

# TEXT & IMAGE



*edited by* Elisa Scholz  
*and* Glynnis Maynard



The Archaeological Review from Cambridge is a biannual journal of archaeology. It is run on a non-profit, voluntary basis by postgraduate researchers at the University of Cambridge. Although primarily rooted in archaeological theory and practice, the ARC invites a wide range of perspectives with the aim of establishing a strong, interdisciplinary journal which will be of interest to a variety of fields.

*Archaeological Review from Cambridge*

Department of Archaeology  
University of Cambridge  
Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3DZ  
United Kingdom  
<http://arc.soc.srccf.net>

**Volume 36.2: Text & Image**

© The Archaeological Review from Cambridge  
Theme Editors: Elisa Scholz and Glynnis Maynard  
Published in November 2021  
ISSN 0261-4332

Issue design by Simone I. Russo

Cover art by Livia De Simone

All articles for publication in the Archaeological Review from Cambridge are peer-reviewed.

All images are the authors' own, except where otherwise stated.

Printed by: Victoire Press Ltd

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to sincerely thank Professor Robin Osborne for his insightful comments on early drafts of our introduction and Sergio G. Russo for his proofreading edits. We would also like to extend our thanks to all those who offered to peer review our papers and to members of the ARC committee during the editing process. We thank you all for your time and your commitment. Finally, we would like to thank Livia De Simone and Simone Ignazio Russo for their creative talent in crafting our volume cover and issue design.



# Text and Image in Perspective

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Writing his zoological treatise on the ‘parts’ of animals at some point in the fourth century BCE, Aristotle stated that “some of these things need to be clarified by an account, others rather by visual inspection” (*De partibus animalium* IV, 5, 680 a2-3). The philosopher was dealing with the issue of describing anatomical details—a complex endeavour both through text and drawings. After all, sketch a wrong detail or use an inappropriate adjective and very quickly you’ll find you have the wrong sort of animal set out in your description. But why is this exactly? Why would we need a verbal description for some features and a visual representation for others? And why doesn’t either suffice in every case? While these may seem naive questions to ask, we would expect that possessing one of the two formats would be enough. And yet, there are types of information that are hard or even impossible to convey in texts, just as there are types of information hard or even impossible to convey in images. This is why it is necessary for Aristotle, in some cases, to compensate for the incompleteness of one system with the elucidations of the other (Fürst von Lieven et al. 2020: 12). Whilst there is agreement that words and images do different things, there is little consensus on the differences between the two media, which can appear undefinable and incomplete when separate: “the absence of an adequate sense of word and image is attested not only by the profusion of scholarship on the subject (which does not seem to be united by a comprehensible interpretive platform) but also by the equally large range of words that are used to name the putative difference” (Elkins 2001: 84). While the musings of Aristotle highlight the central tenet of this volume—the contrasting and complimentary communicative functions of word and image—Elkins cautions us against conceptualising word and image as strict binary opposites.

For the greater part of Western history since Antiquity, ways of thinking about text and image have been articulated mainly in terms of imposed hierarchies of perception. Whether the written or the figurative is favoured, the aim remains the same: establish the superiority of one system over the other (see below). Not only does this imply a sharp distinction between the two—which, as the quote above demonstrates, is purely subjective—but it fundamentally alters and distorts our own reading of the communicative functions performed by text and image, in the past as in the present. In a discipline such as archaeology, where interpretation of the past often depends on evidence that can be categorised as ‘visual’, it is more important than ever to understand exactly what *can be* ‘text’ and ‘image’—rather than what *is*—and how integrating the acts of reading and seeing might offer a useful lens to study the past and understand the study of the past, itself a narrative composed of writing and images. To broaden our comprehension of communication in past societies and our own communication of them, Volume 36.2 attempts to offer fresh perspectives on humans’ most intimate and permanent way of leaving traces of themselves.

### **Logocentrism and iconocentrism: hierarchies of perception**

Ancient philosophical worldviews, Christian theology, trends in art history and philology have all stressed the importance of the word/speech (*logos*) above everything else —‘in the beginning was the Word’, *not* the image. Of course, the infamous, ambiguous opening of St. John’s Gospel made use of the noun *logos* in Greek, which may imply both Latin *verbum* and *sermo*—‘word’ and ‘speech/conversation’. Which did the apostle imply here? Traditionally, the sentence had always been translated in Latin with *verbum*, but Erasmus, in 1516, rather shockingly used *sermo* (Goldhill 2002, 25-26). The ambivalence of the concept of *logos*, alternatively interpreted as the written or the spoken word, runs parallel to most Western thought. Plato believed that writing was inherently evil because it was deceitful and destroyed memory: as opposed to the benefits of oral learning to retain content, written characters only gave ‘the semblance of truth’ and eventually led to forgetfulness. According to the philosopher, they also resembled the images of painting, which, in spite of their lifelikeness, were silent. Written characters, too, had nothing to say for them-

selves, they simply repeated the same thing over and over again (*Phaedrus* 274-275). Aristotle followed along his mentor's lines, stating that written words were symbols of spoken words (*De Interpretatione* 16A). From Voltaire in the eighteenth century (1764) to de Saussure in the twentieth (*Cours* 45), the Platonian-Aristotelian maxim of writing as parasitic and secondary to speech was maintained throughout—not surprisingly, Derrida (1976) traced it back to Plato himself. But this perspective has not only dominated philosophy and linguistics, it has come to influence and pervade theology too, particularly Lutheran-protestant, and several strands of German *Altertumswissenschaft* (Squire 2009: 15 ff), translating the epistemological centrality of speech into a clear preference for text over art. Therefore, Plato's general aversion to art—but in fact not his aversion to writing—has been maintained, and writing has come to be considered as the next best thing to the *logos*. Images have thus lost much of their independence and value—although something similar has happened, at the opposite end of the spectrum, with photography, as discussed below. Indeed, they have rarely been thought of as separate from (written) words. This attitude, which assigns epistemological superiority to the word, has been named 'logocentrism'.

Logocentrism is primarily problematic because it tends to confuse and equate language and speech with each other. However, writing and speech are in fact parallel, not in series—it is language that must exist before there can be writing, not *speech*. Language is “a formal system of differences and not restricted to vocal utterances [...] speech certainly is a language but not all language is speech”, but it is also “any system of symbols that serves this innate faculty to communicate through symbols: speech is one such system of symbols, writing is another” (Powell 2009: 4–5, 8, 18). In a logocentric world, glottocentric and/or phonocentric constructions assume a one-to-one correspondence between sounds uttered and letters depicted. While this may be closer to the truth with an alphabetic script, it is certainly not the case with other writing systems. Furthermore, writing inevitably becomes a language of its own (Brockmeier and Olson 2009: 8). Because of its very nature, it quite often ‘freezes’ speech, not accounting for all its differences and repressing them (Powell 2009: 7), so that, even when dealing with alphabetic scripts, there are not inevitably precise correspondences between what is said and what is

written (Harris 2000: 71–81; Powell 2009: 19). If the supposedly indissoluble link between writing and *logos* ceases to exist, writing loses its epistemological centrality. This not only potentially frees images from their dependent role, but also opens up new ways of ‘seeing’ text. Departing from a passive reading of words-as-representation, sight as a modality is itself problematized in the critical analysis of texts as constructed and mediated acts of perception.

Adapting to this new shift in epistemology, American and German cultural theorists in the early 1990s proposed a ‘pictorial’ or ‘iconic’ turn, contesting logocentric dominance in the Western world on the interpretation of visual and material culture (Boehm 1994; Mitchell 1994; Moxey 2008). The iconic turn sought to examine visual media in the widest sense, including subjects that were previously considered ‘non-art’, such as applied arts and photography. Expanding the field of inclusion necessitated a methodological break with traditional modes of visual analysis, and consequently this turn was acutely felt in art historical studies, where images are traditionally ‘read’ for what their semiotic, representational, and/or socio-historical content ‘shows’. Instead, this re-focusing on the image prioritized acts of ‘seeing’, from perception and reception to attention and memory (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 245). Far from neutral, visibility is a cultural construct that influences and moulds our subjective sight (Bryson 1988; Lacan 1979) and is laden in the Western world with (sub)conscious value judgments (Elkins 2001). This holds true for all types of visual media, both art and ‘non-art.’ Photography, for example, whether captured at the field site or in the lab, is not inherently scientifically objective: ‘looking’ through the camera lens or at the finished product reflects the situatedness of the maker and the receiver, mediated via ‘discourse and convention’ (Shanks 1997: 78). The epistemological field of image studies thus widened from the aesthetic to the discursive and cognitive, bringing the discipline into contact with images from the natural sciences, medicine, and cultural heritage management. Yet the ‘iconic’ turn is still very much preoccupied with determining the relationship of images and image-making to oral and written language, and to what extent ‘seeing’ relies on ‘reading’, if at all.

According to Goody (1987: 10), “visual representation requires the advanced conceptual system intrinsic to language use”, and “any sufficiently

close look at a visual artifact discloses mixtures of reading and seeing” (Elkins 2001: 84). The idea of an image without a linguistic equivalent in its matter or interpretation seems inconceivable to us—arguably, even if an image does not need language per se to exist, it does depend on humans’ (linguistic) interpretation of it (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 260). Despite the prevalence of semiotic readings of images, a picture cannot be ‘read’ in the same way a text can, although some sort of internal coherence of its signs does exist (Elkins 2001: 55). While much of Western art has been conceived as connected to text, in the sense that its cultured audience should be acquainted with the story behind the image, just like with writing, the link is with language, rather than writing itself. Both are not-so-alternative *systems* through which we communicate. And yet, the bias that images somehow exist in a dependent state from writing is perpetuated—and perhaps partially originates—visually. The flat, two-dimensionality of letters contrasts starkly with the imagined depth the illusionism of figurative art creates (Baines 2008: 95–97; Schapiro 1996: 119–21) and the two seem to sit rather uncomfortably together. In a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts, the absence of one from the other, only serves to confirm logocentric views.

However, outside of this historical Western paradigm, image systems comfortably exist, forming sophisticated “technical and cognitive supports for expansive social networks” that do not always require established written explanation to function (Wengrow forthcoming). In New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, the tying and untying of gingerplant knots around trees relate to progression of land ownership through time, and processes of knotting, whether as part of bodily performance or demarcating architectural space, recall complex relationships between living and ancestral populations (Kuchler 1999: 152). Images can act as mnemonic ‘anchors’ for oral stories and social histories (cf. Wengrow forthcoming): narrative is told through images and through the words that these images inspire. As explored in Phillips (this volume), regarding the interconnectedness between images of combat and the body of the deceased in Late Bronze Age Greece, the images rely on orality and its stories, orality and its stories rely on the existence of such images. Furthermore, historical examples of Western contact with unfamiliar communicative systems could foment a radical and imposed shift on the understanding and use of

line and figure. Prior to the Spanish Conquest, the Aztec and Mixtec tradition in Mesoamerica did not consider art and writing to be at all separate, as evidenced by the use of the same word to describe the two activities (Chrisomalis 2009: 69), and the same is true for several other ancient languages and cultures, such as Ancient Greece. There was no fixed reading direction and the pictographs existed two-dimensionally in a blank space with no perspective (Boone 2011: 215), somewhat like the alphabet. The pictographs represented things through symbols, rather than through sounds—except very rarely (Boone 2008: 254). With the Spanish Conquest, a wave of new pictographs emerged, but their pictorial value was slowly lost, in favour of glottography, as they moved further and further away from their glyphic quality, assuming the typical mimetic, naturalistic characteristics of European art. Alphabetic writing was also adopted and frequently adorned the pictographs. Text and image, as in European tradition, completely bifurcated, though pictographs kept on being used for several centuries still (Boone 2011; Monaghan 2012). The classic ‘illusionistic’ quality of Western art, discussed above, essentially turned the pictographs more into ‘art’, with a different relationship to space (Boone 2011: 215-216). These are only a few examples which highlight how in different times and areas of the world images have existed in a different relationship to text, which did not in fact imply perceptual hierarchies or any difference at all between the two media.

How has modern Western scholarship approached this new elevation and establishing of images to a level against and/or with texts? There are two diverging schools of thought: in the US, critical media and visual culture studies emerged in response to the iconic turn in contemporary art, focusing on strategies of visualization and how images are mobilized as bearers of both social and political power (Curtis 2010; Heywood and Sandywell 2012; Mirzoeff 2012). Alternatively, in Germany scholars drew their inspiration from philosophy on phenomenology and hermeneutics (e.g. Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty), which was concerned with the ontological status of images, and instead advocated for formalist analyses of images-as-science, or *Bildwissenschaft* (Bredenkamp 2003; Rampley 2012; Schulz 2005). The resulting approaches variously utilized “a phenomenological theory of images placing emphasis on visibility, an anthropology of images focusing on corporeality, [or] a



visual semiotics stressing symbolism” (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 250). These approaches each have their own weaknesses, risking anachronism, lack of cultural and social context, or an overreliance on linguistic models and discounting the emotional and affective power of images. Visual culture studies have also been criticized as too inclusive and heterogeneous, imposing contemporaneity on historical images, and privileging the visual over other modes of sensory perception, such as the auditory or haptic. In some ways, the emphasis on an iconic turn in the arts and humanities has swung the pendulum to its opposite end, furthering a hierarchical narrative, instead of thinking about how image and text as cognitive systems can either interact or not interact depending on learned behaviours of communication acquired in a given society. Reconciling the experiential aspects of images when the cultures in question are far removed from us in space and time should not be undermined by modern assumptions or constructions.

### **Reading as seeing, seeing as reading**

Nevertheless, a crucial aspect which concerns these two media, today as in the past, is their potential for restricting, rather than allowing access to, knowledge. This paradoxical ability, indeed almost *power*, is once more potentially shared by both text and images, but it has been exploited especially through writing. On a very basic level, one skill does not need to be learnt, while the other does: one does not need to be instructed in how to ‘see’ images, although one may have to study many years to learn how to ‘read’ them—and the very use of the verb ‘to read’ derives from a logocentrist attitude. But one must have at least the basic rudiments of education in order to read a text. So effectively, logocentric attitudes have also served to exclude most people from accessing the higher echelons of learning and intellectualism, in a form of elitist restriction of knowledge, while downplaying the complexity of image-systems in both Western and non-Western societies. The exclusionary nature of writing plays out in very diverse and complex ways, as analysed by Hodgkinson (this volume), who argues that misleading photograph descriptions in the British Library archive of Lord Curzon’s activities in India can operate a selection in the images, purposefully picking out some characters, and just as purposefully eliminating others, blurring the boundaries between

titles, handwritten notes and subsequent descriptions. Personal aims mix with greater historical narratives and archival objectives, often entirely shifting the content and meaning of photographs, particularly when one cannot look at the images themselves. Although archival texts can mask or withhold information, they can also be utilised in a productive capacity, as demonstrated in the paper by Hosek, Warner-Smith, and Novak (this volume), who read and interrogate the archive with and against skeletal remains to build a more holistic picture of past life histories.

The taught component of ‘reading’ also contributes to the ultimately artificial nature of perceptual hierarchies. Street (1984: 261) reminds us that all literacies, whether visual or linguistic, are historically situated and socially constituted, not merely a ‘set of technical skills’. Croker (this volume) explores how varying degrees of textual and visual literacy inform the interpretation of a 5th century BCE Athenian kylix, in which the playful inclusion of inscriptions suggests a humorous commentary on literacy and the illiterate. Literacies thus rely on the perpetuation of external apparatuses that are themselves applied onto images and texts, including institutional and educational practices as well as the privileging of some forms of knowledge over others. As demonstrated in childhood development studies (Boone 2005: 314; Tolchinsky 2009: 471), pre-literate children’s scribbles and colour pastiches frequently display a mix of figurative elements and letters. In their minds, there is no difference between the two. This all changes upon entry in school, when they are taught their letters and learn that there is a profound difference between the art and ‘words’ they once amalgamated. The two activities subsequently bifurcate in their minds, the former becoming an artistic, expressive activity, the latter an essential communicative skill, full of rules and constraints. Where art ‘expresses’, writing ‘communicates’, where children ‘read’ books replete with images, adults read books filled with words (Boone 2005: 314)—a situation sometimes used to justify the ontological divide between prehistory and civilised historical societies.

## **New horizons on text and image: the influence of cognition and materiality**

This sharp distinction perpetuated in modern Western education needs to be addressed from a different, and much more intimate, point of view: that of the mind. How we encounter visuality, for example, involves the interplay between the production of mental images and the creation of material objects, inhabiting social spaces and participating in the collective sensorium shared by humans and objects. As Ouimet (this volume) discusses at length, the cosmological and physical spaces produced in divinatory and omen texts, those which are both seen and unseen by the diviner or observer, influence the way humans navigate their social world. This brings studies on text and image into collaboration with neuroscience, questioning how we construct our external world via mental images and the extent to which bias influences our reproduction of these same images back out into the external world. The arrival of modern cognitive neuroscience within this field has effectively offered us unparalleled glimpses into the human mind and its process of production and reception of communication. Studies have moved from the analysis of response—from psychological reactions to the ‘power’ of images (Freedberg 1981) to the role of pictures in the elaboration of empathy and pain (Schott 2015)—to that of ‘production’, to examine what it is in our minds that triggers the response in the first place. Neuronal Recycling Theory, for example, has established a very clear connection in human brains between image and text (the Visual Word Form Area, VWFA) and may go a long way in explaining why the two media are so very linked (Dehaene and Cohen 2011; Dehaene-Lambertz et al. 2018). Furthermore, studies in the acquisition of literacy have also shed light on how being lettered may affect our imaging and spacing skills (Dehaene et al. 2010; Matute et al. 2000; Petersson et al. 2009: 170).

Supporting this cognitive picture is the mediality of images and texts themselves, being both visible as an act of existence as well as visual in how we experience them (for images, see Mersch 2016: 165). As the artisan crafts a vessel through materials, this feedback loop between visuality and the visible is both co-constitutive and continuous. The latter shifts focus from images-as-representation to the visual-as-presentation, and advocates that images

lose their implicit status as ‘static entities’ in favor of processes of ‘imaging’ as a productive, affective relationship between viewers and images, or more broadly, things (Danielsson and Jones 2020: 1-4). Instead of relying on an imposed knowledge system, it generates its own: when an image ‘presents’, it determines its own logic and “evidence which cannot be generated discursively” (Mersch 2016: 176). Information as such is also translational, and can move between verbal and non-verbal sign systems, undermining the text-image dualism in communication while pointing towards multiple orders of cognitive processing. In tracking numismatic examples from Classical Asia Minor, Kerschbaum and Vidin (this volume) show how various minting authorities circulated coins which assumed multiple literacies of the viewer/user, communicating complex political and topographical statements. Visual information can also be strategically coded as both image and text; as Miller (this volume) argues in a re-interpretation of imagery on ancient Egyptian apotropaic wands, iconography is imaginatively ordered and utilized in order to negotiate restrictive cultural expectations on social decorum.

As a discipline, archaeology needs to engage with studies of text and image, not least because its focus on the origins and evolution of human processes makes it particularly privileged and invaluable as a resource. Since archaeology is concerned with object-based or material-based frameworks, it can risk a methodology bias of ‘seeing’ over other modalities that are equally capable of producing meaning. The arrival of cognitive archaeology in the 1990s challenged archaeologists to think outside of narrowly materialist understandings of what objects might ‘mean’ to include the role of human cognitive processes and their accompanying social contexts in the creation and use of objects (Renfrew 1994). Recent studies in materiality also draw attention to how images are embedded in media, advocating that it is important to not only consider the physical properties of a visual or textual (re)presentation, but also the context and process(es) of its own making and becoming (Danielsson and Jones 2020; Enderwitz and Sauer 2015; Ingold 2012; Miller 2005; Molyneux 1997: 3-5). It is the material entanglement between images, texts and other media that provides us with a window into the emotional, cognitive, and experiential aspects of human behavior. In addition, investigating how different sensory modalities interact, without prizing one over the other, is another

useful frame of inquiry to bear on image-text relationships. Overturning the traditional logocentric model linking monumental narrative art to Norse sagas, Neiß and Franco Valle (this volume) take a multimodal approach in their paper on Animal Art, proposing that a combination of visual, material, verbal and mental modalities is needed to appropriately understand the relationship between Viking Age art objects and ekphrasis. As opposed to a rigid tension between image-systems and text-systems, it is instead useful to consider how texts and images either subvert or affirm each other in the co-production of ‘things’. Terryn (this volume) provides an example of how text and image were equally employed in a woodblock print series in order to fully realize the didactic aims of the state in 1870s Japan. Lutz (this volume), in a discussion on the figure of Andromeda in Roman wall painting, also demonstrates the clear influence of text over depictions, but also depictions over text, in an intricate dialogue between the two media.

### **Dissolving hierarchies of perception: old questions, new perspectives**

As the contributions to this volume show, diverse communication systems, in various combinations of written and oral text and image, can be said to have existed and been privileged at any one time: in different contexts and situations, for different people, these have been deemed the most effective and efficient means of communicating particular messages. It is necessary, then, to approach these modalities in a way that does not artificially prize text over image, or image over text. One and the other do different things and communicate in diverse ways, requiring different sets of skills, so that the questions that need asking are of another sort—why one system is chosen over the other in any given situation, or why, within the same context, both are used and what they are *each* used *for*. By exploiting the strongest communicative modes of each system, one arguably communicates the strongest possible message—and, depending on what the message is, the strongest communicative modes may be different. Or, by insisting on the strength of one, as opposed to the other, one lays an artificial emphasis on the elements one wishes to assert. Archaeology is the ideal place to ask these questions of text and image, due to new and emerging toolkits. The contributions of cognitive neuroscience, particularly, have provided archaeologists with the instruments to (begin to)

understand the impact of images and writing on the brain and the functional consequences of literacy, allowing us to explore how communication has shaped our minds (past and present) and how our minds have shaped communication itself. This volume draws attention to all these elements and their diverse application in archaeological and historical research. From what is being communicated and how this changes over space and time, to different modes of seeing and reading, this volume explores the very wide range of ways in which humans have thought of, employed, and exploited the interaction between text and image to communicate across the breadth of history.

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# From Story to Memory: Some Combat Images from the early Late Bronze Age Greek Mainland

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## Abstract

The narrative potential of Bronze Age art typically rests on associations with Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Aegean archaeologists ask who or what these scenes could represent, attempting to identify specific characters or events. This paper aims to shift the focus of analysis, treating images as communication systems in their own right, designed to provoke the recollection of oral performances. What kinds of scenes and stories have people chosen to represent? How and why are these stories materialised? This paper will look at repeated fighting and hunting scenes from the early Late Bronze Age Greek mainland, arguing that they gain power and meaning from their narrative associations. It will then explore the social implications of these images, thinking about prehistoric modes of understanding and engaging with art objects.

## Introduction

Warriors, according to Late Bronze Age artists, grapple in single combat, defend cities from invading enemies, and hunt down groups of lions. They fight and they die, brutally and heroically, to be honoured in extravagant burials, adorned in gold, and remembered by the living. This is an idealised male warrior image, constructed on the early Late Bronze Age Greek mainland through the twin representational strategies of figurative imagery and depositional practice. It is an image that cannot be verified by texts, because this

period (between 1600 and 1400 BC on the Greek mainland) has no surviving literature, or, for that matter, other textual evidence. The administrative documents written in Linear B, dating to ca. 1400–1200 BC, are of limited help, and any use of Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey* necessitates caution, given that these epics did not take their final form until the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. We therefore rely, almost exclusively, on the material remains. Objects do tell stories: but what kind of stories and how do they tell them?

To answer these questions, I want to zoom in on the image and its materiality. The start of the Late Bronze Age marks the first appearance of complex figurative imagery on the Greek mainland. These images were derived from the more developed artistic traditions of Neopalatial Crete and the Eastern Mediterranean but selected for funerary deposition by people on the mainland. My focus here is on images of combat: fighting and hunting scenes that seem to represent and construct a new form of male identity on the Greek mainland. I will look at two objects in particular, the Battle of the Glen signet ring and the Combat Agate. What kinds of scenes have people chosen to represent and deposit? Why were these images worn by or placed alongside buried individuals?

## Two Early Combat Images

The Battle of the Glen signet ring, uncovered during Schliemann's 1876 excavation of Grave Circle A at Mycenae, depicts one of the most famous combat scenes from the Greek mainland. Deposited in Shaft Grave IV around 1600 BC, although possibly produced earlier on Neopalatial Crete, the ring shows four male warriors fighting against a solid gold background (CMS I 16; Karo 1930). A central attacking figure rises above the others, the plume of his helmet waving across the top of the image as he lifts his sword above his head and lunges forward, ready to plunge his weapon into the neck of the man he holds at his feet. His opponent struggles below, legs bent almost to the ground and neck craned backwards as he aims his sword at the head of his attacker. To the right, a third figure joins the battle. Crouched beneath his shield, his helmeted head just visible above its rim and his body almost completely covered, he directs the point of his spear at the attacker's head. A fourth figure sits on

the other side of the seal, a seemingly casual spectator looking straight ahead, arm twisted behind him. Blobby incisions (a Neopalatial Cretan convention for rockwork; Krzyszkowska 2005: 250-252) surround the figures.

The intricacy of this description is only possible because of the level of detail displayed in the image, despite its size (3.5 x 2.1cm). The Battle of the Glen signet ring is a far cry from the abstract schematism of the preceding Middle Helladic period (Alden 2000), from which only a handful of seals survive, a far cry even from the figural representations of the stelae sitting above the Shaft Graves (Malafouris 2015; Younger 1997). Each warrior has his own attributes, and is distinguished according to the details of his hair, clothing, and weaponry (Papadopoulos 2012). The central attacker wears a plumed helmet and carries a dagger; he is naked except for a garment fitted tightly around his pinched waist. His opponent has combed his hair into a bun (the individual lines of his hair are just about visible); he carries a sword and wears the same fitted garment around his waist. The figure on the right is marked out by his shield and spear, the figure on the left by his beard and his lack of weaponry. All four figures are lean and muscular: the lines of their arms, legs, and torsos stand out against the smooth surface of the ring and the marks of the engraving tools become the sinews of their bodies.

The central attacker seems to be the victor here (despite Kramer-Hajos' objections about the eventual trajectory of the spear: Kramer-Hajos 2016: 35). He holds his opponent by the throat, maintaining the upper hand even (quite literally) in the face of any counter-attacks. His lunge is the focal point of the scene, his torso front and centre. The viewer is left convinced that this central attacker will defeat his opponent, observed too by the internal spectator, before continuing his rampage. If we compare other glyptic battle scenes from the Late Bronze Age Aegean, the sequence of action becomes even clearer (see also Blakolmer 2007 on the Battle Krater). Two seals from Shaft Grave III, a gold cushion seal and a carnelian amygdaloid, depict similar scenes: a duel between two male warriors, where the attacker lunges forward and lifts his sword above his head (CMS I 11 and CMS I 12). The attacker is the unambiguous victor of these battles, rising above his opponent and dominating the composition of the scene.

It is the Combat Agate, however, that provides the best comparison here. Discovered in 2015, in the ‘Grave of the Griffin Warrior’ at Pylos (named after an ivory plaque depicting a griffin found there), the Combat Agate has quickly become one of the most important examples of Late Bronze Age figurative art—and one of few Aegean seals to merit its own Wikipedia page ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pylos\\_Combat\\_Agate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pylos_Combat_Agate))! Found on the Greek mainland, but drawing on Neopalatial Cretan precedents, the seal depicts a duel between two male warriors, engraved on a veined agate surface that oscillates between various shades of brown and grey (promptly and exemplarily published by the excavators: Stocker and Davis 2017). As on the Battle of the Glen signet ring, a central attacking figure lifts his sword above his head and drives it into the neck of his opponent, who turns away beneath his shield; a third defeated figure lies at the feet of the victor. The image is incredibly small (the diameter of the seal is only 3.6cm) but is engraved with an astounding level of detail. The individual locks of the warrior’s hair flow behind him as he lunges forward, and the ribs and muscles of his torso stand out above his pinched waist. Each plume of the defending warrior’s helmet is engraved, as is each muscle of the defeated warrior’s back. The three figures ripple across the surface of the seal, almost naturalistic in their detail, but continually evading the grasp of the casual viewer.

The level of detail allows for the possible association of these three figures with the warriors on the Battle of the Glen signet ring (Lewartowski 2019). The attackers are in the same pose on both images: they wear similar clothing, and both carry a sword. On the Combat Agate, the third figure with the shield and spear has joined the central battle, whilst the original opponent lies dead at the feet of the victor. These figures are linked by the details of their clothing and weaponry: the shield, spear, and helmet of the third warrior, the combed hair and sword of the second. Put together, as the repeated details of the images invite us to do, these two images seem to represent two different stages of the same sequence of action, with the same characters repeated across two different scenes. The attacker kills his first opponent, whose struggles have proved futile, and moves on to another duel. The spectator has disappeared between the two scenes: the only internal viewer on the Combat Agate is the dead warrior, whose face we cannot even see. The rocky backdrop has also

disappeared: the Combat Agate needs no additional frame, only the narrative of the battle.

## Of Object Biographies and Oral Performances

On discovering the Battle of the Glen signet ring in Shaft Grave IV, along with another gold ring engraved with a hunting scene, Schliemann apparently exclaimed: “The author of the ‘Iliad’ and the ‘Odyssey’ cannot but have been born and educated amidst a civilisation which was able to produce such works as these. Only a poet who had objects of art like these continually before his eyes could compose those divine poems” (Schliemann 1878: 227). In excavating Grave Circle A, Schliemann really believed that he was uncovering the graves of warriors who had fought at Troy. Swept along by his insistent ego, it is easy to accept that these scenes do indeed depict the heroes of Homeric epic. Stories of Achilles defeating Hektor of the shining helmet (κορυθαίολος), Paris with his well-wrought helmet and nodding plume (δαινὸν δὲ λόφος καθ’ ὑπερθεὺς ἔνευεν: *Iliad* 3.337) or Ajax with his mighty shield (ἦ ὦτε πύργον: see *Iliad* 7.219 among others) are easily projected onto these images of battling warriors, adorned in gleaming jewellery and weaponry. Homer cannot help but figure large in the Late Bronze Age.

Vermeule’s *Greece in the Bronze Age* claims that “poets will guard for us the heritage of the past” (1964: x). Despite a shift away from Homer from the 1980s, this idea continues to resonate today. Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are now seen as oral compositions, projected back into the Late Bronze Age via the long memory of oral story-telling (Nagy 2020; West 1973). Sherratt has in fact demonstrated that the two epics preserve references to material culture known archaeologically in the early Late Bronze Age (Sherratt 1990). Homer’s boar’s tusk helmets, thrusting spears, man-covering shields, and powerful swords are all attested in mainland burials and images (Shelmerdine 1996; Sherratt 1990). Bennet, picking up on Sherratt’s notion of epic as a continuity of practice, argues that the Homeric texts offer ‘ways of reading’ Late Bronze Age material culture, centred around notions of object biographies (Bennet 2004; see Gosden & Marshall 1999 for a more general discussion of object biography). “Just as we can suggest strongly on the basis of linguistic

analysis that the ‘medium’ of epic poetry has a history that goes back to early Mycenaean times, so, perhaps, we can imagine a continuity of practice in the reading and appreciation of objects that goes back an equally long way” (Bennet 2004: 96). According to Bennet’s model, objects act as prompts for oral narratives—as we see in the Homeric epics themselves. Take Achilles’ Sidonian bowls in *Iliad* 23.740-8, or Odysseus’ gold pin in *Odyssey* 19.225-31. These objects are recounted, and therefore displayed, through narrative means. Their life histories frame human identities.

The twin concepts of object biographies and oral performances do seem applicable to the early Late Bronze Age mainland. Almost every object discovered in Grave Circle A has a complex cultural biography, a long history of acquisition, transformation, and deposition (as also argued by Voutsaki 2012). It is easy to imagine the narrativisation of their grooves, marks, and materials—even easier when they are engraved with complex figurative images, condensed scenes of action (Cain 2001). If the Homeric epics give us anything, it is therefore a way of seeing rather than a way of reading. It remains impossible to know who these warriors are (although Schliemann’s optimistic identifications are almost certainly misplaced) or what exactly is happening. But we understand that these are objects designed for aesthetic contemplation and performative extrapolation. The Homeric description of the Shield of Achilles, for example, extending over 130 lines of *Iliad* 18 (cf. 478-608), is one of the earliest—and richest—attempts to evoke images in words. The whole world seems to be depicted on the shield: it is designed, as Hephaestus says, to inspire awe among future generations (οἷά τις αἶψτε ἀνθρώπων πολέων θαυμάσσεται, ὅς κεν ἴδῃται, *Iliad* 18. 466-7). It is, in other words, a wonder to behold, a θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι, precisely because of its detail, its scope, and its story-telling potential (Squire 2013).

A wonder to behold—but to behold with difficulty, at least in the case of glyptic imagery (Panagiotopoulos 2012: 76). The images engraved on both the Battle of the Glen signet ring and the Combat Agate are very small, almost impossible to see with the naked eye (and the choice of material only seems to enhance the illegibility of the image). But the specificity of the representation nonetheless suggests that they were designed to be viewed. The signet ring



even incorporates an internal viewer (the seated figure on the left), who gazes steadfastly at the central duel, breaking the rocky frame to join the external audience. The notion of oral performance explains away some of these complexities. If the image is narrated as it is displayed, then its details do not need to be visible. Select people might be able to handle and scrutinise these images, but others can appreciate their details through oral performances, perhaps as part of the funerary ceremony. In this context, image becomes narrative and narrative becomes performance. Certain people are empowered to fix the meanings of these images through oral narration, a personal achievement as well as a communal activity.

### **Burying People, Burying Images**

The Battle of the Glen signet ring was found in Shaft Grave IV next to Burial II, an extended male skeleton about 30 years old, and close to Burials P and Σ, two extended female skeletons around the same age (Dickinson et al. 2012). All three bodies wore gold funerary masks, engraved with generalising facial features. Burial II also wore gold foil armour (shoulder-straps, greaves, and bands, carefully laid across his body). Two swords were found next to his left thigh, over 1000 amber beads around his head, and gold ornaments scattered around his body (Konstantinidi-Syvridi and Paschalidis 2019; Paschalidis 2018). Shaft Grave IV is a quintessential example of archaeology's conspicuous consumption, a display of wealth so ostentatious that it cannot fail to radiate power and status (Wolpert 2004). The grave contained five extended burials (O and Ξ, in addition to II, P, and Σ) with over 2100 objects. These objects are made from valuable and exotic materials, embellished with figurative and abstract motifs, and deposited in what Voutsaki calls "well-defined zones around the body" (Voutsaki 2012: 174). They narrate and commemorate the identity of the deceased—as Crowley observes, "the human is now important enough in the scheme of things to take the centre stage" (Crowley 1989: 211). The individual, in all their resplendent materiality, becomes the image.

In the case of Burial II, this image is undoubtedly the image of a warrior. The objects in the grave represent the martial prowess and acquisitive ability

of the deceased; a package of expressive themes that comprise the warrior's identity or, for Treherne, the warrior's beauty (Treherne 1995). In this context, the Battle of the Glen signet ring gains additional significance, implicated in the commemoration of the individual warrior and the narrativisation of his identity. The deposition of the signet ring with Burial II makes the story-telling potential of the image and its epic associations part of the tomb. The identity of the deceased can be projected onto the narrative, onto the image or the oral performance. The tomb assemblage makes these associations more explicit: the swords found on the left of the skeleton, for example, could echo the sword held by the attacker in the image. Fragments of a boar's tusk helmet, removed to the north-east corner of Shaft Grave IV, are made whole in the image of a helmet on the attacker's head—the funerary mask of Burial II could evoke the same helmet, as well as the blank face underneath it. The deceased is drawn into a pictorial world that emphasises his heroic capability and warlike nature; he is immortalised as a warrior.

This pictorial world, however, is also one that materialises the moment of death. The internal viewer watches the duel, waiting for the fatal blow, whilst the external viewer (the mourner, in this context) is confronted with the reality of the tomb. If the identity of Burial II is entwined with the image, then he cannot only be associated with the victor. The victor's opponent, for example, also wields a sword—so the swords in the grave could reference either one of these figures. The gold foil armour laid across the body of the deceased, although it is too thin to be functional, nonetheless constructs an image of an armoured, defensive warrior, more reminiscent of the figure hidden behind his shield than the exposed body of the victor. Seemingly, the deceased could be any one of these figures. The body in the tomb, covered in gold, becomes the bodies in the image, engraved in gold.

