



Illustrating the Past in Early Modern England: The Representation of History in Printed Books

James A. Knapp

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Illustrating the Past is a study of the status of visual and verbal media in early modern English representations of the past. It focuses on general attitudes towards visual and verbal representations of history as well as specific illustrated books produced during the period. Through a close examination of the relationship of image to text in light of contemporary discussions of poetic and aesthetic practice, the book demonstrates that the struggle between the image and the word played a profoundly important role in England's emergent historical self-awareness. The opposition between history and story, fact and fiction, often tenuous, provided a sounding board for deeper conflicts over the form in which representations might best yield truth from history. The ensuing schism between poets and historians over the proper venue for the lessons of the past manifested itself on the pages of early modern printed books. The discussion focuses on the word and image relationships in several important illustrated books printed during the second half of the sixteenth century-including Holinshed's Chronicles (1577) and Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" (1563, 1570)-in the context of contemporary works on history and poetics, such as Sir Philip Sidney's Apology for Poetry and Thomas Blundeville's The true order and Method of wryting and reading Hystories. Illustrating the Past specifically answers two important questions concerning the resultant production of literary and historical texts in the period: Why did the use of images in printed histories suddenly become unpopular at the end of the sixteenth century? and What impact did this publishing trend have on writers of literary and historical texts?

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