Invisible Cultures

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Historical and Archaeological Perspectives

Edited by

Francesco Carrer and Viola Gheller

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FOREWORD

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L'idea di interrogarsi sulla possibilità e sulle modalità con cui individuare e descrivere culture e gruppi sociali che sono citati dalle fonti letterarie ma non hanno lasciato alcuna traccia materiale della loro esistenza, o che al contrario sono attestati dall'evidenza archeologica e sono sconosciuti alle fonti scritte, è partita da una storica della tarda antichità e da un archeologo della pre- e protostoria (rispettivamente, un'allieva e un alumnus della Scuola di Dottorato in Studi Umanistici dell'Università di Trento): non a caso, perché gli antichisti sono per mestiere costretti a confrontarsi con fonti ed evidenze solitamente scarse, lacunose e perciò estremamente problematiche, che impongono da un lato approcci metodologici particolarmente rigorosi, dall'altro modelli interpretativi suscettibili di continua revisione. Di qui, immagino, il desiderio di un confronto con studiosi di altre discipline, in particolare non antichisti, con l'obiettivo di uno scambio di saperi e di esperienze che ha costituito uno dei criteri primari (accanto a quello dell'elevata qualità scientifica) adottati dagli organizzatori per vagliare le numerosissime risposte al loro call for papers, e che, come si vedrà scorrendo i contributi raccolti in questo volume, ha in effetti prodotto esiti di grande interesse.

Come era prevedibile, gli interventi sono in maggioranza incentrati su processi e fenomeni culturali la cui invisibilità è in buona parte imputabile alla più o meno grande distanza temporale che li separa da noi (spesso, anche se non sempre, causa primaria della scarsità delle evidenze disponibili), ma anche all'inadeguatezza di molti dei tradizionali metodi d'indagine applicati a contesti che, almeno all'apparenza, risultano archeologicamente "muti." Tale pare essere il caso del sito cretese studiato da Florence Liard: l'analisi dei dati petrografici di resti ceramici dell'Età del Bronzo provenienti da un deposito di Malia induce la studiosa a ipotizzare, pure in assenza di ulteriori evidenze archeologiche, che le attività produttive, i contatti economico-culturali e le pratiche sociali tradizionali vi sopravvissero anche dopo il crollo dei centri della civiltà

palaziale. Sono invece alcuni dati archeologici, non tutti inediti ma evidentemente meritevoli della revisione complessiva offertane da Silvia Lischi, che attestano la presenza, a partire almeno dal I secolo a.C., di una altrimenti "invisibile" comunità di origine indiana a *Moscha Limen* (odierna Sumhuram), sulla rotta commerciale che collegava l'India all'Oman meridionale. In una diversa prospettiva cronologica, anche Lara Tonizzo Feligioni propone un caso metodologicamente interessante, a indicare come l'evidenza archeologica possa almeno in parte ovviare al silenzio documentale, e dunque all'invisibilità sociale dei protagonisti: la storia edilizia della prigione pontificia di origine altomedievale di Leopoli-Cencelle, insieme con la parallela vicenda evolutiva del contesto urbanistico in cui è collocata, consente di interpretare sia le poche testimonianze dirette lasciate in loco da coloro che vi furono rinchiusi sia la relativa scarsa documentazione d'archivio.

Fra gli interventi che muovono da una prospettiva archeologica, interrogandosi sul significato dell'assenza, ma anche della presenza, di evidenze riconducibili a fenomeni e processi socioeconomici e culturali, due si sono incentrati–in un orizzonte cronologico che dal medioevo giunge alla prima età moderna–sulla pastorizia, e più in generale sulle attività connesse con l'allevamento ovino, pratiche cioè che sono tradizionalmente considerate invisibili *par excellence*, stante la generale scarsità di tracce materiali che producono. Confrontandosi con la dibattuta questione della sopravvivenza della pastorizia alpina, attestata non oltre il XIII secolo, Attilio Stella collega la pratica della transumanza nei secoli precedenti con la presenza e l'azione di forti poteri feudali, ma ipotizza che l'invisibilità–documentale e archeologica–del fenomeno a partire dal XIV secolo non implichi necessariamente una sua scomparsa, bensì segnali piuttosto da un lato la crisi del sistema amministrativo signoriale, dall'altro l'emergere di nuove dinamiche del popolamento e dello sfruttamento delle aree d'altura. Nella medesima direzione, orientata a una revisione di opinioni generalmente condivise, si muovono Antonio Malpica Cuello, Sonia Villar Mañas, Guillermo García-Contreras Ruiz e Luis Martínez Vázquez, che studiano le pratiche dell'allevamento ovino nell'altopiano di Granada fra XIII e XV secolo: la centralità economica della pastorizia fino in età moderna, i diffusi e incisivi interventi di modifica del paesaggio indotti dalle attività pastorali, e infine la quantità non trascurabile delle fonti scritte che ne trattano, inducono a ritenere che la presunta invisibilità dei pastori sia la conseguenza di uno scarso interesse storiografico, a sua volta determinato dalla progressiva marginalizzazione della pastorizia nella società moderna e contemporanea.

