

Chloé Ragazzoli, Ömür Harmanşah, Chiara Salvador and Elisabeth Frood, eds. *Scribbling through History: Graffiti, Places, and People from Antiquity to Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, xiv and 250pp., 43 b/w illustr., hbk, ISBN 978-1-4742-8883-5)

Taking a sharp object and scratching signs on a wall, rock, or a tree bark is a primordial gesture which has accompanied humanity since the beginning of time, and there is no civilization which has not produced graffiti. When, in the nineteenth century, archaeologists brought to light thousands of scribbles on the walls of Pompei, they coined the term 'graffiti' (Garrucci, 1856) to indicate a subcategory of ancient inscriptions considered for decades to be the product of the young, poor, and uneducated. The consideration of this material evidence has altered since then, and the simple antiquarian interest was superseded by new study approaches dealing with graffiti as archaeological, historical, cultural, and artistic sources.

The 1960s saw the important contribution of the church historian Violet Prichard (1967), who interpreted British medieval graffiti as artistic expressions made by expert hands or inscriptions which equal in execution to contemporary manuscripts. Subsequently, the 'spatial turn' that took place in architectural studies from the end of the 1980s (Kümin & Osborne, 2013), leading to the conceptualization of graffiti as a result of the interaction of human beings with their environment. Interdisciplinary studies, such as Juliet Fleming's (2001) work on manuscript marginalia, have birthed additional new approaches. The importance of contextualizing this practice, not simply from the point of view of archaeological provenance but also within the broader social context of literacy and orality in the ancient world, is at the basis of the Baird and Taylor's (2011) book—yet another

milestone in the recognition of graffiti as an independent source to study the past.

The three-day workshop held in Oxford in 2013, which gave birth to the book *Scribbling Through History: Graffiti, Places and People from Antiquity to Modernity*, brought together specialists working on graffiti in many different cultures to discuss definitions, theoretical approaches, and methodologies. Even if the discussion did not produce an overarching definition—by contrast, enlarging the spectrum of forms, places, and function—it led scholars to consider graffiti to be an epigraphic field in its own right, as the editors underline in the preface. The book does not aim to be a handbook, rather, a multidisciplinary laboratory which, through twelve case studies and considerable food for thought, displays the great potential of these sources to shed light on a 'multi-vocal past' where the people who are silent in the traditional written sources finally have a voice. It allows us to explore new topics and pose new questions, of which the textual content of graffiti is only one element among others. Graffiti can be a means of communication, self-definition, and space appropriation; it can present dissenting voices and reflect historical periods of unrest, subversion, and social competition, or express social cohesion and cultural development. It has the ability to redefine buildings and paths, narrate unofficial histories, and return intangible aspects of the ancient societies.

Additionally, *Scribbling Through History* has extended the debate in all directions: chronologically, by considering examples from ancient times to modernity;

geographically, by analyzing case studies from many continents; materially, incorporating walls and rocks, paper, and digital screens. Poetry, drawings, symbols, subversive messages, greetings, short verses, or simply words to say 'I was here' and 'I existed' cover public and private spaces all over the world from the deep past to the Nabatean cities and tribes of the Arabian deserts to the women fleeing from the Mongol armies of Medieval China, the stands of arenas and streets of a Roman city of the first century, the Egyptian necropolis in the shade of ancient pyramids, a protest in a square of a big modern capital, such as Istanbul, an exhibition room in Venice where the profile of a pianist painted on the white wall takes us to a Palestinian refugee camp on the outskirts of Damascus.

A wide and cross-disciplinary approach is exemplified by the titles of the three sections into which the book is divided (from the macro to the micro scale): Graffiti and the Landscape (Section I), Graffiti and the Wall (Section II), Graffiti and the Written Page (Section III).

Forty-three black-and-white photographs supplement the chapters. The use of coloured images and more sophisticated survey methods (Valenti & Barazzatti, 2020) would have rendered the illustrations more attractive, but the line drawings ensure the legibility of the most difficult images.

In Section I, scribbled inscriptions or imagery are treated as material traces of the long-term memory of the landscape, which transform geological places—remote corners of the countryside, highlands and lowlands, and even a modern cityscape. Chloé Ragazzoli's opening chapter (Ch. 1) explores the graffiti of an ancient unfinished tomb at Deir-el-Bahari (Egypt) crafted by the scribal staff of the area's royal funerary temples at around 1500 BC. About seventy graffiti, mostly

grouped in clusters, lead to the appropriation of a marginal space in the desert as the result of a collective dialogue impressed on the surfaces of the living rock. Alain Delattre (Ch. 2) provides an investigation of the Greek and Coptic graffiti left on the living rock of the Theban Mountain, in the period in which Christianity flourished in Egypt. These personal testimonies offer precious information about pilgrims and the social competition between local people, as some cryptographic texts seem rather like an intellectual exercise made by local people eager to demonstrate their writing ability. Ömür Harmanşah (Ch. 3) transports the reader to the western Anatolian peninsula in the borderlands of the Hittite Empire during the Late Bronze Age, demonstrating how rock inscriptions and reliefs can be associated with their local context and tradition of venerating mountains, rather than being Hittite propaganda. Sometimes, graffiti could even be partially responsible for a site's process of monumentalization.

Michael Macdonald (Ch. 4) investigates the relationships between two desert communities of the Early and Late Roman Syria and Arabia through the individual and clustered graffiti they left. For the settled Nabatean people, reading and writing was essentially an instrument to the functioning of their literary society, while the Safaitic scripts made by non-literate nomadic groups on boulders, funerary cairns, or rock outcrops near water sources represent speech acts that tell us more about their social structures, daily life, and emotions. In the last chapter of the section (Ch. 5), Christiane Gruber explains how an urban landscape can become a political platform through a strategy of 'sabotage', where graffiti can reconfigure public spaces and return them to the citizens. Her case study is graffiti produced by the members of the 'Occupy

Gezi Movement', who, in the summer of 2013, opposed the Turkish government's decision to destroy Gezi Park in central Istanbul.

Section II evaluates the case studies of graffiti inscribed within the built environment—both public and private. These examples demonstrate how graffiti can assume different meanings and functions depending on the cultural frameworks within which it is created. Rebecca Benefield (Ch. 6) highlights the peculiar characteristics of Pompeian graffiti, such as its dominant themes (gladiators, greetings, and poetry), the absence of anonymity, or its references to positive aspects of life. This graffiti tends to be discreet and respect wall decoration, even if it is carved everywhere; and it does not confront power nor seek to appropriate space. Graffiti in this small city is, in fact, not banned by local institutions because it is not subversive. Instead, it is part of a large-scale conversation that involved the entire society of Pompei (Milnor, 2011). Elisabeth Olton (Ch. 7) provides a suggestive case study of dissident voices in ancient Maya society, that reveals an unofficial history. She interprets graffiti incised on stucco walls inside a private room of a Tikal palace as reinterpreting, in satire form, the canonical narrative of the regional ruler and his protector by modifying the scale, movements, and expressions of the figures. Hana Navratilova (Ch. 8) inspects the graffiti left by New Kingdom period visitors in ancient Egyptian monuments at the necropolis of Memphis. These visitors identified themselves primarily as scribes, pointing to a shared social identity of cultured and literate men. The frequent use of hieratic script, as well as of pen and ink, and the evident careful planning and coordination of the graffiti making suggest that this practice was not incidental but rather a purposeful operation. Karen Stern (Ch. 9) takes us to

the largest known mortuary complex used by Jewish people in the ancient Levant, the necropolis of Beit Shearim (Israel), to analyze pictographic and textual graffiti produced by these communities. Such graffiti consist mostly of acts of commemoration and spatial personalization, which permit us to reassess the cultural dynamics and behaviours of this minority from the late second to sixth centuries AD.

