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Breaking Images

Damage and Mutilation of Ancient Figurines

Edited by

Gianluca Miniaci

Multidisciplinary Approaches to Ancient Societies
Volume 2

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Breaking Images

Multidisciplinary Approaches to Ancient Societies (MAtAS)

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Front cover: An idol of the Hindu god, Ganesha, immersed in a body of water, as part of the immersion ritual at the end of the Ganeshotsava festival © courtesy of Urmi Chanda

Back cover: Vinča figurines, Belgrade area © John Chapman

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Preface

Comparative research represents a flourishing trend in historical studies. Yet its practical implementation in ancient studies still constitutes a major challenge. In general, comparative ancient history usually consists in the juxtaposition of case studies issued from different areas of the world, each one embedded in its disciplinary traditions, practices, and distinctive topics (Egyptology, Assyriology, Classical Studies, Sinology, and so on). This problem is reinforced by the lack of structured common agendas, of shared sets of concepts, which hamper the effective dialogue between different social disciplines. For instance, history, archaeology, economy, sociology, human geography, psychology, cultural studies, or anthropology hardly attempt to engage in really collaborative projects on a particular society, subject, or period of the ancient world. Similar obstacles become too visible between the diverse branches of a single area study. The unfortunate consequence is that ancient history is thus divided into regional and chronological compartments often referred to as ‘worlds’, such as the Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Aegean, Levantine, Mesoamerican, Indian, or Chinese. Such compartmental divisions emphasise borders, differences, and periodisation, a sort of retrospective projection into the past of geopolitical divisions and cultural traditions (‘Orientalism’) that only crystallised in modern times. Inevitably, this approach stresses uniqueness and isolation and favors hyper-specialised research too, thus narrowing the possibility of inter-dialogue with the Other, seen as remote and qualitative different.

It is for this reason that the series *Multidisciplinary Approaches to Ancient Societies* (MA \dagger AS) intends to produce a fertile ground on which original, more structured approaches to the comparative study of ancient societies may flourish and favour dialogue. It is essential that the extraordinary wealth of data from ancient societies must be integrated into current general discussions in social sciences. This could not only help renew and enlarge perspectives on sensitive topics, inspire dialogue, and provide a broader pool of human experiences for discussion. It might also make emerge structural features, practices, and social logics common to diverse societies but hidden under cultural and conceptual specificities. Research in social sciences cannot but benefit from such collaboration. Hence, the series aims to promote comparative and transversal research between unusual but carefully chosen case studies, be they geographical, thematic, or conceptual. Finally, the series intends to introduce inspiring theoretical approaches and innovative methods in ancient studies borrowed from other social sciences.

Then, why selecting a topic concerning the fragmentation? Especially only 20 years after John Chapman opened the question with its book, *Fragmentation in*

Archaeology: People, Places and Broken Objects in the Prehistory of South Eastern Europe, Routledge 2000? Since then several articles, commentary, books, and discussions have been produced around the topic, and still now various scholars are exploring it in a very fertile manner (cf. J. Guernsey, *Human Figuration and Fragmentation in Preclassic Mesoamerica: From Figurines to Sculpture*. Cambridge, New York 2020). The main issue is that each single author analyses the fragmentation and any other type of mutilation or damage of ancient artefacts from the perspective of its own field of study, adopting limited methods, principles, and study cases taken from its own specialty. A single field, however rich in materials and methods will inevitably lead to some dead ends, because contexts and materials offered by the archaeology do not allow movement in multiple directions. As noted in Chapter 1 (cf. Miniaci, this volume), in absence of any explicit trace of an intentional anthropic action, the fracture and damage observed on artefacts are *per se* silent and do not easily reveal their history. Therefore, scholars need multiple tools and directions to explore voluntary fragmentation. Only a comparative approach can open new doors and cross-cultural comparisons can provide new methods, evidence, and solutions.

The scope – non stated – of this volume is to search for traces of any voluntary and intentional fragmentation of ancient artefacts, creating, improving, and sharpening the methods and principles for a scientific investigation that goes beyond single author impression or sensitivity. Fragmentation exists in archaeology and cannot be removed; however, within the fragmentation it is important to recognise that it can be produced by accident and the passing of time, or can be intentional, given by the human behaviour and intention. Therefore, the comparative lens adopted in this volume can allow the reader to explore different fields taken from ancient societies how we can address, assess, detect, and even discuss the voluntary action of fragmentation. The final aim of this volume is to open a path building a solid comparative guide of fragmentation in ancient societies. This will be the base for stimulating more systematic and organic investigation.

Juan Carlos Moreno García & Gianluca Miniaci