The bodies of the four warriors are in fact remarkably similar, all representing an idealised male body type (Treherne 1995), defined by a waspish waist, a muscular torso, and long limbs. But the signet ring plays with this sameness: in the jumble of the fighting, the limbs of the four warriors merge into each other, merge even with the surrounding rockwork. The arm of the attacker emerges from the shoulder of his opponent, whilst the arm of the

opponent becomes part of the attacker's torso, easily mistaken for muscle definition at a casual glance. The shield of the third figure overlaps the opponent's right leg, a leg that almost looks like it too is hidden behind the shield, incorporated into the body of the third warrior. The foot of the attacker becomes a phallic appendage between the legs of the spectator; the spectator's foot becomes another rocky blob. The four bodies become one in the context of the image, united also by their shared materiality and their diminutive size (see Morgan 1989; McGowan 2018 on the ambiguity of glyptic). There can be no straight-forward association between the victor and the deceased.

The Combat Agate presents us with a similar situation (although the deposition is of a slightly later date than Shaft Grave IV, ca. 1450 BCE). According to Stocker and Davis, some of the objects in the tomb can be associated with the iconography of the image (Stocker and Davis 2017). The 'Griffin Warrior' (a man about 30-35 years old) was buried with hundreds of different objects: weapons were placed on the left side of the body (as we saw in Shaft Grave IV), metal vessels at the head, and rings and seals on the body or to the right. The sword on the left of the body, as Stocker and Davis point out, is the same as the sword held by the victor on the seal (Stocker and Davis 2017: 602). Both the body of the deceased and the body of the victor are adorned with necklaces and seals. Even the long hair of the victor on the seal might be echoed in the six ivory combs found in the grave (an unprecedented number for a single burial). The deposition of these objects with the Combat Agate thus ensures that the body in the tomb becomes the figure on the seal: the idealised male warrior of the grave becomes the idealised male warrior of the image.

Again, however, the deceased does not seem to be identified only with the victor. The Grave of the Griffin Warrior also contained a bronze suit of armour and a boar's tusk helmet, both now fragmented into many pieces (Stocker and Davis 2016: 634). The deposition of these objects edges the 'Griffin Warrior' away from the role of victor and towards the more defensive position, presenting an alternative vision of male warrior identity that is materialised in the figure crouched behind his shield, head and body covered. The Combat Agate's defeated warrior can also be associated with both the victor and the deceased. Another sword lies beside his body and his neat hair evokes the grave's ivory

combs. His arm is stretched over his head in the same pose as the victor and the lines of his ribs protrude from his muscled torso, echoing the living body above. But the curves of his body and outstretched limbs represent the limpness of death rather than the vigour of life. He resonates uncomfortably with the reality of the dead body in the tomb, but he is passed over, literally stepped over by the central figure of the scene, on his way to another victory.

The defeated figure is a necessary part of the visual narrative: his inclusion allows the viewer to make the link with the narrative on the Battle of the Glen signet ring, with the broader sequence of action. The deposition of the Combat Agate in a funerary context, however, lends this figure an additional significance, presenting the viewer (or the mourner) with an image of death. The 'Griffin Warrior' is the protagonist of the tomb and, in one sense, the protagonist of the seal, two kindred bodies glittering with jewellery and weaponry. The activities and achievements of the deceased are wedded to the activities and achievements of the hero: biography is melded with narrative (Whitley 2002). At the same time, an effort seems to be made to confront the reality of death and defeat, by associating the deceased with the other figures in the scene.

But if it is the details of the image that allow the viewer to make the link to the deceased, then it is its narrative sequence that really stages a confrontation with death. The Combat Agate dramatises the moment of death, the progression from a living body to a dead body. The head of the defending warrior sags as the sword enters his neck, but his legs and arms remain tensed. The image presents its viewer with the *before* and *after*: the taut, confident action of the victor and the limp, twisted body at his feet. We are left to contemplate what has just happened and what is about to happen, and to project these pictorial happenings onto the world of the deceased. So too on the Battle of the Glen signet ring. The scene presents its viewer with the climactic moment of the battle, the moment of death and defeat. It channels grief and loss through the medium of heroic story-telling.

In these two funerary contexts, scenes of combat seem to play a structuring role in depositional practice. The living, specifically those responsible for the

funeral, select and deposit objects that connect the deceased to the representations on the gems. The seals too are deliberately sourced as part of the curation of the burial, possibly from the deceased's possessions or from further afield. Either way, figurative images, linked to oral performances, seem to dictate the specific forms of the warrior's materiality. Although I have focused on scenes of combat here, I would argue that these twin strategies of figurative imagery and depositional practice can be applied more broadly, to include other forms of narrative imagery with human protagonists. This interpretation hinges on the novelty of complex, narrative images on the early Late Bronze Age mainland. Imports from Neopalatial Crete and the Eastern Mediterranean (whether ideas or finished products) become guides to constructing certain types of identity in death. Story-telling, in this context, is revealed as an important determinant of identity: the social roles of the deceased are channelled through narrative, which is in turn permanently materialised at the start of the Late Bronze Age. In this way, we move from narrative to commemoration, from story to memory.

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The Battle of the Glen signet ring and the Combat Agate tell various stories—stories about the identity of the deceased, about the other objects in the tomb, and about the designs of the living. In a stricter sense, they tell us a story about a group of male warriors, distinct characters who embark on a set sequence of action. By zooming in on the details of these images, we can better understand the parts they play in the context of the tomb. It is the specificity of the image, its detail and its story-telling potential, that connects the pictorial world to the world of the tomb. Figurative imagery and depositional practice work together to associate the deceased with the characters in the story. All three warriors (the attacker, the opponent, the defeated) represent the deceased in some sense—not least insofar as the deceased is also a character, an image constructed in death according to the models provided by artistic tradition. The effect of the tomb assemblage is to turn person into picture, self into narrative. Strategies of imagery and deposition serve to narrativise and commemorate the individual, to construct new forms of the male warrior identity, and to stage a cathartic confrontation with death for the mourner. In

this context, story serves memory.

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# Overexposed: Looking around Photographic Texts and Images in the Archive

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## Abstract

This paper explores the possibilities of studying photographs which cannot be seen and suggests that this opportunity leads to new ways of looking at photographic images. It proposes that the term 'exposure' is a useful one to explain how archival power dynamics attempt to place limits on what can be seen, particularly when these effects are exaggerated by solely digital remote access. The focus of the paper is a photograph held in the British Library. It was created during a 1902 hunting trip in Hyderabad, India, taken by Lord George Curzon (1859-1925), former Viceroy of India. Alternative versions of the photograph are drawn on to demonstrate how the archive constructs the event and supports Curzon's narrative. Building on this, a copy is made from a digitised version of the original photograph and overexposed, making visible a different image.

## Introduction

This article is about a photograph which I have not seen. I have looked at two reproductions of its image but have never seen the physical print which is the subject of this paper; a distinction which frames my decision not to include an image of the photograph below. The photograph is in an album inside the British Library and is part of the Curzon Collection (1876-1904). Lord George Curzon of Kedleston (1859-1925) travelled Asia extensively and was a prominent British politician, most famous for his role as Viceroy of India (1899-1905) and British Foreign Secretary (1919-1924). Individuals

are always engaged simultaneously in the sociohistorical process and the construction of its narrative (Trouillot 1995: 24) and individuals such as Curzon had the resources and desire to contribute significantly to the creation of their own historical record, with the intention that it could be seen in the future. The Curzon Collection contains nearly 1500 documents and 89 photograph albums previously belonging to the Viceroy, a record he initially collated himself and now organised by the British Library.

Existing images and written works about Curzon largely support imperial perspectives of the past. Powerful individuals who were active in colonisation and its perpetuation are over-represented in the historical record, but it remains a vital question how their actions can be appropriately accounted for while they are de-centred. It is necessary to re-centre the individuals who have been marginalised in archival records such as the Curzon Collection to counter imperial history-telling. This article proposes ‘exposure’ as a method to redress this balance and make visible an alternative narrative. It utilises photographic documents created from a photograph of a 1902 hunting trip in Hyderabad, India, to draw out some of the tensions between archival categories and the ambiguous position of the photograph. In doing so, this paper utilises both ‘text’ and ‘image’ in combination to approach the photographic in a novel way. Drawing on the Finding Aid for the Curzon Collection and two reproductions of the image in published books, I identify a slippage in the British Library’s written record of the photograph which reinforces Curzon’s narrative of the event. Building on the copies of the photographs, I create another of my own, exposing it further and undermining the existing visual record.

## **A Theory of Exposure**

The webpage dedicated to the Collection provides catalogue information about the albums’ provenance, including details about the Collection’s Custodial History, explaining that it was transferred to the India Office Library

and Records in 1976 and that further material was acquired in 1992.<sup>1</sup> When working with the physical materials, further details about the acquisition of these albums might be available, but when working solely with the website this remains unclear. The Coronavirus Pandemic and its resulting restrictions have meant that throughout my PhD I have had little to no in-person access to archival material. When Britain's first national lockdown began in March 2020, I was initially left with no images to look at. I increasingly wondered what a thesis about photographs which the author had not seen might look like. This article forms a first attempt at writing about a photograph I am yet to see.

Writing about the past is constructed within and around the limits of the material available, as well as individual researchers' positionalities (Ghosh 2005: 27). The Library collection was originally formed in the eighteenth century as part of the British Museum but became a separate institution in 1973. While the Library in its present form was established after the formal end of the British Empire, the formation of its collections has been shaped by imperial constructions of knowledge. The British Library's archive holds material created from the documentation of British rule in India from the India Office Records. For archaeological researchers using archives in the place of field work, "the form of the archive itself...how it is organized, labelled and accessed, is something that has a direct relationship to the creation, form and possibilities of archaeological knowledge" (Baird and McFadyen 2014: 16).

When accessing archives remotely, the material being studied is changed further by the different physical context. Achille Mbembe (2002: 19) argues that coloniality is embedded in the physical structures of archives, which de-

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1 British Library, 'Browse Collections (Archives and Manuscripts): Curzon Collection (1876-1904),' *British Library*, website: [http://hviewer.bl.uk/IamsHViewer/Default.aspx?mdark=:ark:/81055/vdc\\_100025862941.0x00059a&\\_ga=2.103008963.272164174.1625751481-1682257516.1623682590&\\_gac=1.117107060.1625568337.CjwKCAjw\\_o-HBhAsEiwANqYhp5oq7SB5DhduzVfHMzvx7f16L01eWfQ1R6oyygdGB-WPnPOUqxvCSJxoCx4gQAvD\\_BwE](http://hviewer.bl.uk/IamsHViewer/Default.aspx?mdark=:ark:/81055/vdc_100025862941.0x00059a&_ga=2.103008963.272164174.1625751481-1682257516.1623682590&_gac=1.117107060.1625568337.CjwKCAjw_o-HBhAsEiwANqYhp5oq7SB5DhduzVfHMzvx7f16L01eWfQ1R6oyygdGB-WPnPOUqxvCSJxoCx4gQAvD_BwE), accessed 30 April 2021.

rive their power from their ‘architectural dimension’. Allan Sekula (1986) and Gillian Rose (2000) highlight the physical and bodily experience of the archive on the part of the researcher. Despite the closure of archives during national lockdowns, many researchers in the Global North still had greater access to related materials than those completing research from the Global South usually do. The digitisation of collections offers the possibility of much greater access for individuals who cannot physically visit the archives which hold them, but the limitations of digital reproductions complicate this (Rekrut 2014; Sassoon 2007). This paper plays on the current lack of physical access to archives by embracing this scenario. Looking ‘around’ rather than *at* the photograph, I use archival information and copies of the image to think about seeing the photograph despite not being able to look at it.

Like the archive, photographs are similarly ‘unfinished’ and *unstill*, as Mark Knight and Lindsay McFadyen (2019) have argued powerfully, demonstrating how different timescales are simultaneously present in photographic images. The photographic object is not still either. Like any artefact, it is slowly changing, and the amount of light it is exposed to is crucial to this process. Exposure is what creates the photographic image, yet too much light impairs it, both as the photograph is taken and once a print is made. Archival practices shape the level of ‘exposure’ experienced by documents and photographs, both literally from physical damage caused by light but also by influencing the extent to which they are seen, by whom and in what way. Susan Sontag (2003: 20) writes about the numbing effect of “incessant exposure to images” which depict suffering, especially those which are reproduced repeatedly, leading to “overexposure to a handful of images seen again and again”. This overexposure feeds the search for photographs that will freshly shock the viewer in order to make others’ pain visible again. Utilising Joan Schwartz’ (1995) conception of the negative as being “only a draft” from which multiple ‘original’ photographic documents can be made, the images discussed in this paper are understood to be different iterations of the same photograph. This article uses the concept of ‘exposure’ to think about how archival photographs are looked at and seen by researchers, and how certain ways of looking are privileged over others.

The archive's depiction of the hunting trip, laid out in the photograph and its description in the catalogue, constructs a version of the event. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) demonstrates how the process of the archive's formation begins with a historical erasure, or "silencing", as events unfold. This process is ongoing, as the archive is continuously made and becomes increasingly layered. Subverting this process, Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011: 3) proposes countervisuality as an ever-present opposition to the "self-evident" appearance of authority, which is derived from visuality. By deliberately *not* looking at the photograph in the archive and creating a new, overexposed version, this paper insists that there is more to be seen and attempts to undermine Curzon's narrative of the hunt.

### **A Photograph I Cannot See**

The British Library's online catalogue enables researchers to identify and locate resources, standing in for the collection up until the point at which the individual accesses the archival material itself. The Library's Finding Aid for the Curzon Collection contains information about each album and photograph, providing descriptions which enable the reader to visualise what they might look like. Because I cannot physically go to the archive, I am stretching the expected use of the Finding Aid, requiring it to stand in more completely for the photograph than it usually would.

By downloading the Finding Aid as a pdf file, I turn the interactive text of the website into an image file, creating a new exposure of the photograph in album 430/33. This one is made up solely of black and white text and summarizes photograph 430/33(19) as follows:

"Their Excellencies just after shooting. Tiger shot dead through back of head at 70 yds [hunting scene near Nekonda, Warangal District, Hyderabad]...Lord and Lady Curzon posed with dead tiger. Beaters and bearers stand in the background."

The title and description of the photograph inform the viewer *when* and *where* they are looking at in the image. "Their Excellencies just after shooting"

shows the viewer that they are looking at the Curzons shortly after they have finished a successful hunt, while the detail about the tiger being “shot dead through back of head at 70 yds” and “posed” with the couple in the description of the photograph’s content provides a sense of the scale of the hunting act itself and their proximity to their new trophy. It is not stated who shot the tiger, but the beaters’ and bearers’ central role in the success of the hunt is clearly not intended to be the focus, as they “stand in the background”. During a tiger hunt, beaters worked as a team to control the direction of the tiger, leading it to the huntsman who would then shoot it. While British women increasingly took part in hunting across the Empire in the twentieth century (Thompson 2015), the lack of specification makes it seem unlikely that the shot was Mary’s, as she is never mentioned as having shot an animal in the other hunting scenes detailed in the Finding Aid. Photographs 24 and 25 from the same album also document the hunting trip, depicting the first and second day’s ‘bags’, or kills. The descriptions of both include similar details about the gunshots: “shot by V” and “killed by two shots”. ‘V’ is taken to stand for Viceroy, as it appears elsewhere in the Finding Aid as “V[iceroy]”, in the entries for Photographs 430/43(14) and 430/43(50). Again, the photograph of the already-dead tiger is stretched to include the moment at which it died, affirming the shot of Curzon’s gun as the central event of the hunt.

The photograph is in an album titled “Souvenir of the Visit of H. E. Lord Curzon of Kedleston Viceroy of India to H. H. the Nizam’s Dominions April 1902”. The photographs follow a chronological order and several of them are taken on hunting trips, an integral part of elite British culture in India in the early twentieth century. James Ryan (1997) demonstrates that a photograph of an animal became an alternative to the body or head as a trophy and souvenir in the early twentieth century, which raises the significance of photography as an integral part of these hunting practices. Hunting was a popular sport among British imperialists and tiger hunting was especially prominent in India, reaching its height in the 1930s and having a huge impact on the tiger population in South Asia. John MacKenzie (1988) described the colonial frontier as the hunting frontier, linking the progress of the hunt to the symbolic and literal expansion of European empires.

The entry for Photo 430/33(19) in the Finding Aid informs the viewer that they need to be registered with the Library as a reader to be permitted access to the item: “appointment required to view these records. Please consult Asian and African Studies Print Room staff”. This serves as a reminder of the archive’s role in gatekeeping the collection and the localised, physical constraints on access to it. The only ‘physical characteristics’ detailed about the photograph in the Finding Aid are that it is in a bound volume and has a secondary support made from card, leaving the viewer/reader wondering about the material record.

### **“Beaters and Bearers Stand in the Background”**

The two images of the hunting photograph which I have seen are printed in a hardback copy of Ray Desmond’s *Victorian India in Focus* (1982) and in an eBook copy of James Ryan’s *Picturing Empire* (1997). The two pictures differ from one another, as the digital version appears to be slightly cropped and pixelated, making some of the details more difficult to see than in the printed copy. These images bring us closer to the photograph in the album, making its composition visible. The photograph shows a typically heroic masculine figure posed with the slain tiger at his feet, a common allegory for British rule in India. Mary and George are standing apart, nearly central in the frame. He is standing further forward than she is, and the dead tiger lies on its front to the left of his feet, its head turned away from the camera. Mary stands with a fan hanging from her waist, one arm raised against a tree behind the tiger. George holds a shotgun pointed to the ground next to the tiger’s head, his other hand in his jacket pocket in a classic portrait pose. The Indian men are standing behind the tree facing the camera, but it is difficult to make out their faces, though some details of their clothing are visible.

In the Finding Aid, the detail about the distance from which the tiger was shot is incorporated into the ‘title’ field for the photograph, suggesting that it was part of the typeset caption produced as part of the album. However, Ryan indicates that “in his [Curzon’s] album this photograph has been further annotated with the note ‘Tiger shot dead through back of head at 70 yards’” (Ryan 1997: 103). The handwritten note that Curzon added to the page ret-

respectively would be better categorised as ‘scope and content’ and placed in the relevant archival field in the entry for the photograph with a reference to it being in Curzon’s script. Slippages like this can remain hidden because the digital, all-text format can more easily blur the distinction between photographer, former owner, and archivist in comparison to a physical catalogue where additions are often made in different mediums and so are visibly distinct. It is essential that an all-text catalogue maintains and attributes these distinctions between authors. The digitisation of collections offers the possibility of much greater access for individuals who cannot physically visit the archives which hold them, but the limitations of digital reproductions complicate this. As a result of its incorporation into the title, Curzon’s note is absorbed into the archival record.

Curzon was invested in creating and controlling a personal legacy for himself (Gilmour 1994), something which these handwritten notes are testimony of. The note identified as Curzon’s by James Ryan fits within a wider pattern in the Finding Aid which refers to pencilled notes in other albums, suggesting that the details about the tigers killed in photographs 430/33(24) and 430/33(25) were also added retrospectively. Photograph albums appear to have been an important part of Curzon’s memory-creation and were considered “treasured personal mementos” (Ryan 1997: 111-2). In a small way, the conflation of the handwritten note and the caption of the photograph in the catalogue support Curzon’s aim, taking a personal, handwritten note and entering it into a more official record. Specifying that he had shot the tiger accurately and from some distance, Curzon was perhaps trying to shape this narrative and maintain or further his authority within it, even though this was a personal copy of the album. His emphasis on his own shot further diminishes the presence and actions of the beaters stood behind him in the photograph, without whom he could not have made such a shot.

In the other book, published in the same year that the collection was transferred to the British Library, Ray Desmond compiles photographs from the India Office Records. The copy of the photograph is printed as the frontispiece to the book with a caption providing a short summary of Curzon’s role in the preservation of Indian monuments and creation of the Victoria Memo-



rial in Kolkata. It is significant that Desmond chose the photograph taken on a hunt to represent Curzon, rather than a formal portrait or a stately event like the 1903 Delhi Durbar he famously coordinated. The photograph is emblematic of early-twentieth century British imperial visual culture. The first image to appear in the results of a Google search for 'tiger hunting' is one of George and Mary Curzon posing with a dead tiger laid on a rug. It is used to illustrate the Wikipedia entry for tiger hunting and is dated 1903. It is not the same image as photograph 430/33(19), but from the description provided in the title field of its Finding Aid entry it could be. However, the detail about the beaters and bearers standing in the background distinguishes the two images.

The addition of this detail made by an archivist is a small but important change and forms part of a wider trend to highlight the presence of colonised people in catalogues where they have often been systemically marginalised (Duff and Harris 2002; Light and Hyry 2002; Povinelli 2011). The slippage between the voice of Curzon and of the archive/archivist in the Finding Aid would be accounted for by seeing the photograph in the album, and in this case has been corrected by Ryan's nod to Curzon's narration. To re-centre the role of the beaters in the hunt, a further exposure is required.

## Overexposure

I make a copy of the image in the eBook of James Ryan's *Picturing Empire*, edit it and literally over-expose it, creating a new photographic document. The version of the photograph in the eBook already appeared to have been edited during the digitisation process: the copy of the photograph printed in Desmond's *Victorian India in Focus* is clearer to look at as the digital copy in *Picturing Empire* is slightly pixelated and cropped, but the latter is also lighter. It is likely that the picture was edited to make the people standing in the background more visible. This may have resulted from the difference in how the contrast shows up on a computer compared to the same image in print, but this ambiguity raises the important point that the digitisation process often involves editing to provide a clearer version of the image for the viewer. This process can enable new information about what was in front of the camera to come to light. However, it is often unacknowledged, meaning that a view-

er looking solely at a digitised version of a photograph online may be misled into thinking that the original copy shares the same appearance. This effect fits within the wider argument that photographs are often treated as though they are ‘transparent’. The tendency to ignore, or look past, the physicality of the photograph and focus on the image has a flattening effect, which may be exacerbated by the digitisation process, as is also seen with paper documents (Dever 2013). To try and see the archival photograph more clearly, I have edited the photograph further, insisting that to reveal the bearers requires that the Curzons are made less visible.

In the catalogue description of the photograph the Curzons’ position in the photograph is not given, but the reader presumes it to be in the foreground because of the implied contrast to the unnamed beaters and bearers who “stand in the background”. The darker, printed image which is closer to the archival photograph initially supports this, as the parts of the scene where the bearers stand are incredibly dark. The couple are clearly intended to be the focus of the image, ensured by Deen Dayal’s original exposure, as the contrast between the Curzons’ pale faces and the Indian men’s is stark. Ryan’s account emphasizes the composition of the photograph and builds on the Finding Aid’s description: “Curzon claims his tiger and the beaters and servants recede into the dark undergrowth in the background” (Ryan 1997: 102-3). In the Finding Aid’s description, the beaters are standing in the background whereas Ryan suggests they are moving backwards, almost in retreat, and becoming part of the foliage behind the Curzons and the tiger, which is now George’s possession to “claim”. Ryan’s reading of the photograph exaggerates the Finding Aid’s narrative, confirming that Curzon and his shot are at the centre of the event being documented. This supports Sophie Gordon’s argument that James Ryan’s analysis of photographs is largely formed from written sources related to the images rather than from a focus on their visuality (Gordon 2004: 185).

The way in which the archival description shapes Ryan’s analysis of the photograph points to the way in which written captions are used to try and control visual narratives. Photographs have historically been constructed as objective representations of people, events, and things. Captions contribute

to and reinforce these narratives, informing the viewer's perception of the image. Although archival catalogues are ultimately intended to assist the user in finding an album or photograph, their descriptions of items have the possibility of supporting or undermining the original author's intentions, as is shown in the Finding Aid's quoting of Curzon. Ali Behdad (2016) interprets the caption as an "anchor" which attempts to minimise the multifaceted narratives inherent in the photographic, which supports Ariella Azoulay's (2008) notion that the photograph cannot be owned and therefore never fully controlled by a particular framing. In this case, Ryan recognises the caption as Curzon's telling of the story but accepts this narrative rather than using the photograph to reject it.

My visual and theoretical exposure of the image does not necessarily make the 'bearers' in the background clearer but they do become more visible, taking up more space in the photograph than they did before. Having been described as being in (or even part of) the background, the brighter image makes it clearly visible that the men are standing in line with Mary, not behind her. On the other side of the tree to Mary there are two beaters in a military-style uniform with striped turbans. One of them holds the stick he used to direct the tiger's movement, in a parallel position to Curzon holding his shotgun. He and the man to his left appear to be wearing medals. Some of the other men surrounding them do not appear to be in uniform, but it is difficult to tell even with the higher exposure. On the other side of the photograph, at the edge of the frame, is a man wearing a *sherwani* and a plain turban. His lack of uniform leaves his role in the hunt unclear. The eBook image is too pixelated to tell where Curzon is looking, but in the printed copy he is clearly looking out of the frame, away from the tiger and into the distance. Mary is looking at George, her head tilted towards him. While the other men appear to all face the camera, the viewer cannot see whether they are looking at the camera, at George, or elsewhere in or out of the photograph's frame. Their faces remain too dark, even when enough light is added to make the Curzons' faces blank.

While this paper focuses on a photograph created to tell a story of Curzon's visit to the Nizam of Hyderabad, it shows that the image is not defined by its imperial vision. Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011: 9) stresses that countervisuali-

ty is formed on its own terms, but my exposure of the hunting photograph offers a potential example of “that space between intention and accomplishment that allows for the possibility of a countervisuality” which he has proposed. The photograph in the archive is supposed to tell a simple story of Curzon’s hunting ability, but this does not have to be the subject of the image. The individual mistake identified in the Finding Aid represents the way in which the archive structurally supports Curzon’s narrative of the hunt, as his voice is privileged. This is reflected in James Ryan’s interpretation of the photograph, as he agrees that the bearers are in the background of the image, seeing the image in the terms set out by the catalogue entry. In these versions of the photograph, the bearers are eclipsed by George and Mary and the hunt defined by Curzon’s role. By embracing my inability to see the photograph and creating a new overexposed image, the photograph is seen differently. The bearers are no longer in the background and become part of the main subject of the picture.

## **Acknowledgements**

The research for this paper was generously supported by the Open-Oxford-Cambridge Doctoral Training Partnership. I would like to thank my PhD supervisors, Professor Dan Hicks and Dr Christo Kefalas, for their help and support in developing this work from its conceptualization. Sydney Stewart Roses’ encouragement and feedback has also been invaluable in shaping this article.

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# **The Body as (in, and with) Text: Doing Bioarchaeology with Archives**

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## **Abstract**

Bioarchaeological analysis is often portrayed as ‘reading’ the skeletal body, examining clues and signs that offer insights into past people and social worlds. But physical remains are just one kind of tissue whose materiality informs our inquiries. Bioarchaeologists who work in historical contexts also encounter bodies in and through textual sources. We discuss how historical bioarchaeologists ‘read’ the various sources they draw upon, which include, but are not limited to, human skeletal remains. This article proposes that social bioarchaeology, as a theoretical approach to human remains, can contribute to more holistic readings of skeletal and textual data. Social bioarchaeology engages with multiple traces to enhance, complement, and problematize the study of human remains. Informed by theories of materiality and embodiment, this approach emphasizes multi-scalar biosocial phenomena that influence bodily forms and actions. We argue that social bioarchaeology encourages new articulations of archival and corporeal remains and present two case studies as examples of the generative potential of doing social bioarchaeology in, and with, archives. Importantly, such ‘doings’ bring our own practices and material manipulations into the frame of analysis.

## **Introduction**

Human skeletal remains provide a unique window into the past, but rarely stand alone as a source of evidence. Our access to past lives involves some

combination of the material remains of human bodies and textual sources, even if the latter are merely laboratory standards and forms. Importantly, how these different sources are ‘read’ by bioarchaeologists has implications for the amplification or silencing of particular bodies. This paper examines how bodies enter into, emerge from, and mingle with texts and how bioarchaeologists might better incorporate various bodily representations into their research.<sup>1</sup>

Numerous scholars have highlighted the contributions that come from bridging texts with skeletal evidence (Fay 2006; Geber 2015; Ion 2016; Mitchell 2017; Roberts 2011). Indeed, a subdiscipline of historical *bioarchaeology* seems to be emerging. This research generally falls into three categories: using textual sources as background context for skeletal studies, using skeletal data to fill gaps in the historical record, and testing skeletal data against textual sources (Grauer and Miller 2017; Perry 2007; Robb et al. 2019). While these approaches certainly have merit, we propose that the methodological and theoretical emphases of social bioarchaeology allow for a more holistic integration of text and bone while recognizing the partial potentiality inherent to both.

Social bioarchaeology emerged in North America as a complementary approach to population-based research of the late twentieth century. This interdisciplinary perspective integrates skeletal remains with archaeological, ethnographic and historical sources to pursue a deeper, more contextualized understanding of human lives (Agarwal and Glencross 2011, Baker and Agarwal 2017; Buikstra et al. 2011). Social bioarchaeology invites a focus on individual life histories which, in tandem with population studies, inform on how social and biological contingencies come to be reflected in the body (Baadsgaard et al. 2011; Robb 2002). To “transcend the skeletal body into

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1 While scholars who study human remains in the UK are generally referred to as ‘osteoar-  
chaeologists’, we have chosen to use ‘bioarchaeologists’ in this paper to reflect our focus on the  
theoretical perspectives of social bioarchaeology, a term developed in the United States. How-  
ever, we acknowledge that many osteoar-  
chaeologists also utilize social theory (see Gowland and Kacki 2021) and engage with textual sources in their work.



the realm of lived experience,” social bioarchaeologists actively engage with social theory, particularly theories of materiality and embodiment (Agarwal and Glencross 2011:3).

This article explores how social bioarchaeology can contribute to an historical bioarchaeology that moves beyond establishing historical context or testing skeletal data against texts. Importantly, this is not simply an additive process (i.e., bones + texts = better [pre]history), but is relational, offering generative potential (Fowler 2016; Novak and Warner-Smith 2020). We discuss the relationship between text, the body and how practitioners ‘read’ these sources, as well as the role of the researcher in creating new archives. We outline how social bioarchaeology is a productive space for bringing together archival and corporeal remains and present two case studies that generate new perspectives on past bodies.

## **Reading the body**

At the most basic level of analysis, bioarchaeologists examine human remains to determine demographic information. The trope of ‘reading the body’ is frequently used to describe how bioarchaeologists glean information from the skeleton (Crossland 2009; Krmpotich et al. 2010; Rautman 2000; Sofaer 2012). Bones are placed in anatomical position and visually inspected before being measured, counted, photographed, sketched and sampled. Of course, this metaphor of the body as text is not without its critics. Sofaer (2012) argues that such a conceptualization overemphasizes the visual component of skeletal analysis, neglecting the role of touch and the sensorial body. Furthermore, our ability to ‘read’ skeletal remains ‘scientifically’ implies some tangible reality, upon which more ‘humanistic’ interpretations can be propped up (see Buikstra et al. 2017, for example).

Bioarchaeologists often emphasize information extracted from human remains as an unbiased and factual representation of the past. As this evidence comes from the very bodies of humans living in the past, the assumption goes, it cannot be tainted with the biases of the historical record (Grauer and Miller 2017; Mitchell 2017). Indeed, while there are many types of archives, textual

sources often focus on the literate and/or elite (Grauer and Miller 2017; Perry 2007; Robb et al. 2019). When marginalized or subjugated persons are included in archives, it is often through the lens of governmentality or colonial power (Basu and De Jong 2016; Fuentes 2016; Zeitlyn 2012). Historical archives themselves are curated collections, subject to institutional and cultural constraints (Baird and McFadyen 2014; Zeitlyn 2012).

While skeletal research arguably allows for “a more democratic history” (Robb et al. 2019: 29), the biases inherent in the skeletal record are also well-acknowledged (Agarwal and Glencross 2011; Perry 2007). For example, the oft-cited ‘osteological paradox’ points to how selective mortality and heterogeneity in disease risk influence the formation of skeletal samples (Wood et al. 1992). Attempts to address these issues are now standard practice (DeWitte and Stojanowski 2015), but emphasis often remains on the impartiality of the skeleton when compared to most other sources (Perry 2007; Robb et al. 2019).

More recently have been challenges to how skeletal populations are formed and the conflation of diverse life histories based on shared mortuary or museum space (Fahlander 2016; Komar and Grivas 2008; Novak 2017a; Watkins and Muller 2015). These challenges articulate with those of Indigenous and Black scholars (e.g., Blakey 2021; Lans 2020; Lippert 2007; Robertson 2018; Watkins 2020) and their call to decolonize research and collections. Ongoing changes to practice and ethics in the discipline (Blakey 2008; Kakaliouras 2012), along with recent events in the United States, have spurred conversations that cross boundaries and form solidarities for action (Dunnavant et al. 2021; Watkins 2018).

Without losing sight of this ethical shift to praxis—and in fact drawing from a reflexive turn—there is another critical way of thinking about the body *as* text in bioarchaeology. Lines can be blurred between bone and text, and between collection and archive. Archives are collections of records and data in an array of media (Baird and McFadyen 2014; Battaglia et al. 2020; Zeitlyn 2012). The skeletal body is an archive of life history, containing records of past traumas, labours, and consumption. Skeletal assemblages in aggregate may

also be considered archives. Many of these collections were created through frontier and colonial violence (Geller 2020; Lans 2018; Watkins 2018). Others have been formed through the sampling and research priorities of more recent archaeological projects.

Importantly, the practice of bioarchaeology generates new 'bodies of evidence' (Herring and Swedlund 2003) as practitioners measure, score and record their observations on forms, in databases, and through photographs and illustrations. Curatorial practices also produce paper and digital files. Each body becomes an archival amalgam of text and image as analytical notes, catalogue entries, data points, photographs, sketches, radiographs, CT scans and other media create new representations of our 'primary' source.

Both the analytical trope of 'reading the body' and the role of the bioarchaeologist as archivist highlight ethical considerations. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995: 29) explains that "the production of traces is always also the creation of silences" which enter history at different points as sources are created, archived, transformed into narratives, and given historical significance. Zeitlyn (2012) similarly points out how the archivist plays a role in the production of silences by acting as a gatekeeper whose choices create records of certain histories and obscure others.

With this in mind, we must consider not only how skeletal collections are formed, but also how our research questions and analyses result in new records and representations while potentially obscuring others. While bioarchaeologists may not see their everyday practices in the lab –measuring elements, jotting down scores – in terms of archivist or gatekeeper, the production of silence and absence is built into our practices (Novak 2017b). The most basic questions of *which* skeletal remains to excavate or include in a sample, and *what* data to record prioritizes the creation and archiving of some information over others. Furthermore, certain techniques of analysis are uniquely destructive; radiocarbon dating, DNA, isotope and histological analyses recover trace histories while also fragmenting the body through the removal and destruction of samples (Squires et al. 2020).

Thinking about the body as text and how texts and other media are created during our analyses is meant to foster a more careful approach to the questions that precede our research, guide its execution, and produce new archives of data for dissemination (Chamoun 2020). We suggest that one means of doing so involves the deep contextualization of human remains offered by social bioarchaeology.

### **Social Bioarchaeology in the Archives**

Both anthropologists and historians have turned to texts for biological data (e.g. Grauer 1995; Laqueur 1990; Mant et al. 2021; Newman 2003; Rose 1985; Saunders et al. 2002; Steckel and Rose 2002; Tremblay and Reedy 2020). In anthropology, a biocultural paradigm rooted in Marxist political economy aimed to synthesize the biological and cultural (Goodman and Leatherman 1998; Leatherman and Goodman 2020; Wiley and Cullin 2016; Zuckerman and Martin 2016). In doing so, scholars also invited a synthesis of datasets and methods, including archival data (Blakey and Rankin-Hill 2016; Grauer et al. 2016; Herring and Swedlund 2003). Likewise, historians of the body have applied a material cultural approach to seek out textual forms of embodied experience (e.g., Clever and Ruberg 2014; Duden 2005; Harvey 2019, 2020; Sappol 2002; Wahrman 2008).

Following these developments in related fields, practitioners of historical bioarchaeology engage with textual sources alongside skeletal remains. Buikstra (2000) and Perry (2007) connect the emergence of historical bioarchaeology in North America to the study of historic cemeteries and remains associated with historic sites. Historical archaeologists have used temporal context, types of sources, methods and subjects to draw disciplinary boundaries (Hall and Silliman 2006; Hicks and Beaudry 2006; Orser Jr. 1996), and definitions of historical bioarchaeology are similarly proliferating. For example, in Perry's (2007) formulation, the 'historical' is not a temporal context, but is distinguished methodologically by moving between documents and bone. A recent special issue in *Historical Archaeology* (Novak 2020) similarly emphasizes a relational methodology between bone and archive, highlighting the materiality of the bodies that consume, labour, (re)produce, and negotiate identity.

