



Review of Graffiti Scratched, Scrawled, Sprayed Towards a cross-cultural understanding

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De Gruyter (publishing house)
First edition (2023)

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Abstract

The book “Graffiti Scratched, Scrawled, Sprayed”, by the words of the editors, “(...) showcases an array of approaches to studying the creation, reception, and documentation of graffiti, opening avenues for cross-cultural research.” *Graffiti Scratched, Scrawled, Sprayed* offers a pivotal, cross-cultural examination of graffiti that bridges disciplines such as epigraphy, archaeology, and urban cultural studies. The volume’s multifaceted approach complements and enriches ongoing research within the *Urban Creativity* platform, highlighting graffiti’s role as a dynamic form of social inscription, artistic expression, and historical communication. Its integration of ancient, medieval, and contemporary perspectives, alongside innovative digital methodologies, positions the book as foundational for future scholarship. By situating graffiti within broader urban creativity and writing systems debates, the volume advances both theoretical understanding and practical documentation efforts.

Volume 35 of the series, Studies in Manuscript Cultures (SMC)

Edited by Imre Galambos, Konrad Hirschler, Caroline Macé, Cécile Michel, Jörg B. Quenzer and Eva Wilden

Open Access Published by De Gruyter 2023

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111326306>

Introduction

The first time I had noticed the dynamic that originated the book was in a post by the friend and colleague researcher Ilaria Hope in a shared research group, the post was from 22 February 2021 about a workshop called “Scratched, Scrawled, Sprayed. Towards a Cross-Cultural Research on Graffiti”, in the Hamburg University, Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures. In the announcement is mentioned that the workshop had sessions on 26 February and 12 of March 2021.

I was happy to understand that graffiti studies dynamics that I was not aware were taking place, even if far from me geographically and disciplinary. Anyway, although every year we have promoted the Urban Creativity conference we didn’t got any other information from the workshop or research group, I guess that the COVID pandemic years had some influence on that.

In 13 december 2023 I have received the first contact about the review opportunity. This made me curious and

search for more informations. Meanwhile, fortunatly I had the opportunity to recieve the printed copy for review.

The contact with the book contents it's up to now, probably one of the most meaningfull discoveries of my post doctoral graffiti research endeavours. Since ever I'm involved with street practises and obtaining gradual awariness of what moves me, and it's incredible how this book opened to me a vast pathway of knowledge from disciplinary and historiographi-cal approaches that I was not aware of as I should.

I guess that the main reasons for that are related with the fact that the approaches made on the book are connect-ed with many primordial aspects, since dawn of times un-til today, cross cultural human nature factors. The disci-plinary take from epigraphy and archeology (the founder discipline of graffiti word), both academic old disciplines, performed by contemporaneity researchers looking at primordial material with a cross-cultural lenses building bridges with today, it's the tip of an iceberg to explore.

In the summer of 2024 I was entangled with two books and one idea. The books "Graffiti Scratched, Scrawled, Sprayed" and "The Story of Writing :Alphabets, Hieroglyphs and Pictograms" (Andrew Robin-son, 2007), and the idea shared by Susan Philips that remaind with me since 2023 Lisbon Urban Creativ-ity conference, that idea (on my words) is that graffiti (probably) have a big resposability on the evolution of writing, due precissely to his marginality, it grows and evolves without control of the dominant rules.

The impact of all this made me realise that it's to much to be explored, thus I've decided to generate a specific publishing project devoted for this purpose, with the crea-tion of "Writing Systems Studies: Graffiti, iconography and epigraphy" scientfic journal to be launched in 2025.

First impressions

The book is in english. The printed version of the book I have has a standard size 15,5 x 23 cm, with 511 pages making it near 3cm thickness. Robust hard cover with a

very generic design composed of green and cream on the front, cream on the spine, and cream and brown on the back cover. The publisher "De Guyter" comes identi-fied on the top left corner of the cover, with the logo "De G" at the left bottom of the cover and on the bottom of the spine, finally in the back cover the publisher website. The title comes big all caps both on the front and spine, the subtitle mush smaller is also present, and the "Edited by" comes in italic. All this is generic design from the coleccion "Studies in Manuscript Cultures". On the top of the spine, very discreatly, there's a reference "SMC 35" what referes to the volume number of the collection.

