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HEROM

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The journal is open to international research submitted by individual scholars as well as by interdisciplinary teams, and especially wishes to promote work by junior researchers and new and innovative projects. Challenging research themes can be explored in dedicated issues, and theoretical approaches are welcomed. Book reviews and review articles further screen the pulse of the field.

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BREAKING THE “GREAT CURSE OF ARCHAEOLOGY”

EDITORIAL PREFACE

John Lund, Jeroen Poblome and Daniele Malfitana

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The first two issues of HEROM were dedicated to specific research themes related to the theory and practice of material culture studies. The present issue and the next ones will offer contributions on a wide variety of subjects, linked, however, by the authors’ ambition to throw light on the complexities of past life departing from a study of artefacts.

It is hardly coincidental that three out of the four articles in this issue deal with ceramic evidence (in very different ways it must be said). Rather, it reflects the huge research potential of ancient pottery.¹ By now, this proposition may be commonly accepted, but such was not always the case. The eminent historian Moses I. Finley thus complained in 1965 that: “We are too often victims of that great curse of archaeology, the indestructibility of pots”.² Finley’s influence on the study of ancient economy (or rather economies)³ can hardly be overestimated.⁴ But, as argued by Ian Morris, he was inclined to overemphasize the problems involved in interpreting archaeological material, which led him to virtually ignore archaeological data.⁵ We are, in a sense, still living with the consequences of this, Finley’s blind spot, because other ancient historians have until relatively recently also tended to be disinterested in material culture.⁶ This is somewhat ironic, because Finley himself

1. Poblome *et al.* 2012; Poblome *et al.* 2013; Poblome *et al.* 2014.
2. Finley 1965, p.41. Note, however, the comments by Brian A. Sparkes (Sparkes 1996, pp. 1-2) and the response by Kevin Greene (Greene 2000, pp. 48-49).
3. See for instance Reger 1994, 3, pp. 273-276; Davies 2009; Archibald 2013.
4. Harris 2013.
5. Morris 2005, pp. 102-104.
6. As noted, for instance by Morris 2005, pp. 102-104; Shipley 2013, p. 5.

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acknowledged towards the end of his life with regard to archaeology and history: “There can thus be no question of the priority in general or of the superiority of one type of evidence over the other; it all depends in each case on the evidence available and the particular questions to be answered”.⁷ James Whitley recently made a similar point: “Archaeology is surrounded by misconceptions. One is that archaeology exists to confirm or deny the narratives of historians; another, that the material record exists to fill in ‘gaps’ in the literary. My argument here is that the archaeological record has first to be explained in its own terms before it can be used for any purpose related to narrative history”.⁸ The editors of this journal could not agree more.

It is not our intention to re-ignite the old debate about the relationship between archaeology and history,⁹ but to make two other points, which seem obvious but are nevertheless essential. The first is that material culture studies are central to all research into ancient societies.¹⁰ The second is that all scholarly disciplines involved in this endeavour should take heed of the results obtained in other disciplines instead of carrying out discussions in closed circuits among themselves, as often happens even now. As noted by Graham Shipley, recent anthologies published by historians are mainly filled with contributions by fellow historians,¹¹ and conversely it is equally true that those edited by archaeologists are largely filled with contributions by fellow archaeologists.¹² This is not to cast doubt on the value of the publications in question or to deny the existence of exceptions to this rule. Indeed, the very same criticism might be levelled against the current issue of HEROM. But we - as editors - remain committed to bridging the interdisciplinary gaps that continue to mar the field of ancient research.¹³ In short, it is *one* of our ambitions to contribute in a small way to breaking the Finleyan curse.

Finally, we are happy to announce that from 2015 onwards, HEROM will appear bi-annually. We encourage scholars of all disciplines, who wish to contribute to the fulfilment of the editorial vision, to submit manuscripts for the forthcoming issues. And last but not least, we extend our thanks to Leuven University Press for its continued support and belief in our project.

7. Finley 1985, p. 20.
8. Whitley 2009, pp. 732-733. Cf. also Hurst 2010, p. 92 on the distinction between history and archaeology.
9. See now Hall 2014.
10. For recent surveys of material culture studies, see Hodder & Hutson 2003, p. 14; Tilley *et al.* 2006; Hicks and Beaudry 2010; Basu 2013.
11. Shipley 2013, p. 5.
12. See for example Fenn and Römer-Strehl 2013, and the entire *ReiCretActa* series.
13. As set out in Poblome *et al.* 2007, pp. 17-18. For a broader explanation of the editorial goals, see Poblome *et al.* 2012.

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