Diversi contributi si occupano invece di alcune declinazioni dell'invisibilità socioculturale riflesse nel silenzio delle fonti scritte o nella mistificazione storiografica e letteraria. Aaron Beek esamina le modalità narrative con cui la pirateria è trattata nelle fonti storiografiche antiche, riscontrando come lo spazio, e la conseguente visibilità, riservati al fenomeno siano direttamente proporzionali all'interesse variabile che esso suscitava presso la classe dirigente romana: la pirateria, benché endemica nel Mediterraneo antico, permane taciuta e invisibile fintantoché non offre l'occasione di operazioni repressive i cui promotori possano utilizzarne i risultati per la propria affermazione politica. Analizzando una nota sezione del *Satyricon* di Petronio, Davide Astori, Maria Elena Galaverna e Nicola Reggiani concentrano l'attenzione sugli usi linguistici propri di alcuni dei commensali della cena di Trimalchione, usi che rivelano le umili origini e/o l'eterogeneità culturale dei parlanti; la consapevolezza che costoro mostrano della modestia del codice linguistico del proprio gruppo sociale di appartenenza rispetto allo *High-Level Latin* usato dalle *élites* si traduce in un'aspirazione all'omologazione con la cultura dominante che li destina inevitabilmente all'invisibilità.

Ma il tema dell'invisibilità sociale e/o culturale è anche, se non innanzitutto, una questione di genere, riconoscibile diacronicamente in epoche diverse, come indicano tre delle relazioni qui presentate. Irene Somà ipotizza che nella prima metà del I secolo d. C. le donne della casata imperiale romana esercitassero l'importante ruolo politico che è loro oramai largamente riconosciuto non soltanto nell'ambito, per loro limitato, delle azioni e dei comportamenti pubblici, ma soprattutto attraverso l'esercizio della scrittura politico-storiografica: un'attività invisibile perché non attestata dalle nostre fonti, ma fondatamente attribuibile a parecchie di loro in base ai dati desumibili da un'attenta rilettura delle fonti stesse. Anche dal contributo di Davide Tramarin emerge con chiarezza come la scrittura, alla pari di altre attività legate al libro, potesse costituire per le donne un mezzo privilegiato di acquisizione di un ruolo, e dunque di una almeno parziale visibilità: grazie a studi recenti iniziano a essere individuabili, e dunque a emergere dall'invisibilità a cui parevano destinate, le molte donne che fra tardo medioevo e XV secolo praticarono l'attività di copiste e illustratrici di codici. Il genere, o meglio l'ambiguità di genere, è causa di emarginazione anche narrativa: in questo senso Anna Everett Beek rilegge la storia di Ifi e Iante narrata nelle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio, e vi individua quale motivo conduttore la non-visibilità della condizione e dell'orientamento sessuale *transgender* di una delle protagoniste; solo la sua trasformazione in uomo, e dunque la sua "normalizzazione" nel canone della eterosessualità, consente che la

vicenda si risolva nello *happy ending*, peraltro inusuale nell'opera ovidiana.