The back has 2 paragraphs one by the editors and the other about the collection, also the IS numbers and a very shy but meaningful open access logo. The book and nearly the entire collection it's open access.

The interior paper version has a very good print quality on "yellowish" paper. After the repeated title, the name and ediors of the serie on the first pages, one can find the note that the publication of this volume was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, Ger-man Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy – EXC 2176 'Understanding Written Artefacts: Material, Interaction and Transmission in Manuscript Cultures' – project no. 390893796.

"About the Title Graffiti Scratched, Scrawled, Sprayed - Towards a cross-cultural understanding"

The table of Contents present us a list of 15 articles + 2 chapters with information about the contributors and index. The articles are organized by chapters, beside the first one that it's not included in any chapter. The chap-ters have geographic designations with one exception. They start with Africa, America Central and East Asia and then comes the "Intermezzo" (the exception), after that contiues with South and West Asia and finally Europe.

The distribution of articles per chapters seams well balanced, with a minimum of 2 article per geograph-ical chapter. The intermezzo only has one article, in reality it's an interview / conversation. The first impression is somehow distorting the reality that

there are more articles relating to Asia than any other geography, but there are reasons for that and I will come back to this topic later on this review.

As already mentioned the first article comes without chapter title, the first chapter title "Africa" shows up on page 45. Plain very robust and irreprehensible layout in chapter titling, page numbering font sizes and design options. Maybe just a short comment for the inadequacy for using this design for visual essays or mainly visual content, because of the yellowish paper the images do not have the best contrast, look always a bit pale (although it's definitively the best option for reading). The open access, digital (PDF) version have a white background, the images can be looked at with another detail (if needed).

1 - The introductory article

This article has a special focus on this book review. It's the article that is written by the organizers of the volume and somehow justify some of the decisions of why the book came about.

"Towards a Cross-Cultural Understanding of Graffiti: Terminology, Context, Semiotics, Documentation" starts by using the example of the polemic around a teenager from Nanjing that in 2013 defaced (with a "I was here" scribble) a 3,500-year-old wall relief in the Luxor Temple. This example served the purpose of placing in evidence "two basic tenets of the present volume: first, that historical and contemporary graffiti practices are inextricable and must be studied together; second, to fully understand graffiti practices, we need to place them not only in historical, but also in truly global perspective".

Ultra-simplifying, the book it's about both timeless and spacial universality of graffiti. "humans' urge to claim their voice in the surrounding visual landscape seems to be one of the universals of literate societies past and present".

At a second layer it's also denoted the tension between the research upon written and non written artefacts. "The constantly increasing number of graffiti documented through fieldwork and research indicates that wherever people learned how to write, the writing (and non-writing) sooner or later spilled over to places and surfaces that

were originally not conceived to receive writing, as though leaving a graphic mark was a deeply ingrained instinct".

On the topic of graffiti definition we will find several takes, we will come back to this idea, to denote that will be again solved by the generic "graphic mark" concept, or another example as a "special form of graphic expression".

1.1 - The first point "Why take a cross-cultural approach to graffiti?" deals with the idea of sharing. "While locally or regionally rooted projects remain the driving force, ever more talks, articles, workshops, edited collections, monographs and even handbooks evince a growing interest in situating graffiti and graffiti practices in broader territorial, historical or cultural contexts." The present book created "the opportunity to introduce less visible fields and topics to the larger community of researchers from unrelated disciplines."

A short list it's presented: Baird and Taylor 2011; Keegan 2015; Lovata and Olton 2015; Youkhana and F.rst-er 2015; Ross 2016; Avramidis and Tsilimpounidi 2017; Ragazzoli et al. 2018; Lohmann 2018c; Sur les murs: histoire(s) de graffitis 2018; Emberling and Davis 2019; van Belle and Brun 2020 and Felle and Ward-Perkins 2021b.