As outlined by Perry (2007), historical bioarchaeologists generally approach textual sources as an introductory context to skeletal remains, an incomplete record to be augmented by skeletal data, or a framework against which to test skeletal research. However, some scholars have taken a more integrative and explicitly theoretical path, notably Meredith Ellis' (2020) assembling of skeletal data, vital records, coffin plates and historic letters to examine how fetal identities were made in relation to parents and faith communities in nineteenth-century New York City. Following this type of work, we acknowledge specific areas where social bioarchaeology can benefit historical bioarchaeologists. While social bioarchaeology does not have an explicit emphasis on textual integration, the practice of contextualizing skeletal remains through other sources lends itself to studies with a historical focus. A social bioarchaeology perspective invites integration of text and bone along with the acknowledgement of biases and silences in these sources without giving primacy to one over another.

The theoretical focus of social bioarchaeology on lived experience and the social and biological forces that influence the body also offers a way to rematerialize bodies in archives. This perspective acknowledges the body as a 'work-in-progress' that is formed and transformed by social and physical environments (Harvey 2020; Sofaer 2006). Importantly, Joanna Sofaer (2006) observed that bodies are part of the material world and proposed approaching the archaeological body as a type of material culture enmeshed in social processes. Food must be chewed, buttons fastened, tools wielded. In recovering such embodiments from archives, we might better follow human traces and tissues through both skeletal and textual records.

The following case studies demonstrate how non-skeletal evidence can be integrated with corporeal remains. In this limited space, we focus on the scale of the individual while acknowledging that aggregate data and population studies have important articulations with other sources. This approach builds upon the notion of osteobiography (Hosek and Robb 2019; Robb 2002; Saul and Saul 1989) but does not give primacy to the skeletal evidence. By presenting how skeletal data and text can be 'read' together, these case studies present richer insights into past lives than either bone or text alone can provide.

## The Body and the Martyr

Libice nad Cidlinou was an early medieval center in Bohemia (today part of the Czech Republic), influential in both politics and emergent Christianity in the region (Mařík 2009; Sláma 2000). Excavations at Libice uncovered a large cemetery containing approximately 500 graves (Mařík 2009; Turek 1980). Bioarchaeological analysis, including an examination of trauma, was conducted by Hosek on a sample of 117 individuals from burials dating to the height of Libice's influence – the late ninth through tenth centuries – based on artifacts and site stratigraphy (Mařík 2009). While a small number of remains exhibited perimortem trauma ( $n=4$ ), one individual stood out for both the severity and pattern of wounds.

Burial 264 contained the remains of a young adult female (20-29 years) in a typical extended position with the head to the west. Grape-style earrings date this burial to the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Turek 1980). The young woman was found to have multiple deep, sharp force wounds in her cranium suggesting an attack with a heavy, bladed weapon (fig. 1). Wounds to the superior and posterior surfaces of the cranium suggest that her attacker struck from different positions, including from above and behind, or potentially while she was lying prone. Extensive postcranial trauma includes 14 wounds to the left posterior radius and ulna, indicative of parry wounds made while her arm was raised to block an attack. Nine stab wounds on the left ribs suggest that she was stabbed in the upper left part of her back with a smaller blade. Evidence for decapitation is found in a cut slicing completely through the fifth and sixth cervical vertebrae.

The only other individuals in the sample exhibiting perimortem trauma are three older males with different sharp-force trauma patterns suggestive of warfare or punitive violence (Hosek 2019; Mitchell 2014). As such, the violent death and mutilation of a young woman is unusual by itself at this site. However, early medieval textual sources show that her wounds also bear significant similarities to those described in written accounts of the life and death of a contemporary Czech martyr. Importantly, these documents are extant copies of originals, subject to replication and alterations by many (often unknown)

hands, including modern historians on whose translations this analysis relies.

Václav (more famously known as St. Wenceslas) was a Czech ruler killed by his brother in the early tenth century (fig 2). His martyrdom made him one of the earliest Czech saints and a cult quickly grew around his relics (Kantor 1983; Vlasto 1970). One of the earliest *vitae* (lives, or biographies of saints) of Václav, the *First Church Slavonic Life of Saint Wenceslas*, was likely written in the AD 930s shortly after his death and is known today through fourteenth-century Croatian versions (Kantor 1983). As described in surviving copies of his *vita*, Václav was brutally attacked by several assailants:

Thereupon the Devil inclined Boleslav's ear and corrupted his heart...and he struck him over the head with his sword. And Wenceslas [Václav] turned around and said, 'What have you plotted?'...Now Tuza came running and struck him on the arm, and Wenceslas released his brother and ran toward the church. And Hněvysa came running and pierced his ribs with his sword, and Wenceslas gave up the ghost...they hacked Wenceslas apart and left him unburied (trans by Kantor 1983: 148-9).

The traumatic parallels (struck over the head with a sword, wounded in the arm, stabbed in the ribs, and dismembered) between the saint's demise and Burial 264's injuries are striking. Knowledge of Václav's death was likely common in the tenth century as he was a popular Czech political and religious figure. Historical evidence also connects Václav and his legacy to Libice. Some accounts suggest that after his assassination, his most devoted followers fled there (Vlasto 1970). Additionally, a historic massacre at Libice in 995 purportedly occurred on September 28, St. Václav's feast day (Panek and Tuma 2009; Vlasto 1970).

The postmortem treatment of Václav and Burial 264 offers further insight into medieval fragmented bodies. While the bodies of saints and kings might be divided for religious or political purposes, there was much concern over bodily integrity for the Resurrection (Tracy and DeVries 2015; Walker Bynum 1991) and separated body parts might be gathered in death (Gilchrist

2012). The *vita* describes how Václav's mother, Drahomíra, collected the pieces of his body and laid him out in clothing before burial (Kantor 1983). Of course, Václav's body was later moved and separated as a cult grew around his remains, but the initial focus on bodily integrity by mourners is apparent in the text. The body and mortuary treatment of Burial 264 parallels this concern. Despite clear skeletal evidence of decapitation, she was buried 'intact' in a normative position with the head anatomically placed. Indeed, the archaeologists unearthing the remains did not record anything unusual about this burial (Turek 1980).

Similarities in wound patterns and historical associations with Libice aside, we cannot otherwise explain how this woman might have been connected to the saint. The use-period of the cemetery also means that her death may have preceded Václav's assassination. Of course, exploring the parallels between these textual and skeletal traumas is not meant to 'prove' that Václav's martyrdom was reenacted on Burial 264, or to offer a direct link between these individuals. However, when read together, these two sources generate new understandings of the complexity of early medieval violence and ideologies around what constituted a 'good' death and proper burial.

With other evidence for violence at Libice, we might interpret Burial 264's wounds as collateral damage from local warfare or as punitive violence. However, the textual accounts of Václav's death and his connection to Libice add potential ritual or performative significance to this woman's trauma. This pattern of wounds may in fact position certain violence relative to the sacred or holy, complicating what might otherwise be interpreted as denigration of her body and soul. Furthermore, the textual emphasis on bodily integrity offers insight into how this mutilated body received a normative burial. At the same time, the skeletal remains demonstrate how depictions of a martyr's wounds and death may be more than mere literary flourishes. Instead, these narratives might extend beyond oral traditions or the pages of manuscripts to be archived in embodied experiences of violence.



## The Storage Drawers of an Anatomical Collection

The George S. Huntington Collection is comprised of over 3,000 individuals who died between 1893 and 1921 in New York City. These decedents were dissected at the College of Physicians and Surgeons before becoming part of Dr. Huntington's comparative collection, curated in Washington, D.C., at the National Museum of Natural History (Muller et al. 2017). As a documented collection, information such as names, occupation, sex, age-at-death and cause of death are recorded, drawing many scholars to this rich archive (Hunt and Spatola 2008; Lans 2018, 2020 ; Muller et al. 2017; Pearlstein 2015; Zimmer 2018). The information documenting each skeleton, while providing more personal data than is typically available, still offers only fragmentary hints of complex biographies. Importantly, these remains were gathered to document "racial character, variations, reversions" (Huntington 1901: 610) and were used to argue for racial variation in the long bones (Hrdlička 1932).

Though these archives are shaped by race science, they also can be brought into articulation with skeletal remains to offer detailed life histories. The power of doing so is illustrated by Anne (#318945), a woman who died at the age of 70 years and was examined by Warner-Smith as part of a larger study of Irish immigrants in the collection.<sup>2</sup> Anne was born around 1834 in Ireland and was about ten years old at the start of the Great Famine in 1845 which forced many families to leave Ireland (Diner 1983). Anne, however, did not leave until after the event, arriving in New York City at the age of 30. She, like many other women, became a domestic servant (Diner 1983; Lynch-Brennan 2009).

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2 The use of names has been described as a move to humanize past peoples for the general public (Robb et al. 2019). However, I argue that naming is also a methodology that can emplace individuals back on the landscapes they experienced during life, and I refer to this woman as Anne to avoid objectifying her as a specimen number. In compliance with the National Museum of Natural History confidentiality request, this name is a pseudonym.

The bones of Anne's right shoulder offer evidence of experiences in the city. A traumatic injury has resulted in new bone formation on the anterior surface of her scapula (fig. 3). The joint surfaces also display extensive osteophyte development and remodeling and her humerus was displaced anteriorly. These changes indicate an unreduced or chronic shoulder dislocation. Anne's death record reports that she lived in New York City for 40 years prior to her death, which suggests the injury occurred in the city while she laboured as a domestic servant. Nineteenth-century hospital records indicate falling and broken bones were hazards for domestic servants (Linn 2008). Over 90% of dislocations are caused by traumatic injury, many of them from falls (Buikstra 2019).

CT scans offer further insight into the long-term effects of this injury. These scans, taken at the distal end of the humeral shafts, document cross-sectional geometric properties as a measure of activity. This practice is shaped by methodological concerns for documenting 'normative' movement. Bones with pathologies are portrayed as 'skewing' the results and not typically included in a scanning sample (Saers et al. 2017; Wesp 2020). Selective sampling therefore introduces silences, while creating a 'normal' collective. In this study, however, Anne's bones were included to obtain a more comprehensive perspective of labour across the life course. The CT scans of Anne's humeri show that her right humerus exhibits markedly less cortical bone (30%) than the left (52.5%). The atrophy of her injured arm suggests she was unable to use her right arm or chose not to. Such changes to movement likely affected her ability to perform salaried work, and it was not uncommon for ageing or debilitated domestic servants to enter the almshouse for this reason (Lynch-Brennan 2009).

Interestingly, the injury was not noted on her admissions record when she entered the almshouse (renamed the City Home for the Aged and Infirm in 1903) on Blackwell's Island. These documents often made note of disabilities, injuries and other impairments (fig. 4), as institutions were concerned with the kinds of labour residents could perform to 'pay' their way and justify receiving aid. There was also an increasing concern with classifying diseases and ailments. Institutions segregated bodies, both bureaucratically and spatially,

into “appropriate places” for targeted treatment (Kingsbury 1915: 101). For example, Blackwell’s Island included a series of subdivisions in addition to the almshouse itself: the Almshouse Hospital, the Hospital for Incurables, and the Blind Asylum (The City Club of New York 1903). The fact that Anne’s injury went unacknowledged by the admitting physician suggests her impairment was considered typical of ageing and infirm bodies. Thus, while osteologists would consider Anne’s arm ‘abnormal,’ her injury was not notable within the context of the almshouse. The absence in the ledgers is therefore suggestive of how disability was ‘read’ and categorized within public institutions.

Importantly, a contemporary population-based analysis of the life course would preclude using Anne’s bones based on her injury, which works to mark her as unable to perform ‘normative’ activities. By contrast, a traditional osteobiography would have likely centered on the skeletal and radiographic evidence of her traumatic dislocation. From this perspective, however, there is a temptation to highlight the ‘truth-value’ of the bone and the inadequacy of the archives. At the same time, both the traces and silences in the archives provide a more vivid sense of how this injury might have occurred, the potential reverberating effects on her life, and how others might have perceived her impairment.

Anne’s case demonstrates the value of bringing together sources and reading them against the grain (Stoler 2009; Zeitlyn 2012) to generate new findings and questions. Bones alone offer evidence of a traumatic injury in the shoulder joint. CT scans in isolation suggest uneven development of the arms. When brought into conversation, these sources make visible changes to Anne’s embodied experience that remain absent from the ledgers. But the ledgers provide insight into how her work as a domestic servant may have resulted in an injury and the need for public aid. Furthermore, the *absence* of the injury in the ledgers suggests that her impairment was read as normative, even as public institutions were becoming increasingly specialized. Here, at the intimate scale of Anne’s shoulder, the generative value of working *with* the various traces, is made apparent.

## Concluding Thoughts

We have aimed to reinvigorate a reading of the body with, and through, text. The two cases present different types of textual sources brought into articulation with skeletal remains. Each highlights ways data is constructed and manipulated, including how presence and absence can manifest and inform our understandings of the past. Burial 264 is invisible in the historical record, but her suffering takes shape within ideological landscapes that leave less tangible remains. Anne, by contrast, has a greater archival presence, and yet the absence of her aches and pains in the ledgers persists unacknowledged as simply a fact of ageing and urban poverty. These integrations provide richer life histories than could be gleaned from one type of evidence alone.

The case studies are also attentive to the formation of the archives – skeletal and otherwise – that anchor narratives, and the silences implicated therein. This framing positions archives as dynamic, contingent, and partial, while acknowledging our own roles as scholars in selecting and assembling traces, thereby forming new archives. The theoretical intervention we propose emphasizes the materiality of bodies, both in the archives and on the laboratory table. The bodies of evidence and the narratives that activate these traces are still partial and incomplete. Recognition of these many silences and absences offer possibilities for new materials and meanings to be identified, articulated and debated. Rather than a quest for the final word, our approach leaves frayed edges. While it might seem untidy, these threads offer opportunities to explore past lifeways in all their many forms.

## Acknowledgments

Lauren Hosek's research was funded by a National Science Foundation GRFP, DGE-1247399. Special gratitude is owed to Jan Mařík and the Archaeological Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, including the library staff. Access to research collections and laboratory support was generously provided by Petr Velemínský and the National Museum in Prague. Alanna Warner-Smith's research was funded by a National Science Foundation GRFP, DGE-1746928. The writing of this article was supported by the Palo-

heimo Fellowship from the School for Advanced Research. Special thanks are owed to David Hunt of the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, for assistance in accessing the collection, for support during research, and never-boring lunch conversation during lonely research days. Shannon Novak extends her gratitude to Lucy Mulroney and the Syracuse University Special Collections Research Center, where a Faculty Fellowship allowed her to expand her understanding of archives in their many forms.

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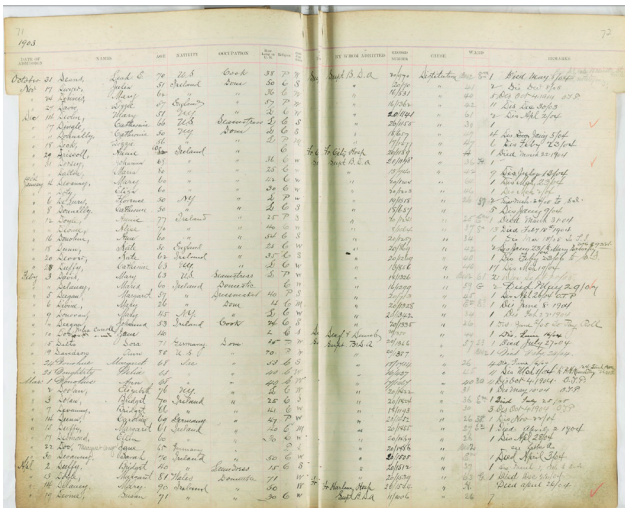
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*Fig. 1.* Burial 264 cranium, posterior view. Four perimortem, sharp-force wounds are marked by arrows. These wounds are most likely the result of blows from a large, double-edged weapon such as a sword. (Photograph by Lauren Hosek).



*Fig. 2.* Image from a tenth century Latin *vita* depicting the martyrdom of St. Vaclav at the hands of his brother. St. Vaclav flees to a church to escape his brother's sword, but a priest closes the door. (Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: Cod. Guelf. 11.2 Aug. 4, folio 21r).





# **A Kylix by Onesimos: Visual and Linguistic Humour in the Athenian Classroom**

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## **Abstract**

This chapter assesses a fragmentary kylix by Onesimos (ca. 480-470 BCE) housed at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, that is decorated on both sides and in the tondo with school scenes. This discussion seeks to reconstruct the vase, and assess the significance of the highly unusual boustrophedon inscription added to the scroll held by one of the figures. When the inscription is considered alongside the imagery, it appears that the painter included humorous elements to the scene designed for both literate and illiterate audiences. Moreover, these jokes centre on the idea of literacy, and the dissatisfaction of both the student and teacher in the classroom. When the text and image of this vase are analysed together, they give an insight into the potential wittiness of vase-painters, and the latent significances held by Athenian vases.

The vase in question was found in the Hellenion of Naukratis. A piece of the first fragment (preserving the scroll) was found in 1898 (Hogarth et al. 1899), and further fragments were retrieved in 1903 from the threshold of building 64, interpreted by the excavators as a shrine (Hogarth et al. 1905: 114). The five fragments come from a type C kylix, approximately 24-26cms in diameter at the rim. Fragment A (fig. 1) preserves parts of three figures. To the left, the face, hands and shoulders of a bearded male figure playing pipes are preserved before the break-line, the bottom of his staff resting on the ground. In the centre, a draped male youth (of whom only his torso, arms and

thighs are preserved) sits on a stool. He leans forward, with the edge of his chin and nose preserved before the break-line—his head therefore stooped over his lap.<sup>1</sup> He holds an unfurled scroll, on which is inscribed an intricate verse (see below). To the right are the fingers of another figure, facing the scroll-holder and inscribing an open tablet with a stylus. It is possible the scroll holder is dictating to the writer, who dutifully transcribes the verse, though this would perhaps make the action of flute-player difficult to explain (Beazley 1927: 13). Fragment B (fig. 2) comes from the tondo of the cup, and preserves the base of the stem on the exterior. To the right is the top of a male youth's head, garlanded with a red-slip fillet. To the left, you find the frontal face of an older, bearded man, his arm raised, probably in the act of dictating to the youth (Beazley 1927: 13). The interior of fragment A preserves part of the meander border around the tondo, but also a scrap of red-slip at the break-line which is probably from the fillet of a further youth, potentially suggesting that at least three figures adorned the tondo.

Fragment C (fig. 3) preserves the far left of a scene, and the very base of the handle. To the right are the torso and forearm of a seated male figure. The edge of his forehead and nose are preserved before the break-line, indicating his head was tilted upwards, perhaps in the act of singing. Beazley (1927: 14) suggested the lines in front of the figure's torso to be the strings of a lyre, but one line terminates before the edge of the fragment. In all other examples of Onesimos' lyres, strings are painted onto the black-glazed background, while here the background is reserved. Perhaps it is better to interpret this object as drapery rather than a lyre, and that another figure played the music to which he sang. In the centre, a naked male youth leans against an Ionic column, his frontal face resting in his right hand, a wash-bag, strigil and aryballos dangling from his left. Beazley (1927: 13) interpreted this figure as a servant and the frontal face may indicate he is tired from his work (Himmelman 1971: 33). However, when other examples of school scenes are examined, perhaps this youth may be better interpreted in another way. A different education scene

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1 Compare the position of a similar scroll-holder on a cup by the Ancona Painter (Ferrara 19108, BAPD 203657).



depicts a nude youth with a washbag - side A of a kylix by the Cage Painter (fig. 4). The similarity between this figure and the youth on fragment C is highlighted not just by the wash bags they both carry, but also by the fact that both stand by a column on the far left of the scene. It would seem the naked youth and column are somehow related. It is possible that the columns indicate the edge of the school space, and these youths have returned for class after exercise, caught in the moments before dressing. In short, they need not be servants, but could instead be students.

Fragments D and E (figs. 5 & 6) preserve a standing figure leaning against a staff. While not certain, it is likely they belong to the same figure (Beazley 1927: 14). Behind the figure, a scrap of a linear object is preserved before the break-line, which Beazley (1927: 14) hypothesised could be a column. The very edge of fragment D preserves a line, spaced 0.15cms from the edge of the object, the same width as the flutes of the column on fragment C (0.15-0.2cms), thus making this interpretation highly likely. For the purposes of understanding the images on this vase, and their relation to the text, it is important to reconstruct how these fragments fit together. Firstly, it is vital to determine whether the four body fragments came from two sides of the vase or one. On many kylikes, the scene depicting education only occupies one side of the vase,<sup>2</sup> however, some also have school scenes on both sides of the vase, such as the example by Douris in Berlin (fig. 7). Therefore, both possibilities are plausible. However, the four body sherds depict six figures in total, exceeding the maximum of five figures depicted in school scenes on either side of intact vases.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, I suggest that these fragments come from two sides of the vase. The overall appearance of the vase was probably similar to the slightly earlier kylix by Douris (Buitron-Oliver 1995: 23).

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2 See Munich 2607, BAPD 200906; Amherst 1962.74, BAPD 275229; Berlin F 2549, BAPD 3407.

3 Sides of kylikes depicting school scenes either depict three figures (eg. London 1901.5-14.1, BAPD 203642) or five figures (eg. Berlin F 2285, BAPD 205092).

The figure holding the scroll on fragment A, judging by the composition of the cup by Douris, was the central figure; the inscribed scroll would have undoubtedly been the focus of the scene. This side will henceforth be referred to as side A. This fragment therefore depicts three of the five figures on side A, the man playing the pipes, the man holding the scroll, and the figure with the writing tablet. If the sides had five figures, and the scroll-holder was the central figure, fragment C cannot belong to the same side, as the flute-player of fragment A and seated figure of fragment C must both be the second figure from the right on either side. Considering this, fragment C therefore must belong to side B. It has been suggested that a column exists on the right of fragment D. In other examples of school scenes with a column,<sup>4</sup> only one column exists in the scene, and always on one edge. Therefore, I suggest fragments D and C cannot belong to the same side, placing fragment D on side A. Overall, four figures of side A are surviving, with the figure on the far left now lost. Further, only two of the five figures survive from side B. This reconstruction (fig. 8) would therefore imply education scenes decorated the tondo and both sides of the kylix.

### **The inscription: boustrophedon on Athenian pottery**

The scroll is inscribed ‘στεσιχο|ρον ἠμνον | αἰοισαι’, written both stichedon and boustrophedon (on the translation, see below). Boustrophedon, meaning ‘as the ox plows’, is a form of script chiefly associated with inscriptions, in which alternate lines are written in opposite directions (Hays 2017). On each retrograde line, the letters are also typically reversed (Immerwahr 1990: 16). Boustrophedon is most commonly used in the sixth century BCE, with a particular prevalence around the middle of the century and almost total abandonment by the beginning of the fifth century. A series of sacral inscriptions from the Eleusinion in the Athenian Agora (ca. 510-480 BCE) present

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4 Louvre G 318, BAPD 203643; Amherst 1962.74, BAPD 275229.

a uniquely late epigraphic example (Jeffery 1948: 103).<sup>5</sup> Only 20 examples of boustrophedon writing on vases are recorded in Immerwahr's *Corpus of Attic Vase Inscriptions*, searchable in the Beazley Archive's pottery database. Eight of these are so-called end-boustrophedon, where a word has its end written retrograde in order to fit a tight space between figures.<sup>6</sup> Nine are found as post-firing graffiti on ostraka (Lang 1990: 9), probably facilitated by the lack of space on the sherd.<sup>7</sup> This evidence shows that most of the boustrophedon on Greek pottery is used because of spatial constraint.

Apart from our kylix, two other examples of boustrophedon are used without these same spatial limitations. One is found on a plate fragment from the Agora (fig. 9), between the legs of a striding figure, probably best interpreted as Athena (Athens AP 1859A-B). The inscription reads → ΣΟΤΕΣ ΜΕΠ [Ο] | ← ΙΣΕΝ ΠΑΙΔΕΡΟΣ | → ΕΛΡΦΣΕ[Ν], 'Sotes made me, Paideros painted me'. This painter/potter inscription is exceptional not only because of it being written boustrophedon, but also because these ceramicists' names are only attested on this one fragment. It has been noted the plate's shape makes it appropriate for dedication, as, like the plaque, it could be easily hung in the sanctuary (see Callipolitis-Feytmans 1974; Wagner 1997: 40), and may have been specifically produced for this purpose. Perhaps this use

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5 Boustrophedon appears on a number of types of Attic inscription: dedications from the Acropolis (IG i3 589bis; IG i3 590; IG i3 594; IG i3 597; IG i3 599; IG i3 600; IG i3 601; IG i3 1009), boundary markers to sacred precincts (IG i3 1055; IG i3 1068), and lyrical tomb epigrams (IG i3 1194bis; IG i3 1196; IG i3 1197).

6 New York 12.231.2, BAPD 203221; Louvre G 138, BAPD 203853; Louvre G 152, BAPD 203900; New York 07.286.85, BAPD 207338; Florence 4209, BAPD 300000; Athens 1.607, BAPD 310147; Reggio Calabria 12862, BAPD 310415; Athens AP 2293, BAPD 9017128.

7 Athens, Agora P 15555, BAPD 9016384; Athens, Agora P 13, BAPD 9016441; Athens, Agora P 4627, BAPD 9016462; Athens, Agora P 14687, BAPD 9016539; Athens, Agora P 14693, BAPD 9016540; Athens, Agora P 24745, BAPD 9016606; Athens, Agora P 6067, BAPD 9016624; Athens, Agora P 15379, BAPD 9016658; Athens, Agora P 13251, BAPD 9016777. For the explanations of early 'names-on-sherds' which predate the institution of ostracism, see Vanderpool 1949: 407 and Lang 1976: 16.

of boustrophedon, associated largely with dedications from the Acropolis, helped signify this vase as an offering. The placement of inscriptions on vases often conveys meaning (Gerleigner 2016) and it is possible this positioning at the feet of Athena imitates boustrophedon inscriptions that accompanied sculptural dedications, often placed on the sculptural base (for example *IG* i<sup>3</sup> 590 and *IG* i<sup>3</sup> 599). A similar use of boustrophedon is found on an olpe in Rome (Capitoline 6 A). The vase depicts Ajax and Achilles playing dice (fig. 10), an iconography common after Exekias, and believed by some to have been inspired by a sculptural dedication on the Acropolis (Mannack 2001: 87; Thompson 1976). The block between the players is inscribed with a pre-firing inscription: → ΝΕΟΚΛΕΙΔΕΣ Κ | ← ΑΛΟΣ, ‘beautiful Neokleides’. Like the inscription on the plate fragment, the placement of this text between the figures at the base may reference dedicatory inscriptions found alongside sculptures, potentially adding further weight to the possibility of a sculptural prototype. It is however questionable whether a simple kalos inscription would have been associated by the viewer with dedicatory inscriptions. These examples date to the mid-sixth century BCE, when boustrophedon was most common in epigraphy, and it is possible these examples on vases reflect their epigraphic usage alongside sculpture. While Immerwahr suggests some book-rolls may have been written stoichedon in this period (Immerwahr 1964: 45), there is no evidence they were inscribed boustrophedon.<sup>8</sup> The inscription on our vase should therefore not imply contemporary forms of calligraphy, but could have been used by the inscriber to convey other, more representational meanings.

### A separate scribe?

To ascertain the relationship between the text and image on this vase, it is important to determine whether the inscriber of the scroll was the same as the painter of the scene. It is possible it was not Onesimos, but instead a

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<sup>8</sup> No scrolls from this period survive from Archaic Athens—the earliest example dates to ca. 430BCE (West 2013: 73), but one would perhaps expect a greater number of depictions of scrolls to be inscribed boustrophedon if it was a common form of calligraphy.

scribe associated with the workshop who was specifically hired to add inscriptions to vases. However, this possibility seems implausible. The vast majority of school scenes recorded in the Beazley Archive pottery database do not have literately inscribed scrolls (62 of the 68), yet were still commercially viable. If vase-painters did not require an inscription to sell their vases, it seems strange that some painters would go to the expense of hiring a scribe. Another issue with this possibility appears in the process of producing the vase. The slip used to create the black glazed background was a refined form of the clay used to pot the vase, and thus would have been the same colour before firing; keep in mind it is the process of oxidisation in the kiln that causes the colour change (Williams 1985: 8). The position of the scroll would therefore have been very difficult to see before firing, which would have made a scribe's job of adding an inscription to an already painted scene very difficult. Where we know two painters worked on the same vase (such as a kylix by the Euergides Painter and Epiktetos, Louvre G 16) the artists painted different areas, in this case the outside and interior of the kylix, potentially to avoid this issue. Additionally, while Onesimos' alphabet is variable, certain idiosyncrasies remain in his handwriting throughout his whole career, including high-kicking alphas, omicrons with flat upper rights, and pis with shorter verticals (Immerwahr 1990: 84). It would be very unlikely Onesimos kept one scribe throughout his entire career. It therefore seems more likely Onesimos was the inscriber of his own vases.

## Visual and literary humour

Our vase is exceptional not just for the use of a very rare script form, uncommon on Greek pottery, but for its seemingly archaising use at the date of production (c. 480-470 BCE). Given Douris' scroll is not written boustrophedon, this seems to have been a deliberate adaptation by Onesimos. The explanation for its use is perhaps to be found in the meaning of the inscription. The inscription can be read in two different ways:  $\sigma\tau\epsilon\sigma\iota\chi\acute{o}|\rho\omega\tilde{n}\ \eta\acute{\upsilon}\mu\omega\tilde{\nu}\ |\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\omicron\iota\sigma\alpha\iota$  or  $\sigma\tau\epsilon\sigma\iota\chi\acute{o}|\rho\omega\tilde{n}\ \eta\acute{\upsilon}\mu\omega\tilde{\nu}\ |\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\omicron\iota\sigma\alpha\iota$ . In the first, the inscription would be translated as 'I introduce the hymn of Stesichoros', thus referring to the late-seventh/mid-sixth century poet, Stesichoros of Himera (Birt 1907: 143; Finglass and Kelly 2015: front-cover). However, the more likely second reading, which would

imply an address to the Muses, translates as ‘Muses, who lead the chorus-leading hymn’ (Beazley 1948: 338). While the meaning is unclear, the line scans and has rhythmic form. Taking the normal understanding of the verb as ‘leading’ perhaps suggests a visual joke in the boustrophedon. The backwards and forwards arrangement of the lines reflects the dancing of the chorus.<sup>9</sup> We have previously noted the flute-player behind the scroll-holder and the singer on side B of this kylix—the audial environment of the school has therefore been made clear by the painter. Perhaps here these depictions of music-making are designed to combine with this inscription, both in the physical and metrical way it is written, further enforcing the melodic beat of the classroom. Musical education is commonly depicted in school-scenes (eg. Vienna 3698; Beck 1975: 23-28), as is dancing (eg. Syracuse 20966; Beck 1975: 55). With this understanding of the inscription, it perhaps adds weight to the visual reading that the scroll holder on fragment A may not be dictating to the writer, but instead singing, justifying the involvement of the flute-player that Beazley struggled to explain (Beazley 1927: 13).

Intellectual humour drawn out by the inscriptions on book-rolls is found in another education scene: Douris’ kylix in Berlin (fig. 7). Sider (2010: 543) has suggested the mistakes on the book-roll were intentionally included by Douris. The line reads ‘Μοῖσα μοι ἀ[ν]φι Σκαμανδρον ευρων αρχομαι αει{ν}δεν’, which scans as hexameter, and seems to conflate two ideas of ‘Muse to me’, and ‘I begin to sing of the wide-flowing Scamander’ (Immerwahr 1964: 19). While the line is metrically sound, syntactically it merges two distinct constructions, certainly precluding it from being a line lifted from a now lost poem. While the literacy of vase-painters is still contested, and was probably varied in the Kerameikos, it is likely, given the range and competence of the painter’s other inscriptions, that Douris was literate (Buitron-Oliver 1995: 41-5; Sider 2010: 550). It is unclear in that scene whether the boy is reading from the scroll presented by the teacher, or perhaps is being asked to recite

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<sup>9</sup> It has been suggested that the chorus sang and danced (Kitto 1956). The ‘vivid and energetic rhythms’ of choral odes may indicate that the dancing of the chorus was equally lively (Kitto 1956: 6).

from memory. Douris' inclusion of these mistakes perhaps creates another, more credible visual interpretation: that the teacher is reading the student's unsound homework, perhaps pointing out corrections (Sider 2010: 550). In this example, the vase-painter includes an element of humour in an otherwise sombre scene of education. Given that Douris and Onesimos potentially worked very closely to one another (Beazley 1918: 97; Boardman 1975: 138), it is possible they may have shared each other's wit and sense of humour.

Whether we take the word 'στέσιχο|ρον' as meaning 'chorus-leading', the word will have still been associated with the poet Stesichorus. It is perhaps interesting that boustrophedon as a form of epigraphic writing and the floruit of Stesichorus are contemporary, even if this vase is later. Notably, funerary epigrams from the sixth century are sometimes inscribed boustrophedon. One such epigram commemorates Tettichos, who died in war, and dates to ca. 575-550 BCE (*IG* i<sup>3</sup> 1194bis). While the forms of grave epigram poetry and the lyric poetry of Stesichorus are dissimilar, they are both contemporary. It is possible this was known by Onesimos, who chose to use this script to visually connect the form of writing to the period of the insinuated poet. It has been noted that grave epigrams are connected to the image of the dead (Day 1989: 21), and here we also see the same cognitive connection of the inscriber—in the same way these boustrophedon grave epigrams connected to the image on the tombstone, this boustrophedon scroll connects to the image of the school. Thus, boustrophedon acts in both cases as a form of script that links image and text.

The reference to Stesichorus may also have another usage. Diogenianus (early second century CE), in his list of proverbs, records the phrase 'οὐδὲ τὰ τρία Στησιχόρου γινῶναι' (Diogenian.7.14) as something said of the illiterate; not knowing your Stesichorus became, by this date, a marker of the ill-educated (Davies 1982; Pitotto 2015). It is impossible to know when this proverb became part of common parlance. However, if it was used in the late-Archaic period, perhaps this connection added further depths to the humour; poking fun at those that would be unable to read the inscription. This play on words implies both a literate producer and consumer able to understand the complexities of this witticism, and implies the proximity of an illiterate audience

at whom the joke is directed. Like the poorly written scroll on Douris' kylix, literacy (and illiteracy) becomes a source of humour. Here the joke links with the scenes adorning the vase—the inability to understand the joke probably reflected the inability to relate to the school scene.

If humour was conveyed by the text, it is possible it was also conveyed in the image. It has been noted that the kylix bears two unusual uses of frontal faces—one older man in the kylix (fig. 2), and one youth leaning against a column on side B (fig. 3). It has already been suggested, given the comparison to the Cage Painter's kylix, that rather than a servant, the naked youth may be a student returning to the school after exercising. If we interpret the older male in the tondo to be dictating to the youth seated in front of him (Beazley 1927: 13), it is likely this figure is a teacher. Korshak's analysis of frontal faces on Archaic vases illustrates their use to create pathos; in the dead/dying/endangered, in the physically burdened, and in the spiritually burdened or moved (Korshak 1987: 2). This interpretation of frontal faces seems correct in the rest of Onesimos' work. For instance, in one example, a frontal face is used on the figure of Kerkyon as he struggles in a fight with Theseus (Paris G 104), and in another, Troilos is given a frontal face in the final struggle before his death at the hands of Achilles (Perugia 89).

But how are we to read the frontal faces on our vase? If we take the teacher's face as indicative of 'spiritual burden', this rendering is designed to illustrate the teacher's exasperation at his students. The fragmentation makes this difficult to ascertain—perhaps the student was engaged in a particularly imprudent activity. A similar scene is found on side B of the Cage Painter's kylix (fig. 4), in which a draped bearded figure, probably best interpreted as a teacher, has a frontal face that is perhaps in the same posture of exasperation. Beazley noted that the Cage Painter was related to the Antiphon Painter (Beazley 1963: 348), who, like Onesimos, paints cups potted by Euphronios (Berlin F 2303), and whose style shows close parallels with our painter (Boardman 1975: 135). It is therefore likely the Cage Painter and Onesimos belonged to the same workshop and the exasperated teacher was probably an iconographic joke shared between the painters. As for the naked youth, it is possible his frontal face indicates his tiredness from exercise. Alternatively, his entry into the school



space may account for his ‘spiritual burden’; perhaps his frontal face is intended to indicate his despair. With this interpretation, it is therefore possible that both these frontal faces, like the inscription, may have conveyed humour. If the scroll on side A was designed to amuse the literate, the frontal faces on side B and the tondo may have been used to amuse the illiterate, perhaps suggesting Onesimos was trying to cater to both possible audiences. Together, they augment the scene with humour, subverting an otherwise sombre vase.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to reimagine Onesimos’ images on this kylix through its relation to text. When text and image are considered together, it becomes clear that the Onesimos used both as a vehicle of humour, perhaps aimed at two distinct audiences. Upon analysis, the visual implications of *bou-strophedon* suggest possible connotations with sculpture on two vases, and the possible imitation of the dancing chorus on our kylix. These inscriptions help us understand the scenes, perhaps accessing the intended connotations of the images created by the vase-painter. These connotations help us understand the creative processes of the painter, and in this case, the wit introduced by painters into otherwise sober scenes.

