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There is no original!

What did the Greeks and the Romans think a copy was? What were their criteria for assessing the value and exactitude of a copy? How does orality affect the way stories are depicted in art? Conversely, what is the role of text? Objects from Archaic Greek art (the bilingual vases of Andokides/Lysippides) through the Roman era (the monument of Aemilius Paullus) are considered. At the same time literary references from Thucydides and Plato to Cicero and the two Plinys are crucial both for what they say directly about copies and indirectly for what they mean by "imitation" and "translation". Cicero, for example, produces what he considers a translation of Aristotle's Topics, even though he has no text of Aristotle at hand, with the inevitable and obvious result of two very disparate works. Classical interest in "original" art must not be confused with the classical desire to know "original" inventors. Nor can context be ignored. People in antiquity lived in a very different world from ours where neither texts nor pictures of objects from distant places were readily available. As a result, the one pre-eminent characteristic of any Greek or Roman copy, text or art, was gist, as Thucydides (1.22) would have put it, since only a very few would have seen "the original", much less remember it with precision. Exactitude, the basis of our concept of copy, was rarely of concern. This conclusion has major ramifications for our judgement and understanding of classical art.