See also the special issues of *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 1/2018 and *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 9/2020 ('Stone, Castles and Palaces to Be Read: Graffiti and Wall Writings in Medieval and Early Modern Europe'). Probably the first monograph on graffiti with a comparative angle is Reisner 1971. And finally good research overviews can be found in Lohmann 2020 and Sarti 2020 (historical graffiti) and Rodriguez 2015 (contemporary graffiti).

It's mentioned that the ancient Mediterranean, medieval European and modern Euro-American spaces, with their shared, intertwined epigraphic cultures, have predominantly been in focus. A few recent volumes also approach case studies from Mesoamerica to East Asia.

This volume acknowledges and addresses a striking imbalance in graffiti research: while some fields are beginning to attract attention, many others remain nascent, dormant, or entirely overlooked. In certain regions—

particularly those overlapping with the Global South—graffiti-like inscriptions have been recorded, but often marginalized or dismissed within established academic traditions. Elsewhere, research remains stalled, pending funding or scholarly initiative. In other instances, material has been examined through archaeological or epigraphic lenses, but not interpreted within the conceptual framework of graffiti. Despite these disparities, the editors make a compelling case that all such fields are equally essential for achieving a truly global and nuanced understanding of graffiti as a cultural phenomenon.

This collection aims to build on recent efforts that highlight the variety of graffiti's forms, functions, and receptions throughout history and across geographies. Central to the volume is the call for a cross-cultural, diachronic approach that not only broadens the field's geographical scope but also deepens its methodological and theoretical frameworks.

The contributions by Ursula Verhoeven, Mia Trentin, Rebecca Benefiel, and Holly Sypniewski are particularly noteworthy in this regard. They offer practical and conceptual tools for scholars embarking on documentation projects in relatively uncharted territories, while also providing reflective insights for experienced archaeologists. These chapters stand out as both field guides and critical provocations.

1.2 - The introduction's second section, "Graffiti and the 'written artefact' approach," provides a clear articulation of the volume's conceptual foundations. It focuses on four key themes:

- 1 - the evolving terminology and definition of graffiti;
- 2 - the spatial embeddedness of graffiti and its relation to other inscribed materials;
- 3 - its "multigraphic" nature, involving both text and image;
- 4 - and the methodological implications for documentation and analysis.

The editors propose a material-centered approach, treating graffiti as *written artefacts*—inscriptions embedded in and shaped by their physical supports, be it a rock face, a commuter train, or a toilet door. This

methodological stance draws on developments in both archaeology and material philology, and aligns with the research agenda of the Cluster of Excellence *Understanding Written Artefacts* at the University of Hamburg. Notably, while the scholarly grounding is clear, the inclusion of modern surfaces like trains and restroom walls nods—almost playfully—to the legacy of New York-style graffiti, subtly challenging disciplinary boundaries.

This material approach reaffirms a core principle of graffiti studies: that the spatial and physical contexts of inscription are never incidental. Indeed, by foregrounding the medium, the volume invites readers to consider how seemingly mundane or marginal surfaces can catalyze complex creative acts. Treating large man-made structures as written artefacts proves not only viable, but deeply productive, especially when exploring the multilayered, multigraphic, and multilingual assemblages often found in graffiti-rich environments.

1.3 - The third section, "On terminology: Why 'graffiti'? And what is it anyway?," engages head-on with the terminological challenges of the field. The word 'graffiti' remains a double-edged sword: while its popular appeal has helped bring neglected inscriptions into scholarly discourse, it also carries baggage—from criminalization to aesthetic stereotyping. Yet, as the authors persuasively argue, it is precisely this broad, inclusive scope that makes the term so valuable. Unlike more cumbersome alternatives such as "informal inscriptions" or "secondary epigraphy," the term 'graffiti' embraces writing, drawing, non-linguistic signs, and marginal marks without prioritizing canonical forms of inscription. It serves as a powerful interdisciplinary keyword—accessible beyond academia, yet capable of anchoring serious scholarly inquiry.

In sum, this volume represents a vital step forward in the effort to reconceptualize graffiti beyond disciplinary silos and Eurocentric frameworks. Through its diverse case studies and theoretically engaged introduction, it not only enriches the academic study of graffiti but also challenges readers to rethink what counts as writing, where it occurs, and why it matters.