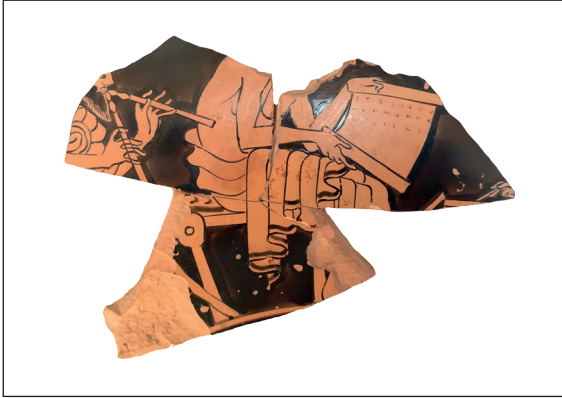
## **Acknowledgements**

I am hugely grateful to Dr Thomas Mannack for his thoughtful observations and suggestions, and constant academic supervision. I am indebted to the anonymous reviewers of this paper, who gave insightful, perceptive and pertinent advice and additions. I am sincerely thankful to the Ashmolean Picture Library, and particularly Erica Martin, for allowing reproduction of the images of this vase, and to Liam McNamara, Curator for Ancient Egypt and Sudan at the Ashmolean, for granting access to these fragments. A debt of thanks is also due to Dr Amin Benaissa for his advice on the papyrological record. Thanks also to Prof. Lin Foxhall for her suggestions and support in the early period of this research. Thanks are also due to Isabella van der Sande for checking over the illustrations for this paper.

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*Fig. 1.* Fragment A of Onesimos' kylix, with inscribed scroll (Oxford G.138.3.a). Image reproduced by kind permission of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Author's own image.



*Fig. 2.* Fragment B of Onesimos' kylix, from the tondo (Oxford G.138.3.b). Image reproduced by kind permission of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Author's own image.



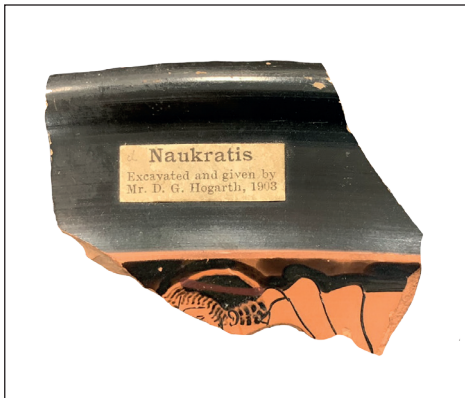
*Fig. 3.* Fragment C of Onesimos' kylix, with naked youth (Oxford G.138.3.c). Image reproduced by kind permission of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Author's own image.



*Fig. 4.* Drawing of sides A and B of a kylix by the Cage Painter (Louvre G 318). Author's own image.



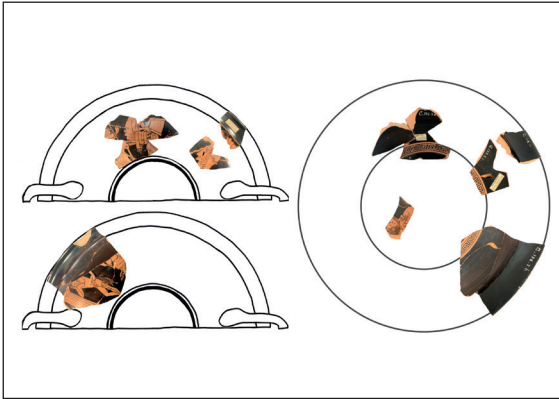
*Fig. 5.* Fragment D of Onesimos' kylix, preserving drapery of figure (Oxford G.138.3.d). Image reproduced by kind permission of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Author's own image.



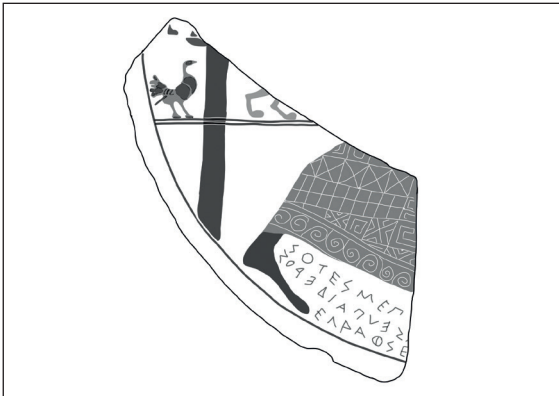
*Fig. 6.* Fragment E of Onesimos' kylix, preserving head of figure (Oxford G.138.3.e). Image reproduced by kind permission of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Author's own image.



*Fig. 7.* Drawing of sides A and B of a kylix by Douris (Berlin F 2285). Author's own image.



*Fig. 8.* Reconstruction of sides A and B, and tondo, of Onesimos's kylix (Oxford G.138.3.a-e). Images reproduced by kind permission of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Author's own image.



*Fig. 9.* Drawing of a plate fragment signed by the potter Sotes and the painter Paideros (Athens, Agora AP 1859A-B). Author's own image.



*Fig. 10.* Drawing of a fragmentary olpe (Rome 6 A). Author's own image.

# Maybe it's a Sign: Observation and Doubt in a Mesopotamian Omen Series

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## Abstract

Focused on the liminal zone where physical landscapes meet supernatural perception, the Akkadian omen text *Šumma Ālu* theorizes an emic, subjective imagery and interpretation for archaeologically-known urban environments of first-millennium Mesopotamia. Throughout 120 tablets, omens with explicit ‘observers’ are juxtaposed with those in which the portent is merely present. By contrast, at least some of these omens are, implicitly, unobserved. The paradox of a sign beyond sight yet within concern of the omen system complicates the role of the senses and of observer-agents in forming ominous meaning. Omens in practice could only have dealt with observed phenomena. Why, then, would the solely theoretical category of unobserved signs exist in the compendia, a text to inform practice? I offer that unobserved signs assert the emic existence of an external, objective—in Mesopotamian terms—reality at the fundament of the omen system, independent of the observer’s mechanical liabilities and doubts. Observed omens then integrate this certain systemic basis with uncertain human action and thought, generating meanings which *can* be doubted. Although paradoxical, coexistence yet distinction between uncertainty localized in the observer and certainty grounded in the system is what allows incongruities between predicted and real outcomes to accumulate without undermining the perceived value of divination. Incongruities do, however, perpetuate doubt of the self, but even the observer’s self-doubt is productive, maintaining the very anxiety which fuels appeal for augury. Not merely a catalog of ominous images, the purposeful constructions of this text thus mediate Mesopotamian participants’ perception of the ominous system

as a whole while negotiating its own expanded definitions of the nature, observability, and discontents of ‘image.’

### The Ominous World of *Šumma Ālu*<sup>1</sup>

From wailing demons and the waking dead to flaming rivers and cannibalistic sheep, the signs which populate the first-millennium terrestrial omen series *Šumma Ālu* puncture the membrane of mundane life, jolting observers into parallel planes of thought where prediction precipitates from the liminal fringes of possibility (Guinan 2002: 7). However, besides those which assault the senses, other signs rift the fabric of normalcy in ways less obvious, like ants in a gateway (37:93). Conversely, a shocking light-flash, which in 43 preceding variants portended affliction, “should not” even be “take[n] as an omen” (*ana itti lā iṣabbat*) if seen “from afar” (20:44). Not only must a Mesopotamian observer be able to identify what images qualify as signs categorically but also where lies the inflection point at which the unremarkable crests over into the strange—just how many twins constitute a normal versus “numerous” population? The ruin of cities is at stake (1: 80, 90).

Throughout the minimally 120 tablets of *Šumma Ālu*, the definition of these ominous categories and thresholds is necessarily negotiated and ambiguated by the interfering actions, limited sensory faculties, and interpretive filters of observers and diviners (Freedman 1998: 2). However, omens with explicit “observers” are juxtaposed with those in which the same portent is merely present. For example, the protasis in which “a ghost cries out” (*eṭem-mu issi...*) is followed by: “if a ghost cries out and someone hears it” (*...issi-ma šēmū iṣme...*; 19: 46, 47). By contrast and proximity, the first omen adopts the implication of being unobserved. More rarely, there are even signs explicitly unseen (44:17<sup>2</sup>). The paradox of a sign simultaneously beyond the ambit of observability yet also within the interests of the omen system poses questions regarding the role of sensory perception as process and of the observer as agent

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1 All transliterations come from S. Freedman with my normalization and translation based upon her work; given remote research, I do not have access to the tablets to collate.



in the formation of ominous meaning as derived from images, seen and unseen.

In this paper, to investigate the relation of signs to observers, I typologize terrestrial omens by examining the intersection of observation and action. Although heuristic, these types illustrate that the formation of ominous meaning is a participatory process in which observer and observed interact and negotiate their respective contributions; the structure of the text at sentence level and across omens thus constructs an eclectic Mesopotamian meaning for ‘image,’ at least in a divinatory context, as an assemblage of experiential, interactive, even embodied axes of intensity. At one extreme, unexperienced signs completely circumnavigate the observer, their meaning derived from sources removed from human interference. Yet, omens in daily practice could only have dealt with observed phenomena. Why, then, would this solely theoretical category of signs exist in the compendia, a text to inform practice? I offer that the pervasive distribution of unobserved signs throughout *Šumma Ālu* asserts the emic existence of an external and therefore objective reality—objective in Mesopotamian terms—at the fundament of the omen system, independent not only of the observer’s mechanical liabilities but also his doubts. Observed omens integrate this certain systemic basis with uncertain human action and thought, generating new meaning but meaning which can be doubted. Although paradoxical, this constructed coexistence yet distinction between uncertainty localized in the observer and certainty in system is what allows incongruities between predicted and real outcomes to accumulate without undermining the perceived value of divination. These incongruities do perpetuate doubt of the self, but even the omen observer’s self-doubt is unexpectedly productive, maintaining the very anxiety which fuels the need for augury and its textual elaboration.

### **Typology of Action**

Mesopotamian divination is often divided into two subgroups, provoked and unprovoked, by specificity of the question posed for augury. Provoked divination seeks godly guidance for a particular query; the gods are ‘provoked’ to respond promptly with a specific answer whether in sheep entrails or swirls

of oil (Ellis 1989: 145; Maul 2007: 361-362, 364). While extispicy is the exemplar of provoked augury, terrestrial omens are traditionally lumped into the unprovoked category, materializing to the surprise rather than the summoning of their onlookers (Maul 2007: 368). Unprovoked omens arise from the gods' will to send a message, coded as image, into the physical world and not in response to any previously posited question (Koch 2010b: 45). However, this label 'unprovoked' applies a mask of homogeneity, even passivity, over the actual variety in terrestrial omen formation (Ellis 1989: 155, 158; Maul 2007: 364). Perhaps the 'black cat' cannot be called at will, but the degree to which a person subsequently interacts with the cat—and cat with person—changes the predictive outcome. Not only can objects, animals, and states be signs but so can actions and inactions, both accidental and intentional; the text thus defines 'signs' as more than just those bold icons with clear visual bounds (e.g., the black cat) but rather blurs the notion of image iconicity and clarity by encompassing also spatially and temporally *unbounded* actions and conditions. For example, the king fulfilling rituals on a cyclical basis or a man digging a well counter the typical notion of 'unprovoked' omens as discrete signs simply sent at the gods' behest for which observers must wait.

To illustrate the range of pathways which generate terrestrial signs, I discuss five types of interaction between observer, observed, and observation as the process by which sign and signified may attach:

1. A sign passively exists and is observed

DIŠ EME.ŠID *ša*<sub>2</sub> 2 KUN.MEŠ-*šu*<sub>2</sub> u *ša*<sub>2</sub> ZAG GID<sub>2</sub>.DA *ina* E<sub>2</sub> [NA IGI DIN]GIR.ŠA<sub>3</sub>.DIB.BA *ana* LU<sub>2</sub> [ŠUB.MEŠ]

If<sup>2</sup> a lizard with two tails and the right one (being) long **is seen** in the house of a [man, divine] wrath will [repeatedly befall] the man (Nineveh 32:2').

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2 There are debates as to the best normalization/translation of DIŠ in *Šumma Ālu* and other omen series. Semantically, "if" makes sense, but DIŠ may not have been rendered in speech as *šumma* but rather served like a 'bullet point' to mark the start of each entry, with "if" implied (see Rochberg 2010 for DIŠ debate and her "P implies Q" omen formatting). For this essay, I normalize omens beginning with *šumma* to communicate the concept of the conditional statement, the fundamental structure of the text.

2. A sign performs an action and is observed

DIŠ EME.ŠID MUŠ KU<sub>2</sub>-*ma* *ina* E<sub>2</sub> NA IGI *ana* E<sub>2</sub> BI <SU>.KU<sub>2</sub> ŠUB-*su*

If a lizard **eats** a snake **and is seen** in the house of a man, famine will befall that house (Nineveh 32:50').

3. A sign performs an action and is (possibly) unobserved

DIŠ EME.ŠID *ina tal-lak-ti* E<sub>2</sub> NA [U<sub>3</sub>.TU] ŠUB E<sub>2</sub>

If a lizard [**gives birth**] in the walkway of the house of a man, downfall of the house (Nineveh 32:53').

4. A sign acts upon the observer

DIŠ EME.ŠID *ana* UGU GIR<sub>3</sub> NA E<sub>11</sub> *i-bad-du*

If a lizard **climbs onto** the foot of a man, he will rejoice (Nineveh 32:17').

5. An observer acts upon the sign

DIŠ NA *ina* NU ZU EME.DIR KI.U[Š] NU UG<sub>7</sub> N[A BI] A<sub>2</sub>.TUK TUK-*ši*

If a man unwittingly **treads upon a lizard** (but) does not kill it, [that] man will acquire gain (Assur 32:16').

In types one and two, the observer initiates construction of sign-significance by witnessing a static condition or entity, like a two-tailed lizard, or an active event, like a lizard eating a snake, which he recognizes as a 'sign' (Guinan 2002: 22). Without recognition, the image either does not exist as a sign or takes a different apodosis. In type five, such as a man stepping on a lizard, the observer participates further, his own action in part constituting the interactive event as a sign. The example specifies that the action was performed "unwittingly" whereas other type-five omens not having this designation as well as via content appear intentionally executed (e.g., 22:36). This illustrates internal variation within types. In all three aforementioned types, the observer either takes his own active verb in the protasis or his role is implied by the stative construction "is seen" (IGI-*ir*; *amir*). In contrast, a sign in a type-three omen is its own agent. A lizard giving birth in a pathway has self-activating meaning, presaging abandonment of a house despite that no observer explicitly enters the picture. Lastly, in type-four omens such as a lizard scaling someone's foot, the observer is present but not so much an agent as an object of the sign's action. The repetitive use and juxtaposition of these structural combinations indicates that syntax and verb form are not insignificant precipitates of the

text's content but conscious choices which themselves create meaning for the images described; the purposefully diverse and even contradictory conditions for these images' constitution as omens (observation, observability, lack of observation, interaction, etc.) together interlock as the paradoxical resilience of the system, both the abstract system of divinatory ontology and epistemology and its systemic textual manifestation.

Two points of clarification are in order. First, although its stem is a verb of observation, the stative construction "is seen" (*amir*) could be understood as describing an inherent quality of the sign rather than implying the silent presence of an observer. However, some omens offer the explicit addition of a human actor in conjunction with the passive-voice "is seen," clarifying that this frequent omission does not delete but merely delegates his presence to assumption:

[If... **i**]s **seen**, that marsh will lack reeds; **its eye-witness**<sup>3</sup> will become rich (63:58').

This combination of stative observation with an explicit noun for "eye-witness" (*āmiru*) suggests that omen types one and two are both observed, whether expressed by the stative or the rarer "an observer sees it" active phrase or variants.

This observation begs the question: why do only some omens with stative constructions receive "observer" addendums in their apodoses? The distinc-

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3 IGLA<sub>2</sub>.BI, which I translated "eye-witness," has multiple options for normalization and translation. This compound is in some texts equivalent to *awirānu* or "stagnant water" (CAD A/2 *amirānu*: 63). Within the context of this omen, this translation appears valid. However, Freedman translates as "its observer." I agree with Freedman's translation—IGLA<sub>2</sub> corresponds also to *āmiru* or *āmirānu*, while BI represents "its" or *-šu* (or "that"). I also prefer this reading given the verb "becoming wealthy" aligning well with a human subject. Alternatively, stagnant waters could be "rich" as in "abundant." However, the verb *šarû* is almost exclusively attested with human participants or an extension of the human (e.g., household) in the CAD (Š/2 *šarû*: 131-132).

tion appears to be one not of absence of an act of observation but rather regards the identity of the persons affected by the omen's outcome, indicating an element of effective directionality for the concept of 'image' in this text. For instance:

[If a turtle] is seen [in] the city square, that street will become silent; a great person of the city will die (63:63').

This example illustrates the contrast in ominous content between an omen with an explicit observer and one lacking such. Whereas the former type sees the predictive power of the sign focused on the observer himself, the latter type has no need to expressly write an "observer" into the prediction. If the observer is not the affectee of the omen outcome (but instead a different figure like the "great person" above), his role initiating sign significance can be abbreviated as an implication of *amir*.

Secondly, not all "observers" need be human nor signs inhuman. Tablet 22 provides numerous examples of when "a snake sees a man" (MUŠ NA IGI; *šerru amēla imur*) with no mention of that man seeing the snake (22:26-32). Whether such role-reversal omens should count as type-one with snake as observer and human as image or type-three with the snake as unobserved sign matters less than the recognition that in these omens, human sensory faculties which filter external observation into internal perception cannot, at least rhetorically, be the means by which meaning is formed. Unlike other omen types, the semantic glue securing sign to signified is not observation but observability.

## Observables Unobserved

For the purposes of this paper, I define observation as the actual event of mobilizing the senses to gather and internalize information from the exterior world (Larsen 1987: 212). Observability, rather, involves encultured understandings of what is possible to perceive through the senses (Guinan 2002: 10; Rochberg 2010: 376, 388). This category of possibles may exceed, overlap, or fall short of (biologically) real experience (Larsen 1987: 213; Maul 2007: 361;

Rochberg 1999: 562-565; Rochberg 2010: 389). Even if a first-millennium Mesopotamian might never see a *šedu*-demon with his own eyes in a biological sense (although indeed with encultured eyes of a psychological sense), the demon is still an observable in that observation is considered possible (*amir*) according to *Šumma Ālu*.

I use the example of the demon to illustrate definitions. However, an omen in which a *šedu*-demon “is seen” in fact relies on both principles of observation (theoretically) and observability to make meaningful the prediction (19: 34’; Guinan 2002: 29). This is due to the nature of the sign—the observable demon—in conjunction with the nature of how the sign is known—observation. Real sight (*amāru*) is explicitly invoked as the meaningful application of the senses which constitutes this micro-narrative as ominous. The notion of observation of ‘image,’ at least ominous images, is thus not related in a biological sense to only those omens which are truly possible to see, hear, or smell (natural versus supernatural), but rather concerns what *Šumma Ālu* as a theoretical, scholarly text *itself* identifies as situations of observation—the text determining (observed) ‘image’ (Rochberg 2010: 388).

Observability becomes the sole principle of meaning-making only in unwitnessed omens, unhinged from observation. Although the observer is excluded from the scene, the sign still predicts an outcome; these images exist independent of observation, but only in the textual and theoretical dimensions of the omen system, not in discrete events of practice. “If a mongoose gives birth in the lower courses of the city-gate,” even if no one watches, “the dispersal of the city” is nevertheless anticipated (34:1 [DIŠ “NIN.KI]LIM *ina a-su-re-e* [KA<sub>2</sub>].GAL U<sub>3</sub>.TU BIR-*ah* URU). Despite lack of observation, the protasis remains an emic observable—the mongoose is understood as ‘seeable’ if only an observer were present at the precise time and place. Observability without actual observation links sign and significance (Koch 2010a: 129).

However, in the example above, the text is ambiguous as to whether the sign *must* be observed or unobserved to proffer the specific outcome. Given the simplicity of attaching a brief *amir* (IGI) to the protasis, omission of any reference to observation appears purposeful. This is not to say that this omen

must go unobserved. Rather, the act of observation seems here irrelevant to the nature of the outcome. This opens the door, then, with ambiguous type-three omens teetering on the threshold, to the realm of unobserved omina, imagery beyond human experience.

While it could be argued that such types of omens lacking verbs or nouns of observation merely delegate this act to assumption, other omens in which the sign is explicitly “not seen” demonstrate concretely the existence of phenomena that not only can but must occur beyond the ambit of the senses:

If an animal of the mountains, in a city whose city-wall is intact, city-gate is fast, and population(?)<sup>4</sup> has left(?), goes out of its city-gate and **is not seen** (NU IGI-*er*; *lā amir*), the people of the city will be thwa[rtd], that city will be abandoned, and its governors will be removed (44:17’).

This does not prove that omens such as 34:1 above similarly require a lack of observation. To the contrary, as I have argued that the lack of *amir* or other vocabulary in a clause is a conscious omission, lack of *lā amir* is as well. What such examples of explicitly unobserved omens do attest is that the ambiguity of type-three omens is an intentional construction. If *Šumma Ālu* only evidenced explicitly observed omens and ambiguous type-three omens, we may have no reason to assume that ambiguous omens are not merely operating with the assumption of unexpressed observation. However, since *Šumma Ālu* offers both forms of explicit omens (explicitly observed, explicitly unobserved), this means the *possibility* of type-three omens to take either condition is real.

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<sup>4</sup> The contextually-appropriate translation of NAM.LU<sub>2</sub>.U<sub>18</sub>.LU or NAM.LU<sub>2</sub>.U<sub>x</sub>.LU (Akkadian *amīlūtu* or *amēlūtu*) is ambiguous. Freedman translated as “population” of the city, a well-attested meaning according to the CAD (A/2 *amīlutu* 1c1’: 60). I have followed Freedman’s lead. However, other well-attested readings include specifically (status of) free men or workers, retainers, or enslaved people (57-63). These readings could suit the context here, too, especially as a different term for “population” (UN.MEŠ, *nīšu*) is used in the apodosis as if referring to a different group than the former NAM.LU<sub>2</sub>.U<sub>18</sub>.LU.

Yet, predictions produced by the same sign (explicitly) observed and (potentially) unobserved often differ. Therefore, in some cases of the ambiguous type-three omens, we can in fact infer whether the omen demands observation or its lack given other omens in its vicinity:

If a ghost cries out in the house of a man / cries out in the gateway, dispersal of the house (19:46').<sup>5</sup>

If a ghost cries out **and someone hears it**, downfall of the house; the man will die, and (there will be) mourning (19: 47').

That the two omens deliver different outcomes while drawing upon the same sign suggests that their conditions of observation must differ. Given that the second omen is explicitly observed (*šēmū išme*), the first cannot be— a kind of image known not visually but only textually, a priori.

The change in outcome that occurs at the moment of observation suggests a Mesopotamian rendition of the “observer effect”; mere observation manipulates phenomena under scrutiny, the Heisenbergian observer necessarily prodding a metaphorical quantum particle out of place to measure its momentum. Thus, observers can expect only some of the possible range of apodoses to arise from the signs they see, because by the very act of seeing, the outcomes for that sign unobserved become inaccessible. For those types of unseen signs paired with observed variants, the outcome can only occur if the sign is utterly unwatched. In these cases, the absence of an observer or verbs of seeing or hearing does not indicate optional observation but demands lack of surveillance to predict the outcome specified.

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<sup>5</sup> Slash indicates *Glossenkeil*; read “or.”

The interpretation of the *Glossenkeil* for this context (as it can have different meanings between and even within texts) is that it separates two variants for the omen. Either option in the protasis (a ghost crying out in the house *or* a ghost crying out upon the threshold) will result in the same outcome. See U. Gabbay 2016: “The commentaries reveal how some non-verbal features in the text were realized when read out. Thus, the *Glossenkeil* separating variant versions in the base text was probably rendered as *šantš*” (19).



Unobserved omens permeate this tablet series in non-trivial numbers (although statistical analyses of omen types have not yet been conducted, and artefact damage hinders quantification). Thus, the text and the omen system it expresses clearly invest interest in a rhetorical, theoretical realm of ominous signaling which diverges from divination's daily applications. What use was it to record omens which, although observable in theory, could never be known in practice without mutating their trajectories of prediction?

I offer that the purposeful juxtaposition, wide distribution, and self-generative significance of unobserved signs throughout *Šumma Ālu* asserts the existence of an external and therefore (culturally-subjective perception of) objective reality as the unadulterated basis of the omen system. Unobserved omens exist in their own arena beyond the purview of the human senses and yet predict events pertinent to human society. These signs without observers, observers not only liable to err but whose presence is interference, are assuredly tamper-free and thus so are their outcomes—their predictions take on unique certainty given immunity from the observer effect. This certainty cannot be verified by observation, but paradoxically, it is exactly this lack of observation which allows for certainty. Unobserved omens, then, lend externally-sourced authority not so much to each individual omen in turn but rather to the integrated system of terrestrial divination as a whole. The system is thus bolstered “by removing expected reasons to doubt its veracity”—human interference (Boyer 2020: 103). If, as Boyer outlines, divination's perceived reliability is “a direct function of the perceived reality of detachment” from human biases, then unobserved omens are the epitome of credibility via detachment, even if that credibility in pure form exists only in believers' cognitive maps (104). The text therefore appeals to verisimilitude by cleaving the expected tie between image and observer.

### **Divination's Doubts and Durability**

This affirmation of the omen system's objective theoretical foundation suggests, then, recognition and reaction to an undercurrent of doubt coursing through the interface where omens in thought meet omens in practice. Why expend time and tablet surface area elaborating unseen signs—invoking objec-

tivity—if the efficacy of observation was not already subject to skepticism and in need of rhetorical buttressing?

Doubt abounds when omens are observed, intermixing structure and agents. Although the sign itself remains an outgrowth of a certain systemic basis, the sign’s meaning becomes malleable at the introduction of human action and thought. A nonprofessional observer of omens is an added filter through which the production of meaning must now pass (Rochberg 1999: 565). Can he be trusted to recognize that the ants in a gateway are indeed a sign or that a light-flash “seen... from afar” is not an omen at all (37:93, 20:44)? The official diviner has his own uncertainties (Maul 2007: 365, 370). Despite his familiarity with the textual corpus, the diviner’s ability to determine predictions are muddled by omens with ambivalent outcomes:

If (of) a city, its rubbish heap is green,<sup>6</sup> that city will flourish /  
will become desolate (1:42).

We saw earlier a case in which the *Glossenkeil* (slash in translation) marked multiple options for the protasis of an omen (19:46’) as opposed to this instance demonstrating ambivalence in apodoses. While the former offers possible enhancement of textual usability by streamlining multiple image inputs to shared output, the latter appears only to tangle the hermeneutic wires of the omen scholar, leaving him at an interpretive standstill and the omen system a (seemingly) self-contradictory and ineffective endeavor.

Thus, not only does doubt reside in the self—in an observer’s limited sensorial capacities and diviner’s interpretive idiosyncrasies (Boyer 2020: 110). These actors also have the potential to aim their uncertainties at the overarch-

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6 The sign used here for “green” is SIG<sub>5</sub>. However, SIG<sub>7</sub> represents “green” (*arqu*). SIG<sub>5</sub> is unexpected and not supported by CAD examples (A/2 *arqu*: 300). However, this could be an instance of a sign with shared pronunciation value representing another. The typical meaning of SIG<sub>5</sub> (*damāqu*) does not fit with the content of the omen. Unfortunately, I cannot collate the sign at this time.

ing system based on incongruities between predictions and reality.

In debates surrounding divination in the Near East and other anthropological contexts, interpretations of purpose and effect frequently propose that such practices, especially Mesopotamian divination, sought not so much to predict the future as to provide guidance for actions in the present, to offer a sense of control amid life's usual fog of uncertainty, potentially even to rearrange social structures towards further cohesion or, just as effectively, tension (Boyer 2020: 100, 111; Ellis 1989: 171, 175; Guinan 2002: 25; Koch 2010a: 129, 140-141; Koch 2010b: 44; Maul 2007: 363; Myhre 2006: 313; Rochberg 2010: 378). While I support much of this interpretation, I would like to challenge the reasoning which tends to follow—that accuracy or inaccuracy of specific predictions was of little emic concern or at least less concern than that of textual play upon paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures (Ellis 1989: 172; Rochberg 2010: 378, 387, 391).

As Rochberg states, “the validity of inferences such as are allowed by conditional statements is syntactic not semantic,” as theoretical validity derives from the truth-functionality of a conditional's logical construction as opposed to a pragmatic correspondence between an ominous consequent and a real, observed outcome (2010: 393). However, while it elucidates a potential appeal driving scholarly popularity of omen texts, this reasoning does not offer an explanation for divination's popularity with the general populace in concrete situations of omens' application and advisory capabilities, capabilities which would seem to depend on predictions' accuracy to the ‘imagery’ of outcome. Other forms of argumentation which appeal to a *lack* of emic emphasis on accuracy can, however, explain the persistent appeal of omen systems despite inevitable abrasion of expectation against reality (Guinan 2002: 19). Cross-culturally, self-destruction is said to be averted by participants simply waiving intellectual emphasis away from predictions' veracity or else appealing to confirmation bias to dispel social memories of predictions' discord (Boyer 2020: 100; Larsen 1987: 203-205, 223).

However, as discussed above, *Šumma Ālu* itself contemplates and problematizes – not ignores – observation, observability, and objectivity, display-

ing not only awareness but engagement with this interface where real and possible mingle in the concept of image. As Koch and others aver, divination was indeed used as “a practical means of obtaining otherwise inaccessible information... beyond the range of ordinary human understanding” – in which case, accuracy and outcome matter (Koch 2010b: 44). But *Šumma Ālu* is not only a mere how-to manual of terrestrial divination. It grapples with Mesopotamian ontology and epistemology, warranting a closer reassessment of this issue of predictions and their truth.

Discord between outcomes predicted in omen apodoses and those observed would seem to rapidly undermine the efficacy and perceived value of divination. The frequency of such dissonance would seem to erode even the power of confirmation bias in sustaining faith in the system on the tenuous basis of cherry-picked concords. Boyer concurs, “most ethnographic reports suggest that people, far from endorsing all statements produced by divination, often entertain doubts about specific diagnoses or are suspicious of the qualifications of particular diviners” (2020: 102, 109). Observers are thus compelled to doubt, but their doubt need not be an all-encompassing rejection, nor evasion, of prediction. An unexpectedly productive paradox arises: omens can still be trusted, but only if they are *not* to be trusted.

In any predictive practice, whether augury or quantum mechanics, concentrated doses of uncertainty must be introduced in order for participants to accept that observed outputs may defy expectation without necessitating dismissal of the system entirely (Rochberg 1999: 561). When hypotheses differ from experimental results, physicists do not throw their hands in the air and reject science; they question whether assumptions were justified, whether methods require modification, or if data were misinterpreted. In short, observers doubt themselves and thus maintain general trust in the overarching systems in which they operate. This localization of uncertainty is evident in the observed omens of *Šumma Ālu*.

Inquiring into the rhetorical effects of unobserved omens suggested they draw authority from existence external to uncertain observers and that they lend this authoritative baseline to the system as a whole. Interrogation of the

observed omens involves the same question in reverse—why *include* signs which require interaction with an uncertain observer to formulate their predictions? Why envision an entire class of omens where image is muddled and meaning colored with doubt? Just as unobserved omens situate reliability in structure, I argue that observed omens constrain doubt to the role of the intervening human and his bounded ability to observe rather than allow its spread into other or all aspects of the system. By interweaving and contrasting the diverse array of omens typologized above, from signs devoid of observation to acts of intentional disturbance, *Šumma Ālu* constructs coexistence but vivid distinction between certainty of the omen system and uncertainty of the observer. Observers thus doubt themselves and their abilities to assess portentous images while seeking certainty at the systemic level.

Self-doubt renders divination ironically durable. Not only is the inevitability of skepticism offered a limited channel in which to flow without, at least too frequently, flooding into the rest of the system, threatening faith in the utility of omens in the abstract. Self-doubt of the observer, the consumer of omens, additionally sets up a positive feedback loop perpetuating the very unease that omens intend to service, creating steady demand. This tension between trust in the system but uncertainty in an individual's ability to tap into its images could be the very anxious, generative force behind the textual expansion of terrestrial omens from humble precursors in the Old Babylonian Period into the thousands of thematically organized and detailed entries of *Šumma Ālu* known from the mid seventh century BCE (Ellis 1989: 156; Freedman 1998: 2; Koch 2010b: 43; Larsen 1987: 214; Maul 2007: 367; Rochberg 1999: 563).

## Conclusion

The interplay of observation, observability, and action throughout *Šumma Ālu* illuminates the ways in which Mesopotamians who saw and interpreted 'signs' dealt with doubt—the doubt pervading existence generally, doubt embodied in the liabilities of observers' senses, and doubt arising from paradoxes in the very predictive system which attempted to assuage it. Certainty and uncertainty are produced by meaningful construction and juxtaposition

of different omen types. Both conditions, simultaneous but separate, are critical to divination's perceived integrity despite ongoing contradictions between propositions internal and observations external. Rather than assuming that the accuracy or inaccuracy of forecasted outcomes was more or less ignored by participants, this analysis of the mechanics internal to *Šumma Ālu* suggests that Mesopotamians who engaged with the divinatory system consciously addressed this issue of prediction and that they did so without dismissing the importance of the images they observed.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Seth F. Richardson for teaching me about Mesopotamian divination, inspiring me to write this essay originally for his course on Babylonian Knowledge, and always offering his endless support for my endeavors and his wisdom and advice on my work. The credit for the inspiration of this paper and of the questions that drive it is all due to his wonderful teaching on how to meaningfully engage with ancient texts and draw out the voices and stories of the past they hold within.

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# Beyond the Written Content – the deliberate use and omission of coin inscriptions

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## Abstract

The interplay between text and image is at the core of every numismatic study. Quite surprisingly, this phenomenon, especially for the pre-imperial period, has never been studied systematically before. Our contribution aims to understand in what ways text and image could interact on coins and what role they played in shaping the overall message of the coin as an important public mass medium in antiquity. To illustrate the potential of coins for inter-medial investigations, two case studies will be used: *symmachia* coinage from the Classical period in eight cities on the Mediterranean Sea and the meander pattern on Late Classical/Hellenistic coins from eight cities located in the Maeander Valley (Asia Minor).

## 1. Introduction

### History of research: image and text in different media

‘The man who has heard (the historian) thinks afterwards that he can see what is being said.’ (Lucian. *Hist. Conscr.* 51)

The interplay of image and text as two competing and interacting, yet separate, systems was already known in antiquity—this is especially evident in the Greek word ‘graphein’, which means both ‘to draw’ and ‘to write’. This relationship between image and text as two different systems remains one of the core areas of many research disciplines, such as archaeology, art history,

or media and communication studies. The relevance of the relationship, as well as the hierarchy, of image and text is expressed in two turns named the 'linguistic' and the 'iconic' turn, each of which argued for the primacy of one medium over the other (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 245–278). The linguistic turn focuses on grasping and defining the world through language and words. The limits of language and speech correspond therefore with the limits of reality and thought. The iconic turn can be understood as a counterstrategy to the linguistic turn and focuses on the methodological approach to understand the world through images. The iconic turn postulates therefore the intrinsic power of images in order to gain a new access to visual cultures and perceptions (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 246).

As Michael Squire (2009: 15–17) has already pointed out, particularly in ancient studies, strong logocentrism prevails. As part of the linguistic turn, the logocentric approach is especially focused on analysing written sources, which, in contrast to images, allows for unaltered and direct access to understanding the ancient world. As such, he and other researchers tried to bridge the gap between image studies and textual studies by investigating the multifaceted interaction of image and text in antiquity. Of particular note is the anthology 'Art and Inscriptions in the Ancient World' (Newby and Leader-Newby 2007), which examined this interaction using three methodological approaches: 'looking at the word behind an image, the words an image can provoke, and the parallel, yet separate ways in which word and image communicate' (Newby and Leader-Newby 2007: 5). Numismatics did not play a role in Newby and Leader-Newby's (2007) volume, which focused primarily on archaeological sources. This paper will discuss the coins as additional medium which functions as an important carrier of image and text. Due to the reduced size of a coin, both systems must interact or communicate in a very confined space, which will be explored in depth within the following sections.

