

ANTENOR QUADERNI 46

ANTHROPOLOGY OF FORGERY

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY
APPROACH TO THE STUDY
OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FAKES

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ANTENOR QUADERNI

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Edited by
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FROM MATERIALITY TO AUTHENTICITY: METHODOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

Luca Zamparo

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to provide some reference points for the authentication of a presumably archaeological artefact with no context of provenance. First of all, this contribution analyses the Italian laws most relevant to authentication, while also presenting the history of the main research on the subject, and proposing definitions for “authentic” and “fake” items. Then, the fundamental procedures to carry out during archaeological authentication analyses are examined.

KEYWORDS: Authentication, materials, visual examination, history of the research, archaeology of production.

*“Però la questione principale che noi dobbiamo considerare è la seguente:
è questa opera, antica o no?”*

Ugo Foscolo, 1826

INTRODUCTION

The trustworthiness of the expert’s eye was already being questioned by Ugo Foscolo in 1826 and it remains an object of debate to this day¹. After all, J. J. Winckelmann had already discussed this problem in the *Preface* of his *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1764), when he declared that it was necessary to “distinguere le aggiunte, fatte per sostituire parti mutilate e perdute, da quello che è invece veramente antico”. He also assured his readers that he had personally endeavoured “di far luce sulla verità, avendo avuto tutte le occasioni favorevoli per esaminare con calma le opere d’arte antica”².

At the current state of the history of ancient art, distinguishing original artworks from copies and fakes is essential for those who wish to contribute to a new landscape based not on acquired notions or indirect knowledge of the objects, but on first-hand examination of a growing number of artworks and artefacts. This pressing need becomes even more so when taking into consideration the demands of art collectors and of the very active and still poorly regulated³ art market⁴.

¹ Ugo Foscolo’s *Ancient Encaustic Paintings of Cleopatra* was published in the “London Magazine” in 1826 and is also found in Eugenia Levi’s “*L’articolo sull’Incausto di Ugo Foscolo*” of 1913-1914. LEVI 1913-1914.

² For an analysis of Winckelmann’s work see, for example, “*Il Bello nell’arte. Scritti sull’arte antica*”, edited by Federico Pfister. PFISTER 2008.

³ NATALE 2017.

⁴ BRODIE 2014.

The history of art (and the history of archaeology as history of ancient art⁵) is full of lures cast by “image professionals” to attract amateurs, collectors and scholars, who then need appropriate critical tools to correctly identify these baits⁶.

The problem of fakes was ignored by scholars of art history at least until the first years of the 20th century despite its widespread nature. Meanwhile, several articles warning an ever-growing public of art collectors and merchants against the counterfeits and fraudulent manipulations flooding the market were being published already from the first half of the 19th century. As a matter of fact, between the 18th and 19th centuries, Neoclassicism and Romanticism both changed the notion of authenticity of a work of art, so that it acquired a decisive and broader sense of historical truth. However, its modern meaning seems to be an essentially post-romantic cultural construction⁷.

Max J. Friedländer’s articles on the problems of attribution and falsification were among the most interesting ones on the subject to be published during this period. There, he suggested a way out based on the concept of the “quality” of the artworks, and on their being able to convey aesthetic emotions, something that copies and counterfeited items could not accomplish. His yardstick was modelled after the experience of the connoisseur, who is able to feel “*the strength of the sensually spiritualised impression*”⁸; uncovering fakes, then, was part and parcel of the trade. Friedländer’s considerations did not hide the danger even for the more expert of being victims of judgement errors; nonetheless, they were essentially reassuring and described the merits of formal analyses.

In the same years, Hans Tietze published his reflection on the problem of fakes, which he considered not only signs of a lack of visual culture in a context of general infatuation for art, but also an outrageous offence against the artists’ original characters⁹. During the same period, Julius S. Held spurred scholars not to rely on scientific examinations only, as the progress of the research on counterfeiting methods seemed closely linked to the advancement of forger’s technical abilities. So, the formal and stylistic study became a deciding factor for authentication, because any artwork reveals precise historical and chronological coordinates when carefully examined; these coordinates can then be used to place the artefact in a common sequence. In fact, forgers have the means to copy techniques, but they breach the laws of history. It was not a coincidence that, during the first half of the 20th century, Otto Kurz published his famous book on *Fakes*. There, he described the different technical sectors of forgery not only according to their various manifestations, but also following the history of taste and, in some cases, relating them to the history of art criticism¹⁰.

Then, the topic of fakes and its corollaries, that is, the topic of copies, authenticity, originality and reproducibility of the work of art, are essential for studying not only the history of artistic practice and its reception, but also the history of art history (from ancient to contemporary art) and of aestheticism¹¹.

TOWARDS A (OR SEVERAL) DEFINITION(S) OF FORGERY

Authentication is the operation by which an object is recognised as authentic and is declared original¹², that is, its provenance is affirmed¹³. On the opposing side we find forgery, the mental¹⁴, arti-

⁵ BIANCHI BANDINELLI 1976.

⁶ Famous example: HEBBORN 1994.

⁷ ANDREOLI 2014, p. 27.

⁸ FRIEDLÄNDER 1941, p. 143.

⁹ TIETZE 1934, p. 17.

¹⁰ KURZ 1948.

¹¹ For an update, see FERRETTI 2009.

¹² *Dizionario Treccani, s.v. Autenticazione*. Online available: <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/autenticazione/>.

¹³ CASARIN 2015, p. 42.

¹⁴ “Si frainrende la falsificazione ove si creda di poterne trattare da un punto di vista prammatico, come storia dei metodi di fabbricazione dei falsi, invece che partirsi dal giudizio di falso. Ciò che risulterà subito esplicito se si pon mente che il falso non è falso finché non viene riconosciuto come tale, non potendosi infatti considerare la falsità come una proprietà inerente all’oggetto”. *Enciclopedia Universale dell’Arte*, 1958, p. 312.

ficial and manual operation by which a technical stratagem is planned, created and/or developed to make an object appear to be something it could never actually be, that is, an authentic artefact that has authority because it has been recognised as such¹⁵.

A fake¹⁶ is an artefact created and desired by man, implying a process based on contemporary and cutting-edge technical and formal skills, and finds its place in its social and economic context, as it reflects the fashion and tastes of the time of its creation¹⁷.

Clearly, forgeries must be distinguished from other forms of mimicry¹⁸ such as copies, replicas, and pastiches, that imply a condition of freedom from their models, and also from mystifications, that is, fakes created with intent of being uncovered as such at a precise time. In addition, there are the products of restorations, those resulting from the need to integrate a decorative composition or a collection; there also the products of revivals and of serial productions, that at one point were rejected as such.

Fighting against illegal trade and forgeries aimed at deceiving both people and Art itself is absolutely right and proper. However, what must be considered equally important is studying the mechanisms, techniques and thoughts underlying the several faces of forgery, which are in themselves a reflection of a society, like for example the contemporary one.

The complexity resides in the fact that falsity is a subjective and human value, a part of the judgement concerning the link between the object and the idea and intent behind its creation and distribution. Thus, it exists only when understood and perceived as such; it is not inherent to the object, nor is it one of its characteristics, it always refers to something else. A further difficulty arises from the historical relativity of the definition, since different principles were applied to deem fakes as such¹⁹.

For example, according to Herodotus (V, 59-61) and Pausanias (I, 48, 7), even in Classical Greece there were cases of fake epigraphs being placed on monuments, statues and furnishings preserved in several sanctuaries, put there with the aim of giving them a greater symbolic value or historical and religious meaning. They are not counterfeited items, as they were perceived as necessary for maintaining a balance in the religious sphere; nonetheless, there are quite close to being actual forgeries. During the Hellenistic period, then, the psychological relationship between the public and Classical Art masterpieces became even more complex, taking the first steps towards a new understanding of the reproduction of original Greek models²⁰. Hellenistic sovereigns gave life to a Classical Art revival pertaining to the Greek masterpieces from the V century onwards, and Rome adopted this line during its Mediterranean expansion and gradual submission of Greece and the Hellenistic realms as well. The imperialist power raided Greek masterpieces and triggered an unstoppable process of acculturation of Roman elites in the Greek sense. As a result, aristocrats wished to possess preferably authentic artworks and handicrafts of Greek craftsmanship²¹. When the demand for Greek artworks became increasingly high and looting was no longer enough to meet it, there was a marked increase in the number of artists' workshops in the Greek homeland, and a migration of Greek artists to Rome. The ancient peoples, then, did not consider originality an essential value, as is proven by the widely spread wish to possess copies of famous artworks when the originals could not be had, and copying was not considered unacceptable either.

This relationship with originals and copies, a characteristic of the Roman world, allowed to experience more freedom as regards the concept of "reproduction" and, clearly, did not consider the

¹⁵ CALAON 2018, p. 391.

¹⁶ The *Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio* (D. Lgs 42/2004), that is, the Italian Code of the Cultural and Landscape Heritage, recognises three different types of forgery: counterfeiting (a fake artwork is entirely fabricated and made with the intent of being passed off as genuine), alteration (any action aimed at adapting/changing an artwork to make it meet more closely the tastes of its possible buyers), and reproduction (the creation of an exact copy of an original artwork, so that it may be mistaken for the original).

¹⁷ RADNÓTI 2006, p. 27.

¹⁸ MELUCCO VACCARO 2000, p. 202.

¹⁹ The question is quite complex and, to be properly understood, the historical relativity of the concept of forgery – not always founded on the same principles – must be considered.

²⁰ For a short analysis of the question, see CIUCCARELLI 2018.

²¹ COARELLI 1998.

concept of “counterfeit” nor that of actual “forgery”, since the forged artefact as such did not appear to exist. Jumping back in time to the pre-Roman world, something similar to forgery may be found in the ceramics created by potters from Southern Etruria and, later, by those from Italic Apulia. They imitated with unerring accuracy the pottery imported from Greece, probably for economic and commercial reasons. Shapes, colours and decorations were so accurately reproduced, that suspicions regarding it being only a matter of taste may arise. Rather, what may underlie these choices could have been an ill-concealed intent of forgery against unwary buyers, at least as regards a precise production period.

In the contemporary world, instead, when talking about fakes²² there is always an implicit reference to fraud, that is, there is a fake only when there is an intent to deceive (otherwise, there is simply imitation). As stated above, a fake is created when there is an artifice not only in the deceitful manipulation of the material, but also in the intent of the forger, who tries to insert themselves in a tradition that does not belong to them²³. Fakes, as consumer products, are essentially linked to the economic law²⁴ of supply and demand. They answer to someone’s wishing to possess something they love, for the purpose of personal gratification and recognition, typical of collectors of all times²⁵.

Therefore, forgery²⁶ is an operation that sets up as identical something that is not, dispossesses someone else’s work, appropriates their way of solving the problems of that artwork, lends historical credibility to an item that – for the moment – does not have it, presents a false story of its origin and makes the item take an historical place to which it has no right²⁷.

Lastly, like any other man-made object, forgeries betray their personal data and, thus, acquire a limited historical meaning of their own. Thus, its distinguishing negative sign becomes a positive one, and places it alongside those items that, without presuming to be part of art history, nonetheless find their place in the history of costume and technology²⁸.

In sum, the topic of fakes, together with the topic of copies, authenticity, originality and reproducibility of the work of art, is essential for studying not only the history of artistic practice and its reception, but also the history of art history, the history of aestheticism and the history of art collecting²⁹.

Fakes, then, have their own rights: the right to be studied³⁰, and the right to find a place within the understanding of the social, historical, economic and cultural context that generated it, put it into commerce, and bought it. Fakes, once they have been identified and smartly used, may prove an incredibly useful tool for promoting legal behaviour as pertains cultural heritage, in opposition to illegal behaviours. They also prove valuable for the valorization of authentic materials and, e.g., the education of the future archaeological class, that is increasingly multidisciplinary and with a perspective embracing the materiality of objects. As stated in the introduction, distinguishing original artworks from copies and fakes is a must for those who want to delineate a new historical land-

²² ECO 1975.

²³ See, *in primis*, BRANDI 1963 and following reprints.

²⁴ The acquisition of tangible goods has experienced a considerable quantitative leap, directly linked to the deepening of the financial crisis in the last few years. The cultural sector was touched as well, as now more than ever artworks are considered safe havens. However, an investment is such only when the value of the object has been guaranteed and authenticated. ANDREOLI 2014, p. 17.

²⁵ *Interpreting Objects* 1994.

²⁶ CALCANI 2006, p. 131.

²⁷ Walter Benjamin wrote that the artwork has a unique existence. Based on this premise, the ascertainment of artistic interest of an object, on the occasion of the verification/declaration of its cultural interest in accordance with the D.Lgs. 42/2004, must analyse the individual characteristics of the artwork, regarded as a *unicum* that cannot be repeated. BENJAMIN 2011.

²⁸ VLAD BORRELLI 1971, pp. 93-95; FERRETTI 2009, p. 117. Fake artefacts, to whomsoever they may belong, may be declared of notable cultural interest in accordance with the D.Lgs. 42/2004, art. 10, paragraph 3, d), if their particular cultural importance has been declared because of their reference to political or military history, to the history of literature, art, science, technology, industry and culture in general, without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph 5 of the same article. For example, the application of this principle is currently being defined by the Ufficio Tutela of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per l’area metropolitana di Venezia e le province di Belluno, Padova e Treviso. GABBANI 2017.

²⁹ On the role of objects in society, see ARNESANO 2016, pp. 127-128.

³⁰ RADNÓTI 2006, p. 31; ZERI 2011, pp. 153-154.

scape based no longer on acquired and indirect notions, but on first-hand examination of artworks³¹.

Forgery (not the forged object) understood as fraudulent behaviour, must be banned³². Fighting against it is our duty, because it damages the Community and the idea of Culture itself.

AUTHENTICATION AND FORGERY IN THE ITALIAN LAWS ON CULTURAL HERITAGE

For the above reasons, the Code of the Cultural and Landscape Heritage (D. Lgs. 42/2004) sets limits to declarations of cultural interest (as per art. 10, paragraph 5) when the artefacts are counterfeited or altered for purposes of gain. Additionally, the law rules that these objects or artworks shall always be confiscated and that they shall not be sold, without any time limit, in auction sales³³.

Moreover, art. 64 of the Code states that whosoever conducts activities of sale to the public, of exposition for commercial purposes or of mediation for the purpose of selling works of painting, sculpture, graphic art or of antique objects or objects of historical or archaeological interest, or whosoever in any case habitually sells the aforesaid works or objects, must provide the buyer with documentation certifying authenticity, or at least probable attribution, and provenance; or, lacking such, declaration must be provided containing all the information available with regard to authenticity of the work or object or to its probable attribution and provenance, according to the procedures provided for by the legislative and regulatory provisions pertaining to administrative documentation.

The fifth part, title II³⁴, chapter I, art. 178 of the Code also punishes whosoever, knowing them to be false, authenticates works or objects which have been counterfeited, altered or reproduced. Additionally, whosoever, through other declarations, evaluations, publications, affixation of stamps or labels or by any other means, certifies as authentic or contributes to the certification as such of works or objects which have been counterfeited, altered or reproduced, knowing them to be false, shall be punished³⁵.

These articles are the product of the national and international relevance and spreading of art collecting, and there is also an underlying will to suppress forgery. This is due to, first, a need to safeguard the art market and collectors, by promoting a healthy and transparent market instead of encouraging, albeit unintentionally, an underground and unregulated one³⁶. Second, according to the case law of the Italian Court of Cassation, this criminal offence is to be considered a multiple offence, in other words, the Code aims at safeguarding “sia il mercato – lecito – delle opere d’arte sia il patrimonio artistico sia la pubblica fede³⁷”.

As a matter of fact, laundering and other offences linked to it, aim at “[far] fruttare economicamente le opere d’arte in modo illecito” by exploiting a market worth millions. This market debases art and devalues Culture³⁸, that is, it denies that sense of “testimonianza materiale avente valore di civiltà”, as stated by the Commissione Franceschini in 1964³⁹.

³¹ NATALE 2017, p. 51.

³² Fake artefacts are “legitimised” from a scientific point of view once they are put into the market and bought by citizens or public institutions, and can then lead to a warped historical and artistic evaluation of ancient artefacts. The damage caused by forgery is double, then, as it increases and encourages illegal excavations to supply illegal markets, and, additionally, it places fake objects in the scientific circuit. MALNATI 2018, p. 73.

³³ CALABI, ZOLLINO 2004.

³⁴ Title II is currently being examined and updated on the basis of the bill “Disposizioni in materia di reati contro il patrimonio culturale”, presented to the Italian Senate on 18 October 2018.

³⁵ MESSINA 2018.

³⁶ VOLPE 2018, pp. 87-88.

³⁷ *Cass. pen.*, sez. III, 25 febbraio 2000, n. 4084, in *Cass. pen.*, 2001, p. 615.

³⁸ RIVERDITI 2018, p. 293.

³⁹ Commissione d’indagine per la tutela e la valorizzazione del patrimonio storico, archeologico, artistico e del paesaggio, in accordance with Law n. 310 of 26 April 1964, chaired by Italian MP Francesco Franceschini.

FROM MATERIALITY TO AUTHENTICITY

Every day, archaeologists and museum curators work to uncover and tell the stories of the objects of the past, putting time, effort and funds to identify and characterise these artefacts⁴⁰. Ceramics are incredibly important to understand and date archaeological contexts and to make considerations on the dynamics of production, trade flows and social interactions⁴¹.

Due to wars and illegal trade and excavations, though, this cultural heritage is losing its link with its original context, and instead becoming part of a new economic and social system. So, in a way, object find themselves unable to tell their stories. At the same time, the still high demand for archaeological artefacts⁴² results in a prolific production of fake objects. Identifying these forged items is becoming increasingly difficult, due to the cutting-edge, constantly updated techniques used by forgers. These forgeries are then put on the market⁴³, almost always alongside the authentic material that is inevitably, terribly affected by them⁴⁴.

Usually, archaeological analysis is based on the assumption that the original artistic artefact holds within itself its own story, in a partially clear and partially hidden way. This story does not end for good with the creation of the artwork, but goes on with each deterioration and reconstruction, additional correction, and change in its intended use; and it also includes all interpretations and traditions concerning it. This whole, long process is the true “memory of objects”.

However, reconstructing the “memory” of a forged object is a very elusive process. When was it created? Who was its creator’s intended target? How was it “narrated” by its buyer? How much did it cost? How was it preserved by the collector? These are only some of the question we must ask to define, understand and fight against forgery⁴⁵.

Professional archaeologists are often called to answer these questions by the most varied people and institutions (public institutions, legal authorities, private citizens, Soprintendenze, auction houses, etc.), especially in the case of a transfer of ownership (for example in a devise), of a donation (from private citizens to a public institution), of a sale from authorised dealers, or of a purchase for museum purposes⁴⁶ (something that is increasingly unusual). Thus, archaeologists come into contact with the stories of people, not only those of objects, which are extremely different between them and that usually find a common denominator in a shared cultural taste, though people are often unaware of what they have actually acquired during their lives. Emotional reasons, the desire to stand out, self-satisfaction, and assertiveness are just a few examples of the “moto acquirente” of collectors, and not only of modern-day ones⁴⁷. So, the process of multidisciplinary knowledge aptly described by Giuliana Calcani as “diagnostica umanistica” starts.

This “diagnosis” starts from the historical, technical, stylistic, and formal analysis that is a characteristic of our profession. It all converges in the evaluation of the authenticity of the artwork⁴⁸, starting from the alterations in shape and style, to the changes to the conditions of representability, and finally arriving to taste as regards the imagery of subjects and themes⁴⁹.

The worst possible situation for archaeologists to find themselves in is having to examine and authenticate presumably archaeological artefacts that have absolutely no context of provenance⁵⁰.

⁴⁰ SALVADORI *et alii* 2018.

⁴¹ See for example the workbooks by SINOPOLI 1991 and SKIBO 2013.

⁴² See the survey “*Collecting in the Digital Age. International Collectors Survey*”, published by AXA Art in 2014.

⁴³ On the art market, see preliminarily the book by BRODIE, MACKENZIE 2014 and the volume edited by DESMARAIS 2015.

⁴⁴ CALCANI 2006, p. 136.

⁴⁵ On the figure of the forger and their motivations, see LENAIN 2011, while for the ethical, legal and practical implications of forgery, see *Aspects of Art Forgery* 1962.

⁴⁶ On the topic, see the Code of Ethics for Museums drafted by the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

⁴⁷ *Interpreting Objects* 1994, pp. 157-159, 193-204; BAEKELAND 1994, pp. 205-219.

⁴⁸ O’CONNOR 2004 gives a detailed description of the analytical process as well, though in different fields.

⁴⁹ CALCANI 2018, p. 473.

⁵⁰ On the study of ceramic material coming from an archaeological excavation, see CECI, SANTANGELI VALENZANI 2016 and LUND, POBLOME, MALFITANA 2018.

In these cases, there is no information regarding the context they were found in, let alone on how they came to be part of the collection and/or assemblage; in short, there is no information regarding neither their past history nor their recent one.

When faced with this situation, the archaeologist must first make an inventory, and classify⁵¹ the materials following technical and formal criteria linked to their shape, function, presumed chronology, supposed area of provenance, and technical and decorative characteristics⁵².

Making a rich collection of photographs may seem unimportant from a methodological point of view. Of course, visual examinations are essential and may not be delayed, since several, important issues regarding authentication may be solved only through observation and direct contact with the material. However, photography is an essential tool, because, first, it makes it possible to create a wide selection of photographs of objects that otherwise would not be commonly available to the general public, and that are rarely published. Second, if used correctly, it makes it possible to create terms of comparison (e.g., in a vase: the handles, the foot, etc.) and, lastly, it contributes to the naked-eye examination of the professional, as details hidden to the naked eye may be revealed in a photograph. Portable optical microscopes have become accessible at low costs and are of excellent quality. They can be used, for example, to get detailed images at an ideal resolution for the main analyses on the techniques used to create the artefacts. Several kinds of analyses are possible using a common camera, instead, ranging from the traditional feature extraction (to get a better result when studying the images) to its combination with UV light through polynomial texture mapping techniques⁵³. The latter allows to do a preliminary inspection of restored areas, to identify any decorated areas invisible to the naked eye, e.g. the preparation, and to highlight the intrinsic characteristics of the artefact.

But let us return to the hands, the forger's fearsome weapons, and to the interaction between professional archaeologist and artefact⁵⁴. The first thing an archaeologist has to do is to observe. They have to watch for any discrepancies between what they see and what their study of the humanities has taught them over the years; they have to watch the whole and the details; they have look at the relationship between them and the whole context. The presumed archaeological artefact, as a matter of fact, is nothing more than a context to be studied with a scientific and stratigraphic method, proceeding sensibly and with order.

For simplification purposes, we will take as example the authenticity survey of a presumably archaeological vase⁵⁵. First of all, after having identified the ceramic class it belongs to and having taken the photographs, its shape must be verified. Is it coherent in all its parts? Are its dimensions attested in the main archaeological literature? Is each one of its parts in keeping with the shape that circulated in antiquity?

We are used to several ancient variations, e.g. Greek amphorae, but we also know that forgers like to meet the demands of the market, that is, they prefer to make an object that answers closely to the wishes and fashion of its possible buyers. For this reason, we often see shapes similar to the attested ones, but also some incredibly odd ones⁵⁶.

In any event, the analysis must go on. If the artefact were authentic, its shape would also indicate its function, according to that logic of functionality that is typical of the ancient world⁵⁷. *Hydriai* have three handles because they had two purposes with two different corresponding movements: lifting water from a well or fountain, and then filling the drinking vessels on the tables. So, knowing the shape means verifying its function. In this case, the archaeologist will look for all those alterations due to use, like abrasions, that may - or may not - be found on the surface of the vase, so as to verify that it had indeed been used in antiquity⁵⁸.

⁵¹ CLARKE 1998.

⁵² See ELLIOT *et alii* 1994, pp. 109-124; *Interpreting Objects* 1994, pp. 125-132; GIANNICCHEDDA 2014.

⁵³ EARL, MARTINEZ, MALZBENDER 2010.

⁵⁴ TALIANO GRASSO, MEDAGLIA 2018, p. 123; ZERI 2011, pp. 153-154.

⁵⁵ A sublime example of this method may be found in FONTANNAZ 1999.

⁵⁶ The Greek and Roman ceramic production was quite functional and answered to precise practical requirements and to the principle of functionality. On the making of the main Greek ceramic shapes, see SCHREIBER 1999.

⁵⁷ For a general overview of the topics discussed here, see MANNONI, GIANNICCHEDDA 2003.

⁵⁸ For a study on the production, trade and use of vases in Greece, see the book by SCHEIBLER 2004. An update on the topic may be found in OAKLEY 2009.

Where all vases used (thus causing alterations) in antiquity? It is not so simple, of course. Many vases were created for ritual purposes or to be part of grave goods. However, if this were the case, what must be checked are not so much the alterations due to use (possibly the ones caused by contact), but the post-depositional ones⁵⁹. Are there any residues inside the vase? Are there any incrustations? If so, where are they? We know that forgers use “aging” techniques to better attract buyers increasingly often. Incrustations are precipitations of calcium carbonate or silicon dioxide from the soil the artefact is buried in. To give an example, they are often applied according to a certain logic, but they do not behave like what they aim to imitate during a normal treatment owing to a visual examination; this is because they are more often than not applied using modern glues⁶⁰. But it does not stop here. To give an even better “idea of antiquity”, in many cases forgers actually cause breaks, suggesting a “troubled” story and thus making the artefact seem authentic to less expert eyes. In some instances, they even “restore” artefacts to lend more credence to their words. After all, who would go to such great expense to restore a vase, if it were not authentic? And yet, it is what forgers actually do. With the help of a professional restorer, the archaeologist must also analyse this kind of restorations to ascertain their validity and, if possible, to date them. In the case of a fake artefact, dating it would also mean discovering when it was probably created.

Continuing with our analysis, a certain shape is often linked to a certain area of production, at least in the Greek world and Magna Grecia. In this case, the technical characteristics of the vase must be analysed. On the basis of scientific literature, the archaeologist must examine the ceramic body, that is, the paste, and its surface treatment. Using a technique similar to the stratigraphic analysis, the professional must verify three factors: the composition of the ceramic body (the clay used to make it, and any inclusions), its consistency (its hardness on the Mohs scale) and its colour (the one you see, maybe using Munsell colour charts for support). The same approach applies to the surface treatment, if there is any, and to any other element on the surface of the artefact. As regards the surface treatment especially, particular care must be taken with alterations due to use and post-depositional alterations. As a first step, they are recognisable without using archaeometric analyses, and may be described according to principles of consistency, composition and – in this case – distribution.

Thus, the archaeologist will obtain the technical elements (linked to firing temperatures, kinds of clay used, methods of manufacture, and ancient technical skills) that they will then have to relate to what they had already established as regards the class of the presumably archaeological artefact.

Only at this point may the analysis of the style and decoration of the vessel start. What is the style of the vase? Forgers often used – and still use – red-figure or black-figure styles to meet the demands of the market. Regretfully (or luckily), they used, and use, them on vessel shapes that are not attested in the literature⁶¹. Are the shape and decoration technique coherent?

Additionally, each technique requires a measure of artistic “tricks” and craftsmanship and, thus, is unique. An example may be found in the contours of the red figures, signalling a preparatory sketch on the vase, or in the delicate incisions used to draw the details in the black figures. How do these “tricks” look? How do they look to the eye and touch? In these cases, forgers often make mistakes, being led by their crave to produce, to sale. What tools did ancient potters use? How did they relate to the object? Forgers often accelerate the production process and, thus, leave behind a faint trail.

Finally, we have arrived at the true analysis, that is, the iconographic analysis. What is the theme of the decoration? Who or what are its subjects? Are they coherent between them? Are they coherent with the setting and depicted scene? And also, does the theme have any comparison? Is it coherent with the estimated date of production of the vase? Are there other vases with the same shape and theme? Some themes, for example, were only depicted on specific shapes, e.g. the Dionysian theme, so popular on *kylikes*. Forgers also tend to add a great number of details to their scenes in an effort to give more value to their work, even though such richness of detail is not characteristic of the ancient world. Of course, there are forgers so knowledgeable that they put figurative blocks that work well

⁵⁹ VIDALE 2007, pp. 47-70; SKIBO 1992; VIDALE 1992, pp. 113-129.

⁶⁰ FABBRI, RAVANELLI GUIDOTTI 2004, pp. 100-115.

⁶¹ We strongly suggest seeing COHEN 2006 on the topic.

together in complex scenes. In these cases, verifying that the forger has tampered with the entire iconography is possible only by breaking it up in parts and then analysing them one by one.

Alongside the decoration, there are often inscriptions on the surface of the vessel. On the vases created by the greatest Greek potters, there are the names of the protagonists of the depicted scene, or some indication as to what is happening (who can forget the indication of the score of the dice game between Achilles and Ajax in the famous amphora by Exekias?). Fake objects show inscriptions as well, though they are often copied without following any kind of logic. As a matter of fact, it happens quite often that an inscription carries the name of someone that is not in the scene, or that there are spelling, grammar, or, often, alphabetical errors, due to the confusion between the Greek and Latin alphabets⁶².

At this point, the archaeologist should be able to give an opinion on the authenticity of the artefact they have analysed. Now, they are asked to answer the most difficult question of all: is this object authentic? If the answer is yes, the analysis will find a place in the discussions regarding various, linked topics: social (For whom was this vase created? Who was it used by? What was the relationship between potter and buyer?), economic (How much did the vase cost in ancient times? How many potters had to work in the workshop to create it?), technical and formal (Which workshop does it belong to? And to which production?), chronological ones (When does it date back to? How long was it used for?), etc.

What happens if the vase turns out to be a fake? In this case, there are two main lines of thought: 1. Since it is a fake, it has no value (Anglo-Saxon school⁶³); 2. Since it is a fake, it has no value as an archaeological artefact (thus removing it from the market), but it can still tell a different story and have some value at a technical, formal, and historical level, as a symbol of a period, a symbol of fashions and tastes that were different yet widespread⁶⁴.

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⁶² For a general overview, see *Corpus of Attic Vase Inscriptions* by Heinrich R. L. Immerwahr, also available online: <https://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/attic>.

⁶³ See the exchange of opinions between Neil Brodie and John Boardman. BOARDMAN 2006 and BRODIE 2007.

⁶⁴ This article was translated by Daniela Borgo.

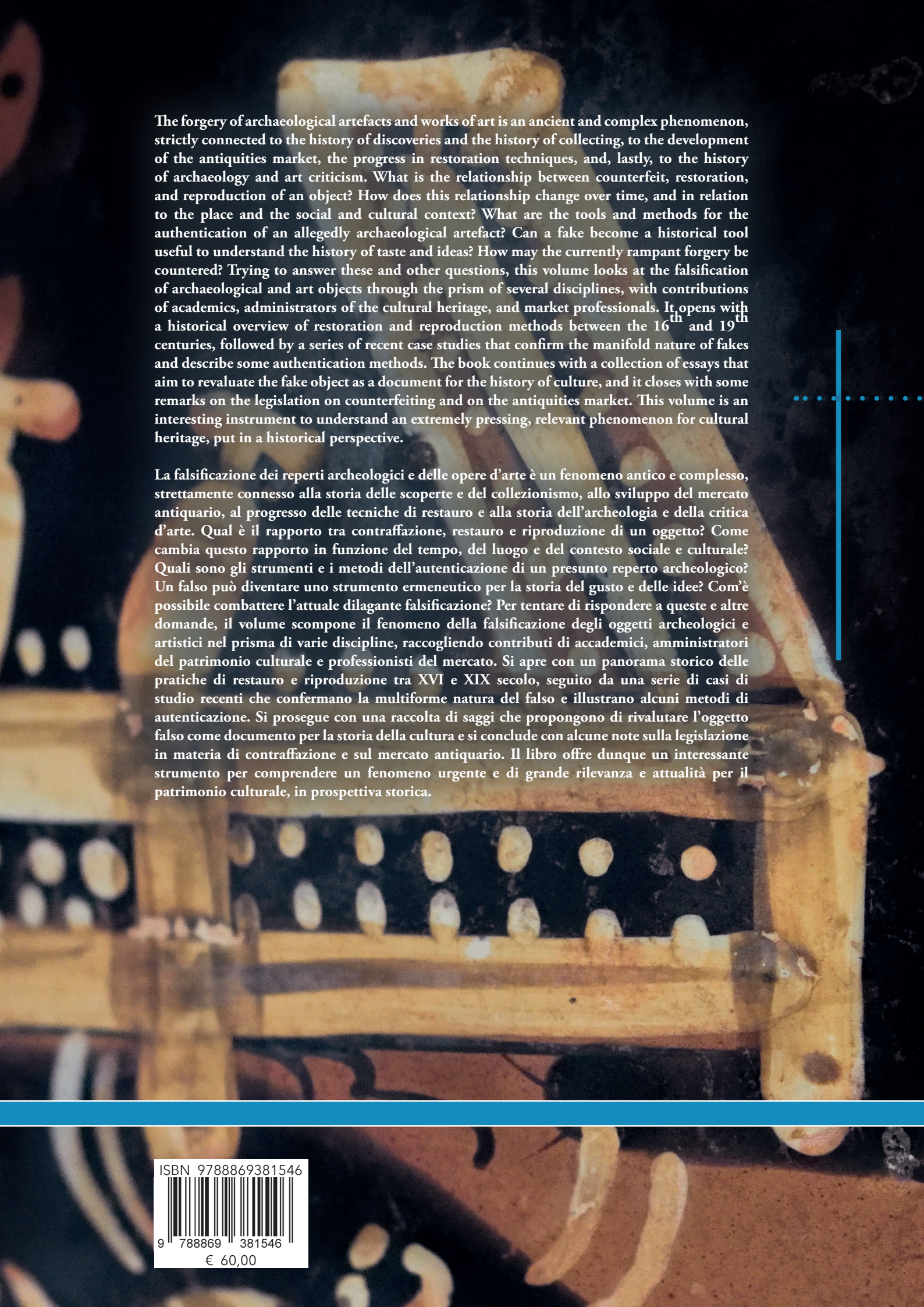
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The forgery of archaeological artefacts and works of art is an ancient and complex phenomenon, strictly connected to the history of discoveries and the history of collecting, to the development of the antiquities market, the progress in restoration techniques, and, lastly, to the history of archaeology and art criticism. What is the relationship between counterfeit, restoration, and reproduction of an object? How does this relationship change over time, and in relation to the place and the social and cultural context? What are the tools and methods for the authentication of an allegedly archaeological artefact? Can a fake become a historical tool useful to understand the history of taste and ideas? How may the currently rampant forgery be countered? Trying to answer these and other questions, this volume looks at the falsification of archaeological and art objects through the prism of several disciplines, with contributions of academics, administrators of the cultural heritage, and market professionals. It opens with a historical overview of restoration and reproduction methods between the 16th and 19th centuries, followed by a series of recent case studies that confirm the manifold nature of fakes and describe some authentication methods. The book continues with a collection of essays that aim to reevaluate the fake object as a document for the history of culture, and it closes with some remarks on the legislation on counterfeiting and on the antiquities market. This volume is an interesting instrument to understand an extremely pressing, relevant phenomenon for cultural heritage, put in a historical perspective.

La falsificazione dei reperti archeologici e delle opere d'arte è un fenomeno antico e complesso, strettamente connesso alla storia delle scoperte e del collezionismo, allo sviluppo del mercato antiquario, al progresso delle tecniche di restauro e alla storia dell'archeologia e della critica d'arte. Qual è il rapporto tra contraffazione, restauro e riproduzione di un oggetto? Come cambia questo rapporto in funzione del tempo, del luogo e del contesto sociale e culturale? Quali sono gli strumenti e i metodi dell'autenticazione di un presunto reperto archeologico? Un falso può diventare uno strumento ermeneutico per la storia del gusto e delle idee? Com'è possibile combattere l'attuale dilagante falsificazione? Per tentare di rispondere a queste e altre domande, il volume scompone il fenomeno della falsificazione degli oggetti archeologici e artistici nel prisma di varie discipline, raccogliendo contributi di accademici, amministratori del patrimonio culturale e professionisti del mercato. Si apre con un panorama storico delle pratiche di restauro e riproduzione tra XVI e XIX secolo, seguito da una serie di casi di studio recenti che confermano la multiforme natura del falso e illustrano alcuni metodi di autenticazione. Si prosegue con una raccolta di saggi che propongono di rivalutare l'oggetto falso come documento per la storia della cultura e si conclude con alcune note sulla legislazione in materia di contraffazione e sul mercato antiquario. Il libro offre dunque un interessante strumento per comprendere un fenomeno urgente e di grande rilevanza e attualità per il patrimonio culturale, in prospettiva storica.

