

**ANCIENT GEOGRAPHIES, MODERN TRAVELS: THE PROVENANCE(S) OF  
IMAGINED CREATURES ON ARCHAIC PAINTED POTTERY (660-480 BCE)**

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation utilizes Archaic Mediterranean painted pottery depicting imagined creatures (660-480 BCE) to map out the multiple geographies of an ancient iconographic corpus and to investigate the impacts of modern and uncertain provenance data on our studies of the ancient world. While the ancient and modern geographies of creature pots are separated by thousands of years, and often by country borders or continents, juxtaposing these geographies can enable us to productively identify patterns in ancient distribution, to work more confidently with uncertain provenance data, and to begin to chart a path forward for researching and publishing un- or under-provenanced ancient art objects while recognizing the loss of ancient contexts.

The demand for creature pots in Archaic Etruria and Egypt – and in the modern antiquities market in the United States and Europe – were driven by the same impetus: the need to acquire creature pots, to interact with their well-crafted designs, to carefully select pots that serve as symbols of connectedness, worldliness, and status. 57% of the excavated creature pot corpus was exported away from its production region in ancient times, and 52% of the creature pot corpus has been exported away from its modern findspot in modern times. While this modern divorce represents a loss of archaeological context, decontextualization due to consumer demand has been a feature of the

creature pot corpus since its inception in the Archaic Mediterranean, and we can identify productive ways to study this decontextualization and offer recontextualization in relation to objects' modern travels and geographies.

Taking geography as a central lens highlights patterns in production, iconography, use, and collection across time and allows the juxtaposition of ancient and modern networks. Just as painters creatively reimagined monsters from oral epics into different pottery production traditions, modern users and collectors place different weight on specific points in an ancient pot's itinerary to answer today's demand for licit provenance. Chapter 1 defines the creature corpus and the scholarly and methodological basis for the study, seeking to de-center Attic production, to validate modern provenance as a valid context for ancient objects, and to use imagined creatures to outline real geographies. This dissertation builds from a scholarly foundation of previously-disparate painted pottery connoisseurship, network studies, provenance efforts, and mapping and digital approaches, bringing them together under an overarching geographical lens. Chapter 2 analyzes Archaic creature iconography in terms of its ancient production to trace interregional connections (and discontinuities). This chapter features case studies on the production of the five most populous imagined creatures of the Archaic period – the Chimaera, Pegasos, the Hydra, Kerberos, and the griffin – and follows their iconographical evolutions across production regions. Chapter 3 maps the creature pots' ancient distribution, including both imports and exports, and uses solely excavated pots to illustrate distinct distribution patterns for each creature. This useful subset of the creature corpus lends itself to studying where each "species" was distributed over time, in conversation with the production patterns identified in

Chapter 1. Although the dataset is limited by the survival of findspot information, the corpus offers concrete patterns via mapped visualizations, particularly focusing on the funerary uses of Kerberos pots in Etruria and the culturally-Greek distribution of Hydra pots. Chapter 4 introduces the Provenance Reliability Index as a framework to integrate modern provenance into studies of ancient objects. This chapter documents and analyzes the modern redistribution of the creature corpus and its complications, including comparing the findings from the provenanced objects in Chapter 3 with uncertain “said to be from” provenance data and identifying productive contrasts between the two datasets. The PRI offers potential avenues for studying objects and collections with uncertain provenance data, demonstrating the range of provenance data by modern country, collection, and object shape.

This dissertation investigates the multiple geographies associated with imagined creatures on Archaic painted pottery, both ancient and modern, and concludes that a) there was a communal imaginary of monstrosity across the Archaic Mediterranean, among and across different production traditions, b) imagined creature production and distribution evolved as ancient artists’ and consumers’ ideas and needs changed, c) iconography was a significant factor for Archaic consumers, as reflected in the distinct concurrent distribution patterns of different creatures (particularly the Hydra and Kerberos), and d) the modern distribution of Archaic painted pottery can be mapped and analyzed – and in some cases strengthen our ability to study patterns in the ancient world – using the Provenance Reliability Index framework introduced in this text.