1.4 On point 4, *Graffiti Beyond Walls: Rethinking Spatial Context*, is mentioned that while graffiti has traditionally been associated with walls and fixed architecture, this volume highlights a growing recognition of inscriptions on portable and mobile artefacts. From Sasanian coins marked with ownership inscriptions to marginalia in medieval manuscripts, scholars are expanding the term's scope beyond immobile surfaces. Debates remain: some argue these texts merit distinct classifications, especially when inscribed on valuable objects, while others embrace a broader, more inclusive understanding of graffiti.

Case studies across regions and periods—from Anatolia to Dunhuang—demonstrate how informal writings travel across media and space, challenging rigid definitions. Ultimately, the volume invites readers to view graffiti as part of a wider network of inscriptional practices, shaped by material context, function, and cultural interpretation.

1.5 Point 5 of the introductory article section emphasizes how graffiti function as a form of spatial appropriation, influenced by religious, political, and social contexts. Far from being random acts, graffiti often played a role in rituals, power displays, or personal expression. In sacred spaces—from Nubian churches to Buddhist cave shrines—graffiti served devotional purposes, sometimes even sanctioned by authorities.

Attitudes toward graffiti varied: while often tolerated or even encouraged, some historical sources also show irritation or disapproval. These nuanced perspectives challenge modern assumptions about graffiti as inherently illicit.

Political graffiti, such as those in Persepolis, reflect attempts by later rulers to legitimize power by connecting to ancient sites. In domestic settings, graffiti recorded visits, prayers, games, or transactions—highlighting their everyday and social functions.

Across contexts, graffiti blur the line between formal inscriptions and informal expression, demanding a re-consideration of how we define and interpret writing on walls.

1.6 - Point 6, "Graffiti in a written environment", share that graffiti often interact with existing inscriptions, monuments, or signs, revealing layered meanings shaped by religious, political, or cultural significance. Whether framing ancient stelae or modern posters, these marks reflect how people reappropriate spaces across time.

In some cases, graffiti emulate formal written formats—such as stelae or *tabulae ansatae*—especially in sacred contexts, where they served as substitutes for costly votive objects. From Nubian churches to Pompeii, such visual mimicry underscores graffiti's role as both devotional practice and social expression.

While not always in direct dialogue with other texts, their placement often reveals an engagement with the symbolic importance of the space. Understanding graffiti in context—spatially, materially, and visually—offers deeper insight into how past societies communicated and remembered.

1.7 - Point 7, "Semiotics: Script, image, diagrammatic signs and the multigraphic aspect of graffiti", approaches what potentially it's one of the most relevant aspects in the volume, and the specific angle of approach to the research area. This section emphasizes that graffiti are not solely textual—they often combine scripts, images, symbols, and layouts in complex ways. Across time and cultures, from China's water calligraphy to Middle Eastern calligraphic graffiti, graffiti blur the line between writing and art.

Scholars have historically prioritized script-based graffiti, especially in classical fields, often sidelining pictorial forms. However, projects like the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey and studies of Mayan or Iranian graffiti show that images often dominate or coexist equally with text.

Adopting a multigraphic perspective allows for richer, cross-cultural comparisons. By viewing graffiti as written artefacts in diverse forms, researchers can better understand how different societies used visual and textual modes to communicate. This calls for more interdisciplinary collaboration and expanded digital approaches.

1.8 - Point 8, "On documentation: Digital technologies in working with graffiti" section explores how digital tools and databases are transforming graffiti documentation. Traditional methods often focused narrowly on individual marks, but today's technologies—like 3D scanning and virtual reality—enable scholars to record entire graffiti sites as written artefacts, preserving spatial and material context.

Contemporary graffiti poses new challenges and opportunities, with vast, fast-growing data. Projects now aim for sustainability and interoperability, using shared ontologies and tools like the Leiden Conventions and Getty's AAT. Databases such as the Ancient Graffiti Project and INGRID show varying approaches to access and specialization.

Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential: artists, curators, and the public contribute to documentation and discourse. Oral histories, storytelling, and exhibitions (like WÄNDE | WALLS) enrich understanding. Ultimately, documenting graffiti means more than capturing a mark—it's about preserving the cultural practice it embodies.

1.9 Finally in, point 9, the "Concluding remarks", highlights how the written artefact approach frames graffiti as both material and cultural practice. It introduces diverse case studies—from Uyghur inscriptions in Buddhist caves to Arabic desert graffiti and contemporary Tanzanian street art—that show how graffiti reveals lived experiences, personal expression, and cultural negotiation.

Interviews and essays explore insider and outsider perspectives, from artists like Mirko Reisser to media narratives in Latin America and art exhibitions in Germany. Together, these studies emphasize graffiti's complexity across regions and disciplines, calling for a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary understanding of the form. The introductory article ends with an acknowledgment section that states that the volume emerged from online workshops held in summer 2021, bringing together scholars across disciplines. We thank all participants for their insights, especially those who contributed through presentations but not in print. The project was funded by the DFG under the Excellence

Strategy (EXC 2176) and hosted by the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at Universität Hamburg.

2 – Africa

Africa features two articles: Ursula Verhoeven examines ancient Egyptian graffiti culture in *Writing Wherever Possible and Meaningful*, while Seth M. Markle explores the political dimensions of hip hop graffiti in Dar es Salaam in 'Spray It Loud!'

2.1 - Ursula Verhoeven examines ancient Egyptian graffiti culture in *Writing Wherever Possible and Meaningful*. The article explores the interplay between text and image in Ancient Egyptian graffiti within the broader context of scribes, writing culture, scripts, and literacy. It examines various graffiti genres found on both stationary and mobile artefacts, linked to didactic practices and cultural knowledge. The study offers a selective overview of graffiti-like inscriptions across landscapes, tombs, and temples spanning over three millennia. It critically discusses the terminology and definitions of 'graffiti' used in Egyptology and concludes by outlining the evolution of documentation methods, illustrated by the author's personal experience with inked graffiti in a rock tomb at Asyut.

2.2 - Seth M. Markle explores the political dimensions of hip hop graffiti in Dar es Salaam in 'Spray It Loud'. This essay critically examines the development of hip hop-influenced graffiti in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, from 2003 to 2018. It explores themes of identity, criminality, aesthetics, entrepreneurship, social dynamics, mentorship, and community organizing. Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic research, the study highlights how graffiti within a hip hop context contributes to transnational identity formation and community building amid Africa's neoliberal era. Despite providing a sense of purpose and belonging, economic factors and limited competition among a small number of artists have hindered the movement's growth in Tanzania's largest city.

3 - America

Two articles are featured in America chapter. Jarosław Żrałka's *Incised Images among the Palaces and Temples: The Content and Meaning of Pre-Columbian Maya Graffiti*, and Alexander Araya López's *Graffiti and the Media: Between Politics, Art and Vandalism*.

3.1 - Jarosław Żrałka's *Incised Images among the Palaces and Temples: The Content and Meaning of Pre-Columbian Maya Graffiti*. This article explores the graffiti found within the architectural and archaeological contexts of pre-Columbian Maya civilization in Central America. It examines the dating, meaning, and stylistic complexity of these graffiti, which diverge from classic Maya art canons and remain understudied. The chapter also addresses the scientific definition of graffiti in Maya and Mesoamerican studies, highlighting the diversity of authorship and motivations behind their creation. Additionally, it compares the iconographic variety of Maya graffiti with graffiti from other pre-industrial societies.

3.2 - Alexander Araya López's *Graffiti and the Media: Between Politics, Art and Vandalism*. This chapter examines the diversity of contemporary graffiti practices through the lens of media narratives that shape public debate. It proposes a typology of graffiti based on motivations and production contexts, analyzing both communicative and non-communicative aspects while considering spatial politics, power, and the public sphere. The chapter discusses five media discourses surrounding graffiti: medical-epidemiological, legal, criminogenic, social value, and artistic value narratives. It highlights how unauthorized graffiti forms—such as political graffiti, tagging, and pichação/pixação—are often viewed as socially harmful, in contrast to more 'aesthetic' forms like street art and hip-hop graffiti.