Alcuni interventi hanno infine correttamente sottolineato che anche oggi, in piena civiltà dell'informazione, processi culturali e fenomeni sociali, pure di primaria importanza e non soltanto per la comunità che li esprime, possono restare non-visibili in quanto espressioni di gruppi sociali marginali o emarginati. La riflessione di Fabrizio Filioli Uranio si incentra sulla apparente scomparsa–e dunque sulla non-visibilità–di due paesi della Valle del Vajont forzatamente spopolati a partire dal 1948, quando gli abitanti furono "deportati" altrove per consentire la costruzione della famigerata diga: costoro, a più di sessant'anni dall'inizio della vicenda che li coinvolse, e nonostante l'assoluto disinteresse mediatico e politico che li circonda, combattono il disagio dello sradicamento mantenendo e alimentando profondi legami, materiali e non, con i due paesi d'origine, dei quali vengono così garantite la sopravvivenza e la visibilità. Lo *slum* di Villa Muñecas, presso Tucumán in Argentina, costituisce invece il *case-study* scelto da Martina Hjertman e Per Cornell per affrontare quell'aspetto peculiare dell'invisibilità contemporanea che è la marginalità urbana, nei suoi caratteri socioeconomici e culturali; gli autori mostrano come un inedito approccio archeologico alle tracce materiali degli *slums* possa dare visibilità a gruppi sociali emarginati e a luoghi marginali, altrimenti destinati a una provvisorietà che è oggettivamente sia reale sia percepita. In una prospettiva post-coloniale, Yoshimi Tanabe considera invece come l'appropriazione consapevole della propria storia recente, ottenuta mediante un "esercizio di memoria" che porta a una ri-narrazione degli eventi associati al periodo delle rivolte urbane dell'ultimo ventennio, aiuti gli immigrati nordafricani in Francia a costruire uno spazio di resistenza alla violenza epistemica prodotta da spiegazioni ufficiali della realtà solo apparentemente "vere" e "legittime." Tale *Memory Work* è in grado di indurre gli individui coinvolti nei processi di immigrazione a riformulare un racconto del loro passato (*Weak History*) alternativo alla narrazione dominante (*Strong History*), e pertanto consente loro di sfuggire alla rimozione e all'invisibilità a cui la loro "storia debole" sarebbe altrimenti destinata.

In conclusione, mi sembra di poter affermare che l'incontro sulle *Invisible Cultures*, con le relazioni che vi sono state presentate e con le discussioni spesso animatissime che hanno coinvolto sia i partecipanti sia il pubblico presente, abbia costituito un'occasione rara e preziosa, sia perché autenticamente e proficuamente interdisciplinare, sia perché ha richiamato a Trento un numero consistente di giovani studiosi, europei ed extraeuropei, che per due giorni hanno fatto del nostro Dipartimento ciò

che vuole e deve essere: una comunità scientifica internazionale, in quanto capace di proporre temi di riflessione e di ricerca che le consentono di interloquire col mondo. Per questi motivi, la Scuola di Dottorato in Studi Umanistici, sorta e organizzata partendo dalla convinzione che il dialogo fra discipline diverse debba affiancare qualsiasi specializzazione settoriale, e si ponga come il primo antidoto a ristrettezze mentali e provincialismi culturali, ha creduto fortemente in questa iniziativa e l'ha sostenuta, confidando in un risultato della cui qualità ritengo che questo volume rappresenti la prova concreta.

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NARRATIVES AND INVISIBILITY

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When dealing with historiographical sources, it is fairly usual not to find what one is looking for. This is obviously true for Antiquity, when historians have often to work with fragmentary or isolated texts, and complete their information with evidence of a different kind, such as epigraphic, numismatic, iconographical or archaeological sources, often fragmentary and isolated themselves. Interestingly enough, however, the situation does not change that much when one looks at other, closer historical periods, including Contemporary History, when properly historiographical accounts are usually supported by other types of narrative, such as chronicles, journal articles, reportages etc. which feed the illusion that a more objective and less hypothetical reconstruction is attainable.

Actually, a closer look at specific case-studies from different periods and contexts clarifies that which makes the use of "narrative" sources, either literary or not, slippery and uncertain. It is not necessarily their wider or narrower availability, or their self-sufficiency, but something more endemic, involving the sources' "primary nature."

In the next few pages, I will mainly deal with literary sources in order to demonstrate the problems they pose to historians, but the reader will surely perceive that very similar issues relate to other kinds of narrative.

