

NOTES ON *DILIGENTIA* AS A TERM OF ROMAN ART CRITICISM

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IT IS DIFFICULT TO READ Pliny the Elder's discussions of art without noticing that he often praises the skillful imitation of nature, expressing particular admiration for representations, *similitudines*, that deceive viewers into the belief that they are looking at "the real thing." Pliny tells us that the realism (*indiscreta veri similitudo*) of a bronze dog licking its wounds, a sculpture once displayed on the Capitoline Hill, was so impressive that its guards had to pledge their lives as a sort of insurance for it (*HN* 34.38). He marvels at a scene painting in which "crows, deceived by the image flew straight at the representation (*similitudinem*) of rooftiles" (*HN* 35.23). The *Natural History* is, in fact, filled with anecdotal accounts of artworks in which birds fly at painted grapes, horses whinny at paintings of their species, representations of athletes actually seem to sweat, and portraits are so lifelike that professional physiognomists can divine the year of the sitter's death.¹ Such anecdotes have dominated modern evaluations of Pliny's artistic judgment, often leading to the conclusion that his understanding of the subject is simple-minded and unsophisticated.²

Pliny did, however, evaluate works of art according to criteria other than their ability to deceive the eye. In this regard, one critical term that repays closer examination is *diligentia*. The present study argues that *diligentia* characterized the best artists, and that this quality was directly related to their ability to produce convincing likenesses, or *similitudines*. It also argues, however, that an artist's *diligentia* was not sufficient to make a work of art great. In Pliny's view, which appears to be shared by other Roman writers, an artist might be excessively *diligens*, and might on this account destroy other qualities that were desirable in a work of art.

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1. See, for example, Plin. *HN* 35.65, 35.95–96, 35.71, 35.88–89.

2. So Moorehouse 1940, 35: "... his aesthetic sense was not highly developed and ... Pliny, if alive today, would prefer the product of the still camera to any painting, and the moving (and talking!) picture to either, because of the greater 'likeness.'" Similarly, from one of the most frequently cited commentaries on art in the *Natural History*: "If Pliny cared for art at all, it was only for its most realistic and imitative aspects" (Sellers [1896] 1968, xciii). Isager (1991, 136–40) accepts the primacy of illusionism in Pliny's aesthetics, but argues that it is shared by numerous Roman and Greek writers, and therefore cannot be taken as evidence that Pliny is insensitive to art. Daneu Lattanzi (1982) and Michel (1987) have argued that Pliny possessed an aesthetic sensibility far keener than is usually acknowledged.

The word *diligentia* has a variety of meanings, including “attentiveness,” “assiduity,” “thrift,” and “carefulness”; but because it appears frequently in Pliny’s discussions of art, it is fair to ask specifically how the term functions in Roman art criticism. It is widely agreed that, in such contexts, the term can denote an artist’s “precision in the application of small details—proportions, measurements or fine points in naturalistic representation.”³ The locus classicus for this definition is a passage in which Pliny says that Pythagoras of Rhegium first sculpted nerves, veins and hair *diligentius* (*HN* 34.58–59). So the term appears to refer in some cases to the meticulous reproduction of minute details; and by extension it sometimes simply means “precision.” J. J. Pollitt, a pioneer in the study of the terms of ancient art criticism, therefore accepted the suggestion initially made by Carl Robert that the Latin term is essentially an “exact” translation of the Greek word ἀκρίβεια.⁴

Ἀκρίβεια and *diligentia* are clearly related concepts, but I wish to argue here that the two terms are not entirely interchangeable, that the Latin term is not always an exact translation of the Greek. In at least two notable instances of criticism from the second century C.E., which I will discuss below, the word πόνος was deemed a more appropriate Greek equivalent. I suggest, therefore, that *diligentia* as a term of art criticism possesses certain nuances that can best be determined not by assuming that it is simply the Latin equivalent of ἀκρίβεια, but from an investigation of its use in Latin texts, particularly in the *Natural History* itself, where it appears over a hundred times.⁵ By an examination of the term elsewhere in the *Natural History*, we can achieve a better understanding of its meanings in Books 33–37, the books that Pliny devotes in great part to artists and works of art.

In passages of the *Natural History* that have little to do with art, the label *diligentiores* often refers to people who have studied a question or phenomenon closely. In fact, Pliny frequently resorts to the opinions of the *diligentiores* and *diligentissimi* when he wants to settle an issue that is widely debated. In these cases, he generally presents one side’s point of view on the subject, but will then present another point of view and indicate that this second alternative is preferable because it is what the *diligentiores* believe. Sometimes he will only discuss what the *diligentiores* believe, thereby leaving us to deduce that less reliable authorities have inferior opinions. Because of the careful attention they have paid to their subject matter, for Pliny it is the *diligentiores* whose opinions are to be considered correct, or at least highly probable.⁶

3. Pollitt 1974, 354.

4. Robert 1886, 32. Most of the Greek authors mentioned by Pollitt in his discussion of ἀκρίβεια lived under the Roman Empire. These include Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Dio Chrysostom, Plutarch, Galen, Lucian, and Pausanias. Of 24 passages cited by Pollitt, only two, by Aristotle, predate the first century B.C.E. (Pollitt 1974, 117–25). One of these indicates that “precision of detail” was one critical meaning of the word in the fourth century B.C.E., but tells us little else about usage at this early date.