### **Coins as a medium of communication**

Coins have a dual function as a means of payment and a medium of visual communication, especially of city-related topics. This means that coins utilise a communication model that assumes a sender-receiver relationship: the

sender, in this case the minting authority, consciously decides on the design of the coin in order to convey selected information and messages (Lorenz 2016: 172–183; Martin 2011: 91–98; 2016: 3–8). This deliberate choice means that the selected messages were expected to be understood by the recipients. Conversely, it must also be assumed that coin images were consciously perceived and interpreted by the viewers according to their own knowledge. In some cases, messages were intentionally designed for their expected audience. The practice of the so-called ‘audience-targeting’ includes restricting images to certain denominations or metals so that gold and silver coins, for example, included different images than bronze coins (Hekster 2003; Noreña 2011).

Coin images only rarely depict reality: they adapted especially image contents from other visual media such as sculptures, statues, reliefs etc., but in simplified or condensed versions of the objects that could be found in real life. Moreover, they were often loaded with additional messages. Thus, the images depicted on the coins are like a code with additional visual semantics that had to be deciphered to understand the different layers of meaning (Schierl 2001: 217). Conversely, however, the complexity of coin images also means that the viewer’s level of information is thus crucial for understanding the image—not only in antiquity but also in modern times. The viewer’s knowledge about the meanings of the image must be preserved in order to fully understand it.

### **Text and images on coins**

Inscriptions and images on coins can serve various purposes. The simplest yet most important function of the inscription was the naming of the minting authority. Particularly in the Archaic period of the ancient Greek world, these minting authorities were cities, which would depict their most important deity. By the Classical period, individuals such as kings, dynasts or emperors could also place their name and image on coins, thus giving it a propagandistic function. In addition to the purpose of guaranteeing value, naming the minting authority, and communicating propaganda, the text on coins can also fulfil a fourth primary function related solely to the coin image: explaining the image by ‘naming’ it. This was especially necessary when the visual language was new or not understandable and therefore had to be translated or

explained by text (Ritter 2002: 154–156). Particularly exciting, but currently underrepresented in numismatic research, is the phenomenon of intermediality — the complementary or contrary interaction of image and text that goes beyond the mere explanation or confirmation of the image by text.

One of the few researchers to discuss this phenomenon, Susanne Muth (2006), using imperial coinage as a case study, argued that text and image can interact through the combination of complementary contents. The coin image can be combined with text that has a non-descriptive connection to the image. For example, a denar under Probus shows the emperor in a military dress receiving a wreath from Victoria (fig. 1). Usually, the depiction is supplemented by an inscription that describes the scene, such as VICTORIA or VIRTVS AVGVSTI. However, in this case, the inscription is CONCORDIA MILITVM, which means that the text alludes to the unity of the army, which forms the backbone of the emperor's victories. This concord is therefore the overarching theme of the depiction, the inscription does not describe the image itself. Only by considering the image and the inscription in tandem is it possible to understand this coin's combined message. Susanne Muth (2006: 9–10) suggests the addition of the inscription leads to a clear narrowing and hierarchization of the coin's multilayered interpretations beyond what the image alone could offer. The viewer's possibilities of understanding the image were thus defined by text.

Not only do text and images function as two separate systems, the boundaries between the two are fluid, which means that texts can function as part of the image, such as an inscription on the temple of the Bithynian *koinon* minted in Nikomedeia (fig. 2). Conversely, images can serve as pictograms: the rose on the coins of Rhodes is a pun on the city's name, which means exactly 'rose' in Greek (fig. 3).

Overall, the interaction of image and text has been presented in the modern research landscape in the form of single case studies for the Imperial period but has not yet been systematically investigated (Watson 2021). The Greek period is especially neglected; missing corpora make any systematic investigation difficult and Greek coins are often underestimated in their complexity.

With this in mind we will exemplify the enormous potential of Pre-Imperial coins in terms of the multi-layered interplay between image and text. For this purpose, two examples will be used in the following section: *symmachia* coinage from the Classical period, which depict the famous snake-wrestling young Herakles on the obverse, in use in eight Greek cities; the depiction of a meander pattern on urban coins from the Maeander Valley issued from the Classical period to the 1st century BCE.

## 2. The case studies: Toddler Herakles and Meandric Bends

### The *symmachia* coins

In the Classical period, coins are still free of additional political messages beyond representing the polis as minting authority by naming the city and, in some cases, the magistrates. The coins mainly showed the most important deity of the city on the obverse while the reverse is thematically bound to the obverse. Coins with the ΣΥΝ inscription are the first coins in the Classical period to transmit a political message linked to a political event. The inscription ΣΥΝ is the abbreviation of the word *symmachia*, which was either a temporary or permanent alliance between two or more poleis. The alliance could be defensive or militarily offensive against common enemies.

These so-called ΣΥΝ-coins were minted in eight cities on the Chian standard: Byzantion, Samos, Kyzikos, Lampsakos, Rhodes, Ephesos, Knidos and Iasos. Most of these coins show the same image on the obverse: a toddler fighting snakes combined with the ΣΥΝ inscription (fig. 4). The winner of the fight cannot be inferred from the scene. The reverse, on the other hand, shows the typical coin image and inscription of the respective cities, such as the head of the goddess Aphrodite with the inscription ΚΝΙΔΙΩΝ in Knidos (fig. 5).

The alliance was then communicated via the obverse, while the reverse verifies the city involved. While these coins obviously testify to an alliance between the cities, it remains unclear to this day in what specific historical context these coins were minted and how inscription and image relate to each other.

The city of Rhodes was founded in 408 BCE, so this date is the *terminus*

*post quem* for the coins. In terms of foreign policy, the late fifth century BCE was marked by struggles between the great powers Athens and the Persian Empire against Sparta. The coins have therefore been interpreted both as an alliance against Sparta (Cawkwell 1956, Delrieux 2000: 185–211), against Athens (Cook 1961: 66–72; Fabiani 1999: 118–123; Karwiese 1980; Meadows 2011, 286–293) and as the result of the liberation of the eight cities from Athens or Sparta. These different interpretations, from a political perspective, show that a close examination of the interaction of image and text is an essential step towards understanding these coins.

The scenic depiction of a boy wrestling with snakes shows the myth of young Herakles, who wrestles with two snakes sent by vengeful Hera because her husband Zeus had fathered Herakles with the queen Alkmene (Woodford 1982). However, the boy was already so strong that he could strangle the snakes with his bare hands (Theoc. *Id.* 24).

The myth was not depicted on the coins in as much detail as, for example, in vase paintings, but was represented only by selected and meaningful pictorial elements such as the snakes and the fighting toddler. The identification of this content with the abbreviated pictorial version of the myth can be expected from the ancient viewer, since myths of gods and heroes were generally an important component of everyday life. This layer of interpretation will henceforth be called the ‘first layer’ in this paper.

The next layer connects the myth and the mythical figure with a real political situation. This connection is made only through the inscription. Out of the above mentioned research positions, the most influential interpretation was made by S. Karwiese (1980: 14–15). In his explanatory hypothesis, the eight cities joined forces with Sparta against Athens. The mythical scene of young Herakles’ liberation from the serpents was interpreted as symbolising the liberation of these cities from membership to the Delian League, and thus from Athenian economic and political oppression, thanks to Lysander’s victory against the Athenian fleet at the Hellespont, near Aigospotamoi, in 405 BCE. The choice of the scene with Herakles is explained not only by the act of liberation associated with this historical event, but also by Lysander’s claim to

be descended from Herakles (Plut. *Lys.* 2, 1.).

The image alone testifies to a coalition but does not reveal the reason behind it. The occasion becomes clear only through the inscription. But the concrete historical occasion remains unclear, which leads to the differing interpretations mentioned above. The text is thus the determining factor in the overall interpretation of the coin. But in contrast to the first layer of interpretation, the second layer for now can only reflect the perspective of modern research, since it is not possible to reconstruct whether the ancient viewer interpreted the connection between image, myth, historical event and text in this way. Unlike the first layer, the second layer is not certain, but is merely an explanatory hypothesis. This explanatory hypothesis is strongly influenced by the logocentric view of the world, in which a superior meaning is attributed to words and, as a result, images are seen as subordinated to texts.

From the ancient perspective (sender-receiver model), the minting authority's intention can be reconstructed to the extent that it politicised the coin image by adding an inscription. Whether the ancient viewer understood any part of the political message, particularly the context of the political alliance, as well as the text itself, depended on their level of knowledge of writing and politics. Finally, the question which arises is whether this logocentric way of thinking and interpreting these coins is also to be assigned to ancient viewers or whether it is simply a modern phenomenon.

To summarise, these particular images with these specific inscriptions were selected solely for the purpose of *symmachia*. The purpose-oriented production of these coins together with the active and conscious choice of this image and the political inscription shows that they must be related and were probably not matched randomly.

Even though the subject of the image is apolitical, the political inscription gives it a second layer of interpretation, which eclipses the first layer from the modern logocentric perspective. However, it is not possible to reconstruct from an ancient perspective whether the second layer of interpretation (alignment of myth with reality) was understood by the recipient.

## Coins from the Maeander Valley

The first example has clearly shown how images can be politicised by texts. The second example will show how a pictorial element can be interpreted not only on a visual level, but also as a substitute for text.

The valley of the river Maeander in present-day western Turkey is characterised by its homonymous river Maeander (today: Büyük Menderes). The river was the longest waterway in Asia Minor (around 329 miles), crossing a huge delta plain before entering the sea between Miletus and Priene. Already in antiquity, the Maeander was preeminently famous for its winding course. The orator Dio of Prusa wrote in the second century AD: 'He is by far the most divine and wisest of all rivers, which, turning through a myriad bends, visits, as it were, the best part of Asia.' (Dio. 35.13)

Due to its great importance for the local urban identity, it is not surprising that many cities within the Maeander Valley depicted this significant landscape marker on their coins. The visualisation of water was somewhat problematic due to its fluid nature and was solved in different ways by ancient die-cutters. The most famous imperial motif is the reclining river god on an urn from which water flows. In the case of the Maeander, the decision was made to emphasize the aforementioned and most significant characteristic of the river: its riverbends. To depict these, an abstract key-pattern was chosen, which is still called 'meander' in numerous modern languages. This 'meander pattern' was struck in various forms on the coins of eight cities from the Late Classical / Hellenistic period to the first century BCE. That the abstract pattern in fact visualizes the river can also be proven by the rarity of its appearance on any coin beyond the Maeander valley (Thonemann 2011: 33).

The earliest issues in silver and bronze showing this pattern were minted in Magnesia on the Maeander and can be dated to the fourth century BCE. Due to the importance of the city and a prolific minting phase, Magnesia will serve as a case study in the following sections. The earliest image type initially shows a copy of a type from Priene: the head of Athena on the obverse, and a trident in a meander circle on the reverse (fig. 6). However, Magnesia quickly



switched to its own image type: a horseman with lance on the obverse and a humped butting bull in a meander circle on the reverse (fig. 7).

On smaller coins, the meander pattern is shown not as a circle, but only as a ground line under the bull. The meander pattern remained nearly universal on all emissions down to the mid-second century BCE. In Hellenistic times, Magnesia minted tetradrachms for Alexander the Great as well as for Lysimachos. On both types, the meander pattern serves as a civic blazon indicating the mint Magnesia (fig. 8). On the Seleucid coinage minted in Magnesia the meander pattern appeared only on the bronze coinage of three kings, namely Seleucus I, Antiochus I and Seleucus II (Houghton and Lorber 2002, types 8, 329, 670). The pattern even survived the introduction of so-called wreathed tetradrachms in the 160s BCE (fig. 9).

The obverse of the new types was decorated with a bust of the main deity of the city, Artemis Leukophyrene. On the reverse, Apollo is depicted standing to the left in a wreath with a meander pattern under his feet. The issue of these coins was already discontinued in the 140s BCE, but the pattern was again depicted in the 1st century BCE—probably for the last time—on bronze and silver coins from Magnesia (fig. 10).

While the obverse with Artemis Leukophyrene is already familiar from older pieces, the reverse of the 1<sup>st</sup> century coin issues allows for a political interpretation. It shows a stag to the left on a meander pattern, its head lowered as if grazing or drinking. In the Hellenistic period, the image of the stag functions as the enigmatic symbol of Mithridates VI, king of Pontus, and was consequently understood as a political statement: Magnesia proclaimed its alliance with the king by depicting his stag drinking from the Maeander river (Kinns 2006). This also means that here the meander pattern was not used as civic blazon, but rather more according to its original meaning: depicting the river Maeander for the last time. The meander pattern disappeared from the coinage of all cities in the Maeander valley during the first century BCE and with it came the end of a long image tradition. The river god Maeander was only seldom depicted on imperial coinages (Schultz 1975: 59, no. 88, 62, no. 110, 90, no. 339).

So how do text and image interplay in this example? The full understanding of the coins of Magnesia on the Maeander, as the lengthy description of the coin images above has shown, required complex prior knowledge from the viewer. First, the viewer had to comprehend the visual metaphor that the meander pattern symbolised the homonymous river. And second, they had to be aware that the mint was located on this river, which means that knowledge about the special geographical situation of Magnesia was required. This requirement was also necessary for the other cities in the Maeander valley, as the river was used as a local reference point in other media. In official media such as inscriptions, for example, the cities were still defined by their position at the Maeander in the Imperial period, as the customs law of Asia (Augustan Age) demonstrates; thus, Priene is further defined as 'Priene by the mouth of the Maeander' (Cottier et al. 2008: line 25) and not Priene in Ionia or otherwise.

Moreover, the meander pattern became a figuratively rendered part of the city's name. This transition from local reference point to epithet can be observed on Hellenistic tetradrachms, on which Magnesia used the meander band as civic blazon. The assumption that the meander pattern became part of the city's name and thus gained a textual connotation can be strengthened further: as was demonstrated above, the coin images were changed and adapted to political circumstances, but the meander pattern remained a constant pictorial element of the different coin types. Especially for Magnesia, the decision to keep the meander pattern was a deliberate one. This pictorial element was important because it allowed the city to distinguish itself from other Magnesia of the same name – such as the one at the Sipylus. Nevertheless, it is also astonishing that almost all cities in the Maeander Valley used this pattern as a local reference point on their respective coinages, thus sharing a regional visual language.

### 3. Conclusion

The analysis of the two case studies of the *symmachia* coins and the meander pattern have shown that the interplay of image and text could already be complex and multi-layered in the Classical period.

The first case study makes it clear that the understanding of the coin image

was strongly influenced by logocentrism, as only the text enables the viewer to grasp the full spectrum of interpretation and specifically the political reference, as the image itself has no political implications. The second case study, on the other hand, illustrates the dominance of the image, as even text was substituted by pictorial references.

As explained in the introduction, the level of knowledge of the viewer was crucial in correctly interpreting the message of the coin. It is very clear that only one kind of knowledge was not enough to interpret all coins correctly. The *symmachia* coins not only required prior mythological knowledge, which the viewer had to have acquired through texts or oral tradition, but in order to grasp a possible political meaning conveyed by the text, the viewer had to know about the political circumstances. Only in combination with the text could the unpolitical image be read in a political way.

The meander pattern, on the other hand, required a deep local knowledge about the geography of the Maeander Valley. The pattern was not only used as part of a shared regional language. The *longue durée* perspective has shown how especially Magnesia used and reinterpreted the pattern as part of an image, as well as a part of the city's name.

Both case studies were not limited to the urban level. Consequently, the regional use of certain images in combination with texts presupposes a collective acceptance and recognition through shared knowledge.

This paper aimed to observe phenomena of the interplay of text and image on coins. It has become quite clear that neither logocentrism nor the analytic instruments of the iconic turn suffice to understand the complexity and the embedded messages of coin images. This is due to the fact that text and image are deeply intertwined with each other, resulting in a co-dependency of these two communication systems. However, a deeper understanding of the manifold kinds of interaction of these two systems can only be gained through further studies. Further investigations of the interplay between these two systems, particularly as they are displayed on early Greek coinages, will be carried out by the authors in their ongoing project. Thus, it is worthwhile to look

specifically for chronological developments and geographical differences in the use of images and text on coins. This can be done by analysing the existing numismatic corpora, but also by taking into account the documented hoards, as the circulation of the coins can give us more information, for example on their targeted audience. In addition, a comparison with other image media, from archaeology and art history, is worthwhile in order to uncover differences and similarities in the use of image and text in various societies and cultures. In this way, new insights can be expected not only for numismatics, but much more generally on the handling and perception of ancient societies with the two media systems of image and text.

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*Fig. 1.* Kyzikos, Antoninian (AE), 4.25g, 23mm, 276–282 CE, IMP C M AVR PROBVS P F AVG, radiate, draped and cuirassed bust right / CONCORDIA MILITVM / XXIMC, victory, holding wreath and palm branch, and Probus, holding sceptre, standing facing one another; T between them. Numismatik Naumann 78 (02.06.2019) 818.



*Fig. 2.* Nikomedeia, Cistophorus (AR), 11.34g, 28mm, 117/118 AD, IMP CAES TRA - HADRIANO AVG P P, laureate, draped and cuirassed bust right, border of dots / S P - Q R / COM BIT Temple showing eight columns; on frieze, ROM AVG; border of dots. NAC AG 74 (18.11.2013) 307.



*Fig. 3.* Rhodes, Tetradrachm (AR), 15.02g, 25mm, 5<sup>th</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century BC, frontal head of Helios turned slightly right / POΔ-ION, blooming rose with a smaller rosebud left, in field left Φ, in field right patera. Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18216566. <https://ikmk.smb.museum/object?id=18216566>



*Fig. 4.* Samos, Tridrachm (AR) 11.29g, 24mm, 404–394 BC, ΣΥΝ Herakliskos strangling a snake in both hands; ΣΑ lion mask frontal view. Nomos 18 (05.05.2019) 164.



*Fig. 5.* Knidos, Tridrachm (AR) 10.68g, 23mm, 404–394 BC, ΣΥΝ Herakliskos strangling a snake in both hands. ΚΝΙΔΙΩΝ; head of Aphrodite. Historia Numorum Online type no. 695. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, Fonds général 448.



*Fig. 6.* Priene, Hektobol (AR), 4.92g, 18mm, 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, head of Athena / trident with surrounding meander pattern; ΠΡΙΗ/ΕΥΠΙΟΛ. Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18203263. <https://ikmk.smb.museum/object?id=18203263>



*Fig. 7.* Magnesia, Drachm (AR), 3.59g, 16mm, 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, Armored cavalryman, holding lance, on horse galloping right / ΜΑΓΝ above, humped bull charging left, head lowered, ΠΙΤΟΙ below; all within circular Maeander pattern. Heritage Auctions 3053 (17.01.2017) 35128.



*Fig. 8.* Magnesia, Tetradrachm (AR), 16.98g, 28–31mm, 282–255 BC, head of young Herakles with lion skin / Zeus sitting on a throne holding eagle and sceptre, under him meander pattern; ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ. Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18247460. <https://ikmk.smb.museum/object?id=18247460>





*Fig. 9.* Magnesia, Tetradrachm (AR), 16.05g, 31mm, 177–150 BC, draped bust of Artemis/ ΜΑΓΝΗΤΩΝ. Apollo standing left, behind him tripod, under him meander pattern; in the left field ΠΑΥΣΑΝΙΑΣ / ΠΑΥΣΑΝΙΟΥ; all in a laurel wreath. Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18204005. <https://ikmk.smb.museum/object?id=18204005>



*Fig. 10.* Magnesia, Trihemionbol (AR), 11.74g, 22mm 1st century BC, diademed bust of Artemis right / Horse grazing right on meander pattern; monogram behind; ΜΑΓΝΗΤΩΝ; ΠΑΥΣΑΝΙΑΣ ΜΗΤΡΟΔΩΡΟΥ. CNG Electronic Auction 170 (2007) 89.



# Emblematic representation on ancient Egyptian apotropaic wands

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

## Abstract

Curved ivory ‘wands’ found across Egypt conferred magical protection upon individuals by manifesting the apotropaic beings depicted on them. The distinctive range and forms of figures on wands may be the products of conventions of decorum that restricted the use of certain figural types, particularly anthropomorphic ones. The use of emblematic forms that played on the pictoriality of the hieroglyphic script negotiated those constraints. Emblematic forms include figures in the emblematic mode of depiction, as well as emblematic personifications. ‘Ontological ligatures’ between representations and their subjects meant that such forms manifested the concepts denoted by iconic linguistic signs, with implications for the relationship between ‘text’ and ‘image’. The distribution of wands across Egyptian society, especially when compared with other categories of religious material such as ‘under-world books’, raises questions concerning the contexts and media of knowledge transmission, and by extension the nature of ‘icono-literacy’.

## Introduction

Curved implements, usually made of longitudinal sections of hippopotamus tusk and often featuring incised decoration on one or both faces, have been found at sites in Egypt, Nubia, and Syria. Peculiar to the early second millennium BCE, these objects are commonly known as ‘wands’ and have been alternatively termed ‘apotropaia’ and ‘birth tusks’ (e.g. Altenmüller 1965; Quirke 2016). Most wands with Egyptian provenance were deposited

during the late Middle Kingdom (ca. 1850–1700 BCE; Quirke 2016: 93–176, 229–232). In reassessing elements of their iconography, I highlight distinctive relationships between ‘text’ and ‘image’, in the hope that this category of Egyptian material may contribute to refining understandings of those terms and the conceptual frameworks that they underpin.

Wand decoration primarily comprises rows of animals, deities, and hieroglyphic signs. Inscriptions on wands, and the occurrence of similar iconography on objects such as feeding cups and a birthing brick (e.g. Allen 2005: 30; Quirke 2016: 594–602; Wegner 2009a), indicate that wands were involved in protecting mothers and babies. However, they were evidently used in other contexts: many specimens with Egyptian provenance come from burials, and wands are shown being used by the ‘nurses’ (*bnmt* ) , ‘wet-nurses’ (*mn* ‘*t* ) , and ‘hairdressers’ (*nšt* ) of a tomb-owner, as well as being part of temple furniture (e.g. Davies 1943: pl. 38; Wreszinski 1927: pl. 36).<sup>1</sup>

Extensive research into wand iconography has been carried out by Hartwig Altenmüller (1965: ch. 5; 2013: 18–22; 2017: 83–86), who has variously suggested that their zoomorphic figures represent interplay between local cults and broader theological systems, or that individual figures represent celestial bodies. These interpretations are problematic: they are frequently mutually exclusive, and they often extrapolate from chronologically and geographically distant sources. Stephen Quirke’s (2016: 326–432) general work on wand iconography is largely descriptive, but includes parallels for several motifs in other contexts, facilitating renewed analysis.

Since visual representation is ‘culturally mediated and conventionally coded’ (Bahrani 2003: 123), analysis should attempt to account for how ancient actors believed pictorial material to function. I use the term ‘enactive depiction’ to encapsulate an ontological framework in which depicting something

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<sup>1</sup> I give Egyptian words in consonantal transliteration with accompanying hieroglyphic signs. References to common signs use the numbers in the list in Gardiner 1957.

made it real and hence enabled ritual efficacy. External factors also influence the forms of depicted figures. These include decorum, argued to be ‘a set of rules and practices defining what may be represented pictorially with captions, displayed, and possibly written down, in which context and in what form’ (Baines 2007: 15).

The three factors of meaning, ontology, and decorum were often balanced through play on the pictoriality of figural representations and of the hieroglyphic script, whose elements functioned as phonograms, logograms or ideograms, and taxograms (commonly known as ‘determinatives’ in Egyptology).<sup>2</sup> I argue that this was often achieved through emblematic forms. These foregrounded the ‘thickness’ of signs (Stauder 2020: 2, with n. 5), which flowed between the categories of ‘text’ and ‘image’. The categories may be treated as potentialities of semantic and ontological expression, harnessed in order to fulfill context-specific functions of visual representation. I attempt to articulate the directions of such movements, as well as the graphic procedures involved. I then consider how understandings of these practices may have varied across society. Situating wands in a wider context suggests that there was not a single standard of ‘icono-literacy’; pictorial material was understood differently by different people.

## **Wands in context**

Zoomorphic, often non-composite forms predominate on wands, expressing the qualities of their subjects symbolically and metaphorically. Anthropomorphic forms are mostly avoided except when depicting enemies, while mixed human–animal forms are uncommon. Furthermore, individual hieroglyphic signs that do not constitute ‘texts’ are interspersed among figures on wands. These patterns may arise from historically specific conventions of decorum concerning the direct depiction of powerful, animate beings.

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2 Brief introduction in Allen 2010: 2–5. On determinatives, see, e.g. Goldwasser 1995: 80–107; 2002; McDonald 2002: 15–46.

In many contexts, decorum restricted the direct representation of gods, at times excluding them entirely. Gods were rarely represented in non-royal contexts during the Middle Kingdom. When they were, emblems or enlarged script elements—mainly determinatives—were used, and even then only in marginal areas (e.g. Baines 2009: 5–7; later developments: Baines 2007: 20–23). Such manoeuvres ‘recalibrated’ pictorial signs, intensifying their non-linguistic dimension (Vernus 2020: 25). In this way they could interact with other elements in the pictorial composition, and potentially with subjects external to the material object, while maintaining their separation from direct figural representations of humans and of entities lower in ‘the hierarchy of supernatural beings’ (Lucarelli 2010: 2).

The motifs used on wands, including extensive faunal imagery, fit with those used on jewellery and amulets (see, e.g., Aldred 1971; Andrews 1994). Wands were part of a visual milieu in which decorum constrained the representation of divine beings in non-monumental contexts, especially those displayed on or close to human bodies. This may have applied particularly strongly to non-royal individuals, for whom contact with gods or the king was potentially dangerous.<sup>3</sup>

These conventions may have emerged from an ontological framework in which an image had ‘the potential of becoming an entity in its own right, a being rather than a copy of a being’ (Bahrani 2003: 125). There was an ‘ontological ligature between depiction and depicted’, so that an image made its subject present in a particular context (Nyord 2020: 4–5, 68). Indeed, inscriptions on several wands quote the speech of the protective beings depicted on them, often introduced by variations on the phrase: ‘We have come so that we may set protection over NN’ (*ȝy.n=n stp=n s3 hr NN*).<sup>4</sup> Conversely, images could be suppressed, mutilated, or destroyed to negate their power (e.g. Roth 2017).

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3 See, e.g., Baines 1997: 138. On the king as vehicle for divine agency, see Shaw 2010: 189–190.

4 Altenmüller 1965: 67–69. On *stp-s3*, see Shaw 2010: 184.

## Negotiating pictorial representation

The contexts in which wands were used meant that they had to depict beings whose protective qualities could be defined and mobilized on behalf of ritualists and their beneficiaries. Analysing certain motifs as emblematic forms is a fruitful way of approaching their significance and modelling the iconographic system of wands in historical and cultural context.

Two types of emblematic form may be distinguished on wands. The first encompasses subjects in an iconographic register that has been termed the ‘emblematic mode of depiction’. It is ‘a compromise between direct pictorial representation and the writing of a text’, in which ‘pictures of deities are replaced by pictures of cult images, which have a logographic rather than a pictorial value and are subject to restrictions of scale, or by simple hieroglyphs, which otherwise function mostly as taxograms’ (Baines 1985: 280). ‘Emblematic personifications’ constitute the second type of emblematic form. These are ‘hieroglyphs and related symbols, or groups of symbols, which are given human or animal limbs and sometimes a human body, in order to make them capable of action’ (Baines 1985: 41), thus marking an ontological intervention. Such iconographic devices enabled subjects to be anthropomorphized as little as possible. With mixed human–animal forms, human elements such as added limbs are not ontologically foregrounded but rather enhance meanings and relate the iconographic register of their core non-anthropomorphic elements.



Emblematic forms occupy the conceptual space between ‘text’ and ‘image’ and harness both potentialities to varying degrees. Enactive depiction enabled script elements to possess power as ‘things’ in themselves (Houston and Stauder 2020: 19–25, 32) and for other figures to be modified by, or as if they were, script elements. The design and selection of forms negotiated the iconographic constraints to which wands were subject while enhancing—or at least not limiting—the capacity of images to manifest the beings and forces as required for the effective functioning of wands. Form was subordinate to the overriding ritual factor of ontology. Such strategies furthermore enabled designers to juxtapose conceptually diverse images in a visually consistent way, producing a

distinctive decorative programme with few parallels in other media.

Analysis in terms of this system should not be seen as identifying an ancient set of fixed rules, but rather as a heuristic for approaching representations on wands from a variety of perspectives. My model is developed from limited evidence, while flexibility is to be expected in a relatively widespread and versatile class of objects.


### The emblematic mode of depiction



Figures in the emblematic mode of depiction may function as icons or symbols, expressing meaning through mechanisms such as metaphor. This grants them a relatively high degree of fluidity in terms of form. Hieroglyphic signs with a strong linguistic dimension of signification more closely approach the category of ‘text’, while pictorial representations of subjects with a weaker linguistic aspect approach that of ‘image’. The less specific the subject of an image, the closer it is to a hieroglyphic sign.

Logographic hieroglyphs can denote both things and concepts. Enactive depiction means that figures such as *wd3t*-eyes  and braziers  (Quirke 2016: 367–368, 397) manifest what they signify, here ‘wholeness’ and ‘fire’. Theirs is a general presence; they do not perform specific actions, but they may clarify the nature of other beings or that of the wand as a whole. Such ‘powers’ or ‘affects’ (Nyord 2020: 51–52) were more frequently expressed through metaphorical or symbolic figures without a similarly strong linguistic dimension, such as non-specific, mostly unlabelled animals (Quirke 2016: 326–432). In other instances, hieroglyphs could be incorporated into figural images which refer to mythical episodes or ‘mythemes’ relating to healing (Goebs and Baines 2018: 646–647). Examples include the motif of a baboon carrying a *wd3t*-eye (Goebs 2002: 54–58; Quirke 2016: 364–366), in which the eye is arguably symbolic or even iconic but with reduced linguistic signification.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See also the reverse face of the wand MMA 26.7.1288a,b+Louvre E3614 (Altenmüller 1965: cat. 127; Oppenheim et al. 2015: 200).

Depictions of divine emblems similarly work through metaphor and symbolism. Examples on wands include a cobra with a knife on BM EA 65439 (fig. 1), and a quail chick wearing the White Crown on Brussels E7065 (fig. 2), both shown atop divine standards. These images may or may not represent actual cult images; they parallel the generic ‘falcon on perch’ hieroglyph  (Gardiner no. G7), which is used as a prototypical determinative marking ‘divinity’ (Shalomi-Hen 2006: 13–68). Their differentiated forms are more specific than the prototypical form, clarifying the qualities, and possibly identities, of the deities represented.



Ambiguity arises where an image may or may not signify as a word. Figures of scarab beetles are good examples (e.g. Louvre AF 6447-AF9+Copenhagen NM 1314: Altenmüller 1965: cat. 128). They could manifest the notion of ‘becoming’ or ‘transformation’ (*hpr* ) , or represent the sun-god in his morning scarab form Khepri (*hpri* ) , which symbolized his qualities of ‘transformation’. In some cases, pictorial context is instructive: the scarab on BM EA 24425 (fig. 3), for example, can be identified as a representation of the sun-god since it is next to a ram-headed figure which depicts his evening form. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive, because the ‘personality’ of deities was arguably:

an aspect that accrued to them to the degree that religion assumed a discursive character (...) The personality of the deities was a function of the linguistic dimension of divine presence, and their essence extended beyond it (Assmann 2001: 102).

## Emblematic personifications

Some figures that could function logographically as hieroglyphs were on occasion configured as emblematic personifications for ontological and aesthetic purposes. Emblematic personifications retained their subjects’ capacity for agency—often clarifying and elaborating on it—while increasing their visual consistency with the adjacent zoomorphic and mixed-form representations. Emblematic personifications consequently have a more limited formal

range. They represent movement from ‘text’ toward ‘image’; they enable concepts to act autonomously, rather than absorbing them into the ‘personality’ of a deity.

The ‘jackal head with legs’ is one of the most prominent motifs that may be analysed as an emblematic personification (examples in figures 1, 2, 4; Quirke 2016: 247–249). The limb(s) attached to the head are a single feline leg, two feline legs, or two human legs. There are no apparent semantic or conceptual differences between the forms, although the first two are more strongly zoomorphic.<sup>6</sup> The motif arguably represents the abstract concept of ‘power’ (*wsr* )<sup>4</sup>, usually written with the sign of a jackal-headed staff which originally represented the head and neck of a canid (Gardiner no. F12). Supporting this interpretation is the occurrence of the single feline-legged form in the jewellery of the 12th Dynasty princess Khnumet alongside other hieroglyphs and emblems (de Morgan 1895–1903: 63–65, pl. 5; Melandri 2012: 42), as well as cases of the double human-legged form  as a variant of the common *wsr*-staff hieroglyph in writings of kings’ names (Ben-Tor 2007: 106 n. 524; Tufnell 1984: no. 3213).

Some scholars have claimed that the ‘jackal head with legs’ derives from a fully figural, mixed-form representation of a deity with jackal head and human body, perhaps Anubis.<sup>7</sup> However, the forms more probably exemplify parallel iconographic means of imparting agency to the *wsr*-staff hieroglyph, the former avoiding fuller anthropomorphism. The motif could be shown striding alongside others, increasing visual consistency. The form also amplifies non-linguistic signification, bringing it closer to figures more heavily freighted with symbolism. The reappearance of the form in later periods to represent demons or the god Re-Atum may reflect the attribution of *wsr*-power to such


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6 Note, however, Ramessid sources which use a lion’s leg as a determinative for the verb *skr* ‘to strike’ and its derivatives, mobilizing the lion as a metaphor for power (McDonald forthcoming).

7 Berlev and Hodjash 2004: 70; Drioton 1940: 316. For the mixed-form figure, see Roberson 2020: 40, sign C25.




beings (Liptay 2011: 149–152).

Other motifs may be interpreted similarly. One example is the image of a ‘panther pelt with legs’ on the wand Penn E2914 (fig. 4). This is perhaps an agentive representation of ‘strength’ (*phṯy* ) (Gardiner no. F9; McDonald forthcoming). Another motif is that of the ‘solar disc with legs’ (Quirke 2016: 387–388), which is probably not a representation of the sun-god in the emblematic mode but an emblematic personification of solar power.<sup>8</sup> Variant forms, such as figures with anthropomorphic bodies and solar discs as heads (Darnell and Darnell 2018: 223–224) are known from other categories of material and underscore the iconographic constraints operating on wands.


### Iconography in the service of ontology






Interplay between the categories of ‘text’ and ‘image’ meant that figures could move between representational modes, allowing negotiation of semantic content and agency while maintaining visual consistency within the decorative programmes of individual wands. This points toward a systematization of iconographic principles and procedures across the entire class of objects.

Such transformations were often effected on the level of individual figures. Thus, one wand depicts a jackal-headed figure with a spotted canine or feline body, standing upright on its hind legs and grasping a lizard in one paw (Swiss private collection: Altenmüller 1986: 3, fig. 1, pl. 1). As a hieroglyph, the lizard writes ‘*š3*  ‘many, numerous’ (Gardiner no. I1), so that this jackal-headed figure may be viewed as a mixed-form variant of the more common ‘jackal head with legs’ motif, expressing the concept ‘great of power’ (‘*š3* -*wsr*’) with intensified agentive force. Such an effect could not be easily achieved otherwise, explaining the departure from ‘the principle that only essential limbs are





























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




<sup>8</sup> Compare the ‘hieroglyphic’ image of a sun-disc with radiating light on BM EA 18175 (Roberson 2009).

added to emblematic figures' (Baines 1985: 47). At the same time, the figure's zoomorphism does not depart too far from wand conventions and has parallels in other motifs: hippopotami touch *ss*-knots  ('protection'), baboons hold *wḏst*-eyes ('wholeness'), and many figures grasp serpents and knives. Such configurations may relate to the practice of 'ornamental' and 'thematic' cryptography: a practice attested as early as the mid-third millennium BCE, but which burgeoned in the early second millennium BCE and reached a peak in the mid-second millennium BCE (Darnell 2004: 14–17; 2020; Parkinson 1999: 80).

Another example is the 'feline hindquarter' motif attested on the wands MMA 22.1.79a and MMA 32.8.5 (figs 5a, b). As a hieroglyphic sign  (Gardiner no. F22), it occurs as a phonogram in writings of 'strength' (*ḫty*    ). This is probably how it was conceptualized on Figure 5a, complementing the 'panther pelt with legs' discussed earlier.<sup>9</sup> On Figure 5b, however, its paw grasps a knife. The latter form, with the added symbolic knife, parallels how mixed-form variants of emblematic personifications may hold implements. Here the knife only elaborates on the function of 'strength' in the context of apotropaic ritual. It does not imbue the figure with capacity for action, so that the figure as a whole is not an emblematic personification despite its similar appearance but more probably a hieroglyph as a 'merograph' (Houston and Stauder 2020: 23): a *pars pro toto* realization of the more common motif of a lion, often shown brandishing serpents or a knife and attacking enemies (e.g. MMA 15.3.197; MMA 26.7.1288a,b+Louvre E3614: Altenmüller 1965: cats 93, 127; Quirke 2016: 335–346).