1. Writing History, telling stories

When a story is told, whatever medium is employed, it is told by someone who thought about it in a certain place and time, with particular needs and worries. When someone writes History, or more generally, when one reports *a fact*, he pretends he is telling *the Truth*, or giving an account of it in the only possible or more reliable way. The claim to objectivity has been progressively abandoned by historians, who look now for a *plausible* much more than for an *absolutely sure* reconstruction of the phenomena they specifically tackle. However, the full consciousness of

the endemic unreliability of a narrative is even more important when transposed in methodological terms. It makes clear that any kind of text was written by an author for a specific aim: telling a story, solving a juridical problem or dispute, spreading news and resolutions, keeping in touch with someone, explaining a fact and preserving its memory for future generations and so on.

Obvious as it might sound, this is one of the main problems posed by narrative sources in general and written texts in particular, since it means that, on the one hand, no text can tell us *exactly* what happened, and on the other that any text reflects its writer's intentions and points of view, answers to specific needs, wills and aims. Therefore, the information derived from them has not, and cannot have, any universal validity or scope, nor does it represent reality *as it is* or *was*. This apparently simple statement has had very important consequences concerning the evolution of historical research, whose attention passed from factual to social history, from broad phenomena to micro-history, from the story of winners and rulers to that of marginalized and subdued categories. In fact, once we overcome the idea of an objective and reliable representation, a very important question arises about what *is* and what *is not* in the picture. It is a question about the reasons for presence and absence, about the way something is represented and something is taken out or ignored.

2. Consciousness, unconsciousness, intentionality

The first question that has to be answered is whether the process of inclusion/exclusion of the single elements from a narrative has been conscious or not. If the answer is positive, then the problem shifts to the reasons why something was kept and something was not; if the answer is negative, then it simply means that what we are looking for was not among the main interests and worries of our author(s). One might then wonder why something that is so important for us was not at all relevant for people living in a different time or context. There are some very striking examples of this kind of phenomenon: for instance, economic and financial matters are of primary importance in our modern world, and we know that the Roman Empire was based on commerce, that it had public expenses and a tax system, that from Nero onwards the *denarius* was progressively debased, until the fiscal reform of Constantine the Great, but one cannot find the scantiest trace of a theoretical reflection on "economy" in ancient sources, nor a specific account reporting the stages of the Empire's economic history. The full reconstruction has to be based on indirect sources, such as coins, inscriptions, critical pamphlets against one

or the other Emperor, and so on. This demonstrates that the lack of direct sources does not necessarily prevent a question from being answered, but, at the same time, it raises other questions: why were the ancient Romans so indifferent to how their own economic system worked, and how it could be improved in terms of efficiency?

The question is a big one, and I will leave the answer to experts, just pointing out that we would know almost nothing about ancient economy if we just relied on narrative or literary sources. Indeed, the texts we have to deal with, wherever and whenever they were written, were not meant to answer *our* questions, nor–most of the time–those of their contemporaries as a whole, but only those of their authors, or of their social, political and cultural milieu.

On the other hand, as already mentioned, groups of people, single individuals or specific events can be intentionally excluded from a narrative, and the reasons for these exclusions always deserve explanation. An aprioristic selection of events might be due to the authors' personal interests and inclinations, or to their peculiar perspectives: a History of the Church, for example, will obviously focus on different events from a book on political History, and a military historian will probably tend to ignore the role of women in society. Yet there is another kind of selection, much more connected to the authors' bias, their particular aims and the way a specific kind of representation might prove functional to them. To give an obvious example, a successful usurper will display his good deeds towards his new subjects and will try to prove he has the *right* to rule, highlighting at the same time the evil nature and bad conduct of his predecessor.

There are many complex reasons why narrative and written sources don't give any information about some historical actors, but there are also some methodologies which can help to get beyond these epistemological difficulties. The papers presented at the Invisible Cultures conference tackled these issues from multiple points of view, taking into consideration various case-studies from a number of different contexts and historical periods. This proved useful to highlight both the *reasons* for "invisibility" and the *possible means* that might be employed to grasp information about unrepresented categories. I will now extract some examples from the articles published in this book to get more into the detail of methodological problems of historical research, referring to the articles themselves for further discussion.