5. About twenty of these appearances are in Books 34–36, the books of the *Natural History* that contain fairly lengthy discussions of art and artists.

6. Examples of passages in which contradictory opinions are resolved by an appeal to the opinions of the *diligentiores* include Plin. *HN* 3.128, 4.83, 15.45–46, 19.126, 32.26.

Speaking generally, then, *diligentia* has connotations of correctness or accuracy. Such connotations may explain some passages of the *Natural History* in which this quality is directly associated with the idea of *symmetria*. In one such passage, comparing Polyclitus to Myron, Pliny describes the latter as *quam Polyclitus . . . in symmetria diligentior* (HN 34.58). In another, he describes the *symmetria* of Lysippus, which he preserved (*quam . . . custodit*) *diligentissime* (HN 34.65).⁷ While the term *symmetria* is usually translated as “proportion” or “commensurability of parts,” it has proved difficult to reach a clear understanding of all its nuances.⁸ It is, for example, not entirely clear to what extent artists who were known for their *symmetria* employed mathematical formulae in the creation of their sculptures and paintings.⁹ For the purposes of the present argument, however, Hanna Philipp’s definition of *symmetria* is of special interest. She understands it as “the right relationship of parts for the achievement of a particular goal.”¹⁰ So, for example, it can denote the right relationship of moisture and dryness for the achievement of health; or, with regard to artistic creation, the right relationship of one body part to another for the achievement of beauty. In other words, the term *symmetria* does not mean just “proportion” but more specifically “correct proportion”—correct, at least, with respect to a particular goal. (Incorrect proportion is, in Philipp’s view, denoted by the word *asymmetria*.) It would appear, then, that *symmetria*, like *diligentia*, implies a species of correctness.

The two passages in which *symmetria* is linked closely with *diligentia* occur as part of an “evolutionary,” that is to say developmental, account of sculptural representation from its beginnings to its zenith. (This account, extending from 34.54 to 34.67, also happens to include the remark about Pythagoras of Rhegium’s depiction of nerves, veins, and hair.) This portion of Book 34 has traditionally been thought to derive from Hellenistic criticism, in particular from Xenocrates of Athens, an early Hellenistic sculptor whom Pliny cites as one of his sources.¹¹ Arguments in favor of Xenocrates as a source are twofold: the developmental history stops with Lysippus, that is, in the fourth century B.C.E.; and it makes extensive use of technical, workshop language, including terms like *numerosior* and *symmetria*.¹² Pliny seems to use *diligentia* in this passage as a translation of one such workshop term, ἀκρίβεια, precisely because of the overtones of accuracy and correctness that the Latin term already possessed. This does not mean, however,

7. In addition, Pythagoras, whom Pliny notes for his *diligentia* (HN 34.58–59), is cited by Diogenes Laertius (at 8.46) for his *συμμετρία*.

8. The term did not acquire its present connotation of a mirror-image composition until the sixteenth century; see Hommel 1987.

9. Pollitt (1974, 14–22) argues, for example, that the *symmetria* attributed to Polyclitus actually may have derived from Pythagorean sources and resulted in his employment of a specific system of numbers and proportions. Philipp (1990, 138–39) argues that the evidence for this is ambiguous.

10. Philipp 1990, 138: “. . . ein Massverhältnis zweier oder mehrerer Dinge zueinander, das im Hinblick auf das gewünschte Ergebnis—Schönheit, Gesundheit—das richtige ist.”

11. Sellers [1896] 1968, xvi–xviii; Schweitzer 1932, 1–52.

12. Pliny (HN 34.68) asserts that *symmetria* has no Latin equivalent (*non habet Latinum nomen*), which would seem to support the suggestion that it derives from Greek workshop language.

that the entire semantic range of the term can be determined from the evidence of this one passage.

Pliny the Younger also uses *diligentia* to imply artistic accuracy or correctness, though in a somewhat different sense from that just explored. In his view, that painter is *diligens* who approaches his or her work with care and attention, and whose representations therefore turn out to be faithful or correct with regard to the model(s).¹³ We know this because he requests, by letter, copies of two portraits that decorate a friend's library, specifying his desire for an artist who is *quam diligentissimum*. He explains this request by noting that it is difficult enough to produce a likeness (*similitudinem*) from nature, but that an *imitationis imitatio* is far more difficult; so the artist should not depart from the model even if it is to make improvements.¹⁴ Clearly, the object here is the production of a painting that is as similar in appearance to the model—and in this fairly restricted sense as “correct”—as possible. It is interesting to note, however, that Pliny the Younger fears that the artist might try to improve on the paintings he is meant to copy. This hints at the possibility that patrons and artists might sometimes have espoused aesthetic values other than accurate representation, a suggestion to which I shall return below.¹⁵

“Correctness” or fidelity of representation sometimes implies close visual observation. Even in non-artistic contexts Pliny uses the adjective *diligens* to describe especially such attentiveness. So, for example, the emperor Augustus, whose eyes had unusually large whites, became furious if somebody looked at them *diligentius* (HN 11.143). We learn elsewhere that when a magpie notices a human observing its nest *diligentius* it removes its eggs to another location (HN 10.98). These are striking uses of the term, precisely because they imply visual observation, rather than, say, dedication to a particular task or line of inquiry. Such usage may help us to understand certain passages of the *Natural History* that would otherwise remain obscure. Apelles, we are told, often hid out of sight and listened to public criticisms of his work because he considered the crowd to be a *diligentiorum iudicem* than he (HN 35.84–85). Both the artist and the viewers are considered to have the potential for *diligentia*, but Apelles grants his viewers a greater portion of this quality. Pliny cannot be saying, here, that Apelles thought that the crowd was more dedicated to the craft of painting than he. What causes Apelles to consider “the crowd” *diligentior* would seem to be that they were more observant, and consequently more adept at judging the final product. Visual observation may also be implied by a passing remark about Nicias the Athenian, who painted women *diligentissime* (HN 35.130–31). Nicias’

13. Pliny the Elder, because he is the subject of this study, will simply be referred to as Pliny. His nephew is distinguished here as Pliny the Younger.