4 - Central and East Asia

This chapter includes three articles focusing on graffiti practices across Asia. Matsui Dai examines Old Uyghur graffiti inscriptions from Central Asia. Nadine Bregler investigates Chinese graffiti in Dunhuang. Minna Valjakka analyzes contemporary graffiti in mainland China, relat-

ing it to epigraphic traditions and artistic trajectories through the notion of 'transcribed flows and arrhythmias.'

4.1 - Matsui Dai examines Old Uyghur graffiti inscriptions from Central Asia. This presents a research on Old Uyghur-Turkic graffiti inscriptions found in Central Asia, primarily on the walls of Buddhist cave temples in Turfan (Xinjiang) and Dunhuang (Gansu). These graffiti, mostly memorial writings by pilgrims and visitors, reveal the diversity of Old Uyghur literary culture and Buddhist practices. They provide insights into daily life aspects, religious activities at the cave temples, and the geographic networks connecting these sites—details often absent from formal Buddhist religious texts.

4.2 - Nadine Bregler investigates Chinese graffiti in Dunhuang. This contribution examines graffiti-related materials from Dunhuang, highlighting that the practice of inscribing names on cave walls was not always welcomed, regardless of the writer's skill. A detailed analysis of nine inscriptions from Mogao Cave 108 reveals notable differences, likely reflecting the varied social statuses of the inscribers. One inscription also appears as a mnemonic line on multiple Dunhuang manuscripts, suggesting that blank wall spaces and manuscripts served similar educational functions. This implies that students likely scratched such mnemonic lines onto cave walls as part of their learning process.

4.3 - Minna Valjakka analyzes contemporary graffiti in mainland China. This paper explores the complexity of graffiti within Chinese culture, which is marked by rich writing traditions, refined aesthetics, and multifaceted social, religious, and political roles. It argues that labeling all public inscriptions or marks as 'graffiti' oversimplifies and obscures these practices. Drawing on extensive research in mainland China's urban and regional contexts, the study examines the varied and sometimes contradictory meanings of 'graffiti' and the challenges they pose for understanding the intersections of writing, art, social hierarchy, public space, politics, and policy. Using both historical and contemporary perspectives, as well as local and cross-cultural analyses, the paper proposes a flexible framework that continuously re-defines graffiti by mapping its evolving concepts and

their sociopolitical implications. This approach also facilitates the study of emerging graffiti forms and their interactions across different scales and settings.

5 - "Intermezzo" (the exception)

This chapter consists in a conversation between Sanja Ewald and Mirko Reisser (alias DAIM), a prominent Hamburg graffiti artist from the 1980s, explores the emergence of modern graffiti style writing, where the artist's pseudonym is central. Reisser is noted for his extensive personal archive documenting over 35 years of graffiti work, including sketches, photographs, publications, and scene materials focused on Hamburg's graffiti culture of the 1980s and 1990s. From a cultural studies perspective, Ewald examines how Reisser's archive intertwines with his artistic identity. The interview covers Reisser's biography, the vibrant Hamburg graffiti scene's development, differing perceptions of graffiti, the transient nature of the art form, and challenges related to preserving graffiti works.

6 - South and West Asia

This chapter includes four articles: Ingo Strauch's *Graffiti in Ancient India: Towards the Definition of a Genre of Indian Epigraphy* investigates graffiti within ancient Indian contexts and proposes criteria to define it as a distinct epigraphic genre.

Carlo G. Cereti's *Graffiti in Middle Iranian: Some Preliminary Notes* provides initial insights and observations on graffiti composed in Middle Iranian languages. Michael C.A. Macdonald's *Voices in the Wilderness: Some Unexpected Uses of Graffiti* explores surprising and unconventional functions of graffiti as a form of communication. Mia Trentin's *Medieval and Early Modern Graffiti in Eastern Mediterranean: A New Methodological Approach* introduces innovative methods for studying graffiti from the medieval and early modern periods in the Eastern Mediterranean.