3. The victorious tell the tales, some tales tell about the losers

One of the biggest and most usual problems when dealing with historiography and narrative sources in general is that "the victorious tell the tales," as Aaron Beek writes in his paper. It means that we often have to understand the history and characters of some groups of people from their enemies' representation, and not from their direct voice. The question is, then, "how did these 'losers' perceive themselves?" Winning parties obviously have a strong interest in offering a negative portrait of their adversaries, sometimes trying to reach their permanent oblivion through the means of propaganda or the physical destruction of whatever could preserve their memory. On the other hand, as Beek shows, those who talk about a group without being part of it can easily be misled in using labels, or *consciously* use "wrong" labels in order to mislead their audience, to raise their fear, to gain their support against a common enemy. The "victorious" can represent an uncertain victory as absolute and decisive, just to strengthen their position and wreck surviving opposition, they can justify their actions and make them acceptable towards their addressees.

It is not only the "winners" (ruling class, representatives of the dominant culture, members of higher social strata) that chose to condemn their opponents to oblivion, or simply those who belong to a different milieu. Sometimes, a parallel phenomenon has to be detected: that of members of lower social strata or marginalized categories trying to imitate the most powerful groups in order to gain some kind of social promotion. Through the analysis of the language attributed to freedmen in the *Cena Trimalchionis*, from Petronius Arbiter's *Satyricon*, Davide Astori, Maria Elena Galaverna and Nicola Reggiani highlight this kind of process, showing that freedmen–usually coming from non-Latin speaking areas-tried to modulate their way of speaking in order to make it as similar as possible to that of the Romans. This is just one example of how subordinate categories may tend to obliterate all those characters that could make them recognisable and consequently prevent them to enter the ruling community. Their conscious hiding, together with the lack of interest of the dominant class in their respect, leads to their actual disappearance from the historical record.

It is remarkable that, while modern research is devoting specific attention to socially excluded or less-represented categories, until very recently these groups could gain some kind of representation only in a very indirect way, and to answer some cultural needs of the ruling groups. The *Cena Trimalchionis* is just one example of a properly literary text

offering one of the rare insights into an under-represented category which had to have a very important role in Roman society. Petronius was not interested in proposing a detailed picture of a social group in itself, or a full account of freedmen's way of life. On the contrary, his aim was that of reaching a strong comic effect, evoking some well-known situations and human types, immediately clear to the audience, and that we–as very distant observers–cannot but glimpse through the literary construction.

The importance of romance and poetry to fill the blanks of historiography and to gain a glimpse of otherwise unrepresented phenomena is also shown by Anna Everett Beek's contribution. The author deals with a peculiar episode from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, that of Iphis, transformed from female to male by the goddess Isis in order to have her life saved. The story of Iphis and the way Ovid tells it is one of the rare examples allowing a view, although mediated, on homosexuality and transgenderism in the Roman world and the way sex-change could be imagined or perceived. Nonetheless, Everett Beek's reading of the episode is interesting also because of her critical approach to the modern reception of Iphis's story, in turn influenced by the perception of gender, transgenderism and homosexuality in contemporary times. This is also a very good demonstration of how the perception of a narrative and the importance accorded to a single detail changes with time, influencing the position it occupies in a historiographical account.

4. "Weak History's" payback

Considering the ancient world, it is not at all astonishing that most of the details escape our sight: scholars and students have to accept that they may outline only a very broad picture, and they may propose hypothetical reconstructions, as likely as they can be, with only a very few spots of certainty. The assumption that the level of certainty increases with the amount of available sources is still very widespread: the details are expected to enrich the picture, and make it the more and more similar to its subject. In fact, Yoshimi Tanabe and Fabrizio Filioli Uranio show that the reconstruction of contemporary phenomena and events suffers similar, if not the same, difficulties and problems as that of the distant past. Even in our own time, and even with the powerful media we can rely on, a number of aspects of a process, or *the* process as a whole, can remain hidden and basically unknown.

Tanabe tackles the problem of postcolonial immigration in France, showing how its memory has been nearly completely obliterated from French people's self-representation, and even from that of the immigrants'

descendants. It is only very recently and through the action of some cultural associations that this memory has started to be at least partially recovered. Collective and individual memory are labelled as "weak history," as opposed to "strong history," to be intended as something similar to the official representation of a process. The erasing of "weak history" easily leads to a different shaping of individual identity and self-perception, which ignores specific individual or collective experiences. It looks like the postcolonial immigrants' descendants struggle for an opposite purpose from that of Roman freedmen: that of marking their difference from the dominant culture, recovering their specific identity, underlining their personal and family history to outline that of a whole forgotten phenomenon.