14. Plin. *Ep.* 4.28: “Peto autem, ut pictorem quam diligentissimum adsumas. Nam cum est arduum similitudinem effingere ex vero, tum longe difficillime est imitationis imitatio; a qua rogo ut artificem quem elegeris ne in melius quidem sinas aberrare.”

15. Zanker (1995) has identified many such Roman “improvements” to portrait types. As just one example among many, he argues (p. 13) that portraits of Menander executed in the Augustan period, when “youthful faces were the order of the day,” tend to look much younger than portraits of Menander from other periods.

interest was not in rendering the hair and nails of women more precisely than they had hitherto been rendered; rather, he seems to have been more *observant* (and perhaps as a result more *accurate*) than most painters in his renderings of the female form.¹⁶

Pliny also sometimes describes as *diligens* a scholar who has studied a subject first hand. This aspect of the term is related, but not always identical, to the more general denotations of close study and accurate knowledge that have already been discussed. The scholarly *diligentiores* whose opinions Pliny treats as authoritative often appear to reach their conclusions through direct observation of “the thing itself,” rather than through book-learning or tradition. In his discussion of geography, for example, Pliny cites a number of different sources on the grounds that each authority wrote most accurately, *diligentissime*, about the region in which he lived. Apparently he intends this as a programmatic statement, since he feels the need to defend himself later in the text when he departs from the authority of writers with this sort of native knowledge (e.g., *HN* 3.1 and 6.141). Another example of the authority of firsthand knowledge is Sextius Niger, who is described as *diligentissimus* with regard to medical questions. Sextius refuted the folk tradition that male beavers bite off their testes when captured by asserting that beaver testes are small and constricted and adhere to the spine (*HN* 32.26–27), the implication being that it was a physical impossibility for a beaver to do such a thing. Sextius’ refutation has the ring of personal investigation, as do many of the conclusions about natural history drawn by Pliny’s *diligentissimi*.¹⁷

The association of scholarly *diligentia* with firsthand knowledge finds an analogue in the artist who does not simply learn a τέχνη, or imitate the art of others, but who actually makes the effort to go out and study models directly from the natural world. Artists in the *Natural History* sometimes appear to acquire their reputation for *diligentia* when they study models “from life.” Thus Pasiteles, the popular sculptor of the first century B.C.E., is described as *diligentissimus* when he goes down to the docks to study a lion in his cage (*HN* 36.40). Pliny’s version of a famous anecdote describes Zeuxis as so *diligens* that, before he produced a painting of Helen of Troy for the temple of Lacinian Juno at Agrigentum, he had all of the young women in town appear naked before him so that he might choose five from whom to select the best features. He then combined those five women into an image of ideal beauty (*HN* 35.64).¹⁸ What qualified Zeuxis as *diligens* in this instance was not the minute rendering of details like hair or nails,

16. Although the word *symmetria* does not appear in this passage it is attractive to think that the association, discussed above, between *diligentia* and *symmetria* is evoked here, and that Pliny is crediting Nicias with a greater interest in, and observation of, the proportions that result in female beauty.

17. Other examples include Plin. *HN* 6.84 (that better knowledge (*diligentior notitia*) of Ceylon was acquired when an embassy arrived from that island), 10.181 (on the preferred mating times of certain animals), 10.163 (on the anatomical origin of poison within the body of a poisonous snake), 13.31 (that plants come in both sexes), and 23.112 (on the medical properties of pomegranate blossoms).

18. Several versions of this story were famous in antiquity and it became a favorite in the Renaissance. Ancient versions include Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 2.1.1 and Dion. Hal. *De imit.*, frag. 6, 202–3 (Usener-Rademacher). Pliny does not mention explicitly that the painting is of Helen, though the other sources cited here do.

nor was it the faithful replication of a model since, in fact, he had five models; rather, it seems to have been his direct study of his subject "from nature."

While it might seem ironic that a scholar who is well known for the use he made of numerous *auctores* would place such a premium on direct, personal knowledge, earlier scholarship on Pliny exaggerates that irony: *Quellenforschung*, along with a corollary assumption that Pliny contributed little material of his own, was once a common approach to the *Natural History*. Though it has not been extensively practiced for many decades, the lingering effects of this *Quellenforschung* can still be perceived as a tendency to treat Pliny as a transparent, if distorting, filter through which to view both Greek art and Greek criticism.¹⁹ Any discussion of Pliny's sources is, however, made possible by the very fact that he cites them, which theoretically once permitted his readers to determine which ideas were his and which were those of his sources. This, of itself, suggests how important it was to Pliny to distinguish between firsthand and secondhand knowledge.²⁰

