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ICAR:
An Internet Database
of Figured Scenes in
Pre-Roman Italy

BY NATACHA LUBTCHANSKY

INTRODUCTION

ICAR, an acronym for Iconography and Archaeology, is an internet database of figured scenes in Etruscan and Italic art. This extensive project contains artistic scenes that date from the eighth century B.C. to the late fourth century B.C. from Italy alone.¹ These present chronological limits are subject to change.

1. Program Development

This database is part of a larger research program called *Image and Religion in Classical Antiquity*, created in Rome at the ...École Française.² The project is now based at the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) at Nanterre University (Maison René Ginouvès), in the unit directed by Agnès Rouveret (*Espaces, pratiques sociales et images dans les mondes grec et romain*), and supported by funds from the French Ministry of Research (Action Concertée Incitative Jeunes Chercheurs, 2000). This program aims to bring together different scientific approaches such as History and Anthropology of Religion, History of Art, and Iconography and Archaeology, in dealing with images from the ancient Mediterranean world.³

The idea of creating an Internet database is an important part of this project. One goal is to compare images ('documents') created by different cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world. Another goal is to develop historiographic perspective while collecting data for each iconographic document. Indeed, iconographic studies need processing tools such as those used in history and other fields of study. We now have available improved database sets that provide the historian with all the ancient texts from almost every part of the ancient world. Such a tool should be available for archaeological material—images and objects—that are just as useful as texts for historical inquiry. One example of an Internet database of this sort was created by Oxford University for over 67,000

Attic vases in the Beazley Archive at the Ashmolean Museum.⁴ For pre-Roman iconography in Italy there are merely two small data sets on Etruscan mirrors developed by P. Moscati at the CNR in Italy and R. Lambrechts in Louvain University.

The database is directed by Natacha Lubtchansky, *Maître de Conférences* in Tours University, as part of the activities of the unit of Agnès Rouveret (ESPRI) in the CNRS and Nanterre University. We also have cooperative agreements with the *Ecole Française of Rome*, the *Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art*, the *Soprintendenze Archeologiche per l'Etruria Meridionale* and the *Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts* in Rome. So far, we have elaborated the structure of the database and processed a corpus of wall paintings from Etruria. Members of the research group are: Sylvain Mottet (computer programmer and database design - CNRS–Paris V University), Annick Fenet (researcher - Paris X–Nanterre University), Laurent Haumesser (assistant researcher - Paris X–Nanterre University) and Ludi Chazalon (assistant researcher - Aix-en-Provence University).

2. Conception—Iconographic scope and historiographic data

Iconographic scope: the figured image is the central and most important element for description, techniques, artists and dating, locations, interpretation, bibliography and illustrations. Other data, not only iconographic information, is also provided on the database, mainly on the archaeological background. ICAR does not include every archaeological object from pre-Roman Italy but only those with figured scenes. For the painted tombs of Etruria, we have considered only tombs decorated with one or several figured scenes, and not those with merely ornamental motifs. The database does not contain all the tomb paintings.

Historiographic data: all facts in the database are accompanied by their bibliographic references. For dating a particular tomb, reference is made to all the conclusions reached by different scholars. In the same way, those who propose a particular artist, site of discovery, or interpretation of the scene, are explicitly mentioned. Information given in each published study is shared amongst the various fields of the database. Furthermore, we only consider what has been published in the academic literature, without giving new interpretations, and we do not add comments. The information is reported as objectively as possible. Some records have several empty fields when no information was found in any published study.

3. Contents

In reporting information on individual scenes on objects and their archaeological background, we attempt to distinguish facts from interpretations, a difficult task since some post-modernist researchers claim there are only interpretations and no facts at all.

For example, in dealing with a particular scene, the text of the database gives a description with as little interpretation as possible. Individual characters are not named, for example: the name 'Herakles' does not appear, but rather 'a man with a club and a lion-skin.' The **description** is composed using a standard pattern, with an identical vocabulary. We describe the scene from left to right. All the iconographic **interpretations**

of the scene are then to be found in this section of the database: the theme, and the characters, the values of the scene (social, mythological, ritual, etc.), as proposed by different authors in their published studies. A short summary of each modern study is provided, as well as a list of pre-established **keywords**. This list presents the full contents of the scene, including themes, mythological, historical, and everyday characters, ancient authors, and historical places. In the example above, next to ‘club’ and ‘lion,’ the keyword list also contains ‘Herakles’ and ‘Theseus,’ since such identifications appear in the bibliography. The **illustrations** in the database are as complete as possible: BW/colour photographs, modern copies (as watercolours, drawings, lithography, engravings), archaeological sketches or tracings, plans, together with information about the provenance of these images and detailed legends.