Two wands illustrate how strategies could be combined to structure a wand's decorative programme. First is Figure 4 which shows zoomorphic fig-

9 In later periods, Gardiner no. F22 is incorporated in an emblem  for personified *ḫk3* 'magical' (e.g. Guilmant 1907: pl. 79, top right; Baines 2012: 53), the typical hieroglyphic orthography being                              

ures and emblematic personifications atop a row of baskets. The baskets, Egyptian *nb*  (Gardiner no. V30), are likely to manifest ‘all’ or ‘every’ (*nb*) being that could be represented by those forms. Their implicit presence maximized the wand’s efficacy. Such conceptual transformations are not unparalleled. The leonine ‘Bes-image’ (Romano 1989) is used ‘non-linguistically’ on a late Middle Kingdom headrest on which an inscription uses the same motif, as well as two of hippopotamus composites, as hieroglyphs possibly reading ‘protectors’ (*s3w*    ), matching their identification in wand inscriptions (BM EA 35807; Perraud 2002: 315).

Second is the wand Munich ÄS 2952, which is undecorated except for an emblematic scene depicting the destruction of enemies that is similar in form and structure to those on contemporary royal pectorals (fig. 6; Oppenheim et al. 2015: 112–114; Quirke 2016: 288). However, major gods and royal sphinxes are replaced here by figures common to wands—lions and hippopotamus composites—perhaps for reasons of decorum, paralleling the ‘more absolute’ separation of gods from humans other than the king (Baines 2007: 23).

### Framing ‘icono-literacy’

Relationships between emblematic forms, writing, and religious knowledge raise questions concerning the reception and comprehension of wand motifs. The systematization of the principles and procedures used to construct those representations hints at formalized means of transmission, given the relatively wide distribution of wands. If correct, this finding opens additional avenues for thinking about the social and cultural dimensions of wand iconography.


Several of the images examined above indicate the prominence of solar and Osirian symbolism on wands.<sup>10</sup> Those themes align closely with that of the set

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10 Osiris, the major Egyptian deity associated with the underworld and representing an ‘engendering principle’ (Allen 2013), is attested from the mid-third millennium BCE onwards (Smith 2017: 121–122; Baines 2020: 188). His relationship with the sun-god was a major aspect of Egyptian religion.

of cosmographic compositions known as ‘underworld books’, first attested ca. 1500 BCE as part of the decorative programme for royal tombs. These compositions describe the nightly journey of the sun-god through the underworld to unite with Osiris. Their regenerative encounter precipitated the following sunrise (Darnell and Darnell 2018: 1–60; Hornung 1999: 26–111), which was considered to re-enact the original moment of creation and was thus an apt metaphor for transitional events such as birth and death.

Some of the underworld books probably developed from manuscript precursors that were contemporaneous with wands (Assmann 1970: 57 nn. 2–3; Werning 2013: 271–274) and whose content may have been represented in architecture (e.g. Rößler-Köhler 1999; Wegner 2009b). A wand is furthermore depicted in the underworld book known as the Amduat (Bucher 1932: pls 2, 27; Régen 2017: 503), and Joshua Roberson (2009) has suggested that the iconography on at least one wand is a forerunner to the underworld books (BM EA 18175: Altenmüller 1965: cat. 56; Liptay 2011; Quirke 2016: 258–259).

These overlaps suggest that wands and underworld books may have developed in the same institutions, with their schemes and content recorded on similar media by select groups (Baines 1990; Wente 1982). Tabular ‘pattern books’ which were perhaps kept in temple libraries seem a plausible means of storing and transmitting repertoires of figures and names (Hagen 2019: 245–265). The Amduat includes hieroglyphic and emblematic forms such as royal sceptres, *ntr*-poles  that form the hieroglyph for ‘god’ (Gardiner no. R8), and serpent staves in its own catalogue of ‘beings’ which inhabit the underworld (Bucher 1932), while columns of inscribed text separate individual figures on the wand Cairo CG E2007.04.58, and vertical lines delimit segments of a composite apotropaic rod that is similarly decorated to a wand (fig. 7). Such layouts might have been influenced by modes of organization in source material that were at times reproduced in different contexts: the 12th Dynasty stela of Wepwawetaa enumerates gods in vertical cells incorporated into horizontal running text (Munich Gl WAF 35: Hoffmann 2015: fig. 3). Such processes may also explain the transmission of some wand motifs into the late second and early first millennia BCE (e.g. Liptay 2011: 154; Niwiński 1989;

on pattern books, see, e.g. Kahl 1999: 294; Müller 1982). Repertoires on manuscripts may have used figural forms that fitted the iconographic conventions specific to the composition for which the content had originally been devised; their combination in later material may be affected by a loosening of decorum and other extraneous factors governing the use of visual elements.

### **Conclusion: The complexity of ‘icono-literacy’**

Manuscript histories constitute a complex topic and cannot be discussed in further detail here, but it is worth exploring the implications of their settings and distribution for ‘icono-literacy’. Understandings of ‘text’ and ‘image’ were probably mediated by factors such as age, class, and gender, which are axes along which principles and patterns of wand iconography could be organized and interpreted.

Hieroglyphic and emblematic representations negotiated an iconographic middle ground, based on primarily zoomorphic forms, that enabled wand designers to juxtapose subjects that existed in hierarchical relationships in other contexts. Such complexity indicates that designers of templates possessed restricted knowledge of visual elements and their manipulation, supplemented by familiarity with certain hieroglyphic signs if not the script more generally. Such knowledge may have involved specialized vocabulary and was displayed to outsiders in deliberately opaque and allusive ways (e.g. Stauder 2018: 242–243, 256–262; compare Fischer-Elfert 1998: 16–26, 49–50).

Many wands were produced for elite individuals, often with experience in the mechanics of magical practice and perhaps with links to the royal court (e.g. Geisen 2018: 1–29; Miniaci 2020: 85–87; Quibell 1898: 3–4, pls 1–3; Quirke 2016: 573). More comprehensive knowledge of content and graphic systems was perhaps possessed by ritualists and beneficiaries who participated in the discourse surrounding practices of representation, while some non-specialist actors may have recognized common logographic forms from accoutrements and zoomorphic forms of deities from their wider religious experience. For others, including children, decorum and exclusion may have meant that the figures in wand iconography were seen only as generic ‘protectors’ (*sw*



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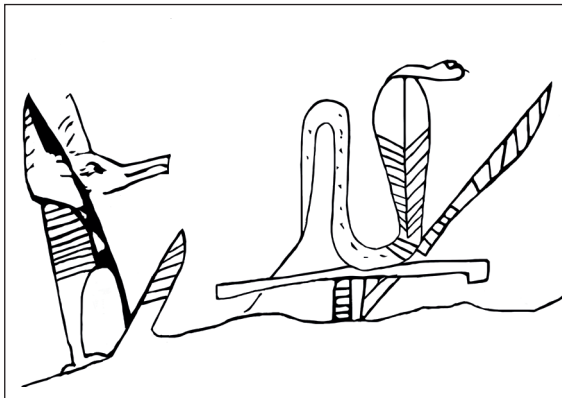


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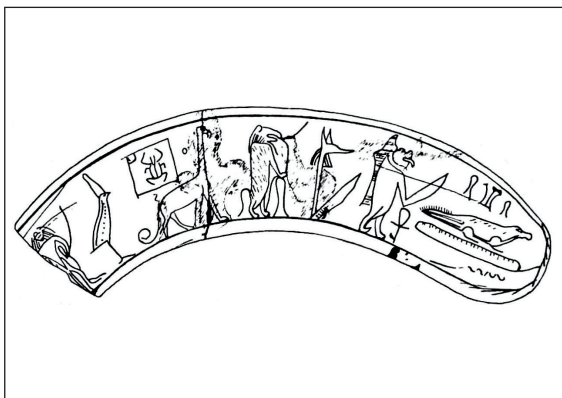
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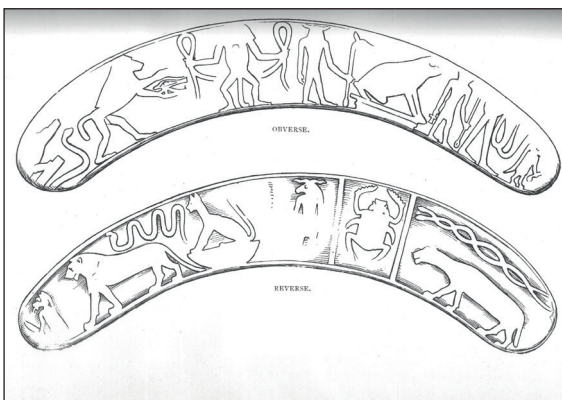
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*Fig. 1.* Caption to: Line drawing of two figures from the wand BM EA 65439 (Altenmüller 1965: cat. 24; drawing by author)



*Fig. 2.* Line drawing of the wand Brussels E7065 (Altenmüller 1965: cat. 66; drawing after Altenmüller 1965 [ii]: 120, fig. 14)



*Fig. 3.* Line drawing of the wand BM EA 24425 (Altenmüller 1965: cat. 59; after Legge 1905: pl. 2)



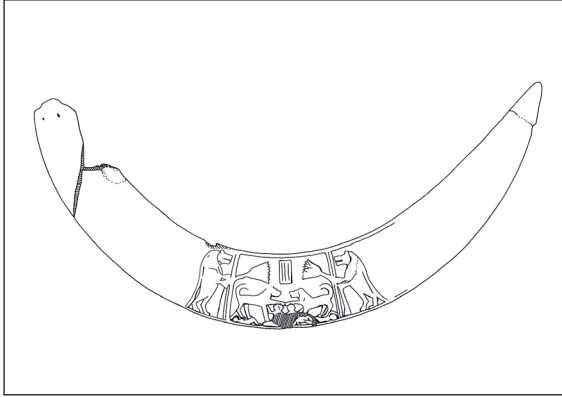
*Fig. 4.* Decorated face of the wand Penn E2914 (Altenmüller 1965: cat. 130). Courtesy of the Penn Museum.



*Fig. 5a.* Decorated face of the wand MMA 22.1.79a (Altenmüller 1965: cat. 99). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, licensed under CC0 1.0.



*Fig. 5b.* Decorated face of the wand MMA 32.8.5 (Altenmüller 1965: cat. 112). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, licensed under CC0 1.0.



*Fig. 6.* Line drawing of the wand Munich ÄS 2952 (Altenmüller 1965: cat. 88; 2017: fig. 1a)



*Fig. 7.* Composite apotropaic rod MMA 26.7.1275a–j (Oppenheim et al. 2015: 201–202). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, licensed under CC0 1.0.





# Devices of Ekphrasis? A Multimodal Perspective on Viking Age Animal Art

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## Abstract

Traditional discussions on Viking art assume two things: the existence of a monolithic Christian culture within medieval Europe that suddenly came to dispel the equally well-defined pagan culture up North, and the existence of two categories of art, i.e. pictorial narratives on a monumental scale that carried meaningful messages versus applied arts on practical devices that were devoid of deeper meaning. A new concept of ekphrasis challenges these ideas and suggests that these devices can be referential objects for poems. By leading the discourse around ekphrasis onto practical devices with Animal Art and their polysemic layers of meaning, we explore the borderland between pictorial, oral and written texts and explore mental spaces. This way, we challenge the traditional hierarchy that places writing above other modalities and reconstruct a new way of 'reading' artefacts that better reflects the oral culture of Viking Age Scandinavians who were in the process of accepting canonic Christendom.

## Introduction

Whenever discussing Animal Art someone will throw in a quote by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1091–1153) in which he resents the use of visual art (fig. 1. including quote; cf. Neiß forthcoming). There is little doubt that Bernard's critique struck a chord with his contemporaries. And yet, he remains

hard to interpret. Some claim he mocked fellow monks who preferred contemplation on images over the written word and use him as evidence for the argument that Animal Art was meaningless décor. Others focus on Bernard's choice of words, according to which his brothers would rather *read* pictures than books. The fact that medieval people tended to do their reading aloud indicates an encounter between pictorial and verbal modality. But the overall appearance of the cultural framework for this meeting of modalities remains unclear. Did Animal Art function as pictorial writing (Borg 1985: 89–90; Camille 1992: 62–64)—or did the monks instead contemplate on a verbal story to guide them through the visual labyrinth of Animal Art? Writing affects the way we think (Ong 1982: 94–133). Despite the proverb that a *picture is worth a thousand words*, modern Europeans tend to limit their visual depictions to statements that could be realized through writing. However, this does not constitute a universal law: during the course of human history, the delimitation between modalities was constantly renegotiated (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 21 f.). Historically, the West lacked a favoured modality, which resulted in a fluid transition between written, verbal and pictorial language well into the modern period (Wandhoff 2003: 4–6). Back then, people tended to read written words aloud and equate the effects of words and images to that of real-life actions (Raible & Beck 2002: 308), and did not distinguish clearly between pictures and writing characters. Consequently, we are in need of a practice-oriented definition that separates reading from ekphrasis. Viking Age Animal Art originated in an oral culture that had only marginal use of writing (cf. Bianchi 2010), and we cannot rule out that some people used pictograms or ideograms as alternative writing systems. Therefore, we define ekphrasis as a verbal statement that derives from interplay with non-verbal modalities and whose message appeals to the audience's 'inner eye' – that is their imagination (cf. Wandhoff 2003). Reading aloud refers to all attempts to vocalize statements made in a medium, or that which fulfils Walter Ong's (1982: 100–104) requirements for a writing system (i.e. a storage medium and a set of graphemes and conventions that help readers reproduce the grammatical relation of words).

How pronounced then, was the border between verbal and visual medium in Viking Age society? Viking Age poets described their own craft with

the verbs *smíða* or *skapa*. *Smíða* referred both to metal craft and carving in bone or wood, and *skapa* to the act of shaping objects, poems and human fate. The analogy between poets and artisans is mirrored in the self-revelation of the skald Bragi Boddason—who supposedly invented the entire skaldic genre—as ‘*skapsmið Viðurs*’ (‘thought-smith of Viður > Óðinn’) and ‘*hagsmiðr bragar*’ (‘skilful smith of verse’; Clunies Ross 2005: 1–2; Kristoffersen 2010: 262, 269). According to the manual of poetry written by the famous Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), skalds used technical terms from metalcraft and carving. The final poem was considered craftwork with physical properties. It could be gifted away, was the subject of art criticism and became a memorial to its author (Clunies Ross 2005: 25, 95; Gade 2000: 65; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 2004: 196–197; Marold 2005a: 25, 571; Poole 2005: 555). It seems that the intellectual work of poets, metalworkers and carvers were considered comparable (Clunies Ross 2005: 84). Following this formulation, we suggest considering the products of their crafts as comparable entities.

### **Decorated monuments versus practical devices**

There are two research imbalances that traditionally decouple style from pictorial content, as well as from the actual artefact. The first one conceives of Animal Art as devoid of meaning. Historically, this was promoted by a combination of two factors. On one side, there is the Eurocentric concept of art that distinguished between ‘art for art’s sake’ and ‘the applied arts’. On the other, there is an evolutionary idea of cultural progress that entailed a pessimistic view on décor-producing, non-European cultures that were not expected to have reached the necessary intellectual level to connect pictures with meaning (Müller 1880: 188, 399, 403). Art historians’ classifications of ‘Oriental’ and ‘Primitive art’ hearken back to this idea (Morphy 2010: 269–270). As a result, scholars more often focused on dating, distribution and attribution than on the conceptual analysis of the artefacts in front of them (Høilund Nielsen & Kristoffersen 2002: 17; Morphy 2010: 268–269; Neiß 2004: 10–11; 2009: 91–92; Wicker 1999: 166–167). This view has been paralleled in the encounter of European scholars with Islamic art, which they approached with etic research aims (such as style, iconography etc.), which meant that they were predisposed to overlook the emic significance, function and meaning of their

chosen materials (Nejdet Erzen 2007: 69–70). The second imbalance involves the interconnection between pictures and their carriers. Silver brooches are for clothing, weapons for fighting, and stone monuments for commemorating the dead. Until recently, scholars tended to handle those carriers as neutral canvases. However, recent studies indicate that the same depiction acquires different meanings depending e.g. on the function and material properties of its carrier, as well as the perspective of the observer (Helmbrecht 2011).

These imbalances still influence modern research, for instance when researchers claim that Animal Art filled a symbolic function when they appear on monumental carriers, but not on metal devices (Fuglesang 2001: 165). An example of allegedly ‘meaningful’ décor derives from Jelling in Denmark where we find an ensemble of royal monuments that document the gradual rise of Christendom, amongst other two memorial stones. The larger stone from ca. 968 (fig. 2) features runes and pictures. According to Signe Horn Fuglesang, this design introduces a new layer of meaning that cannot be deduced from earlier rune stones. The written medium commemorates the Christianization of Denmark by Harald Gormsson. The pictorial medium reinforces the written medium in a medieval way—i.e. by alluding to a different narrative with a message that coincides with the written message concerning Harald’s agenda. In this way, text and decoration of the Jelling stone work together. The depiction of Christ follows European models but is presented in Nordic fashion (Fuglesang 2001: 163–164). Thus, the instrument of his martyrdom has given way to some vegetable tendrils that represent the tree of life which according to Genesis grew in Paradise (*Genesis* 2: 8–14 in Egeler 2013: 18) and that in a later stage of the cosmic drama provided the timber for the holy cross (Egeler 2013: 20; Gjedssø Bertelsen 2002: 16). Research scholarship typically identifies the depiction of the quadruped on the next side (fig. 2) as either a lion, wolf or dragon. Its significance has been explained as a symbol of Christ fighting against evil, the triumph over paganism, and as an emblem (Fuglesang 1981: 101; Graham-Campbell 2013: 98; Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966: 120). These interpretations are based on the rendering of the physical extremities and the mane of the quadruped that reminded many scholars of a beast of prey. Else Roesdahl has suggested that the Jelling beast could represent a stag instead (Roesdahl 2013: 869). This would not only

explain its headgear, but also elucidate its meaning. In this case, the leonine mane and claws of the beast are arguably explained as result of the same stylisation that occurs elsewhere in medieval representations of stags (fig. 4; cf. Catalogue 15, 16, 17). According to a common mythological trope of this era, the stag regularly regenerates its life by swallowing a snake and water from a spring (fig. 3 including quote). This condenses three themes that are associated with immortality, i.e. rejuvenating waters and two kinds of beasts that are connected to the circle of regeneration by shedding their antlers and skin, respectively. This myth has ancient roots and was incorporated into *Physiologus* and Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* (Rackham 1940: 116–119; Suárez López 2007: 3–6, 10). Christian authors like Saint Isidore of Seville (560–636) would later spread it throughout medieval Europe (Herrin 1989: 348; Walsh 1990: 416), where it symbolised a longing for God and the thirst for eternal life, which is quenched through the act of baptism (Egeler 2013: 21). The occurrence of stag and snake bestows the entire monumental ensemble of Jelling with a new layer of meaning—that of a giant baptistery (Roesdahl 2013: 872). The iconography of the stone could be an import from the Ottonian realm, where the myth was widespread and where Harald might have been baptized. And yet, we should not rule out that it could have been mediated through different channels, like coins and other visual art (e.g. Catalogue 5, 9; Franco Valle 2016: 24).

The common link between Jelling and the following objects lies in that all seem to relate to stags. The first one is a brooch from Gnězdovo in Russia that can be conceived of as an interactive sculpture. In their canonic form, sculptural brooches are cluttered with puzzle pictures, i.e. ambiguous compositions that change shape as the viewer changes perspective (fig. 5). Recent studies revealed hitherto unknown parallels between brooches and skaldic poetry in regards to context, cognition and imagery. Therefore, it is tempting to ask whether both cultural expressions were linked by means of ekphrasis (Neið 2007; 2009; 2011; forthcoming). The Gnězdovo brooch represents a reconstruction of an older sculptural brooch (Neið et al. 2012). As such, it lacks significant portions of the canonic iconography. The bottom plate features an equal-armed cross and eight ribbon-shaped beasts. The décor of the central boss contains different elements that depending on viewer perspective melt into an equal-armed cross (fig. 6b). It is surrounded by four quadrupeds

(fig. 6a). Our second object is a box from the Basilica of San Isidoro in León (fig. 8, 9), that was consecrated in the eleventh century when the remains of the aforementioned writer Saint Isidore were transported from Seville to León. The openwork relief of the box in León is carved out of deer antler (Morales Romero 1991: 40) and features a large bird with a three-dimensional head. Between the jumble of tendrils that cover the box, one can spot seven smaller beasts, identifiable by their round eyes. Due to the cylindrical shape of the item, one needs to turn it slowly to appreciate the décor in its entirety. During the course of this manoeuvre, the elusive imagery seems to gradually transform, and one becomes aware of one new shape after the other. As with other puzzle pictures, the onlooker needs to engage in a physical and intellectual exercise to discern what is represented (Franco Valle forthcoming). Box and brooch share a few characteristics. First, they derive from craft traditions that are associated with the verb *smíðaða*. Second, they represent practical devices that need to be manipulated rather than just contemplated, like the Jelling stone. Third, they both feature Scandinavian Animal Art with puzzle pictures that need to be deciphered with the aid of movement, i.e. a kinesthetic modality. This means that they crave close interaction with their onlookers who potentially ascribed them an agency of their own (cf. Kopytoff 1986). Fourth, both might have served as referential objects for ekphrasis.

### **An updated definition of Viking Age ekphrasis**

Amongst the poetic genres of Scandinavians, eddic and skaldic poetry occupy a special place, as both transitioned from Viking Age oral culture to medieval text culture. They differ in form, function and transmission. The *Poetic Edda* is a collection of poems with mythological and heroic content that appears to go back to an obscure oral tradition. The stanzas survived first and foremost in a manuscript called *Codex Regius*. Eddic poets regarded themselves as custodians of ancient lore and remained anonymous. Skaldic poetry, in contrast, was exercised by fame-seeking poets who eulogised the dead and the living by means of a poetic language full of metaphorical allusions to eddic and occasionally, Christian themes. Skaldic stanzas survived as more or less complete quotations in several hundred manuscripts, including many sagas that embed them in situational contexts whose authenticity is up for de-

bate. Skaldic poets celebrated their own artistry and tried to make a name for themselves. However, the boundary between these two genres cannot always be drawn satisfactorily, and it remains up to debate whether skalds were active in the eddic genre (Gade 2000: 62–65; Guðrún Nordal 2003: 339; Simek 1993: 287). Within Old Norse studies, ekphrasis is considered a praise poem (Fuglesang 2007: 203). The oldest example (*Ragnarsdrápa*) describes different images on a shield. It was supposedly composed during the early eighth century by the semi-mythical Bragi Boddason and is considered an example of object-based ekphrasis (Fuglesang 2002: 132–133; Lie 1952; McTurk 2004: 111–112). Another ekphrasis (*Øxarflokkr*) dates to the twelfth century. It was composed by Einarr Skúlason who describes an axe (Clunies Ross 2005: 129). A recurring problem lies therein, that the genre of ekphrasis offers few clues to reconstruct the iconography of their referential objects (Fuglesang 2002: 139). In their quest for the pictorial sources of Viking Age ekphrasis, scholars tended to focus on monumental art with naturalistic images instead of practical devices with animal art (Clunies Ross 2007: 162, 182; Heslop 2009a: 13) — despite the fact that Einarr's description of his axe seems to mention Animal Art (fig. 7). Thus, scholarly discourse remained overshadowed by logocentric thinking which places verbal modality in a superior position to pictorial modality. This fed into the idea that ekphrasis related to narrative pictures that were, in turn, related to oral myth (Clunies Ross, 2007: 162; Fuglesang 2007: 216).

Such a traditional approach has drawn criticism from scholars who are familiar with classic and medieval ekphrasis and tend to regard the impulse to reconstruct referential pictures as old-fashioned positivism. One criticism highlights the tendency among scholars in perceiving the saga-based framing stories of ekphrasis as genuine descriptions of their context instead of artistic inventions; another criticizes the use of an obsolete genre concept that defines ekphrasis as picture describing poems, whereas other disciplines regard them as poems that create mental pictures, spaces and actions (Heslop 2009a; 2009b, 2009c). Therefore, Kate Heslop advocated focusing on the narrative function of skaldic ekphrasis and the mental images it creates. This led her to certain results that will be relevant for our later discussion. First, ekphrasis makes us envision an imaginary object and observe it through the eyes of the

skald. Second, ekphrasis creates an internal textual reflection in the sense that the material properties of its referential object mirror elements of the alluded narrative—for instance when the golden inlays of Einarr’s axe correspond to certain elements of the myths that he evokes, like Freya’s golden tears or Fróði’s gold mill. Third, Einarr’s description of the axe also appeals to our synesthetic senses, as he repeatedly evokes the feeling of holding it. The circumstance that ekphrasis pays more attention to imaginary allusions than referential objects made Heslop suggest we have little reason to believe that they referred to real objects (2009a: 1–15; 2009b: 9–10; 2009c: 383). A text fragment that seems to fall in line with Heslop’s vision of ekphrasis was preserved through a runic inscription on a piece of red deer antler from Fishamble street in Dublin (Catalogue 11). It dates ca. 1000 and reads:

**hurn:hiartaR \* la:a ys aR**

“The hart’s antler lay at the river mouth”

(Birkett 2011: 19, n5; Looijenga 2003: 109, 172, 285).

According to one interpretation, the inscription was carved by some crafts-person who wished to express that this valuable piece of material had been acquired in a legal way (Barnes et al. 1997: 41). Yet the question remains why then would this someone choose to declare the material properties of this find, despite the fact that those should have been obvious to anyone who might dispute this claim of ownership. Self-referential rune inscriptions that evoke their material support—i.e. object and substance—are not entirely unusual (Looijenga 2003: 109). Scholars have been able to show that some of these inscriptions served some ekphrastic purpose (e.g. Herschend 2020: 82–85, 99). Therefore, it seems fair to suggest that the combination of stag and waters in the Fishamble street fragment is bound to evoke associations with the regeneration myth. The only question is—which version? We have mentioned how the triad of stag, snake and water influenced Christian thought. The fact that it returns within eddic poetry (see further down), indicates, arguably, some influence on Scandinavian mythology (Egeler 2013: 20–22). By associating the Dublin carving with the mythology surrounding stag and rejuvenating waters (or to its eddic equivalent; cf. Drobin 1991), we turn it into the kind of mem-



ory space that Einarr evoked in '*Øxarflokkur*' —in the sense that the materiality of the text carrier becomes a bearer of its own narrative. The most striking difference between Einarr's axe and the rune carver's antler from Dublin lies in the latter happening to be real instead of imaginary.

### Iconographic (re-)interpretation

Before we can place the objects from Gnězdovo and León in the current research discourse surrounding ekphrasis, we need to address their potential messages. In 1996, Gustav Trotzig launched an interpretation of sculptural brooches that dealt with the iconographic schema behind the brooch type. He suggested that brooches consist of a fountain-like construction encircled by stag-like beasts (cf. fig. 5a). The occurrence of a similar combination of sculptures seen in the Lateran Baptistery led him to the conclusion that those brooches refer to the springs of Paradise. Although this sculptural group no longer survives, two-dimensional parallels are still preserved through pictures. A pictorial theme consists of the Tree of Life and Knowledge, which is nourished by the rejuvenating waters, before they split up into the four world rivers that quell the thirst of the stags (*Genesis* 2:8–14 in Egeler 2013: 18). Representations of the Tree of Life and the Springs of Paradise are still to be found in early medieval mosaics (Catalogue 6–7; Egeler 2013: 20–22), albeit with some variations: in one case, we not only observe a stag but also a serpent under the tree (fig. 10; Franco Valle 2016: 24–30). Regarding sculptural brooches, it needs to be noted that Trotzig's analysis omits a significant portion of the pictorial program of most objects, including all puzzle-pictures that appear more consistent with Old Norse than with Christian mythology. In contrast to Viking Age art, high medieval Christian art used puzzle-pictures only sparingly, albeit to express demonic themes that stood in opposition to a pious way of life (cf. Kuck 2002; fig. 1). One of the few circular brooches that happens to be almost devoid of them was the item from Gnězdovo (fig. 6) that underwent considerable alterations. The only remnants of the original are four quadrupeds with headgear that according to Trotzig's line of interpretation represent antlers. Otherwise, the restorer chose to erase large portions of the Animal Art. This way, the central boss turned into something that is reminiscent of Paradise Springs and the bottom plate (fig. 6b; that originally featured

puzzle pictures; cf. fig. 5b), into a combination of one equal-armed cross and eight ribbon-shaped beasts. Here, it should be noted that skalds paraphrased the cross as ‘life tree of the nation’ (*lífstré þjóðar*; *Liknarbraut* stanza 22, cf. Finnur Jónsson 1973b, 166; cf. the tendrils of the Jelling stone). It is tempting to assume that the people responsible for the iconographic modifications were not familiar with the original messages, despite being the descendants of the people who carried sculptural brooches into the East. Alternatively, they could have made a conscious decision to alter the pictorial message of the original brooch into a current Christian theme (Neiße et al. 2012). Thus, in the peculiar case of Gnězdovo, the imagery appears polysemic insofar that it paves the way for constant re-interpretation. An observer with roots in Scandinavian tradition might have favoured a different reading than someone with a Christian agenda.

Signe Horn Fuglesang (2001: 165) argued that some symbolic meaning can be deduced from monumental objects, whereas the décor of non-monumental objects like those done in metal might have been purely decorative—which impacted her interpretation of the Cammin and Bamberg caskets (Catalogue 3–4). Both caskets display Animal Art and were used for secular purposes before they were re-dedicated as reliquaries. In her view, the casket in León is lacking exact antecedents to which it can be compared, as well as a specifically pagan iconography. This led her to suggest that it was created for a Christian context. This view can be questioned with reference to concepts from past research, that we set out to debunk at the beginning of this paper—that is, the dichotomy between fine and applied arts and the idea of artefacts as neutral canvases for stylistic expressions. In León, the great bird happens to be the dominating figure while seven serpent-like beasts do not appear simultaneously, but one by one as the human gaze moves around the cylinder (figs. 8, 9). This iconography remains much of a mystery, until one integrates two important factors into the equation, namely the provenience of the carving and the material properties of its carrier (Franco Valle 2016: 25–30). Since the carving was done following the Nordic style, it seems appropriate to associate its iconography with the eddic poem *Grimnismál* (stanza 26–35) that describes the world tree *Yggdrasill* (fig. 9 including quote). On top of this cosmic pillar, we find a bird that looms over other mythical beings, including seven serpents under the roots of the tree.

This association leads us to a closer consideration of the box material, which, in turn, serves as a springboard for a deeper dive into eddic mythology. The branches of *Yggdrasill* feed a stag called *Eikþýrnir* whose antlers gather dew. This water drips all the way beneath the roots of *Yggdrasill*. Here it becomes a spring called *Hvergelmir* that keeps the tree alive. This is the dwelling of the seven serpents and a serpent-like dragon called *Níðhöggr*, who is on such bad terms with the great bird that they spy on each other (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason 2014: 373–375). The aforementioned observation that one can only see a single creature at a time, whereas the León-bird remains a constant fixture, seems to strengthen the association between bird and *Níðhöggr*. The cognitive connection between the box material—deer antler—and the stag on the one hand, its mythological counterpart and the world tree on the other hand, seems to reinforce this cosmological association.

### **Discussion – reference objects for ekphrasis?**

According to our chosen line of interpretation, the designer of the León box explored different modalities like pictures, materiality and movement to evoke a Nordic variety of the myth concerning stag, snake and rejuvenating waters that cut across the European continent during a period when Scandinavian people gradually adopted Christian thought. In the homeland of Nordic Animal Art, sculptural brooches often sport an iconography that seems to mirror mythological themes that were also preserved within skaldic poetry. And yet, the way in which the descendants of the Scandinavian settlers chose to remodel the Gnëzdovo brooch at a later point in time seems much more consistent with current Christian themes regarding the Springs of Paradise that flourished in the whole of Christendom, including the Kievan Rus. Inconsistent with the iconographic tradition of the West is the number of stags. It remains up for debate whether these differences are best understood as a result of opposition (considering the original brooch design) of different traditions (considering the differences between Eastern and Western Christianity), or of some cultural undercurrent connected to the hybrid culture of the Missionary Era that also came to leave its mark on the eddic poetry of Western Scandinavia—i.e. some time before it was fixed onto Medieval parchment. In contrast to Gnëzdovo, the iconographic program from León appears to have roots that

reach straight back to Nordic tradition. Therefore, it may be more than mere coincidence that its iconography is best understood with the aid of an eddic poem that, arguably, mirrors a similar stage of mythological hybridisation—i.e. from a point in time when the triad of stag, snake and rejuvenating waters had been fully integrated into Old Norse cosmology. Like the Scandinavian metal workers who cast the forerunners of the Gnëzdovo brooch, the carver of the León box employed the Nordic principle of puzzle-pictures by combining visual and kinesthetic resources in a multimodal way in order to convey a message (as anticipated by modern sociosemiotics; Kress & van Leeuwen 1996; cf. Franco Valle forthcoming, Neiß forthcoming). The final clue to our understanding of the León box is hidden within the choice of material. Its carving from antler helped us to associate the depictions of a bird and seven snakes to the mythological beasts of *Yggdrasill*. If our interpretation is correct, the designer of the León box would have actively employed the material properties of the box as a third modality in addition to picture and movement. This leads us back to the discussion of ekphrasis. During our examination, we identified four threads that make the León Box an ideal referential object for ekphrasis:

- 1) It contained puzzle pictures that are also to be found on older objects that arguably associate with ekphrasis.
- 2) Its iconographic message seems compatible with eddic poetry that was safekept by a group of cultural custodians that might have practiced skaldic ekphrasis as well.
- 3) Its particular properties could serve as a text-internal projection space.
- 4) Within the oral culture of Viking Age Scandinavia, ekphrasis was more likely object-dependent than in a culture with developed literacy (cf. Hines 2007).

As we learned before, Viking Art appears polysemic insofar that it allows for constant re-interpretation—at least up to a certain point. The fact that the iconography of the León box survived the centuries without heavy modifications seems to speak for the assumption that it was easier to reconcile its ico-

nography with current Christian thought than in the case of older practical devices with Animal Art.

## Abbreviations

BNM – The National Museum of Bavaria (Bayerisches Nationalmuseum), Munich.

DR – Denmark, see SR.

GE – The State Hermitage Museum (Государственный Эрмитаж), Saint Petersburg.

GF – Gotland Museum (Gotlands Fornsal), Visby.

IR – Ireland, see SR.

KHM – Kulturhistorisk Museum, Oslo.

NMI – The National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.

MAK – Museum of applied arts, Vienna.

OPIA – Occasional Papers in Archaeology, Uppsala University.

RGA – R. Müller & H. Beck & D. Geuenich & H. Steuer & D. Timpe (eds.). *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*: von Johannes Hoops: zweite, völlig neu bearbeitete und stark erweiterte Auflage mit Unterstützung der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Gruyter, Berlin.

SHM – The National Heritage Board of Sweden (Riksantikvarieämbetet), Stockholm.

SHM – The State History Museum (Statens historiska museum), Stockholm.

SPAB – Skaldic Project Academic Body.

SR – Samnordisk runtextdatabas.

Vg – Västergötland, see SR.

## Acknowledgements

Both authors have been contributing equally to this manuscript. We would like to thank our anonymous reviewers for their valuable input. Further thanks go to Lotta Fernstål and Gunnar Andersson (SHM), as well as Rafael Minasyan and Ekaterina Shablavina (GE) for providing generous access to the sculptural brooches from Torsta and Gnězdovo, respectively.

## CATALOGUE

Catalogue 1. Axe (Fig. 7). *Provenience*: Russia, oblast Vladimir(?; Влади́мирская о́бласть?) Suzdal(?; Суздаль?). *Literature*: Düwel 1986. *Description*: Iron/steel with silver plating and gold inlays. Featuring a ribbon-shaped beast that is being pierced by a sword. Eleventh(?) century.

Catalogue 2. Casket (Fig. 8, Fig. 9). *Location*: Spain, Castilla y León, León, Museo de la Real Colegiata de San Isidoro de León. *Inventory Number*: IIC-3-089-002-0009. *Literature*: Christys 2015; Franco Valle 2016; Martin 2019; Morales Romero 1991, 2004; Roesdahl 1998, 2010a, 2010b; Wicker 2019. *Material*: Red deer antler. *Description*: cylindrical box measuring 33 mm x 44 mm (Franco Valle forthcoming). Decorated in Mammen/Ringerike style. Both ends of the tube are covered with copper-alloy lids with openwork featuring tendril and knot motifs. One of them is nailed to the antler. Around 1000 CE.

Catalogue 3. Casket. *Provenience*: Germany, Bayern, Bamberg. *Inventory number*: BNM MA286. *Literature*: Fuglesang 1991: 86; Karlsson 1983: fig. 74. *Description*: Antler. Featuring Art in Mammen style. Around 980 CE.

Catalogue 4. Casket. *Provenience*: German Reich (nowadays Poland), Preußische Provinz Pommern, Landkreis Cammin (nowadays Województwo zachodniopomorskie, Kamień Pomorski), Cammin (nowadays Kamień). *Literature*: Horn Fuglesang 1991: 86; Karlsson 1983: fig. 87. *Description*: Antler. Featuring Art in Mammen style. Lost during WW2. Around 980 CE.

Catalogue 5. Coin (Fig. 3). *Provenience*: Germany, Schleswig-Holstein, Landkreis Schleswig Flensburg, Amt Busdorf/Bustrup, Haddeby (Haithabu)/Hedeby. *Literature*: Varenus 1994: 194; Malmer 1966: 67. *Description*: Silver. Featuring a stag and a snake, posing mouth to mouth. First half of the tenth century.

Catalogue 6. Mosaic. *Location*: Italy, Roma, Archbasilica Santi Giovanni Battista ed Evangelista in Lateran. *Literature*: Trotzig 1996; Egeler 2013. *Description*: Apse mosaic featuring two stags that are drinking from the rivers of paradise. Fourth to fifth century CE.

Catalogue 7. Mosaic (Fig. 10). *Location*: Italy, Roma, Basilica di San Clemente al Laterano. *Literature*: Egeler 2013. *Description*: A stag and a snake stand under the tree of life and pose mouth to mouth, while two other stags drink from the four rivers that flow from the spring beneath the tree. Around 1130 CE.

Catalogue 8. Pendant. *Provenience*: Sigtuna, Uppland, Sweden. *Inventory number*: SHM 29650:48. *Material*: Gold. *Description*: Pendant featuring a bird-like figure. Around 980 CE.

Catalogue 9. Runestone. *Location*: Great Britain, England, City of London, Saint Paul's Cathedral. *Literature*: Karlsson 1983: fig. 81. *Description*: Featuring quadrupeds with antlers and a snake-like beast. Around 1010 CE.

Catalogue 10. Rune/picture stone Jelling II (Fig. 2). One side features a stag-like quadruped and a snake, another side a depiction of Christ where the cross has been replaced by vegetal tendrils that allude to the tree of life. Illustration by Julius Magnus-Petersen (Larson 1912). Jelling II. *Location*: Denmark, Jutland, Vejle Amt, Jelling Sogn, Jelling kirke. *Inventory number*: DR 42. *Source*: Samnordisk runtextdatabas. *Description*: Runestone with pictures. 960 CE.

Catalogue 11. Runic inscription. *Provenience*: Ireland, Dublin, Fishamble street. *Inventory number*: NMI E172:9630; IR 12. *Literature*: Looijenga 2003: 109, 172, 285; Birkett 2011: 19, n5. *Description*: Younger Futhark inscription on red deer antler. Around 1000 CE.

Catalogue 12. Sculptural brooch, circular (Fig. 5). *Provenience*: Sweden, Hälsingland, Hälsingtuna socken, Torsta. *Inventory number*: SHM 6820 *Literature*: Neiß 2009. *Description*: Silver. The decor features a.o. twelve stable pictures and 26 puzzle pictures. Tenth century.

Catalogue 13. Sculptural brooch, circular (Fig. 6). *Provenience*: Russia, Smolensk oblast (Смоленская область), Gnëzdovo (Гнёздово). *Inventory number*: GE 992/93 *Literature*: Puškina 1998; Neiß et al. 2012. *Description*: Silver with (partly secondary) gilding & niello blackening. The bottom plate features puzzle pictures that represent ribbon-shaped beasts and crosses. The proximal bosses feature quadrupeds with a headgear that can be re-interpreted as antlers. The medial boss contains equal-armed crosses and triquetrae. A use-wear analysis reveals that different parts were manufactured at different times. The bottom plate and the central boss appear to be relatively new, and are decorated with niello. The four quadrupeds appear to be older as they display heavy wear. The different provenience of the parts has been confirmed through an independent XRF analysis (Eniosova et. al 2012).

Catalogue 14. Stone relief (Fig. 1). *Location*: Germany, Niedersachsen, Landkreis Helmstedt, Königslutter, Kaiserdom. *Literature*: Kuck 2002. *Description*: At the apse of the church building. Featuring a puzzle picture of a lying hunter with two rabbits versus a laughing devil. Twelfth century.

Catalogue 15. The *Trasenna* relief. *Provenience*: Nola, Italy. *Location*: Yale University Art Gallery. *Literature*: Herbert 1974. *Description*: Featuring a stag with a long mane and a Unicorn. Ca. 950 CE.

Catalogue 16. Tunic belonging to The Göss Vestments (Fig. 4). *Provenience*: Kloster Göß, Göss, Styria, Austria. *Inventory number*: MAK T 6905-1. *Literature*: Pollack 1938. *Description*: The garments made in silk and linen and profusely decorated with geometric patterns and fantastic beasts. 1260 CE.

Catalogue 17. Weathervane. *Provenience*: Norway, Viken, Heggen. *Inventory number*: KHM C23602. *Literature*: Fuglesang 1981; Graham-Campbell 2013: 124–126; Karlsson 1983: fig. 80. *Description*: Copper alloy. Featuring two beast-like quadrupeds with antlers and one sculptural deer figure. 980–1070 CE.

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Fig. 1. (Catalogue 14). Puzzle pictures in Christian art; a. Depiction of a fallen man who preferred hunting to a contemplative life and is now shackled by the tongues of his own quarry; b. The very devil who created this pitfall of sin is grinning back at the observer. The Königsliutter Cathedral. Illustration by Jürgen Kuck (2002). Cf. Saint Bernard:

“What has this ridiculous monstrosity there to do, this strangely ugly beauty and this beautiful ugliness? [...] These horn-blowing hunters? You can see several bodies under the same head, and again several heads on one and the same body. [...] In short, there is such a large and strange variety of different forms everywhere that it is more pleasing to read in the marble than in the manuscripts and to spend the whole day admiring these details than contemplating God's law. Dear Lord! If one is not ashamed of all that folly, why can one not at least feel uneasy at all the expense?”

(Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti-Theoderici Abbatem*, XIIIn: 28; cf. Leclercq & Rochais 1968. 106; own translation).



Fig. 2. Jelling II (Catalogue 10). One side features a stag-like quadruped and a snake, another side a depiction of Christ where the cross has been replaced by vegetal tendrils that allude to the tree of life. Illustration by Julius Magnus-Petersen (Larson 1912). Cf. *Liknarbraut*:

*Leysti sinn at sönnu  
sólballar gramr allan  
lýð fyr lífstré þjóðar  
líknarstyrkr frá myrkrum*

(*Liknarbraut* stanza 22).

“The mercy-strong king of sun’s hall [SKY/  
HEAVEN > = God (= Christ)] freed truly all his  
people from darkness by means of the life-tree of  
mankind [CROSS]”

(SPAB).



Fig. 3.

Coin from Hedeby (Catalogue 5), featuring a  
stag and a snake posing mouth to mouth, which  
indicates that this iconography was circulating  
before Jelling II. Image by Malmer (1966: 7). Cf.  
*Physiologus*:

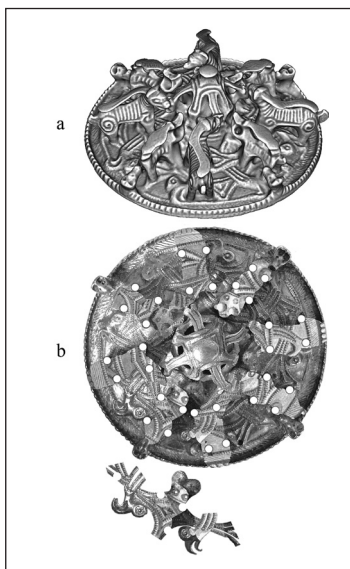
“When the stag reaches 50 years old looks for  
the snake lair, and attracts it outside, putting  
his nose close to the hole of the lair holding its  
breath. Then the snake goes out and comes into  
the mouth of the stag, and eats it. Then the stag  
has to look for a river and drink, so it can live for  
fifty years more. Otherwise, it will die. So said  
the prophet David ‘Like the stag wants the fresh  
water, so my soul wants you, Lord.’”

(*Physiologus*; cf. Theobaldus & Peters 1921:  
31–33; Suárez López 2007: 4; own translation)





*Fig. 4.* Detail of the tunic of the Göss Vestments (Catalogue 16). The garments are richly decorated with depictions of different kinds of beasts. Stags and lions can be differentiated by their head-gear and their body shape. Stags are represented with stylized claw-like hooves. 1260 CE.



*Fig. 5.* Sculptural brooch from Torsta (Catalogue 12); a. Seen from a low angle; b. Seen from a high angle: The bottom plate features a number of puzzle pictures, some representing a gripping beast. Illustration by M. Neiß.



Fig. 6. Sculptural brooch from Gnēzdovo (Catalogue 13); a. seen from a low angle: The original proximal bosses represent quadrupeds with a head-gear that the Christian restorer might have re-interpreted as antlers. The restored medial boss features an equal-armed cross that might allude to the tree of life; b. Seen from a high angle: The restored bottom plate features a combination of eight snakes and an equal-armed cross. The restored medial boss features an equal armed-cross that might allude to the tree of life. Illustration by M. Neiß.

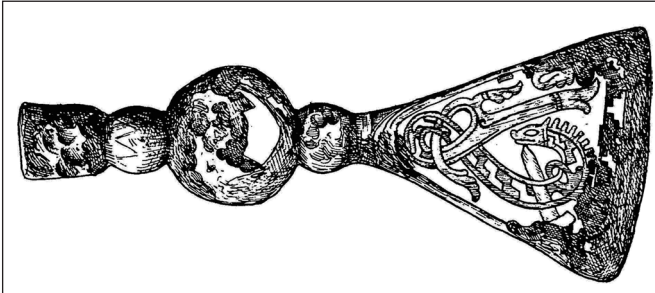


Fig. 7. Axe (Catalogue 1). Visualizing the myth of Sigurðr the dragon slayer? A ribbon-shaped beast is being pierced by a sword. Andrei Bogoljubsky's axe. Illustration by N.N. (Düwel 1986). Cf. Einarr Skúlason:

*Sjá megu rétt, hvé, Ræfils  
ríðendr, við bró Gríðar  
fjörnís fagrt of skornir,  
foldviggs, drekar liggja*

(Einarr Skúlason, 'Øxarflokk' stanza 10).

"They can rightly see how dragons, beautifully engraved, lie near the eyelash of the Gríðr <giantess> of the helmet [AXE > AXE-BLADE], riders of the horse of Ræfill's <sea-king's> land [(lit. 'riders of Ræfill's land-horse') SEA > SHIP > SEAFARERS]"

(SPAB).



Fig. 8. Scandinavian casket in San Isidoro de León (Catalogue 2). Carved in red deer antler. Decorated in Mammen/Ringerike style. Both ends of the tube are covered with copper-alloy Around 1000 CE. (©Museo de San Isidoro and Rebeca Franco Valle). Cf. Poetic Edda:

*Eikþyrnir beitir hjörtr  
er stendr á höllu Herjaføðrs  
ok bitr af Læraðs limum;  
en af hans bornum  
drýpr í Hvergelmi,  
þaðan eigu vötn öll vega.*

(*Grímnismál* stanza 26; Jónas Kristjánsson  
and Vésteinn Ólason 2014: 373)

“Eikthyrnir, the hart  
On the hall that stands,  
Eateth off Læráth’s limbs;  
Drops from his horns  
In Hvergelmir fall,  
Thence wend all the waters their way.”

(Hollander 1962, 58).

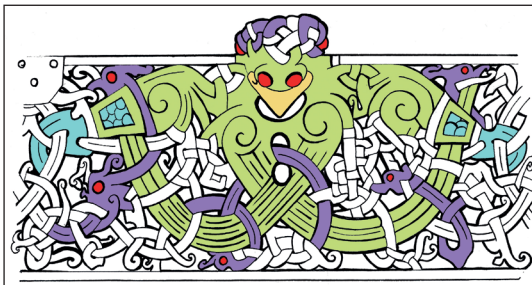


Fig. 9. Extended view of the casket of San Isidoro (Catalogue 2). A great bird-like beast highlighted in green dominates the space. Two triple-offshoot arches spring from a double shell-spiral right below the beak of the bird (in orange). These are the wings of the animal. The legs and claws are marked in blue, and can be identified by the sections texturized with spots or scales. The other seven beasts can be spotted by their round eyes, marked in red. Their snake-like bodies are highlighted in purple. Note that two of the smaller snakes spring from the head of the bird-like animal. (Design by Franco Valle, 2016).



*Fig. 10.* Mosaic in the apse of the Church of San Clemente al Laterano in Rome (Catalogue 7). A stag and a snake, posing mouth to mouth, stand beneath the tree of life while two other stags drink from the four rivers that flow from the spring. 1130 CE. Illustration by Michael Neiß, mixed medium with watercolours.

# Image and Text to Educate the Nation: Reinterpreting the Woodblock Print Series *Pictorial Record of Products of Great Japan*

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## Abstract

This paper investigates how the relationship between the two visual systems of ‘text’ and ‘image’ was intrinsic to the didactic potency of the Japanese woodblock print series *Pictorial Record of Products of Great Japan* (*Dai Nippon bussan zue* 大日本物産図会) (1877). A collaborative project between the publisher Ōkura Magobei 大倉孫兵衛 (1843-1921) and the print artist Utagawa Hiroshige III 三代歌川広重 (1842-1894), this print series of 118 prints has mainly been interpreted in the context of the First National Industrial Exhibition of 1877 as it was displayed and sold at this exhibition. This paper, in contrast, re-examines this print series within the context of the rise of modern education in Japan in the 1870s—a time when the Japanese state assigned woodblock prints a clear didactic function.

## Introduction

In August 1877 the collaboration between the woodblock print publisher Ōkura Magobei 大倉孫兵衛 (1843-1921) and the print artist Utagawa Hiroshige III 三代歌川広重 (1842-1894) resulted in the publication of the woodblock print series *Pictorial Record of Products of Great Japan* (*Dai Nippon bussan zue* 大日本物産図会; henceforth *Pictorial Record*).<sup>1</sup> To date 118

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1 Japanese names are written in the traditional and autonomous usage, with family name

prints have been identified covering the topography of 59 Japanese provinces, their local specialty products and production processes—although it is believed that originally the series consisted of no less than 150 prints (Asano 2002). Previous studies have analysed this labour-intensive print series against the backdrop of the first National Industrial Exhibition (Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai 内国勸業博覧会) organized in Tokyo from August to November 1877, as it was displayed and sold at this exhibition (Asano 2002; Furuya 2017; Hashizume 2013; Iwakiri 2008; Sugawara 2006). This paper, in contrast, seeks to assess the print series in its wider context of production, namely the rise of modern education in Japan in the 1870s, as the Ministry of Education employed the popular print medium to support the spread of education, particularly home education. Japanese woodblock prints—known under its Japanese equivalent as *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵—could take on this task because the prints were a highly commercial art form that mass-produced printed images in a full range of colours and relied upon the vibrant print industry for their wide distribution. Indeed, traditional woodblock printing was the main technology for transferring imagery and text onto paper, with the woodblock print industry flourishing from circa 1650 until 1900 primarily in Tokyo. By re-examining Hiroshige III's print series in the above context, this paper aims to offer a fresh perspective on the intention, production, and reception of the print series as well as seeks to investigate how the context of modern education can give new meaning to the relationship between text and image in Japanese woodblock prints.

### **Woodblock prints as an educational tool for the nation**

The modern school system in Japan originated in the promulgation of the Fundamental Code of Education (Gakusei 学制) in 1872. In order to support

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preceding the given name, and Japanese names and terms are transliterated according to the Hepburn system. Macrons have been provided to preserve long vowels in Japanese for all but anglicized words and place-names. Similarly, Japanese terms (and other foreign-language terms) are italicized except for those that have entered the English language. Any translation in this paper is by the author.



the framework of modern education, the Ministry of Education endeavoured to produce textbooks and teaching tools for usage in schools as well as for home education. In order to do this, the ministry looked towards Western nations and ordered mainly American textbooks and other visual educational tools, such as wallcharts and graphs, to translate into Japanese. Despite the ministry relying on Western practices of education to ensure uniform literacy within families and communities, it refrained from using Western-style printing in favour of Japanese traditional woodblock printing to produce these textbooks and other visual teaching materials. With woodblock printing, it was not only easier to include reading marks and textual glosses for the convenience of Japanese readers but also more practical to incorporate images alongside text as the whole page was carved as one block, allowing greater flexibility than Western-style moveable type. By making use of woodblock printing, the ministry also followed in the footsteps of the Tokugawa shogunate which had relied on domestic printing technique as well as on a network of commercial publishers to distribute and sell copies of official publications during the Edo period (1603-1868) (Kornicki 1998: 143-149). Although the modern Western-style printing techniques, such as lithography and copperplate printing, were gaining a strong foothold in the Meiji period (1868-1912) to transfer imagery and text—contributing to the national push toward ‘civilization and enlightenment’ (*bunmei kaika* 文明開化)—woodblock printing continued to dominate the market of commercial single sheet colour prints and books until the 1880s (Iwakiri 2006: 322-323; Kornicki 1998: 141, 165-166).<sup>2</sup> At this time, Western-style reprographic media performed a different practical function for the Japanese state as the Government Printing Bureau established within the Ministry of Finance employed these techniques to produce bank notes, revenue and postage stamps, and share certificates. Above all, the adoption of Western-style printing techniques was principally due to the contributions of foreign government advisors such as the Italian artist and engraver Edoardo Chiosonne (1838-1898), who was hired by the Ministry of Finance in 1875

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2 Newspapers and magazines, in contrast, rapidly turned to Western-style printing.

(Iwakiri 2009: 100; Kornicki 1998: 168; Mashino 1998: 181).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, to advance the spread of education the Ministry of Education made use of the traditional woodblock printing technique. Since the production process and development of textbooks was in a trial and error state in the early 1870s (Inoue 2013; Passin 1967), woodblock printing was especially employed as an educational tool for the nation to produce other visual teaching materials such as wall charts and woodblock prints—the former to aid teachers at school and the latter for education at home and as preparatory material for textbooks. In particular, the ministry announced on 7 October 1873 that didactic woodblock prints were being produced and distributed with the intention “of saving the education of young children in households” (Administrative order no. 125 of the Ministry of Education in Monbushō 1871-1885: 230).<sup>4</sup> In so doing, the ministry capitalized on the single sheet woodblock print as the most popular and inexpensive way to provide educational information through images and text. Since the latter half of the Edo period, woodblock prints had been widely accepted by the public as the main form of entertainment, both for the enjoyment of the images and of the information they provided (Aoyama 2019: 28). Moreover, woodblock prints inherently demonstrated a didactic potential through their co-dependency of text and image. This co-dependency has a long history in Japan that can be traced back to the emergence of illustrated narrative scrolls (*emaki-mono* 絵巻物) in the twelfth century. Following the rapid commercialization of woodblock printing in the seventeenth century, more and more pictures were incorporated into written texts and more and more writing into visual texts (Formanek and Linhart 2005: 12). Hence, woodblock prints became an archetype of the Japanese visual arts that incorporated text and image and because of their pronounced didactic nature, they easily took up the role of distributing information. In

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3 For an in-depth discussion of the development and application of Western reprographic media in Japan see Iwakiri (2009: 79-154) and Mashino (1998).

4 Although the discussion of textbooks and wall charts produced by the Ministry of Education is an interesting area that requires further investigation, it is beyond the scope of this paper.



general two ‘formulae’ for the interplay between text and image emerged: on the one hand, the text was placed around the figures or the compositional elements of the illustration (fig. 1 and fig. 7) and on the other hand the text was placed in a dedicated cartouche (fig. 2 and fig. 6). The function of explanatory inscriptions accompanying the vast majority of woodblock prints have so far been interpreted as contributing to their self-educational potential as well as to the considerable high literacy among the common people (Coats 2006; Dwinger 2020; Iwakiri 2009; Sugawara 2009; Witkam 2017). Yet, relatively little is known about their potential contribution to the spread of education during the Meiji period.<sup>5</sup>

### Woodblock print series produced by the Ministry of Education

In total the Ministry of Education produced three woodblock print series: *Oshiegusa* 教草 (34 prints; 1872-1876), *Full-colour Woodblock Prints Published by the Ministry of Education* (*Monbushō hakkō nishiki-e* 文部省発行 錦絵) (104 prints; 1873-1881) and *Pictures of Natural History* (*Hakubutsu-zu* 博物図) (25 prints; 1872-1879).<sup>6</sup> The *Oshiegusa* series instructed children on Japanese traditional industries—ranging from honey, rice and lacquer to cotton, silk and tofu—and their production processes, whereas the *Pictures of Natural History* disseminated knowledge of various birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians and mammals as well as included the Japanese, Chinese, English and Latin appellation of the animal in question. The prints belonging to the series

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<sup>5</sup> In general little research has been done on Japanese prints as an educational tool for the nation. Among the canonical studies on Meiji-period prints are those by Meech-Pekarik (1986) and Iwakiri (2009), but they fail to consider the prints in the context of modern education and to mention the prints produced by the Ministry of Education.

<sup>6</sup> The term *oshiegusa* was often employed in titles of various *ōraimono* 往来物 or teaching materials from the late Heian to early Meiji period (Higuchi 1977: 76). For colour reproductions of the *Oshiegusa* see Murase et al. (2017: 88-89 cat. no. 67-1~3); for colour reproductions of *Full-colour Woodblock Prints Published by the Ministry of Education* see also Murase et al. (2017: 78-87 cat. no. 61-66.5); and for colour reproductions of *Pictures of Natural History* see Tamagawa Daigaku Kyōiku Hakubutsukan (2018: 7 cat. no. 190, 194).

*Full-colour Woodblock Prints Published by the Ministry of Education* informed about various crafts (fig. 1), introduced biographies of foreigners and their inventions (fig. 3), and evaluated moral order whereas other prints were to be cut out and assembled into three-dimensional sculptures made from paper.

To these three print series the two visual systems of text and image were crucial to perform their didactic function, although varying degrees of their co-dependency can be detected. In the case of the prints evaluating moral order, no text except for the print title accompanied the illustration, suggesting that the image was sufficient to convey the print's didactic intention. This, however, changed when it came to the prints that were part of the series *Oshie-gusa* and *Pictures of Natural History*, as well as for the prints of the series *Full-colour Woodblock Prints Published by the Ministry of Education* which narrated about the lives and inventions of Westerners (fig. 3) or explained mathematical principles and the labour of various craftsmen (fig. 1), for example. Here, text next to the image was essential to educate young children about domestic products and their production processes as well as to meticulously explain new and foreign concepts such as physical principles and those of mass, volume and length along with the various tools required to measure them. As both image and text supported the information they were providing, it can be said that the Ministry of Education considered both image and text to be essential to woodblock prints fulfilling their goal as an educational tool for the nation.

The Ministry of Education also promoted woodblock prints as an educational tool for the nation to the general public by calling on commercial print publishers to contribute to the spread of home education as it allowed free reprinting of government-produced didactic material such as wall charts and textbooks. This was first announced in November 1874 and widely promoted and distributed via newspapers in the same month, as well as repeated in another administrative order in June 1875 (Report no. 29 of the Ministry of Education quoted in Inoue 2011: 16; administrative order no. 9 of the Ministry of Education in Kanpōkyoku 1889: 1648; Meiji Nyūsu Jiten Henshū Iinkai and Mainichi Komyunikēshonzu Shuppanbu 1983: 155). In other words, the commercial print industry was expected to contribute to the national goal of

educating the nation and advancing the implementation of educational policies, simultaneously ensuring that government-approved didactic material was distributed to a mass audience. As a result, commercial print publishers reissued wall charts on mathematics, vocabulary, geometric shapes and colour as single sheet prints (fig. 4).<sup>7</sup>

### **The reception of the *Pictorial Record* at the 1877 exhibition**

From August to November 1877 the state organized the first National Industrial Exhibition in Tokyo. The Ministry of Education exhibited its woodblock-printed didactic material, such as textbooks, wall charts and woodblock prints, which were listed as representative items of ‘utensils for education’ in the department of manufactured goods, promoting the didactic function of woodblock prints (Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai Jimukyoku n.d. 1: frame 27; n.d. 4: frame 5). Commercial print publishers also submitted woodblock prints to this exhibition, including the print series *Pictorial Record*. The exhibition catalogue listed Ōkura Magobei, its publisher, as the exhibitor. Ōkura taking on a key position in the promotion of the print series is self-explanatory: publishers of commercial prints pre-financed everything from the labour fees for the design, block carving and printing to the material costs for the woodblocks, the ink and the paper and were also in charge of promoting the prints, which here extended beyond the confinements of the bookshop to the exhibition hall. Although the *Pictorial Record* became part of the corpus of exhibition art, the prints were nevertheless listed in the department of manufactured goods and more specifically in the class of ‘furniture and objects of general use in construction and dwelling’. In other words, the state did not consider the commercial prints as examples of fine art, although this department included a specific class for engraving and other graphic arts, but as manufactured goods—similar to the government-produced educational material.

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7 An in-depth discussion of the response of commercial print publishers to the permission of free reprinting is beyond the scope of this paper, but is considered in the author’s doctoral dissertation *Japanese Woodblock Prints and the Meiji State: Production, Intention, and Reception in the Prints of Tsukioka Yoshitoshi and Utagawa Hiroshige III* (2021).

Previous studies have mainly analysed the *Pictorial Record* against the backdrop of the 1877 exhibition and as an advocate of the national goal of encouragement of industry and manufacturing (*shokusan kōgyō* 殖産興業) since the exhibition was organized to serve the abovementioned national goal (Asano 2002; Furuya 2017; Hashizume 2013; Iwakiri 2008; Sugawara 2006).<sup>8</sup> Considering that the print series explained and illustrated various Japanese products with its dedication to the deep study of domestic products, it can indeed be surmised that the series embodied the aims of the state to encourage industry as well as resembling the outline of the *Oshiegusa* series. However, just as the *Oshiegusa* series was inexplicitly tied to the aims of the Ministry of Education—as it was produced under its auspices—the *Pictorial Record* was also created to simultaneously educate the general public on local specialty products of Japanese provinces, an aspect of the print series which has received relatively little attention.

In spite of the *Pictorial Record* being displayed in the class of objects for general use instead of that of educational tools, which was dominated by exhibits of the Ministry of Education, the state did consider the prints to be didactically potent. The publisher Ōkura was namely awarded a certificate of merit for his display of woodblock prints, whereas the examiners' commentary translates as: "We observe that the picture album of products is beneficial to broaden the knowledge of children" (Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai Jimukyoku 1877: 119). The picture album to which the examiners are referring is Hiroshige III's *Pictorial Record*—the only album among Ōkura's exhibits with this particular subject matter. Hence, Ōkura won the award because of the series' didactic potency. This particular attention to the government-promoted function of woodblock prints can be explained by the government official Machida Hisanari 町田久成 (1838-1897) overseeing the group of examiners in charge of commenting on the exhibits, as he was directly involved in the production of the *Oshiegusa* series and in the ministry's display of govern-

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<sup>8</sup> This policy was a catalyst for the art administration of the Meiji era and acted as a driving force behind the definition of art, the participation in world's fairs and also the organization of domestic exhibitions (Norota 2015; Satō 1995, 2011; Terryn 2021).

ment-produced educational material at the 1876 world's fair in Philadelphia (Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai Jimukyoku 1877: 97-98).

### **The role of text and image in the didactic potency of the *Pictorial Record***

Although the reception of print series confirms that the Japanese state considered it to be an educational tool to advance the spread of education, it is more difficult to clearly establish the series' didactic intentions because contemporary documents concerning its production details do not exist. Nevertheless, certain factors demonstrate that the series was intended and produced as a didactic print series, for which the relationship between the two visual systems of text and image was instrumental.

To start with, the format of the print series suggests that its reading experience was intended to be different from other commercial woodblock prints. The 118 prints were namely pasted together and folded alternately, like an accordion, into folded books (*orihon* 折本) with prints on both the recto and verso side of the paper. Although the prints are not listed in the exhibition catalogue as a folded book, an advertisement of Ōkura's shop of 1885 confirms that the print series was sold as a six-volume set of accordion-style books (fig. 5). The title of the print series was subsequently printed on the cover of the folded books, alerting the reader that the prints built on a long tradition of 'zue' 図会, a term that had been primarily used by illustrated woodblock-printed books as early as 1712.<sup>9</sup> The majority of books employing this term were guidebooks containing illustrations and descriptions of famous places in Japan, mainly of Kyoto and Tokyo. For the print series, Ōkura and Hiroshige III also resorted to such guidebooks as both the illustrations and narrative text drew from illustrated guidebooks such as *Illustrated Famous Products of the Mountains and Seas of Japan* (*Nihon sankai meibutsu zue* 日本山海名物図会) (1754) and *Illustrated Local Specialties of the Mountains and Seas of Japan*

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9 For an overview of such illustrated guidebooks see Shirahata (2005: 206-209).

(*Nihon sankai meisan zue* 日本山海名産図会) (1799), among others.<sup>10</sup> By referencing such canonical works Ōkura and Hiroshige III demonstrated the interrelationship between different texts and images by intentionally continuing an established line of tradition. The textual and pictorial practice of copying and transplanting should not be interpreted here as lacking ‘originality’ or ‘inventiveness’ as this was a widespread and accepted practice at the time. In particular, the value of a work could even enhance when references to a certain authority were made, whereas it also demonstrates Ōkura’s and Hiroshige III’s knowledge of, and accessibility to, certain influential guidebooks (Davis 2016: 6; Ehmcke 2005: 111; Kameda-Madar 2014: 709).

The *Pictorial Record* nevertheless differed from these illustrated guidebooks not only by its format, as the prints could be folded and unfolded compactly, and by its usage of colour, as the guidebooks were printed in black-and-white, but also because of its relationship between text and image. The guidebooks either alternated between the narrative text and image or ran both visual systems parallel to one another and separated the narrative text from the illustration by a vertical line—whereas occasionally both visual strategies were employed in one work. The *Pictorial Record*, in contrast, placed the narrative text in a dedicated cartouche which was designed as a scroll (fig. 2 and fig. 6). By doing so, the prints were linked to a long tradition of illustrated narrative scrolls combining painted illustrations with calligraphy, intentionally engaging the established practices of ‘viewing’ and ‘reading’ by using a format within another format—two formats which inherently demonstrate a close interconnection between text and image.

It must be stressed, however, that for the *Pictorial Record* text and image neither functioned as casual decoration or that one took on a supportive role, since they formed an inseparable unity. This is evident in Hiroshige III incorporating the picture scroll for the narrative text in his preparatory drawings, confirming that the series was indeed designed with both text and illustration

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10 For a detailed account of the relation between these guidebooks—and other source materials—and the print series see Moriya and Tsukuba Daigaku Daigakuin (2017).

in mind to perform an equally important role in educating the viewer on the local products of various Japanese provinces.<sup>11</sup> By employing a designated cartouche, the *Pictorial Record* had to present its narrative text more densely and focused than illustrated guidebooks. The narrative text of Aki province (fig. 6), for example, educated its reader as follows:

The Itsukushima Myōjin-Shrine in Aki Province is one of three most scenic spots in Japan with its architecture and view from the shrine being a sight to behold. Above all, the Great Sutra Library, that was founded by order of the Chancellor of the Realm and Imperial Regent Toyotomi Hideyoshi, holds the girders with two ken length [3.64 meters], the beams with almost ten ken and five shaku length [19.71 meters], the rafters with eight shaku width [2.42 meters] and the balustrade furnished in all directions. It is commonly referred to as the Senjōjiki. The really beautiful toothpicks with five colors, that are sold in the shrine facing the sea with the most superb view, are well-known local specialty of the island. Moreover, thousands of monkeys and deer are playing here, who got used to people and beg them for mochi rice cakes.

The explanatory text not only educated about the famous local product, notably toothpicks that were sold in the main hall of the Itsukushima shrine, but also narrated about other elements present in the illustration, such as the monkeys and deer begging for treats, as well as about elements absent from the illustration, such as the Great Sutra Library. In addition, the *Pictorial Record* increased its readability, in contrast to the guidebook (fig. 7), by refraining from composing its text with solely Chinese characters and by replacing the Chinese characters for toothpicks written on the market stall with its phonetic variants (fig. 6). Altogether, the educational information on the province and its famous local product demonstrate that both the visual systems of text and image were integral to the prints performing their didactic role.

Although it can be argued that the *Pictorial Record* was merely an inform-

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11 These preparatory drawings are included in Rijksmuseum and Rappard-Boon (1990: 10).

ative print series, it nevertheless differed from other woodblock prints dedicated to disseminating information. There were two such distinctive woodblock prints genres, notably *kawaraban* 瓦版 and newspaper *nishiki-e* (*shinbun nishiki-e* 新聞錦絵). *Kawaraban* were published during the Edo period to inform their readers about sensational news, for which illustrations were an absolute necessity to accompany the text (Linhart 2005a: 248), whereas newspaper *nishiki-e* presented news as pictures and were published regularly between 1874 and 1878 with the illustration taking up to four-fifths of the sheet (Linhart 2005b: 354-355). Both were disseminating current news or events, mainly sensational, and placed the text around the main compositional elements of the illustration or in a simple rectangle-shaped box. Similarly, the *Pictorial Record* employed text and illustration to convey its message, however, this was not to disseminate information to its buyers on current or sensational news but to educate about Japanese provinces, their famous local products and other relevant information. As such, the *Pictorial Record* is reminiscent of the government-issued didactic prints and textbooks in its approach. Yet, the *Oshiegunsa* or textbooks on national topography, such as *Outline of Geographic Locations in Japan* (*Nihon chishi ryaku* 日本地誌略; 1874, 3 vols.), were unrestricted by their format to achieve their didactic intention as the *Oshiegunsa* measured 35 by 55 centimetres and the textbooks dedicated an average of 2 to 5 pages to each province. The *Pictorial Record*, in contrast, only measured 18.8 by 24.2 centimetres and restricted its discussion of each province to a designated scroll within the image. Nevertheless, the print series exploited its format to its full didactic potential by relying on various source materials and by achieving a symbiosis between the narrative text and illustration conveying the same didactic information. Hence, the *Pictorial Record* can be viewed as a stepping stone to government-issued didactic prints and textbooks which had more volume and space to educate their readers.

## Conclusion

For Ōkura, the exhibition and positive reception of the *Pictorial Record* as well as the recognition and marketability of didactic prints influenced his activities as a publisher. He increased, for example, his production of educational works—such as picture albums (*gafu* 画譜), folded books and diction-



aries—and promoted these works at domestic exhibitions (Iwakiri 2008; Satō 2008; Sekine 2010; Terry 2021). In addition, he joined ten other commercial print publishers in establishing the Picture Book and Nishiki-e Business Association (Jihon Nishiki-e Eigyo Kumiai 地本錦絵営業組合) in April 1881. According to its purpose statement, this association intended “to encourage the civilization of the nation and to make it a principle to educate [the nation/the people]” (Iwakiri 2008: 23, 2009: 24). Hence, commercial print publishers such as Ōkura were not only well aware of the educational policies of the Ministry of Education but were also eager to adapt their commercial strategies to shifting social, economic and political conditions in order to produce works attuned to state policies, to which end the two visual systems of text and image played a crucial role. This is also evident in Ōkura avoiding topics sensitive to the Japanese state, such as the Satsuma province, which was excluded from the series due to its involvement in the ongoing Satsuma Rebellion (Seinan Sensō 西南戦争; 29 January–24 September 1877).

With the state assigning woodblock prints a clear didactic function in the 1870s, this paper offered an alternative perspective of the print series *Pictorial Record of Products of Great Japan* and exposed how the context of modern education can give new meaning to the relationship between text and image in Japanese woodblock prints by revealing how the visual systems of text and image contributed to the didactic intention of both commercial and government-issued woodblock prints. This reinterpretation confirmed the results of previous studies that woodblock prints had a clear self-educational potential as well as provide evidence that the prints were employed as an educational tool for the nation at a time when the framework for modern education was established, in which the two visual systems of text and image played a crucial role.

## Acknowledgements

This paper is based on the research conducted for my doctoral dissertation which is funded by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO). I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the editors and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this article.

