

## IMAGE AND TEXT

SQUIRE (M.) *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*. Pp. xxvi + 516, ills, pls. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Cased, £75. ISBN: 978-0-521-75601-3.

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This formidably-researched book could be said to take several stances at once – indeed it deliberately sets out to do so: S. explicitly commits in his introduction to more than one approach with several intended audiences and sets of receptive sympathies. He says that he is trying to seize an opportunity to re-build some intellectual bridges between the traditional stance of Classical art history (out on a limb) and the practice of that of other periods and places. At the same time, he is concerned to explore and confront the underlying history of the image-and-text hierarchy which sits at the core of the intellectual construction of visual discourse. In this, the book joins a number of others in an evolving process of re-thinking Art History, an attempt to re-configure its disciplinary paradigms and its methodologies of interpretation.

Meanwhile, Object Studies, as distinct from cataloguing typologies, are perhaps beginning to gain disciplinary ground as an intellectually respectable approach to things which sit in that uncomfortable no-man's-land between interpretable art and archaeological evidence. The problem of moving beyond mere description, objective or not, of visual material which in itself constitutes the greater part of its own documentation is receiving due attention. This book is not the first to take on the task of trying to define where Classical Art and Archaeology should sit in relation to 'real' Archaeology or Art History; after all, the field was declared dead by one of its leading cultivators over a decade ago, to little noticeable diminution in published crops – if anything the monograph-count has increased. That said, an essential problem remains: however we approach the intellectual content or emotional impact of a visual medium, via theoretical frameworks, associative or explicative description, cross-referencing of content or form, typology, or any other methodology, we are going to have to communicate our reaction and findings verbally. Arguably, as soon as we say that we are 'reading' a visual source, we commit to the 'hegemony of text and servitude of image' which S. defines as the historical position he is trying to undermine. Understandably, this book engages closely with the history of scholarship and polemic in this intellectual tradition before it moves on to the case studies with which S. argues for his own approaches.

The first core section of the book explores a densely argued and documented history both of the effects of Protestant theology on the reception of visual material in general, and of the consequent European intellectual tradition which explicitly privileges word over image, not least because of the perceived greater demand imposed by verbal material on intellectual effort. This allows for a survey of critical tradition post-Winckelmann, which can include more recent work on Classical art, much of which, as S. remarks, tends to 'configure images around texts', but also introduces some of the attempts to construct theories of contemporary viewing which precede his own in Part 2 of this book. A discussion of Lessing's *Laocoon*, and its argument for the primacy of poetry over painting, firms up the case for a Protestant tradition, and then moves on to begin to argue for an antiquity in which image and text were differently related, using a variety of Graeco-Roman examples which use both interactively, including funerary reliefs, symposium vases, and

eventually the wall-paintings from the Casa degli Epigrammi in Pompeii. This last demonstrates an impressive facility for analysis of the content of both its epigrams and its pictures and for linking them programmatically; the section ends with a seductive argument for the added meaning provided by their intentional location within an illusionistic mural scheme.

This, though, is also the point at which S. makes the move towards the emphasis of much of the latter part of the book on ephrastic material, loosely so defined, and where the very real problems of approach to the visual beyond the purely descriptive begin to surface. S. has by this stage committed to detailed analysis of ancient art-works which integrate a verbal element, and the subsequent section on the Sperlonga grotto is more interested in the embedded though later Faustinus epigram than it perhaps can be in the sculptures with which it was intended to be read. S. encapsulates his problem at the end of the section: 'it is clear that the sculptures complicated interpretations of the inscription: to view the sculptures is to partake in their own system of reference and iconographic allusion, and this necessarily impinges upon the way in which viewers read the epigram'. This presupposes an audience which does both, of course.

Interestingly, the next section, on the House of Propertius and its epigrams, introduces us to Lucian on educationally differentiated responses to visual stimuli in a passage from *On the Hall* which reads as a very direct ancestor of the argument for the primacy of the intellectual demands of text over image. The House of Propertius belongs in a context in which Lucian, Philostratus' *Imagines* and other ephrastic texts are already moving beyond the strictly visual. S. argues, with Elsner and others, that the *Imagines* demands a knowledge of the kind of painting it writes about from the reader or listener before they can engage with its author's intentions. The subsequent chapter uses the Polyphemus theme (one which is used by Philostratus) to argue for genuine inter-engagement in antiquity between media, but also for inter-engagement between images of the same subject. We might note a parallel here with the introductory disquisition on a series of inter-referential cigarette advertisements with which the book begins.

Chapter 6 might be viewed as re-balancing S.'s act, in that it engages with the ancient food-painting, of which there are many surviving examples both in and out of their original associative positions, and they can be linked with both verbal and visual 'discourses about semblance, food and *luxuria*', rather than continuing to suffer downgrading by association with the later 'still-life'. Here S. can argue convincingly for a triangle of resonance in which a recoverable social context, a range of surviving visual objects, and ephrastic texts (Philostratus again) form an inclusive bond.

The conclusion bounces off another set of advertisements, which flip the association between two captions and two images before pointing out that 'if everyone thought the same, nothing would ever change'. It provides a constructive overview both of current disciplinary practices and their boundaries, and of the potentially acceptable bridges the book attempts to construct across the 'gulf between words and images'. It was certainly worth a try, and it will be interesting to see whether its readers view them as bridges or tightropes.

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