Filioli Uranio deals with a strictly linked problem, that of different representations of the same event, and in particular of the differences between "official" history and the accounts given by those people who directly experienced an event. The survivors of the collapse of the Vajont dam in 1963 who agreed to answer questions and talk about the tragedy seem to be willing to keep the disaster's memory alive, both within the community they belong to and outside it. Other people, on the contrary, look for a complete oblivion of their trauma, but the main point is that they all tell a different story from the official version.

It is clear that the true difference between the study of contemporary events and that of distant facts is the possibility of relying upon direct witnesses, of comparing oral history with official accounts, and of interpreting a fact observing it from different perspectives. This kind of study confirms the assumption that even when detailed and full accounts of an event or series of events are available, we must always consider *why* they were told, what kind of interests and personal points of view they could represent and how they could prove useful in reaching whatever aim. This kind of consciousness and the consequent attention paid to the rhetoric of different narratives and accounts, considering the eventual polemical context these accounts may be used in, can enable historians to "read beyond the text," so to speak, and propose a critical reconstruction of an event.

5. "Hyper-direct" sources

This way of interpreting a text presupposes the existence of a narrative including traces of marginalized groups. However, there are categories of people whose existence is not recorded at all in any kind of narrative. In such cases, historians have sometimes to simply infer the presence of these

"invisibles," such as disabled persons, for instance, or certain categories of workers, while sometimes they can rely on what we could call "hyper-direct sources," i.e. objects *belonging to* these groups, which attest their existence without mediation, even when it is not recorded by external subjects.

This is for example the case of the female hand-writers and illuminators considered by Davide Tramarin. The author gives an account of some manuscripts written and illuminated by women both for their personal use and for someone else, which leads us to think they were professional handwriters and/or illuminators. This kind of evidence obviously forces historians to re-evaluate the whole feminine condition in the fifteenth century and the role of women in the production of specific goods, as well as in the general work-system. In a similar way, Irene Somà shows that the *Augustae* in the Julio-Claudian era had access to archives and were themselves authors of historiographic works, biographies and letters, through which they could represent, but also actively intervene in, the decision making process of the imperial court. Despite the lack of attention accorded by male historiographers to the feminine world, the kind of evidence presented by Tramarin and Somà offers new elements to understand women's level of education, their role in producing, and not only receiving, culture and their ability to act as economic actors.

In view of this unmediated evidence, historians are clearly forced to reconsider the accounts they rely on, to detect unsuspected absences and ask new questions to all of their sources. "Hyper-direct" sources are also the objects forming a material culture, and all those remains discovered by archaeology: remains of the distant and recent past which come down to us without any mediation, and often without finding any space in the historiographical record or narrative sources. Archaeology, for example, may allow us to place an ancient settlement where no source recorded human presence, or may show what kind of artefacts were used by a group of people. Nonetheless, "hyper-directness" or absence of mediation is not synonymous with unambiguousness or "certainty." As well as narratives, archaeological data have to be interpreted and read, with precise means and methods, always considering that even material culture has its own "invisibles," appearing and disappearing actors and protagonists. Neither archaeology, nor history can claim to be self-sufficient, autonomous and independent from one another. Both disciplines have their blanks to be filled, both disciplines have to help each other to accomplish the difficult task of unveiling what is invisible.

INVISIBLE CULTURES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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1. Visibility

Archaeological interpretation is mainly based on the study of artefacts and ecofacts from archaeological contexts. This means that the quality of archaeological assemblage influences the comprehension of socio-economic and cultural processes of the past.[1] Some groups or sub-groups might be hidden by the lack of archaeological remains for a specific geographical area or chronological period; others by the difficult interpretation of the available archaeological data. These social, economic and cultural entities are then "invisible" for archaeological interpretation.

The reasons for this apparent invisibility fall into three categories: taphonomic processes, mobility of ancient groups, and characteristics of modern landscape and environment. These phenomena will be briefly described hereafter.

