

## Representing Genitalia in the Ancient Mediterranean

Thomas R. Blanton IV, Philippe Guillaume, Sandra Jaeggi-Richoz, and Joy Rivault

This project sheds light on a cluster of topics that previous generations have closely guarded by taboo: sex and sexuality, the genitalia (vulva, vagina, uterus; phallus, testicles), and the nourishing breast. Although these topics are vital for understanding ancient perceptions of gender, sexuality, and the human life cycle, much of the relevant material—including statuary, frescoes, vase paintings, herms, votives and figurines, gems and amulets, and ceramic breast pumps, among others—remains hidden away in the vaults of museums, uncataloged and unpublished. This project aims to identify, catalog, and publish in an online database previously unknown and under-researched material related to sexuality, the genitalia, and procreation, aspects of the human life cycle that have until recently been insufficiently integrated into scholarly reconstructions of ancient Mediterranean cultures.



Fig. 1 : Ceramic black glaze feeding-bottle with the spout in form of a phallus, based on Snijder Geerto Aeilko Sebo (1933-1934), “Guttus und verwandtes”, *Mnemosyne* 1, 1, p. 34-60: image pl. 3, fig. 15.



Fig. 2 : Red jasp Amulette with on the obverse Omphale a club (or a phallus), on the reverse, ityphallic donkey, based on V. Dasen, *Le sourire d'Omphale*, Rennes, 2015: 93, fig. 3.6a et b, Bonn, copyright Rheinisches Landesmuseum, 36417.

## Project Overview

The current project is part of a multi-year investigation of depictions of genitalia in the Mediterranean basin in antiquity. The project has four related components:

1. The project aims to promote research on artistic depictions of human genitalia in the ancient Mediterranean by organizing and hosting international workshops and conferences dedicated to the academic study of this material. The inaugural workshop, held at the University of Fribourg on Oct. 11, 2018, was entitled “The Phallus in All Its ‘Glory’: International Colloquium.” The workshop was formed when Sandra Jaeggi-Richoz and Philippe Guillaume invited Thomas R. Blanton IV to present a public lecture on the Judaic practice of circumcision. Inspired by the workshop, Jaeggi-Richoz and Blanton decided to initiate a collaboration, which quickly grew to include Guillaume and Joy Rivault, the current project team. We expect to organize additional workshops and conferences in the future.



Fig. 3 : “The Circumcision of Abraham,” Jean de Sy, fourteenth century illuminated Bible.

2. The project aims to publish high-quality academic studies focused on artistic representations of genitalia in the ancient Mediterranean. Our first publication, consisting of papers presented at the 2018 workshop in Fribourg, albeit substantially augmented by the inclusion of articles by classicists, Egyptologists, and archaeologists, is scheduled for publication in January 2021 in a special issue of *Archimède: Archéologie et histoire ancienne* (<https://archimede.unistra.fr/revue-archimede/>) entitled “Le Phallus dans l’Antiquité” / “The Phallus in Antiquity.” Sandra Jaeggi-Richoz has played an active role in organizing the special issue. We expect more publications to follow.

3. The website and blog, *Genitalia & Co.: Représenter les organes génitaux dans la Méditerranée antique* / *Representing Genitalia in the Ancient Mediterranean* (<https://genitaliaandco.hypotheses.org/category/accueil>) make available academic discussions of ancient art and statuary depicting human genitalia, with a particular focus on the cultural codes communicated by this material, conveying information pertaining to sex and gender, ethnic affiliation, social and economic relations, infant care, and protection from hostile forces including the evil eye, among others. The site was visited over 1,000 times during the month of its initial launch, July 2020. Joy Rivault has played an active role in curating the blog.



Fig. 4 : Baubo figurine, approx.. 100 B.C., VAGINAMUSEUM.at (from Antikensammlung Berlin, Germany)

4. Lastly, the project team plans to catalog and make publicly available as much of the relevant artistic material as possible in a freely accessible online database. Although of material has already been published on the subject (see the project bibliography on the Genitalia & Co. website), much more remains unpublished and uncataloged in museums. It is our intention to locate this material so that it can be photographed, described, and included in the open-access, searchable database that we plan to create. The project will therefore be a boon to scholarship on the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean basin and the history of artistic depictions of genitalia, making available high-quality images for the purpose of research to scholars internationally.

#### **Project Team :**

Thomas R. Blanton IV holds a PhD in Biblical Studies from the University of Chicago Divinity School and is an Associated Fellow at the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Social and Cultural Studies, University of Erfurt.

Philippe Guillaume is lecturer in Hebrew Bible and biblische Umwelt at the University of Berne (Switzerland). He participates in the Jezreel archaeological excavation in Galilee, and he is a member of the Oslo research group on Deuteronomy.

Sandra Jaeggi-Richoz holds a PhD in classical archaeology from the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). She is currently a post-doctoral student at the HiSoMA laboratory of the Université Lumière Lyon 2 as part of an FNS early postdoc programme.

Joy Rivault a historian of religions, doctor in History, Civilizations and Archaeology of Ancient Worlds from the University of Bordeaux-Montaigne, and she has a CAPES in Classics. She is an associate researcher at the Ausonius Institute (UMR 5607 CNRS) in Bordeaux and at the French Institute of Anatolian Studies (USR 3131) in Istanbul.

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