In Section III, notes and comments inscribed in the margins of manuscripts, printed books, or e-documents are compared with the practice of engraving graffiti: both are forms of communication, redefine spaces, and claim possession of a place or book. The fascinating article by Glen Dudbridge (Ch. 10) on poetic verses inked on the walls of Medieval China immortalizes their movement from wall to paper. Graffiti reflected the actions of the elite who travelled in times of peace, often covering vast distances, or the drama of people escaping danger in times of war; but Chinese travellers also often made paper copies of verses written on walls, as they were aware that paper offered a lasting basis for transmission. By copying these verses onto paper, they made their literary canonization possible. Janine Rogers (Ch. 11) illustrates how medieval graffiti can be related to marginalia, glosses, and commentaries in medieval books, considering the free book-space as public rather than private, while Marc Jahjah (Ch. 12) shifts the concept of graffiti to the digital screen. Digital reading platforms, in fact, allow the user to produce annotations that, in a capitalist economy, also become editorial, marketing, and commercial resources.

During the last two decades, graffiti has been increasingly the object of research, as well as capturing the curiosity of volunteers and local associations (Champion, 2015). Digital technologies allow it to establish a direct dialogue with the reader.

This book can be seen as another node in this rising research field, especially in light of its courageous multidisciplinary and cross-cultural approach. By presenting such diverse case studies, *Scribbling Through History* creates invisible bridges in space and time, over which these material traces, ‘ephemeral, fleeting, and animate with their intimate humanity’ (p. 51), travel and become enlivened.

REFERENCES

- Baird, J. & Taylor, C., eds 2011. *Ancient Graffiti in Context*. New York: Routledge.
- Champion, M. 2015. *Medieval Graffiti: The Lost Voices of England's Churches*. London: Ebury Press.
- Fleming, J. 2001. *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*. London: Reaktion.
- Garrucci, R. 1856. *Graffiti de Pompei : Inscriptions et gravures*. Paris: Benjamin Duprat.
- Kümin, B. & Osborne, C. 2013. At Home and in the Workplace: A Historical Introduction to the ‘Spatial Turn’. *History and Theory*, 52: 305–18.
- Milnor, K. 2014. *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pritchard V. 1967. *English Medieval Graffiti*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Valenti, R. & Barazzatti, L. 2020. Methods for Ancient Wall Graffiti Documentation: Overview and Applications. *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*, 34:102616. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2020.102616>

SERENA ZANETTO
Independent Researcher

doi:10.1017/ea.2022.11

Minna Silver and Pirjo Uino, eds. *Tiedenainen peilissä : Arkeologian professori Ella Kivikosken elämä ja tutkimuskentät [A Researcher in a Mirror: The Life and Research Areas of the Finnish Professor Ella Kivikoski]* (Helsinki: Sigillum, 2020, 147 illustr., hbk, ISBN: 978-952-7220-15-3)

Ella Kivikoski (1901–1990), the first female PhD in Finland, the first female professor in archaeology in Finland and the Nordic countries and the first female ordinary member of the Finnish Academy of Sciences, was perhaps the most famous Finnish archaeologist in the 1960s and 1970s. This was mostly because she published in 1967 the book called *Finland* in English that came out in the respected series *Ancient Peoples and Place* by Thames & Hudson (Kivikoski, 1967). It was the main source of Finnish archaeology for foreign archaeologists until the 1980s. However, she is mostly absent in collections on female Finnish scholars, and

foreign histories of archaeology that discuss the female trailblazers mainly pass her by. She was not ubiquitous in the encyclopedias or bibliographies of the time. The preface of the book *Tiedenainen peilissä : Arkeologian professori Ella Kivikosken elämä ja tutkimuskentät*, as it is called in Finnish, deliberates precisely about this. What could be the reasons for this situation?

One can find different explanations for this in this collection of papers discussing the life and research areas of Ella Kivikoski. As a professor, Kivikoski herself ‘hid’ her femininity and did not consider it relevant. She only expected to be treated in a similar way to other (male) professors.