Pliny notes, moreover, that, in addition to information that he has gathered from other authors, the *Natural History* is also filled with much that his predecessors did not know, or that had been discovered in the meantime (*HN* Praefatio 17). In fact, various remarks in the *Natural History* suggest that he often engaged in precisely the sort of direct, personal investigation that he so admired in certain of his sources. So, for example, in his discussion of rings in Book 33, he confesses that he is unable to tell us about the ring-wearing habits of the Roman kings. This is because, he notes, the statue of Romulus in the Capitoline Temple wears no ring, nor do the statues of the other kings, except for Numa and Servius Tullius (*HN* 33.9). In other words, Pliny has attempted to investigate the question by looking at what we might consider primary source evidence, the portraits of the kings themselves. Similarly, when he discusses the differences between Aeginetan and Delian bronze, he indicates to his readers that an example of Aeginetan bronze, an ox, can be found in the Forum Boarium, while an example of Delian bronze, a statue of Jupiter, can be found in the Temple of Jupiter Tonans (*HN* 34.10). This remark

19. The popularity of Plinian *Quellenforschung*, especially in the nineteenth century, both derived from and supported a tendency to view him as a mere compiler of earlier texts. Münzer (1897) began the movement away from this sort of research by considering Pliny's techniques of research, selection, and synthesis. By the middle of the last century, Ernout (1952, 6) was already stating that "la Quellenforschung est un exercice qui a coûté beaucoup de temps et de peine pour un maigre profit." Shortly thereafter, Önnérfors (1956, 10), who was interested in semantic questions and approved of Ernout's view, expressed the belief that, though Pliny drew on the language of various genres, he ultimately formed his own style of writing according to his own usage and judgment. The view of Pliny as a "mere compiler," however, lasted longer in art historical discussions than it did in philological ones. Becatti (1951, 215–16) in an otherwise groundbreaking work about Roman artistic taste, evaluated Pliny as "più compilatore che scrittore, più raccogliatore che rielaboratore" and the *Natural History* as "non Plinio dunque ma piuttosto Senocrate, Antigono, Duride, Apollodoro, canoni ellenistici, retori e epigrammisti, Pasitele, Varrone, Muciano e catalogi d'opere d'arte in Roma. . . ." That Pliny synthesized his sources with his experience to form a personal view on aesthetic questions has only recently been argued in detail by, among others, Daneu Lattanzi (1982), Michel (1987), and Isager (1991). For a recent summary history of attitudes and approaches to the *Natural History* in general, and to the chapters on art in particular, see Isager 1991, 9–15.

20. He clearly considered this citation of sources to be a virtue, and suggested that the failure of his predecessors to produce similar references was nothing short of intellectual theft (*furtum*). See Pascucci 1982, 191–92, a discussion of *HN* Pr. 22–23. Pliny is careful in this passage to distinguish between the literary allusions found in such authors as Vergil or Cicero from the intellectual theft practiced by others.

not only suggests that Pliny himself has looked at these sculptures, but even implies that his readers might learn something about the different qualities of the two bronzes if they study these sculptures personally.

The artist's *diligentia* was a prerequisite for illusionism (*veritas*) and therefore for the successful production of a *similitudo*, a convincing likeness of the sort that was described at the beginning of this study.²¹ Pliny the Younger's request for a portrait painter is explicit about the reason he must be *diligens*: so that he can produce an accurate likeness (*similitudinem*). Felix Preisshofen has suggested that *diligentia* often simply means "das Streben zur *veritas*," where *veritas* describes both accurate depiction of a model and the resulting illusionism of effect.²² Based on the foregoing discussion, it would seem that the *diligentia* of an artist can contribute to the convincing appearance of a painting or sculpture in one of several ways. First, it sometimes implies that the artist is able to render masterfully such minute details as hair, veins, and fingernails. Second, it can imply attention to and care for one's work, including, for the artist, close visual observation and an interest in faithful reproduction of the model(s); and finally, it sometimes indicates that the artist studied models "from life." It would seem, then, that Pliny's approval of the artist who is *diligens* is part and parcel of his admiration for art that is rendered convincingly enough to deceive the eye.

This association between an artist's *diligentia*—conceived as a sort of accuracy—on the one hand, and illusionism on the other, may seem puzzling to us. We tend to think of illusionism as a phenomenon that results not so much from accuracy of representation as from the successful manipulation of human subjectivity. Optical illusions, for example, depend, for their effect, on the subjectivity of the observer's perception. Jonathan Crary has, however, recently demonstrated that this notion of the observer as the primary shaper of visual experience, rather than as a recipient of visual information, dates to the nineteenth century when the psychology and physiology of individual vision (including, for example, retinal images, stereoptics, and blind spots) first became subjects of widespread experimentation and discussion.²³ The fact that this development is so recent suggests that illusionism in antiquity was conceived of in a radically different way. It was, I suggest, not thought to result from the subjectivity of the observer's perception, so much as from the artist's will and ability to produce a "correct" representation of the model—from *diligentia*, in other words. This explains why, in the ancient anecdotal tradition, horses and birds are as likely to respond to artistic illusionism as humans are. From our point of view, horses and birds are psychologically and physiologically too different from human beings to react to artistic illusionism. From an ancient point of view, which considers illusion

21. That *similitudo* and *veritas* are closely linked concepts can be deduced not only by the compound *verisimilis*, but by ancient passages in which both terms occur. Quintilian (*Inst.* 12.10.9) discusses Demetrius' excessive *veritas* otherwise as an immoderate fondness for *similitudo*, as if the two terms are virtually interchangeable. Pliny himself joins the two terms when he discusses the *similitudo veri* of the bronze dog on the Capitoline (*HN* 34.38).

22. Preisshofen 1978, 276.

23. Crary 1990.

to result not from subjectivity but from accuracy in the representation of a model, horses and birds can, theoretically at least, respond to illusionism as easily as humans.

For the Roman observer, *similitudo* and *veritas* were not, however, sufficient to establish quality in a work of art. Quintilian, in his summary history of the development of art, gives pride of place to Lysippus and Praxiteles as the sculptors who most nearly approached “the truth” (*ad veritatem*), but then criticizes Demetrius for going too far in this direction, for being “more enamored of likeness (*similitudo*) than he was of beauty (*pulchritudo*)” (*Inst.* 12.10.9).²⁴ In the same passage, he also praises Polyclitus as one whose work possessed *decor supra verum* (*Inst.* 12.10.8).²⁵ For Pliny himself, the notion that a persuasive likeness was not a sufficient goal of art is demonstrated by his remarks concerning a freedman of Nero, who decorated some porticoes with the *verae imagines* of famous gladiators. In spite of the fact that the portraits are characterized by their *veritas*, Pliny uses them to illustrate the folly of the times (*nostrae aetatis insaniam in pictura*), apparently because the subject matter was too base to merit praise (*HN* 35.51–52).²⁶

Just as it is possible for a work of art to be “merely realistic” or “too realistic” at the expense of other qualities, some passages of the *Natural History* suggest that an artist can possess too much of the quality that is usually considered necessary to achieve that realism, *diligentia*.²⁷ This, in turn, implies that *diligentia*, though admirable, was not, of itself, sufficient. Indeed, when practiced to excess it could be destructive. Thus, Pliny describes the fifth-century B.C.E. sculptor Callimachus as one who never limited himself in this respect (*nec finem habentis diligentiae*), and who therefore ruined his creations. In fact, he explicitly cites the sculptor’s *diligentia* as the reason for the failure of his “Dancing Laconian Women,” because it deprived his work of *gratia*: *gratiam omnem diligentia abstulerit* (*HN* 34.92). As far as Pliny is concerned, this is an object lesson: *memorabili exemplo adhibendi et curae modum*.

The same sort of lesson is implied by the case of Protogenes, who was praised by his contemporary, Apelles, and counted by him as a colleague and equal, or even superior, except for one thing: Apelles knew when to lift his hand from the painting. A memorable principle, Pliny comments, and one

24. Seneca (*Controv.* 10.5.27) expresses a similar view, in which *similitudo* competes with “something better” in a work of art. He writes that, when Zeuxis painted a boy holding a bunch of grapes, the grapes were so convincing that a bird flew up and began to peck at them. A bystander then pointed out that any truly convincing depiction of the boy would have scared the birds off. Zeuxis then reacted in an astonishing manner: he removed the (“realistic”) grapes from his picture and kept the (“less realistic”) representation of the boy. Why? Because the artist wanted to preserve what was better (*melius*) about his painting, not what was more realistic (*similius*): *Zeuxin aiunt oblevisse uvam et servasse id quod melius erat in tabula, non quod similius*. In other words, Zeuxis condemns as foolish anyone who believes that likeness to nature is the only or best criterion according to which a work of art can be judged.

25. About this passage, Rouveret (1989, 412) comments, “l’artiste ne se fixe pas comme but suprême le vrai (*verum*, *veritas*, gr. ἀλήθεια) mais la beauté (*pulchritudo*, τὸ κάλλος) qui se trouve au-delà, c’est le *decor supra verum*.”

26. Croisille 1987, 334.

27. Daneu Lattanzi 1982, 98–99.

which teaches us that excessive *diligentia* often causes harm: *memorabili praecepto nocere saepe nimiam diligentiam* (HN 35.80).²⁸

Versions of the Protogenes story can also be found in Plutarch and Aelian. Each is somewhat different in details from Pliny's, but both help us to understand that the painter's failure was supposed, in some respects, to have been similar to that of Callimachus. Aelian (VH 12.41) specifically mentions Protogenes' painting of Ialysus, noting that Apelles admired its great labor (πόνοϋ μέγας), while asserting that it lacked χάρις—in other words *gratia*, the same quality that eluded Callimachus, and something that Apelles supposedly prized in his own paintings.²⁹ Plutarch (*Demetr.* 22) uses the same language but, like Pliny, writes of Protogenes' work as a whole that Apelles felt the effort was great (μέγας ὁ πόνος), but that the work lacked χάριτες.³⁰

Because χάρις (*gratia*) is cast in opposition to πόνος (*diligentia*) in all three versions of the Protogenes anecdote, a full understanding of one term necessitates a proper understanding of the other. I will, therefore, consider πόνος and its implications first, then turn briefly to its conceptual counterpart, χάρις. The choice of πόνος, rather than ἀκρίβεια, in both of these passages, in precisely the anecdotal role that Pliny assigns to *diligentia*, is an intriguing one. It emphasizes the qualities of dedication and hard work implicit in *diligentia* rather than, say, meticulousness in the representation of detail or proportion. This reading is supported by an anecdotal tradition according to which Protogenes spent many years at work on the Ialysus, working and reworking it and barely eating enough to stay alive, until he reached a state of complete frustration with his work and threw a paint-soaked sponge at it.³¹

Protogenes' efforts, and his frustration with the results, imply something else about disproportionate *diligentia*, namely, that it resulted from extreme self-criticism. This is exemplified by another artist whom we have not yet considered, the sculptor Apollodorus. He, we read, was compelled by his *diligentia* to smash all of his completed sculptures (HN 34.81).

Self-criticism may even have been Callimachus' chief flaw, though this possibility has been downplayed because of the traditional understanding of

28. Daneu Lattanzi (1982, 99–100) also points to a couple of passages that do not explicitly use the term *diligentia*, but that support the general notion that an overworked representation did not always produce the most desirable effect. In one of these, Pliny indicates that people often admired the unfinished works of great artists more than finished ones (HN 35.145); in another he expresses admiration for the fact that Parrhasius can use outlines to indicate mass without explicitly showing it—that is, for his ability to use foreshortening (HN 35.67–68). To her examples we might add HN 35.73, about the *Iphigenia's Sacrifice* by Timanthes, which Pliny and others admired in great part because the artist concealed the face of Agamemnon in order to indicate that his grief was too extreme to be represented: cf. Cic. *Orat.* 74 and Quint. *Inst.* 2.13.13.

29. Quintilian (*Inst.* 12.10.6) states that Apelles himself believed his own paintings were characterized by *gratia: ingenio et gratia, quam in se ipse maxime iactat, Apelles est praestantissimus*.

30. For a more complete collection of anecdotes concerning both Apelles and Protogenes, see Overbeck 1868, 358–61.

31. Plutarch (*Demetr.* 22) mentions a rumor that he spent seven years on this painting; Fronto (*Ep.* 2.2) says that he spent eleven years on it, and worked on nothing else during that time. Pliny (HN 35.102–3) tells of Protogenes' austere lifestyle, and of the frustration he felt with his work. Pliny considered it especially important that, when the painter finally threw a sponge at his painting in rage at his failure, the blotch of paint that was left behind actually improved the work. Pure accident, therefore, resulted in a certain *je ne sais quoi* that years of effort had not been able to achieve.

diligentia as “precision in the application of small details—proportions, measurements or fine points in naturalistic representation,” which has led to the widely accepted conclusion that Callimachus’ failure was probably fussiness of style.³² Pliny, however, explicitly calls the sculptor a harsh critic of his own work (*calumniator sui*), just as he called Apollodorus an unfair judge of his own work (*iniquus sui iudex*). It would be useful to know for certain what nickname Callimachus received because he was too *diligens*, as this might help us to understand if tradition considered him overly critical of his work, or if his work was really thought to be fussy in a stylistic sense. The manuscript traditions for Pliny, Vitruvius, and Pausanias, all of whom mention the nickname, supply several alternative versions. One is *catatexitechnus* (κατατηξίτεχνος, “wasting one’s skill”); another is *κακιζότεχνος*, or “abusive of his own skill”; and finally there is *catatechnus* (κατάτεχνος), which may mean “artificial” and as such is most likely of the three alternatives to imply fussiness of artistic detail.³³ The nickname *κατάτεχνος*, if it is the correct version, might also imply stylistic fussiness, though this is by no means certain; while the other two possibilities appear to carry few such implications. It seems, then, that we should understand Callimachus to have been *diligens* for the same reason Protogenes was—because he was overly critical of his own creations, and therefore worked too hard on them.³⁴

Pliny seems, in the case of Apollodorus, Protogenes, and Callimachus, to be emphasizing the moral nuances of this critical term in a way that is peculiarly Roman.³⁵ In art criticism of the Late Republic and Empire, aesthetic terms often have such moral dimensions. So, as we have seen, works that deceive the eye are often said to be characterized by “truth” (*veritas*), while literary, artistic, and rhetorical works are judged according to the criterion of

32. This, in turn, has led to the attribution of various different sculptures, sometimes known only in Roman copies, to his hand (Stewart 1990, 271–72 and bibliography). There is, however, little scholarly consensus as to what works if any are rightly attributed to Callimachus. A relief in the Capitoline Museum (Mus. Inv. 614) signed with the name Καλλίμαχος is of little help, since it is not the work of the fifth-century sculptor, and unlikely even to be a copy of his work. See Helbig 1966, 1371 (von Steuben) and bibliography.

33. Paus. 1.26.7 and Vitruv. 4.1.10.

34. Indeed, Corso et al. (1988, 225) translate *catatexitechnus* as “il Perfezionista.”

35. The reader may object that all of these anecdotes are about Greek artists and must therefore be better evidence for Pliny’s Greek sources than for Pliny’s own point of view. Recent research on historical and rhetorical anecdotes, however, has led to the conclusion that different versions of an anecdote may derive from a common tradition yet vary in details such as chronology, physical settings, characters, and “punch line.” (On the rhetorical anecdote known as the *χρεία*, see Hock and O’Neil 1986, 3–47; on the historical anecdote, Saller 1980.) Such anecdotes are, therefore, virtually useless when one wishes “accuracy with regard to facts in the narrow sense” but still “valuable evidence for the attitudes and ideologies of peoples” (Saller 1980, 81–82). Consider, in this light, the variations on the anecdote regarding Apelles and *gratia*, discussed elsewhere in this study: sometimes the painter expresses his opinion that Protogenes’ Ialysus lacks *gratia*; at other times, he is said to have characterized all of Protogenes’ work this way; sometimes he levels this same criticism at all artists, excepting only himself; and at other times he is seen simply to be generally criticizing those unnamed artists who do not know when enough is enough. Different versions of a particular anecdote may feature different artists or have different “morals.” Compare, for example Plin. *HN* 35.85–86, Plut. *Mor.* 58D–E, and Ael. *VH* 2.2, which clearly come from the same tradition: two versions of this anecdote feature Apelles and one features Zeuxis; in one of the versions starring Apelles, the interlocutor is Alexander the Great; in the other it is Megabyzus. Even the point of each anecdote is different. The variation is such that these anecdotes can be said to tell us little about the historical Apelles or the historical Protogenes, but considerably more about what Romans expected from talented artists.

appropriateness (*decor*).³⁶ Angela Daneu Lattanzi has even suggested that, for Pliny, the excellence of a work of art derives in great part from the same principles that regulate the moral lives of human beings, including such qualities as truth, simplicity, and hard work.³⁷

In support of the suggestion that *diligentia* in these anecdotes has taken on peculiarly Roman connotations of effort and self-criticism, are several passages in Quintilian that evaluate orators and rhetoricians, two of them Roman, as excessively *diligens*. Quintilian describes the speaking style of Asinius Pollio as demonstrating great *diligentia*, "to the extent that it seems excessive to some"; while of the arch-Atticist, Calvus, he says that some people like him, but that others believe he destroyed his vigor (*sanguinem*) through excessive self-criticism (*nimia contra se calumnia*).³⁸ He also describes Isocrates as so *diligens* in his composition that he opened himself to charges of excessive care.³⁹ The *nimia calumnia* of Calvus echoes the description of Callimachus as a *calumniator sui*; and the fact that Isocrates was charged with excessive care (*cura*) might remind us that Pliny considered Callimachus to be an argument in favor of moderating one's *cura*, *memorabili exemplo adhibendi et curae modum*, and that he characterized Protogenes' Ialysus as an *opus immensi laboris ac curae supra modum anxiae* (HN 35.80).⁴⁰ The parallelism of language and thought between Quintilian and Pliny, incidentally, supports recent suggestions that Pliny's aesthetic vocabulary is rhetorical in its overtones; it also supports arguments that his language and ideas derive from his contemporaries as much as, or more than, from his sources.⁴¹

The very notion that an artist can possess too much *diligentia*, now taken as a translation of *πόνοϛ* and as virtually synonymous with *cura*, seems, therefore, to distance the term from the workshop notion of ἀκρίβεια and to place it squarely among the ethical-aesthetic qualities valued in Roman art

36. On the "deceptivity of realism" and the ironies implicit in the idea, see especially Elsner and Sharrock 1991. For a discussion of *veritas* as a moral and aesthetic term, see Elsner 1995, 55. For *decor*, see Dwyer 1988 and Hölscher 1987, 19, as well as Quint. *Inst.* 11.1.31–38 and Cic. *Off.* 1.27.93–1.42.151.

37. Daneu Lattanzi 1982, 98. Croisille (1987, 331) also suggests that Pliny, when he passes judgment on art "a des critères . . . où l'aspect esthétique et l'aspect moral sont la plupart du temps étroitement liés."

38. On Asinius Pollio, see Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.113: *Multa in Asinio Pollione inventio, summa diligentia, adeo ut quibusdam etiam nimia videatur, et consilii et animi satis*. On Calvus, see Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.115: *Inveni qui . . . crederent eum nimia contra se calumnia verum sanguinem perdidisse*. Jones (1966, 119) notes the parallel between Quintilian's description of Calvus and Pliny's description of Callimachus. Note that these two orators were Romans, which suggests that the concept of *diligentia* was not simply inherited passively from Greek criticism.

39. Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.79: *in compositione adeo diligens ut cura eius reprehendatur*. That Quintilian applied such evaluations to the visual arts is demonstrated by his observation that Polyclitus was characterized by *diligentia* beyond all others, but lacked the sort of gravity (*pondus*) at which Pheidias excelled (*Inst.* 12.10.7). It is tempting to think that Hellenistic sources may have deemed that Polyclitus was characterized by ἀκρίβεια in its workshop sense, since our sources indicate clearly his great concern with *symmetria*. Quintilian, however, seems to be applying Plinian criteria, when he admits the sculptor was *diligens*, but asserts that he fails in other respects.

40. Quintilian (*Inst.* 12.10. 6) selects *cura* as the one-word description that best characterizes Protogenes' work.

41. Önnertfors (1956) argues that rhetorical/literary usage was, along with technical language, one significant component of Pliny's style throughout the *Natural History*. Michel (1987) argues more specifically that many of the aesthetic concepts are rhetorical in their origins. Lausdei (1987) discusses Pliny's debt to the language and ideas of his contemporaries.

criticism. Preissshofen has argued that a shift of this nature, from workshop language to moral-aesthetic (and, as we have seen, rhetorical) language, occurred generally in art criticism between the early Hellenistic Period and the Late Hellenistic/Late Republican Period. This entailed a change in focus, from artist-oriented discussions of qualities like *symmetria* to viewer-oriented discussions of qualities like *decor*, *auctoritas*, and *pulchritudo*.⁴² Such a shift may have been responsible for an expansion in the semantic range of *diligentia* so that it came to include the ethical and rhetorical connotations so evident in these passages of the *Natural History*.

