

a) David Sider
Department of Classics
New York University
New York, N.Y. USA 10003

david.sider@nyu.edu

b) Panel 1: Images, Texts, Reality

c) Title: "Reading the text and 'reading' the image in Douris's schoolroom recital scene"

d) Length: 20 minutes

e) Outline: Douris's famous schoolroom scene with four lessons (two involving music, two involving texts) is generally straightforward; a reading/recital, however, is not only the most interesting scene, it also presents the viewer with two problems, which have hitherto been considered separately. My proposal is that the two problems are mutually dependent—that an answer to one suggests the answer to the other.

The first question is how to read the verse clearly visible on the papyrus scroll held aloft by the teacher. On the one hand, with minor allowances for scribal habits, it scans as a dactylic hexameter, one that is clearly designed to be the first line of an epic poem. On the other hand, it does not parse: the initial address to the Muse demands an imperative ("sing, tell me"). Yet the line ends with a first-person indicative ("I begin to sing," a formula that occurs eight times in the Homeric Hymns at the end of a first line).

The second question asks how to understand the visual narrative, in which the teacher holds the scroll so that, if it were a photograph, it could be read by both teacher and student. Usually, however, this pose is taken as artistic license: only the teacher can view the scroll while he checks the student's recital for accuracy. Since, however, the verse as written cannot be accurate, and at the same time is far from the gibberish that does frequently occur on Attic vases, it seems unlikely that, as is usually assumed, the mistake is Douris's. I shall argue that the mistake is to be imagined as that of the student, who, having been given a homework assignment in composition, worked so hard on scansion that his line's failure to parse eluded him.