1.1. Taphonomy

Preservation is one of the major issues in archaeological research. It is well known that ancient perishable materials (like wood, leather, textiles etc.) are preserved only in particular environments: extremely warm and dry, extremely wet, extremely cold. A very famous example of incredible preservation is the Iceman, a naturally mummified 5000-year-old human body found with all its equipment (leather clothes, wooden tools etc.) in the Tisenjoch glacier, on the Austrian-Italian border.[2] Its incredible preservation enhanced the comprehension of European societies during the Neolithic period, and helped to reject several previous hypotheses and theories. This example gives some indication of how much the loss of perishable materials affects archaeological interpretation.

[1] See Gamble 2008 and references therein.
[2] Spindler et al. 1995.

It needs to be pointed out that perishable materials are not the only things that might be under-represented in the archaeological record. In acid soils, for instance, bones and teeth usually degrade quite rapidly as well.[3] In similar contexts also metals and carbonized materials are affected by degradation. In particular situations the preservation of archaeological material is likely to be limited to the stone and ceramic artefacts. Poor preservation, then, is a significant biasing factor in archaeology.

1.2 Mobility

The visibility of an archaeological context is also directly proportional to the types of activity carried out in the site as well as the duration of the occupation period. In a nutshell (and oversimplifying): the longer the occupation the richer the archaeological record. This means that temporary sites of mobile groups, such as hunter-gatherers and nomadic pastoralists, are usually less archaeologically visible than permanent sites.

In his important analysis of the archaeological traces of nomadic populations in the Near East,[4] Roger Cribb wrote a chapter entitled "Nomads–The Invisible Culture?" within which he tried to understand the reasons for the commonly recognized invisibility of mobile groups. Similarly Gifford, who conducted an ethnoarchaeological study of the pastoral sites of Dassanetch in Kenya, argued that the time-limited occupation of these sites does not enable the formation of important archaeological records capable of resisting the strong post-depositional processes typical of that region.[5] Similar assumptions have been proposed for the base camps and hunting sites of foragers and collectors in various areas of the world, from the desert to the tropical forest to sub-polar environments.[6]

It is clear that the knowledge of ancient mobile groups or populations is affected by the invisibility of their sites. A very significant example is Roman transhumance. As Marinella Pasquinucci pointed out, without Roman epigraphic and literary sources (such as the *lex agraria* or the *de re pecuaria* of Varro) we would know nothing about the importance of mobile pastoralism in the late Republic and early Empire.[7] This suggests

[3] See Nicholson 1996 for an experimental evaluation of bone degradation in soil.
[4] Cribb 1991.
[5] Gifford 1978.
[6] Yellen 1977; Sellet et al. 2006; Binford 1978; 1980.
[7] Pasquinucci 1991.

that all the mobile groups not described in historical sources are extremely difficult to identify archaeologically.

1.3. Surface

Current land use is another significant factor that relates to visibility. Some types of land cover enable a better visibility of buried archaeological contexts, while others hide them partially or completely. Furthermore, the archaeological visibility depends also on the scale (intra-site, site wide or landscape) and the methodology (e.g. remote-sensing, geophysical prospection, fieldwalking) of the survey. Woodlands provide a good example to explain these concepts.

Dense woods and forests decrease the visibility of archaeological features. LiDAR-derived DTMs have recently proved to be useful in tackling this problem. Showing the morphology of land surface under the trees, they enable the identification macro-features (structures, canals, terraces etc.), invisible with traditional remote sensing methods (aerial photography) and often difficult to identify by archaeological fieldwalking.[8] However, LiDAR technology is not suitable for identifying smaller artefacts, like surface scattered finds that may indicate the presence of buried sites. Recent research on the distribution of Mesolithic sites in the Alps[9] has enabled reinterpretation of the lack of sites in the forested middle slopes: it does not simply mirror a specific prehistoric strategy of exploitation of mountain resources, but depends mainly on the higher visibility of surface findings in the upland (open pastures) and lowland (ploughed fields and urbanized areas) than on the wooded slopes.[10] This example suggests that diachronic reconstruction of mountain occupation and settlement patterns is usually based on incomplete and biased datasets, with more data for specific feature categories, recent chronologies and areas with a higher degree of visibility.

These inferences are not limited to mountain areas and woodlands; in fact they are quite general, as similar biases can be experienced in different contexts and environments.

[8] Forlin 2013.

[9] These were seasonal base camp and hunting sites, dated to the early Holocene (tenth–seventh millennium BC). Then both modern land use and the temporary nature of these sites affect their archaeological visibility.