We also have information on the object or archaeological surroundings in which the scene was found; its **location**; its **technique**; the **dating** of production; the **artists** and **workshops**; the **archaeological background** (place and dating of provenance, type of background); the history of **collections** (different places where the objects are kept); and a reference to the **ornamental motifs** associated with the scene.

The working database has been designed using File Maker Pro on a PC and Macintosh computer, and the website uses a SQL database on the university server.

The copyright for making this material available on the Internet is still a difficult question. Although we have worked out co-operative agreements with several institutions, each country has its own regulations for use of illustrations. The Internet images cannot be downloaded in a high definition format. Access to the database is free, but requires user registration before use.

4. Searching on Internet

The address of the ICAR website is <http://www.mae.u-paris10.fr/icar/>. It was designed for scholars studying iconography, as well as those conducting stylistic and archaeological research. The database is useful for students since it offers wide documentation that is often scattered in many locations and hard to access.

Any search can be conducted over a large number of criteria, all gathered in five categories: type of object and general bibliography; dating and workshop; provenance; the collection where the object is kept; ornamental patterns connected with the scene; and iconography of the scene. Each of these categories has from one to nine additional criteria so each search can be extremely detailed. All requests can be written as free text or with pre-established word-lists, from any or several categories.

For example:

- Date and a Keyword: ‘What scenes exist with a monkey between 480 and 350 BC?’
- Character and Provenance: ‘What representations do we have of the *Dioscuroi* from funerary contexts?’ or ‘How many scenes of acrobats do we have in Chiusi?’
- Theme, Date and a Collection: ‘What fourth-century scenes of the *symposion* are found in the Museum of Tarquinia?’
- Published study and Objects: ‘In which study did B. d’Agostino refer to the *Tomba del Vecchio* of Tarquinia?’

– Iconographic Value and an Archaeologist: ‘Did M. Pallottino ever study the eschatological value of Etruscan and Italic figured scenes?’

For simple or combined requests, the ICAR database will provide two types of records: either the figured scenes themselves or the objects on which the scenes can be found. The user will be able to view a complete record of scenes matching his request, for details concerning the iconography –description and interpretations, or a record of the object itself with information on bibliography, dating and workshop, provenance, archaeological background and collection. The images are shown as thumbnails or can be enlarged to the size of the screen (800 x 600 dpi).

As an interactive website, it is possible for the user to advance to other records of ICAR, from any criteria listed in a blue font. For example, after selecting the *Tomba delle Iscrizioni* in Tarquinia, the work of J. M. Blázquez, ‘Representaciones de puertas en la pintura arcaica etrusca,’ appears in the dating and artists section. By clicking on this bibliographic link, the user is able to consult all the objects this paper deals with. Another example: for the *Tomba del Triclinio*, F. Roncalli has proposed identifying the two horse-men on the entrance wall flanking the door as the *Dioscuri*. Thus, this term is to be found in the keywords list for this figured scene. By clicking on keywords, the user could consult all the figured scenes that have been similarly identified in the literature.

5. Work in progress and preliminary results

In order to present information coherently, we intend to process each corpus separately, so the user will be aware of what the database contains. Having completed our first corpus on the wall paintings of Etruria, the database contains 570 records of different scenes from 182 tombs, and includes 500 analysed studies and 1,100 illustrations. These numbers continually increase as we add information from new publications. Other *corpora* now in the processing phase include: archaic relief sculpture from Chiusi (Fany Lejeune and H. Laurence Chevillat); the painted tombs of Classical and Hellenistic period from Campania (Rita Benassai, Santa Maria Capua Vetere University, Italy); Etruscan black-figured vase painting (Dimitri Paleothodoros, Volos University, Greece); Etrusco-corinthian vase painting, (Dominique Frère, Lorient University, France); and Etruscan figured sarcophagi, (Laurent Haumesser). In addition, ICAR will be used in an annual course on antique iconography for graduate students in the *Ecole Française de Rome*.

NOTES

1. These present chronological limits are subject to change.
2. S. Estienne; C. Pouzadoux; N. Lubtchansky; and also D. Jaillard and I. L’Herbette (Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes).
3. See homepage of our website: <http://www.image-et-religion.org>
4. See the website: <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk>