

**Despoina Markaki**

University of Crete, Department of History & Archaeology [dmarkaki@hotmail.com](mailto:dmarkaki@hotmail.com),

(full length paper)

**Damnatio memoriae: Antiquities without context**

The documentation of ancient artefacts today in cosmopolitan museums and private collections around the world is quite often incomplete, because of the absence of their finding contexts. What do we really know about cultural objects? Is this knowledge accurate indeed? Most of the items in question are looted and smuggled out of their site, region, or even country of origin, and are sold as artworks, themselves too poorly documented, as “orphans without history”. Their treatment reminds us, metaphorically, of the Latin *damnatio memoriae* – a kind of condemnation of memory.

Cycladic figurines provide a typical example of the material and intellectual damage which is caused by such practices. Besides the loss of their context, it is also the extended circulation of forgeries, due to their high demand in the art market, that intensify the loss. Each figurine with exceptional, unique features becomes, at once, a controversial issue. Are they faked, some or all of them? We cannot prove it, but interestingly enough we cannot deny, neither ignore it anymore.

This paper deals with a particular form of knowledge, that of archaeological provenance, known as provenience in literature. It argues that solid scientific information needs apart from the objects, their secure stratigraphic contexts, making the provenience of knowledge also a desideratum.