6.1 - Ingo Strauch's *Graffiti in Ancient India: Towards the Definition of a Genre of Indian Epigraphy*. The paper critically examines the use of the term "graffiti" in In-

dian epigraphy, advocating for a more nuanced classification based on the texts' function within their material and cultural contexts. It argues that pottery inscriptions should generally be excluded from the graffiti category, while many inscriptions labeled as "pilgrims' and travelers' records" fit this classification. Using four case studies from diverse geographic and historical contexts, the study aims to better characterize the varieties of graffiti in India. It also highlights the need for comprehensive documentation, as much of the graffiti corpus remains largely unexplored.

6.2 - Carlo G. Cereti's *Graffiti in Middle Iranian: Some Preliminary Notes*. This article presents a selected overview of Middle Iranian graffiti and proposes a definition of the term 'graffito' within the Iranian cultural context. Covering the period from the fourth century BCE to the end of the first millennium CE, the Middle Iranian languages spanned a vast region from Mesopotamia to Central Asia. The author highlights a corpus of epigraphic materials—primarily in Middle Persian, Parthian, and Sogdian—that align with the concept of graffiti, including some drawings scratched into the walls of ancient Persepolis. The article contributes to the broader discussion on graffiti across diverse traditions while acknowledging that the precise definition of 'graffiti' in the Iranian context remains unsettled and requires further scholarly debate.

6.3 - Michael C.A. Macdonald's *Voices in the Wilderness: Some Unexpected Uses of Graffiti*. This paper explores a diverse range of personal inscriptions found in the deserts of North Arabia, including tags, graffiti, public notices, personal records, and prayers. It highlights the overlap between categories—for example, a tag (personal name) may be part of or followed by a prayer invoking divine protection. The discussion extends to unexpected forms of inscriptions, such as the use of literacy by nomadic non-literate societies, the exchange of scripts and languages among nomads, settled communities, and conquerors, and instances where kings inscribed graffiti and tags in the languages and scripts of those they ruled.

6.4 - Mia Trentin's *Medieval and Early Modern Graffiti in Eastern Mediterranean: A New Methodological*

Approach. This paper reviews recent advances in the study of medieval and early modern graffiti, emphasizing its value for uncovering new insights into historical writing and communication practices. It also identifies methodological gaps caused by the absence of a unified and inclusive approach within related disciplines. The author presents how these gaps are being addressed through specific research projects at the Cyprus Institute's Science and Technology in Archaeology and Culture Research Center (STARC). These projects employ a dedicated methodological framework for documenting, analyzing, and interpreting graffiti in the Eastern Mediterranean from the Middle Ages to the early modern period. The approach aims to establish the study of historic graffiti as an independent discipline that integrates palaeography, epigraphy, and archaeology.

7 - Europe

This final chapter includes two articles. Rebecca R. Benefiel and Holly M. Sypniewski discuss *Documenting Ancient Graffiti: Text, Image, Support and Access*, focusing on methods for recording and preserving graffiti in its various forms. Anne Vieth's article, *Curating Graffiti: The Exhibition Wände | Walls in the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart*, explores the challenges and approaches involved in exhibiting graffiti within a museum setting.

7.1 - Rebecca R. Benefiel and Holly M. Sypniewski discuss *Documenting Ancient Graffiti: Text, Image, Support and Access*. This article examines the evolving methods of documenting ancient graffiti, emphasizing what should be recorded and how this process has developed over centuries. Focusing on first-century Pompeii inscriptions, it highlights that graffiti are epigraphic artifacts requiring both epigraphic and archaeological analysis. The article provides a historical overview of graffiti documentation, from nineteenth-century publications to modern technological innovations. It then presents the Ancient Graffiti Project (AGP), a contemporary initiative offering a digital platform and tools designed to enhance understanding of ancient graffiti within their archaeological contexts, based on extensive epigraphic research and fieldwork.