The meaning of *gratia* seems to depend on the fact that it is contrasted with *diligentia* in precisely those contexts where the latter term is best translated into Greek as *πόνος*. Once we understand that excessive *diligentia* is tantamount to excessive effort, it becomes clear that the ideal artist works assiduously, but also stops working at just the right moment, when the sculpture or painting is as good as it will ever be. Only then will a work of art be characterized by *gratia*.⁴³ This explains the fact that Apelles, whose art was universally recognized for its *gratia*, “knew when to lift his hand” from a painting.⁴⁴ It also explains why Callimachus could destroy the *gratia* of his sculptures by being too *diligens*.

It might be useful here, also, to recall that, in nonartistic contexts, *gratia* often means something like “popular favor.”⁴⁵ Such a definition is, of course, at the other end of a semantic range from the critical use of the word to mean “charm” or “grace.” Still, it does highlight an essential feature of anything characterized by *gratia*, namely, the appreciation of others. *Gratia* therefore plays a role that *diligentia* cannot. The latter term describes, above all, the attitude and behavior of the artist towards his or her model. An artist who is *diligens* observes a model directly or accurately, or represents it in minute detail and/or applies great effort to the act of representation. That same artist may, however, fail to make the crucial connection with viewers that is implied by *gratia*. Indeed, we learn from the *Natural History* that the paintings of Nicophanes, a student of Pausias, were characterized by a *diligentia* that only artists understood (*quam intellegant soli artifices*, *HN* 35.137). The importance of *gratia* reminds us that viewer response, and expectations about viewer response, are formative agents in the creation of great art, so that a painting or sculpture that lacks this quality cannot hope to be entirely successful.

42. Preissshofen (1978, 272–76) argues that this shift was occasioned, perhaps in the second century B.C.E. by the application of the language of rhetorical criticism to discussions of art.

43. Plin. *HN* 35.80; Lepik-Kopaczynska 1962, 46–47.

44. *HN* 35.80; similarly, Cicero (*Orat.* 22.73) says that Apelles believed that other painters erred by not knowing what was enough: *in quo Apelles pictores quoque eos peccare dicebat, qui non sentirent, quid esset satis*.

45. Pliny uses the term this way in several passages of the *Natural History*. One example is in his prefatory letter, when he justifies his attempt to work in a genre that has hitherto not been practiced by Latin authors (*HN* Pr. 15). Other genres, he claims, have been treated to the point of weariness. It is difficult to give novelty to what is old, authority to what is new, sparkle to what is worn out, light to what is dark, and *gratia* to what has been despised (*fastiditis gratiam*). This string of contrasts indicates neatly that, for Pliny, what is “despised” is sometimes diametrically opposed to what is characterized by *gratia*. Other passages in which *gratia* clearly denotes popularity include *HN* 33.17 and 36.185.

One final point is in order. For Pliny, scholars who are interested in natural phenomena can never, it seems, be too *diligens*. Although he uses *diligentia* and its cognates scores of times in the *Natural History*, the only passages in which he represents this characteristic as destructive are in his discussions of art. There are, to be sure, a few instances elsewhere in the text in which misguided *diligentia* causes somebody to put useless effort into a project. So, when we read that certain people weigh water in order to determine how pure it is, this effort is described as *frustrante diligentia* (wasted effort, *HN* 32.38). Similarly, Pliny describes the transfer of seeds from cold to warm places, or vice-versa, as *falsa diligentia* (mistaken effort) because he believes that such actions have no real effect on the productivity of the seed (*HN* 18.197). These examples, however, do not illustrate quite the same phenomenon as the excessive *diligentia* described above: such mistaken efforts may be a waste of time, but they are not harmful outright. By contrast, in two of the artistic exempla, those of Callimachus and Protogenes, the zealous *diligentia* of the artists actually compromises the quality of their work. In the case of Apollodorus, it results in the wholesale destruction of good, finished sculptures (*perfecta signa*).

That scholars cannot be too *diligens*, but artists (and orators) can, reminds us of the essential contrast, then and now, between the goals and techniques of the artist and those of the scholar: when Pliny identifies somebody who is studying natural phenomena as one of the *diligentissimi*, this may be taken as a compliment, and as a sign of that scholar's authority, in part because correctness and accuracy are among the highest goals of scholarly inquiry. By contrast, the *diligentissimi* among artists (or orators) were not the greatest practitioners in their field.⁴⁶ This was because the best artists, unlike the best scholars, had to reconcile potentially competing aesthetic values that were concerned with audience response. Pliny establishes *gratia* as one such competing value; Quintilian suggests *pulchritudo* and *pondus*.

The recognition that an artist can sometimes be too *diligens* serves, then, as something of a counterpoise to the belief that Pliny, and by extension the Romans, evaluated art exclusively according to its "accuracy" of representation, or the illusionism that was supposed to result from such accuracy. Illusionism was valued, to be sure, but it was not a sufficient criterion for artistic greatness. Qualities like *gratia* and *pulchritudo* were at least as important as—and in some instances more important than—illusionism, realistic detail, or the *diligentia* required to achieve either.

College of the Holy Cross

46. Paus. 1.26.6 explicitly states that Callimachus fell short of "the first" sculptors with respect to τέχνη.

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