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Fig. 1. Utagawa Kuniteru II 二代歌川国輝 (1830-1874). *Pictures Explaining the Necessities of Life (Food, Cloth, and Shelter) Among Family Businesses to Children (Isbokujū no uchi kashoku yo etoki no zu 衣食住之内家職幼絵解の図)*: Blacksmith [Kajiya 鍛冶屋] from the series *Full-colour Woodblock Prints Published by the Ministry of Education (Monbushō hakkō nishiki-e 文部省発行錦絵)*, date unknown; published by the Ministry of Education. Ōban single sheet woodblock print, 35.5 x 24.5 cm. Photograph © National Diet Library Digital Collections.



Fig. 2. Utagawa Hiroshige III 三代歌川広重 (1842-1894). *Tokyo, Production of Nishiki-e (Tōkyō nishiki-e seizō no zu 東京錦絵製造之図)* from the series *Pictorial Record of Products of Great Japan (Dai Nippon bussan zue 大日本物産図會)*, August 1877; published by Yorozyu Magobei 万屋孫兵衛. Chūban single sheet woodblock print, 18.8 x 24.2 cm. Photograph © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.





Fig. 3. Artist unknown. *Pictures of Inventors of Western Machines: James Watt* [*Seiyō kikai batsumeika zu: Uatsuto 西洋器械発明家図: 瓦徳*], from the series *Full-colour Woodblock Prints Published by the Ministry of Education* (*Monbushō hakkō nishiki-e 文部省発行錦絵*), date unknown; published by the Ministry of Education. *Oban* single sheet woodblock print, 33.7 x 24.1 cm. Photograph © Metropolitan Museum of Art.

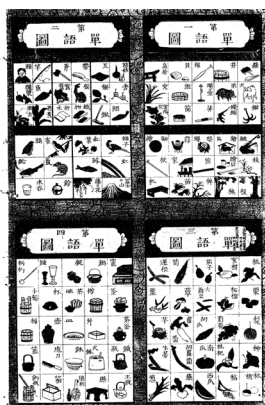
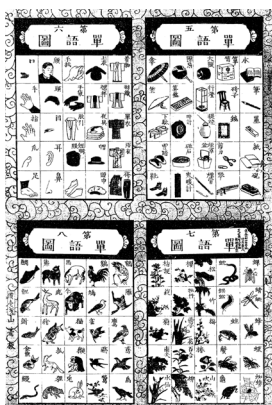


Fig. 4. Word Charts No. 1 to 4 and 5 to 8 reissued on separate *oban*-sized single sheet woodblock prints and mounted into an album. Published by Yamashiroya Jinbei 山城屋甚兵衛, date unknown. Photograph © National Diet Library Digital Collections.

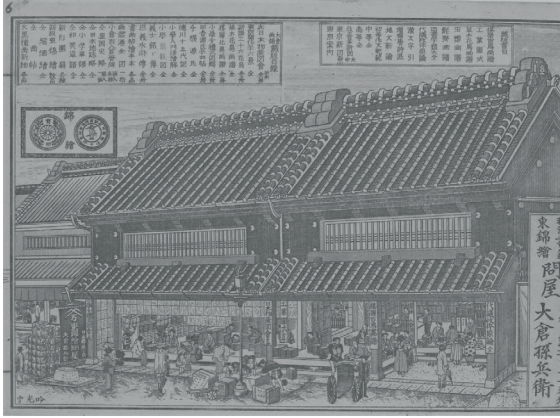


Fig. 5. An advertisement of Ōkura's shop from 1885, which is listed as 'Ōkura Magobei – Wholesale Store of Japanese-Chinese Books and Nishiki-e from Tokyo' (*Wakan shosecki azuma nishiki-e monya Ōkura Magobei* 和漢書籍東錦絵問屋大倉孫兵衛). Included in Fukamachi Genjiō 深満池源次郎, ed. *Pictures of an Extensive Reading of Commerce and Business in Tokyo* (*Tōkyō shōkō hakurane* 東京商工博覧絵, vol. 1, 1885: 3. Woodblock-printed illustrated book, 11 x 16.7 cm. Photograph © gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Fig. 6. Utagawa Hiroshige III 三代歌川広重 (1842–1894). *Aki Province, Selling Toothpicks at Itsukushima* (*Aki no kuni Itsukushima yōji o iku zu* 安芸国厳島楊枝ヲ鬻図) from the series *Pictorial Record of Products of Great Japan* (*Dai Nippon bussan zue* 大日本物産図会), 10 August 1877; published by Yorozyu Magobei 万屋孫兵衛. *Chuban* single sheet woodblock print, 18.8 x 24.2 cm. Photograph © National Diet Library Digital Collections.



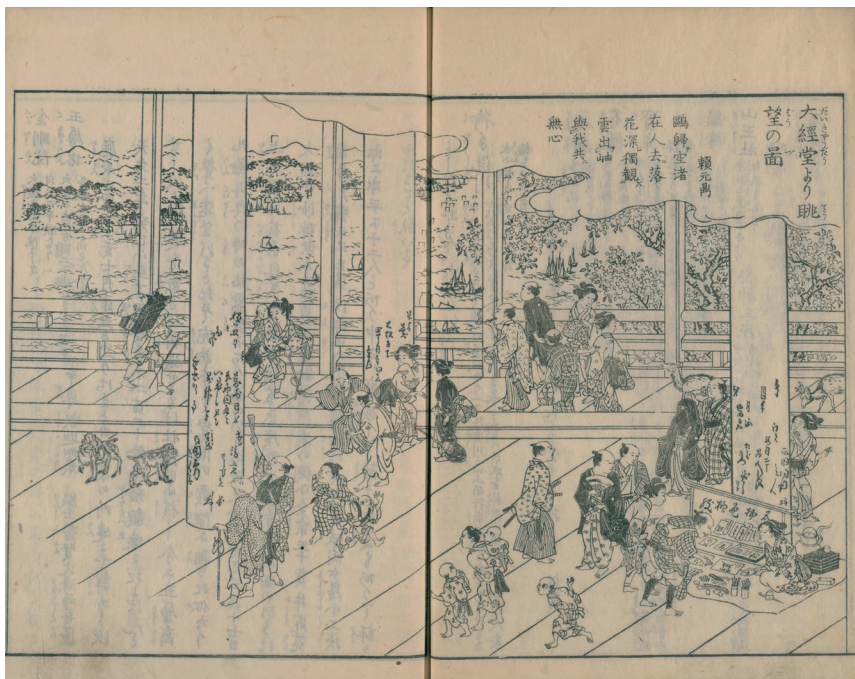


Fig. 7. Okada Kiyoshi 岡田清 (ed.), Yamano Shunpōsai 山野峻峯斎 (illustrations). *Pictorial Record of Itsukushima in Aki Province (Geishū Itsukushima zue 芸州厳島図会)*, vol. 2, 1842; published by Yonamiya Ihei 世並屋伊兵衛. Illustrated book, 26.2 x 18.5 cm. Photograph © National Diet Library Digital Collections.



# Andromeda as *marmoreum opus* in Roman Literature and Wall Painting

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## Abstract

The idea of Andromeda as a *marmoreum opus* (Ov. *Met.* 4.675) features prominently in ancient literature: in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in Euripides' *Andromeda* and in an ekphrasis by Achilles Tatius, texts that all comment on her perfect, art-like appearance. My paper explores how this phrase comes to characterise Andromeda in Roman literature and wall painting. I argue that the three early-imperial fresco types depicting Andromeda explore and yet cast different perspectives on Andromeda's relationship with stone. The 'Landscape Type', with its impressive rock, highlights the materiality of the stone and contrasts it with Andromeda's marble-likeness. The 'Liberation Type' reflects on the mimetic potential of wall painting staging Andromeda in a state of oscillation between statue and living woman. Lastly, the 'Lovers Type' plays on the threat of petrification in presenting Andromeda as an anti-Medusa. The iconotextual notion of Andromeda as *marmoreum opus* and its varied and dynamic pre- and afterlives in Roman visual arts proves an illuminating case study of a reciprocal dialogue between text and image.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Perseus at first mistook Andromeda for a marble statue: *marmoreum ratus esset opus* (Ov. *Met.* 4.675). A surviving fragment of Euripides' influential *Andromeda* relates the the lovers' first encounter in similar terms (TrGF 5.125): "... what maiden's likeness, a statue carved by an expert hand to her very form in stone?"<sup>1</sup> The motif of the marble statue

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1 Trans. Collard and Cropp 2008: 141.

is again taken up in an ekphrasis of a fictitious Andromeda painting in a 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE novel by Achilles Tatius (*Ach. Tat.* 3.7): “She rested within its embrace, and while, if one gazed upon her beauty, one would compare her to a newly carven statue.”<sup>2</sup>

Although this recurring literary characterisation of Andromeda as *mar-morem opus* comments on the heroine’s visibility and thus seems to resonate an intermedial exchange, previous research has not yet explored its implications in Roman visual culture.<sup>3</sup> Recent scholarship, such as Salzman-Mitchell (2005: 77–84), focused on the literary aspect of the objectification of Andromeda through a “fixing gaze” in the *Metamorphoses*. Similarly, Jas Elsner (2007: 3) discussed Andromeda as his first example for a “visual culture of the art gallery” that fills the viewer with “longing, nostalgia, and frustrated erotic desire” (2007: 24). While these approaches view Andromeda’s literary and visual appearance through the lens of objectification, this paper does not focus on gendered power dynamics but rather aims to explore the phenomenon of her characterisation as *figure of stone* in Roman visual culture, of which her objectification is but one aspect.

The core of this analysis will be the rich, varied and well-contextualized visual evidence of Andromeda in Campanian wall painting. Schmaltz (1989: 262–3) distinguishes three types of Andromeda frescoes that depict consecutive scenes of the myth: The ‘Landscape Type’, focusing on Andromeda’s captivity, the ‘Liberation Type’, and the ‘Lovers Type’, showing Perseus and Andromeda as a happy couple.<sup>4</sup> Considering the large quantity and variety

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2 Trans. Gaselee 1969: 149.

3 Previous research includes: Lorenz 2008: 124–149; Maaskant-Kleibrink 1989; Phillips 1968; Schauenburg 1981: 774–790; Vorster 2014.

4 The eight extant examples for the landscape type only appear in the third Pompeian wall painting style, the six examples for the liberation type mostly in the third but also the fourth style, and the ten examples for the lovers type only appear in the fourth style (Schmaltz 1989: 262–3).

of execution of the extant frescoes, I will analyse one representative example of each type, as they all provide a different lens on Andromeda's connection to stone and display dynamic reflections of a medial dialogue on *marmoreum opus*. This paper will look specifically at the visual inspirations as well as responses to the literary motif of *marmoreum opus*, that occurs at least three times in literature, in Euripides, Ovid, and Achilles Tatius, without, however, seeking for "a telltale correspondence between the minutiae of both media" (Squire 2009: 304). The images are no illustrations of the texts, according to Weitzmann's (1959: 1) definition that "illustrations are physically bound to the text whose content the illustrator wants to clarify by pictorial means", and the texts do not contain quotations of famous works of art. Instead, there is a fluid relationship of text and image that is best understood as iconotextuality, which refers to "not only works which really show the interpenetration of words and images in a concrete sense (but also) art works in which one medium is only implied" (Wagner 1996: 16). This approach, "where images conjured verbal discourse, and where texts summoned up images" (Squire 2009: 297) without favouring either text or image, will help us to better understand the complex and intertwined relationship of images and texts in the case of Andromeda. It will shed light specifically on why stoniness became an important underlying theme in Roman visual conceptions of Andromeda, and on why Roman wall paintings in particular explored different concurrent interpretations of Andromeda's stoniness.<sup>5</sup>

### **Rock and marble: Andromeda blending into stone**

The materiality of stone becomes at once apparent in the fresco from the so-called "Mythological Room" in Boscotrecase (Anderson 1987: 48–49; Blanckenhagen 1990), the best preserved example of the 'Landscape Type' (fig. 1): The rock to which Andromeda is bound dominates the whole image. It rises up from the bottom of the fresco and at first seems rather accessible and idyllic with a few shrubs and a mournful female figure, probably Cassio-

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5 For similar comparative approaches for Ariadne and Narcissus see e.g.: Elsner 2007 67–109; 132–176.

peia, reminding us of the mother's boastful vanity as the cause of her daughter's exposure to the *kêtos*. But as the rock grows ever more steeply, its surface becomes rougher and its form more menacing, resembling a gloomy hand that holds the tiny figure of Andromeda in its grip. This impression is evoked also by Achilles Tatius' ekphrasis (*Ach. Tat.* 3.7): here, the natural rock fits perfectly to Andromeda's body, as if rock and girl were made for each other, so much that it encloses her like a tomb. While Achilles Tatius' painting adds a funerary component, it shares with the Boscotrecase fresco the character of the rock as a natural force and the instrument of Andromeda's suffering. In the earlier literary and visual tradition of the myth, the rock was no standard element. In the Sophoclean *Andromeda*, the heroine was probably bound to poles and in South Italian vase images, Andromeda can be tied to a variety of objects. Possibly, Andromeda was first tied to a rock in Euripides' *Andromeda*.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the Greek tradition, Roman sources consistently present the rock as an established element of Andromeda's myth, in visual arts and literature alike. A rock in the supposed original location of the myth in Ioppa even seems to have become a memorial site, or a tourist attraction (Plin. *HN* 5.69; Strab. *geogr.* 16.2.28). We can only speculate how the rock gained such popularity in the Roman context but considering the visibility of the rock, Hellenistic visual culture probably played an integral role to inspire literary versions which again might have inspired visual representations.

The Boscotrecase fresco not only prominently features the rock as the mythological setting, it also explores Andromeda's relation to the rock and characterises her desperate situation. It acts as a spatial divider and isolates Andromeda, placing her out of reach from civilisation and human power—only a flying demigod can reach her. Andromeda's oppressive isolation is enhanced by the surrounding sea and sky, seemingly limitless, coalescing spheres. It remains unclear where the sea ends and the sky begins: the horizon is blurred and the architectural structures in the background are faint, thus creating a disorienting terrain. Even the scene on the far right, where king Cepheus

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6 This might be suggested by TrGF 5. 114 and 125 (Collard – Cropp: 2008: 125; Klimek-Winter 1993: 160; Wright 2008: 204).

greet Perseus in front of his palace, lacks a proper ground as if floating in the air. The all-dominating green-blue colour of the sea takes on a special meaning and power as a “sea of troubles”, resonating with a prominent motif in the Euripidean escape-tragedies (Wright 2005: 207). The actual mythological threat, on the other hand, the *kétos*, is visually disempowered. Its twisting body vanishes into the deep green-blue surrounding and only its feathery tail and head with yellow and lilac highlights stand out in detail. While Roman authors tend to “describe monsters so vast that they could hardly be represented iconographically” (Ogden 2013: 128), the *kête* in Roman art in contrast tend to be reduced to a playful attribute or decorative motif. Serpents acting as dangerous aggressors therefore prove to be a difficult subject in visual media and their menace cannot be expressed through their iconography alone (Muth 2017: 347). In the case of the Boscotrecase fresco, it is the visual superiority of the sea that assumes the role of an oppressive power, overpowering even the *kétos*. The prominent natural elements in the fresco, the sea and the rock, are thus crucial for creating the atmosphere of impending doom and desperation.<sup>7</sup>

A similarly gloomy atmosphere is also evoked in the Polyphemus fresco from the same room in Boscotrecase. Polyphemus is also positioned on a massive rock in the centre of the fresco but his rock offers a contrasting interpretation: for Andromeda, the rock expresses the danger of nature and the hopelessness of her situation, whereas the cyclops is at home on his rock with its peaceful and bucolic atmosphere. The rough stone accurately reflects the uncultivated and crude nature of its inhabitant Polyphemus, but in Andromeda’s case, it is the opposite of her delicateness and beauty.<sup>8</sup> The choice of colour is interesting in this regard: the darker colour of the rock and Andromeda’s lower dress stand in contrast to the light colour of her upper body in the

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7 Newby 2012: 377: “The way that poets such as Ovid and Vergil depict active and threatening landscapes suggests a construction of the natural world as a place of potential violence, realised in art through the visualization of violent events within natural landscapes.”

8 On the antithetical combination of frescoes showing Polyphemus and Andromeda see Bergmann 1999: 92.

fresco. Against the dark and rough rock, Andromeda's skin shimmers white like marble and thus highlights and displays her beauty.<sup>9</sup> Like marble was perceived by Roman viewers, this delicate part of Andromeda appears to be like "a shaped, crafted, polished work of art" (Bradley 2006: 13). But as stone is of course immobile and lifeless, likening Andromeda to be marble also comments on her incapability to escape her imprisonment and ultimately renders her lifeless too.

These evocations of Andromeda's marbleness are further elaborated by Achilles Tatius, whose ekphrasis relies on the knowledge of such compositions as the Boscotrecase fresco. In linking the engulfing power of the rock to the statuesqueness of her body (*Ach. Tat.* 3.7), he even suggests that her statue-likeness is enabled or even caused by her captivation. The stillness of her petrified body has an impact on the way she is exposed to the gaze of onlookers, readers, and viewers alike. As Andromeda is unable to move, Achilles Tatius' ekphrasis extensively lingers on the description of Andromeda's body. In the *Metamorphoses* likewise, Perseus' long gaze at Andromeda plays an important role. Referring to Mulvey's influential 'gaze theory', which states that the narrative pauses as soon as a female body is focused on,<sup>10</sup> Salzman-Mitchell (2005: 78–80) interprets Perseus' gaze on Andromeda's statue-like figure in the *Metamorphoses* as a prime example of the gender-paradigm of male activity versus female passivity. The statuary mode of Andromeda, both in the *Metamorphoses* and Achilles Tatius' ekphrasis, further stresses the role of viewing, not only the viewing performed by the embedded onlooker Perseus but also the one to be performed by the reader. But Andromeda's body exceeds this stereotypical passive and object-like role and instead seems to turn into an ide-

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9 On the Aethiopian origin of Andromeda and for brief discussions on her skin-colour in visual and literary representations see: Bérard (2000); Gruen (2011); Salzman-Mitchell (2005: 165–166); McGrath (1992) on the reception in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century; for discussions on skin-colour in general see: Bradley (2009: 137–150); Snowden (1970 and 1983); Thompson (1972).

10 Cf. L. Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, *Screen* 16, 1975: 6–18.



al object of a viewer's prolonged gaze, a statue.<sup>11</sup> While the link of the stillness of the art object with the gaze is a strong motif in literature, the fresco from Boscotrecase, despite its interest in the theme of stone and petrification, does not zoom in to exploit Andromeda's body as an object of a gaze with openly erotic intent—the figure is simply too small for this purpose. The fresco, rather, lets her figure stand out with her light colour, marble-white against the grey stone and relies on the viewer's imagination to evoke the marvellous beauty of Andromeda. In this way, it focuses on the materiality of stone through contrasting the threatening natural element of the rock and the delicate figure of Andromeda as a *marmoreum opus*, petrified in the form of artful beauty. Such an interplay of materiality might even have influenced the revival of Euripides' literary motif of the *marmoreum opus* in the *Metamorphoses* and later Achilles Tatius.

### **The liberation: from marble to human**

The 'Liberation Type' further explores the marble-like quality of Andromeda. The best-preserved and most-discussed fresco of this type comes from the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6) (Richardson 1955: 155–156) (fig. 2). Earlier research believed this fresco to be a copy of a famous masterpiece by the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE painter Nikias, which has since been disproved or at least doubted.<sup>12</sup> In the depicted scene, Perseus has already defeated the *kêtos* and now leads Andromeda down from her rock. But on closer examination, the composition of the fresco reveals a visual, temporal, and narratological paradox: while Andromeda's left foot is about to take its first step down from the rock, highlighted by her gracefully lifting her dress, her left hand is still chained to the rock, thus forming an incompatible motion sequence.

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11 This was suggested by my second reviewer. On the connection of a lover with the image of his beloved, see Bettini (1999), though he does not discuss the case of Perseus and Andromeda.

12 On the relationship of this fresco with the masterpiece by Nikias see Bergmann 1995: 95–96; Lauter-Bufe 1967: 20–29; Phillips 1968; Rodenwaldt 1909: 230; Schauenburg 1981: 789; Schefold 1979: 153–158; Schmaltz 1989: 259.

The composition of Andromeda's posture therefore cannot consist of one single moment, as for example the neighbouring fresco of Medea in the House of the Dioscuri, which can be considered as a depiction of a "pregnant moment", as proposed by Lessing (cf. Bergmann 1996). In contrast to this concept, the mode to describe a painting in ekphrases is a serial process, i.e. the content of the painting is narrated like a moving spectacle, as, for example, in the case of Philostratus, whose description of paintings has been called a dramatization of the images (Beall 1993: 351). Similarly, in this Andromeda fresco, her figure is composed of different motifs that relate to separate moments of the mythological narrative. This creates a polychronic image, consisting of multiple conflated motifs within one and the same body.<sup>13</sup> In condensing a temporal sequence into the image, at the same time, multiple properties and qualities of Andromeda's character are expressed in the different motifs and merged into one body. In his ekphrasis of a painting depicting Perseus and Andromeda, Lucian praises the painter for having depicted much in little space, meaning specifically different personal qualities (ἐν βραχεῖ δὲ πολλὰ, Luc. *Dom.* 22). In the fresco from the House of the Dioscuri, too, each motif highlights a different quality of Andromeda's character: her beauty, her desperation and hopelessness, her "statuesqueness", her fortunate rescue, her love to Perseus, and the resulting happy ending. This suggests that her seemingly incoherent body posture on the one hand helps to create the temporal sequence of imprisonment to liberation, and on the other hand offers an attributive characterisation of the heroine.<sup>14</sup>

It is particularly the motif of Andromeda's chained left hand that creates the tension in the composition of the fresco – it must then have a special significance if it was not eliminated for the sake of the composition. In the fresco, Andromeda's arm is forced into an unnatural position and from the elbow

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13 This mode of storytelling can also be found in Athenian vases, as described by Giuliani (2003: 159–164).

14 This double function of the incompatible combination of motifs is also proposed by Biehlfeldt (2005: 119) for Orestes.

upward appears greyish, almost anaemic, while her hand hangs lifeless in its shackles, similar to Achilles Tatius' description (*Ach. Tat.* 3.7): "Her hands were stretched out against the wall of rock (...) and the fingers white with the pallor of death."<sup>15</sup> Quite contrary to the fresco from Boscotrecase, the colour of her hand now astonishingly resembles the colour of the rock behind her, both a greyish shade of white. The hand almost seems disembodied from Andromeda herself as if it belonged to the rock instead of her body. This creates the impression that Andromeda is not wholly human—but rather in parts a *marmoreum opus*. Also, the smaller rock, on which she stands in the fresco, forms a pedestal, which Moormann (2008: 198) identifies as a key feature of painted statues in wall painting. It is obvious that the fresco references a sculptural tradition of Andromeda that shows a comparable composition, in that it depicts Andromeda in the highly transitory image between captivity and liberation. A particularly well-preserved statue in the Sammlung Wallmoden shows Perseus helping Andromeda to step down from the rock and holding up her bound arm (fig. 3). A statue of the same type in Dresden contrasts the white Parian marble of Andromeda's body with the dark *marmo bigio* of her dress and thus accentuates her marble-white skin even more (Sinn et al. 2017: 33; Vorster 2011: 333–338). In a Late Hellenistic context, those statues were probably displayed in a landscape setting (Vorster 2015: 43), as for example the statues of Marsyas. Although well-known statues do not usually find direct resonance in wall painting as "one-to-one imitations" (Moormann 2008: 207), especially not Hellenistic groups (Allroggen-Bedel 1999: 360), these Andromeda statues and the frescoes are conceptually connected (Vorster 2015: 41). The awareness of Andromeda's sculptural tradition must have inspired her depiction in wall painting and the intermedial reference created an even stronger opportunity to present Andromeda as *marmoreum opus*.

Before returning to the question of the incoherence between Andromeda's captivity and liberty, we need to digress into art-historical discourse to understand this citation of the marble Andromeda in wall painting. Marble

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15 Trans. Gaselee 1969: 149.

as a material is especially suited to express extraordinary realism of mimetic artworks (Isager 1991: 177), evoking “brilliance and artistic perfection” (Bradley 2006: 13). Through her presentation as a work of statuary, Andromeda is linked to old tropes connected to the statuary tradition: beauty, lifelikeness, and lifelessness. In the *Metamorphoses*, this ambivalence is recognised, as Perseus recognises that Andromeda only appears like a statue (*marmoreum ratus esset opus*, *Met.* 4.675, my emphasis) and reacts with a *stupor* (*Met.* 4.676). This physical reaction for the highest amazement is reserved for truly fantastic marvels, a *mirum* or *thauma*, a wonder to behold (cf. Prier 1999). At the core of this notion seems to be precisely this impossibility to explain such a marvel (Platt 2009: 44) and the impossibility to distinguish between life-like art and art-like life, as is the case with Andromeda’s beauty. This ideal and picture-perfect beauty exceeds nature’s boundaries and can only be found in the realm of art, not in one single woman (Salzman-Mitchell 2008: 307), as the anecdote of Zeuxis’ famed Helena painting illustrates (Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 2.1). The creation of a perfect woman as a work of art is expressed in a nutshell in the myth of Pygmalion and his ivory girl in the *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 10.243–97) and Andromeda as a *marmoreum opus* can be understood as an inversion of the ivory girl: while the created girl comes alive, Andromeda becomes like a statue and turns into an almost lifeless artwork (Segal 1998: 19–20; Sharrock 1991: 49). In the fresco of the House of the Dioscuri, only the fettered part of Andromeda’s skin seems marmoreal. But precisely where Perseus touches her arm, it acquires a more vital colour, as if she comes to life through the touch of her lover, like Pygmalion’s ivory girl, whose miraculous animation manifests through touch (*Met.* 10.281–6). Thus, in the fresco, Perseus seems to save Andromeda not only from the *kêtos* but also from her imprisonment as a lifeless statue. While this continuation of the motif cannot be realised by the statuary groups because of their marble materiality, wall painting can explore such a mimetic enlivenment of Andromeda’s statuary format through Perseus.

Moreover, this touch carries yet another association beyond that of Andromeda’s re-animation. It is placed exactly in the centre axis of the fresco and is the only physical and emotional connection between the lovers. Perseus does not demolish Andromeda’s chains, as he does expectedly in literary versions

of the myth (e.g. Luc. *Dial. mar.* 14), but instead seems to be supporting her chained arm. While Schmaltz (1989: 267) and Lorenz (2008: 135) both are reminded of the *cheir epi karpo*, which in Greek iconography represents the husband's claim of his newly-wed bride, this grip of the elbow differs from this. Again, literature may help provide a link between Andromeda's chains and what Ovid casts as the bonds of love (Ov. *Met.* 4.678–9): "Oh! those are not the chains you deserve to wear, but rather those that link fond lovers together!"<sup>16</sup> Perseus does not seek Andromeda's true liberation but rather wishes to transform her fetters into chains of love, thus alluding to the notion of *servitium amoris* in Latin love poetry (Tib. 1.1.55; Murgatroyd 1981: 596). The theme of love was already a striking feature in Euripides' drama, where Perseus calls on Eros before his fight against the *kētos* (TrGF 5.136; Gibert 1999). Eros' hand in the lovers' fate is even more pointedly realised in Philostratus' ekphrasis of an Andromeda painting, in which not Perseus but Eros frees Andromeda and leads her down from her rock (Philostr. *Imag.* 1.29.2). The liberation of Andromeda is thus visualized as an act of love by the personification of love who takes on the role of her lover. If we return to the fresco in the House of the Dioscuri, we can see how this motif of the captivating force of love has been potently visualized: Perseus upholds Andromeda's chains. While he is freeing her, he is becoming unfree himself.

### Toying with petrification?

The happy union of Andromeda and Perseus is depicted in the 'Lovers Type', as seen for example in a fresco from the House of the Prince of Naples (VI.15.8) (fig. 4): The couple sits side by side, leaning towards each other, while Perseus holds the Gorgon's head above his own to produce a reflection of it in a pond at their feet. While depictions of erotic couples in a pyramidal scheme admittedly are common in the fourth style (cf. Provenziale 2008), the reflection of Medusa in the water, which is particularly well-pre-

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16 Trans. Miller 1916 (revised by Goold): 227. Similarly, in Manilius' rendition of the myth, Perseus envies Andromeda's "lucky" chains (Manil. 5.573: *felicisque vocat, teneant quae mebra, catenas*).

served in this fresco, turns the gorgoneion into more than just a ‘meaningless prop’ (Schmaltz 1989: 268). The motif of reflection also plays a crucial role in the myth of Narcissus, which is popularly featured in fourth style frescoes (Balensiefen 1990: 130–162).<sup>17</sup> Like Perseus’ stupefied reaction to the sight of Andromeda, Narcissus, too, is completely stunned by his reflection, even like a statue in Parian marble (*adstupet; e Pario formatum marmore signum*, *Met.* 3.418–9). For Narcissus, the sight of his reflection proves to be deadly, whereas the sight of Medusa is rendered safe only if perceived in reflection. In the myth, this fact proves the crucial instrument for her annihilation as Perseus uses Athena’s shield as a mirror. In these frescoes, however, heroic armour is exchanged for a calm pond to show the reflection of the gorgoneion. This pond is not only reminiscent of Narcissus’ pond but also represents the extreme opposite and a tamed version of the former “sea of troubles” featured in the ‘Landscape Type’.

Even though in the frescoes of both previous types Perseus is in possession of the gorgoneion, he never uses his “obvious super-weapon” (Ogden 2013: 128). Ironically, in the most peaceful composition of the ‘Lovers Type’, the gorgoneion is now ostentatiously presented above the heads of the protagonists as a prerequisite of the happy ending. Perseus’ final enemies in the *Metamorphoses*, like Andromeda’s former suitor Phineus (*Met.* 5.1–235), are defeated with the gorgoneion, leaving behind a “statue gallery of his petrified opponents” (Hardie 2002: 178).

Interestingly, in the fresco of the House of the Prince of Naples, the mirrored gorgoneion is not depicted upside down but looks straight out of the fresco, rather threateningly like a second dangerous gorgoneion, reinforcing the threat of petrification for the viewer. The gorgoneion in Perseus’ hand, however, even looks towards Andromeda, creating a connection between Andromeda and Medusa. This juxtaposition draws attention to the similarities and differences of both characters (Salzman-Mitchell 2005: 83): Medusa’s

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17 For further analysis on representations of Narcissus in wall painting see e.g. Balensiefen 1990: 130–162; D’Angelo 2012; Elsner 2007: 132–176; Zanker 1962.

petrifying gaze was conquered by Perseus' superiority of sight, whereas Andromeda is capable of dangerously stupefying Perseus with her appearance whilst seeming petrified like a marble statue. Andromeda thus might be understood as an "anti-Medusa", both women being "opposite sides of the coin" (Heslin 2018: 90). The disembodied gorgoneion in the fresco then not only serves as a visual reminder for Perseus' heroic victories, but also for the danger of being turned into a statue – by either one of the three protagonists. In the frescoes as in the *Metamorphoses*, Andromeda's myth ends as it began, by possibly becoming statue-like (Hardie 2002: 183).

### **Conclusion: From text to image – from image to text**

Andromeda's relationship with stone, more explicitly marble, permeates her depiction in wall painting, each type focusing on a different aspect of a stony materiality. The wide range of associations of Andromeda as *mar-morem opus* reveals a fruitful intermedial exchange between motifs shared between literary and visual culture. This intertwined interaction of text and image works both ways, so that "in the same way that images engage with a viewer's knowledge of texts (...) so too might texts play upon a number of visual associations" (Squire 2009: 305).

To conclude this case-study on Andromeda, I would like to propose a scenario for the historical dynamics of this text-image-relationship. While Euripides probably serves as a first foundation of Andromeda's relationship with stone, it seems likely that a Hellenistic statuary group with its emphasis on landscape setting provided the stimulus for stone as a key material theme in both Roman wall painting and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This landscape setting is translated into the 'Landscape Type' with the rock as its threatening key agent, contrasting the rock's roughness with Andromeda's delicate figure and using its sinister materiality as a poignant foil for Andromeda's marble-likeness. The 'Liberation Type' was inspired by the composition of the Hellenistic sculptures and highlights the ambivalence of Andromeda's statuesque condition in a polyvalent image, that ultimately enables her 'revitalisation' through Perseus' touch. The 'Lovers Type' pursues a different direction with its playful take on the danger of petrification. Not only does this type evoke

visual representations of Narcissus, it also reflects the fate of Perseus' petrified enemies and presents Andromeda as a counterpart of Medusa. Lastly, the ekphrases of Philostratus and Achilles Tatius both rely on the knowledge of the visual and literary tradition of Andromeda and amplify certain elements, for example the funerary connotation or the involvement of Eros.

What role, then, does Ovid's phrase *marmoreum opus* play, dating between the 'Landscape' and 'Liberation Type'? Instead of influencing the images, the images rather seem to have inspired this wording: the multifaceted spectrum of Andromeda's connection to stone is narrowed down and fixated in Ovid's *marmoreum opus*, which then has an ekphrastic nature. Ultimately, the iconotextuality of this notion creates a reciprocal dialogue of text and image.

## Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank Ruth Bielfeldt, who also supervised my Master's thesis at the Institute for Classical Archaeology at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich in autumn 2020, on which this paper is based on, for numerous inspiring discussions, her constructive suggestions, and her support of my academic progress. I am also much indebted to Viktoria Räuchle for her constant guidance and for providing me with so many insights.

I also wish to thank my two anonymous reviewers for their thorough assessment and their valuable comments. And lastly, I am most grateful to the editors of this volume for offering me this chance to publish my paper and for their quick support concerning all matters – my heartfelt thanks.

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Fig. 1. Fresco from the Villa of Agrippa Postumus in Boscorease in the 'Landscape Type'. 3<sup>rd</sup> Pompeian Style, around 10 BCE – 0. Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, Inv. 20.192.16.



*Fig. 2.* Fresco from the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6) in the 'Liberation Type'. 4<sup>th</sup> Pompeian Style, 62–79 CE. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, Inv. 8998. – with permission of the Ministry of Culture (Italy) – National Museum Naples.



*Fig. 3.* Plaster cast of the sculpture group from the Amphitheatrum Castrense in the 'Liberation Type' (Sammlung Wallmoden Hannover). First quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE after a model from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. Institute of Archaeology, University of Göttingen, Photo: Stephan Eckardt.



*Fig. 4.* Fresco from the House of the Prince of Naples in the 'Lovers Type' (VI.15.8). 4<sup>th</sup> Pompeian Style. Archaeological Parc of Pompeii, in situ. – with the permission of the Ministry of Culture (Italy) – Archaeological Parc of Pompeii.

## Forthcoming issues

### Volume 37.1

#### *Rethinking the Archaeology-Heritage Divide*

Edited by ALISA SANTIKARN, ELİFGÜL DOĞAN, OLIVER ANTCHAK, KIM EILEEN RUF AND MARIANA PINTO LEITÃO PEREIRA

Archaeology and Heritage are often thought of as different, with separate theories, concerns and practices, despite dealing with the same objects of study and sharing a common history. At the heart of this upcoming volume is the argument that the current institutional and ideological division between Archaeology and Heritage is false, and the two are better viewed as interdependent and mutually constitutive. What can be gained from questioning this pre-existing notion of disciplinary difference and can/should it be dismantled? The collection of works aims to interrogate this ideological disjuncture through case studies and theoretical explorations that highlight not only examples of where a mutual engagement of the disciplines has been achieved, but also instances where their continued separation has been problematised. This reconceptualization serves to question the very purposes of both heritage and archaeological research and who their intended audiences are, thus broadening the scope of archaeological practice to include a more central role in heritage management—and vice versa. Perspectives presented in this volume will interrogate the historic underpinnings of both disciplines and contribute to the development of a more ethical and decolonised study of the past.



## **Volume 37.2**

### *Aesthetics, Sensory Skills, and Archaeology*

Edited by POLINA KAPSALI AND RACHEL PHILLIPS

In the last two decades, growing interest in studying human-object interaction has rekindled attempts to consider the usefulness of the concept of aesthetics in archaeology. Traditionally framed within art-historical and philosophical discourse, the concept has also been used in archaeology as a means to explore past experiences, by shedding light on the capacity of the material world to train the senses and shape human perception. Following on from earlier ARC volumes, such as 'Aesthetics and Style' (1985) and 'The Archaeology of Perception and the Senses' (1998), this volume aims to explore the relationship between aesthetics, sensory skills, and social praxis in past societies and to investigate how social norms are shaped through engagement with the material world.

We consider 'aesthetics' as a concept capturing the socially informed processes of perceiving and evaluating the properties of the physical world (including the natural environment, the human body, and artefacts). We view these processes as dependent on the ways sensory skills are trained in societies through people's interaction with the physical world: as part of their socialisation, people learn to establish associations, knitting together objects, their properties, other people, and values. These associations facilitate social categorisations, routines, and relations. But how can we detect these processes archaeologically?



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