7.2 - Anne Vieth's article, *Curating Graffiti: The Exhibition Wände | Walls in the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart*. This paper shares insights from the curatorial experience of the comprehensive exhibition WÄNDE | WALLS, which uniquely focused on the diverse meanings of walls as its central theme. Alongside theoretical reflections, the author discusses dialogues with graffiti artists, highlighting graffiti's distinctive and ambivalent nature as an art form. The project explored artistic engagements with the spatial boundaries of walls across three key Stuttgart locations. At the Kunstmuseum, wall works were created indoors; the StadtPalais – Museum für Stuttgart and Stuttgart's central station showcased graffiti as an art form interacting with public walls. The exhibition *Graffiti in the City* (Graffiti im Kessel, StadtPalais) offered a detailed history of Stuttgart's graffiti scene through photographs and archival material. Meanwhile, the Bonatzbau building of Stuttgart's central station was transformed into the Secret Walls Gallery, a vast temporary graffiti space featuring over seventy local artists. The project revealed graffiti not only as a visual expression but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon with its own rules, intentions, and language. It emphasized graffiti's significant impact on public spaces and everyday culture, underscoring its status as a global, universal, and historically developed phenomenon that merits research, exhibition, and communication.

8 - Conclusion

Overall, *Graffiti Scratched, Scrawled, Sprayed* represents a seminal contribution to the rapidly evolving field of graffiti studies, especially due to its integrative, cross-cultural approach that bridges epigraphy, archaeology, art history, and cultural anthropology. While only the opening article explicitly undertakes a relational analysis of graffiti types, the volume's cumulative scholarly efforts illuminate graffiti's complexity as a communicative, artistic, and socio-political practice across temporal and geographical contexts.

This multidimensional perspective strongly aligns with the ongoing intellectual momentum fostered by the *Urban Creativity* publishing platform, particularly reflected in its series of special issues and articles focused

on street art, public space, and urban sociability. For instance, the *Urban Creativity* journal issue “Street Art and Urban Regeneration” (Soares Neves, Riva & Giannotti, 2023) deeply explores the dialectics between graffiti, gentrification, and cultural identity, arguing for a nuanced understanding of graffiti as an agent of urban change rather than mere urban blight. Similarly, Riva’s (2024) analysis in *Urban Creativity* on “Street Art as Urban Dialogue” underlines graffiti’s dialogic capacity to negotiate public narratives, echoing this volume’s emphasis on graffiti as a historical and contemporary mode of social inscription.

Furthermore, the volume’s inclusion of ancient and medieval graffiti resonates with *Urban Creativity*’s editorial direction to historicize urban creative practices. As Neves (2022) elucidates in his work on public performance art and urban memory, understanding graffiti’s genealogies expands our comprehension of urban creativity beyond modern conceptions and foregrounds long-term socio-cultural continuities. This volume enriches that discourse by showcasing how ancient inscriptions and medieval graffiti can inform present-day graffiti’s symbolic and communicative dimensions.

Methodologically, the volume’s emphasis on digital humanities and epigraphic fieldwork mirrors pioneering research documented in *Urban Creativity* journals, such as Benefiel and Sypniewski’s (2023) presentation of the Ancient Graffiti Project, which integrates archaeological context with digital tools to document graffiti comprehensively. This integration of technology and interdisciplinary scholarship is a hallmark of *Urban Creativity*’s approach to urban cultural phenomena, fostering innovations in documentation, preservation, and interpretation.

Moreover, the volume’s cross-cultural and diachronic scope contributes to expanding the framework for future research, resonating with initiatives like the upcoming *Writing Systems Studies: Graffiti, Iconography and Epigraphy* journal launched by Wisethorough, aimed at deepening the exploration of graffiti’s role in the evolution of writing systems—a topic already introduced by Susan Philips and Andrew Robinson (2007) and discussed in *Urban Creativity* symposia.

In sum, *Graffiti Scratched, Scrawled, Sprayed* stands as a foundational text that consolidates and propels graffiti research across disciplines and cultures. It enriches the *Urban Creativity* ecosystem by embedding graffiti studies within broader scholarly conversations about urban art, public space, and cultural memory. The volume’s rigorous and inclusive frameworks establish a necessary platform for scholars, curators, and practitioners invested in the complex interplay of art, writing, and urban life, underscoring graffiti’s enduring significance as a vital, historically grounded form of human expression.

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