] Jeffrey 1962: 138–9, no. 46.
[29] Svenbro 1993: 26–43 suggests that first person inscriptions are most common in early funerary monuments with third person ones only appearing after *c.* 550 BC.
[30] See further Ma, Chapter 8, this volume.
[31] Clairmont 1970: 114–17, no. 38; Athens, National Museum 1488; *IG* II$^2$ 8388.

in the image.[32] Both images and texts can make use of standard elements of composition, adding specific details to make them more relevant to the individual commemorated. On one stele the flute-playing prowess of the deceased Potamon is praised in the inscription, and also alluded to through the presence of flutes in the hands of those depicted, who are otherwise shown in a standardised *dexiosis* (hand-shaking) scene.[33] Often, as in the archaic monuments discussed above, the image is an idealised one of a youth or young woman whose identity is then clarified by the epigram, which may also list his or her particular virtues. Yet we would not always know from the epigram what age the deceased was at death, a fact which the visual image can give us when the epigram does not.[34] On other occasions the epigram directs us to a reading of the image which is in contrast to that we would have arrived at otherwise. Two reliefs show a woman with a small child.[35] On one the woman is shown standing, on the other seated (Fig. I.2). While we would usually interpret such scenes as showing mother and child, the epigrams engraved on the stelae instead identify them as a sister and brother, and a grandmother and grandchild. Such cases may be the result of buying off-the-shelf stelae, and then personalising them, as we find happening in Roman funerary art later, though in the case of the grandmother, the affection which she held for her grandchild, stressed in the epigram, is also underscored by the image (Fig. I.2).[36] While I have concentrated here on classical Athenian grave stelae, the correlations, mismatches and nuances which their combinations of word and image provide could also be studied in later funerary reliefs as well as in votive or administrative reliefs, such as those discussed here by Alastair Blanshard (Chapter 1).[37]

To return to the archaic period, the other major situation in which we find texts and images combined is where they feature as identificatory labels,

[32] Clairmont 1970: 55–8. For allusions to the deceased's profession as a copper smelter see Clairmont 1970: 80–2, no. 15; Paris, Louvre 769; *IG* II$^2$ 8464.

[33] Clairmont 1970: 111–12, no. 35; Athens, National Museum 1962; *IG* II$^2$ 8883.

[34] E.g. Clairmont 1970: 82–3, no. 16; Athens, National Museum 827; *IG* II$^2$ 12839, where the epigram simply names the deceased as Phaidimos but the relief shows him as an ephebe.

[35] Clairmont 1970: 89–92, nos. 22 (Athens, National Museum 3845; *IG* II$^2$ 12147), 23 (Athens, Cerameicus Museum; *IG* II$^2$ 10650)

[36] On Roman sarcophagi see especially the sarcophagus in the British Museum where a figure of Ariadne has been recarved to represent Endymion and thus suit a deceased man rather than a woman, Walker 1990: 38, no. 43.

[37] On Hellenistic funerary reliefs see Breuer 1995 though she is more concerned with the general tendencies of the imagery and epigrams than with the specific ways they play off one another.


**Fig. I.2** Funerary stele of Ampharete, identified by the inscription as a grandmother holding her grandchild. Athens, Cerameicus Museum.

especially on Greek vases. According to Aristotle this was a particular feature of 'old paintings where, unless they were inscribed, one would not know what each thing was'.[38] In the extant monuments we find it especially on archaic vases, as well as on the north and east friezes of the Siphnian treasury at Delphi. One of the most famous examples on vases is the so-called François vase in Florence, dating to the first quarter of the sixth-century BC. Here the

[38] Arist. *Top.* 140a20–22.