[10] Cavulli et al. 2011.

2. Recognisability

In the previous paragraphs some of the main factors causing archaeological invisibility have been listed and explained. But there is another issue that should be taken into account. Even in qualitatively and quantitatively rich archaeological contexts, is still difficult to identify specific social and cultural groups. This is mostly due to biases in the systemic context, rather than in the archaeological context.[11] Namely, some social, economic and cultural groups are hardly visible in the archaeological record because archaeological markers of their existence are difficult to recognize.[12]

An interesting example is the archaeology of childhood.[13] The difficulty of addressing this topic resides not only in the discrimination of children's material culture from adults' material culture, but also in the assumption that childhood is a sociological category that can be studied archaeologically. The result is that children are, in most cases, invisible in the archaeological research framework and then in the archaeological interpretation.

The example provided shows that the dearth of archaeological data is not the only bias in archaeological interpretation. Recognisability also has an important role in revealing or hiding specific archaeological cultures or groups. The problem of recognisability, then, is as important to tackle as the previously investigated problems of archaeological visibility.[14]

3. Tackling archaeological invisibility

The invisibility of groups and sub-groups, as noted above, may depend on several archaeological biases. Therefore different approaches are necessary to tackle these biases and to provide potential solutions. The

[11] Schiffer 1972.
[12] Carrer 2012.
[13] Kamp 2001.
[14] It is worth clarifying the alternative use of "recognizability" and "visibility" in this paragraph. The term "invisible" can be applied both to an archaeological record and to a group. The first use indicates that taphonomic processes, mobility of the group and modern land use affected or affect the archaeological assemblage under study. The second use refers to a group or sub-group that is difficult to detect or study, either for the "invisibility" of the archaeological record or for the "non-recognisability" of specific archaeological markers. Hence a problem of archaeological "recognizability" usually implicates a problem of groups/sub-groups' "invisibility."

archaeological papers presented at the Invisible Cultures conference, and published in this volume, have analysed specific case studies that presented one or more of the aforementioned visibility problems.

Florence Liard investigated the political and socio-economic change in the Minoan world, between the Neopalatial and the Final and Postpalatial period; she proposed petrographic analysis of pottery as the best way to understand production and distribution of these objects, thus enabling a new interpretation of social relationships and policies in the last period of Minoan civilization.

Antonio Malpica Cuello, Sonia Villar Mañas, Guillermo García-Contreras Ruiz and Luis Martínez Vásquez dealt with pastoral mobility. They studied the traces of medieval transhumance in the territory of Granada, in order to identify specific archaeological markers and features in the landscape that may enable inferences about the importance of animal husbandry in the economy of ancient southern Spain.

Silvia Lischi studied exotic artefacts from Sumhuram (Southern Oman) suggesting the presence of an Indian community in that city during the first millennium BC; this investigation enabled exploration of the important issue of ethnic minorities and immigrants in the ancient world.

Lara Tonizzo Feligioni investigated medieval prisons, pointing out that this topic is rarely addressed by archaeological research and that it represents an unexplored although interesting field of research.

Martina Hjertman and Per Cornell analysed, using archaeological methodologies, a marginal quarter of a contemporary South American city (San Miguel de Tucumán, Argentina), focusing on how social marginalization influences the "invisibility" of that quarter as well as of its inhabitants.

3.1 A further factor of invisibility?

It is worth noticing that most of the authors focused on what has been labelled as "archaeological recognisability" rather than proper "archaeological visibility." Only Malpica Cuello, Villar Mañas, García-Contreras Ruiz and Martínez Vásquez tackled the problem of how mobility affects the visibility of ancient pastoral sites, using different approaches (remote-sensing, intensive survey, archive documents, ethnoarchaeology, toponymy, etc.) to acquire new data and to enhance the comprehension of Andalusian pastoral groups. All the other authors, instead, investigated different social, economic and cultural phenomena that seem to be weakly represented in the archaeological assemblages: communitarian feasting (Liard), ethnical minorities (Lischi), marginalized groups such as prisoners

(Tonizzo Feligioni) and inhabitants of slum areas (Hjertman and Cornell). Each paper deals with its own topic using a different methodological approach: material culture analysis (Lischi), petrography (Liard), landscape archaeology (Hjertman and Cornell) and urban archaeology (Tonizzo Feligioni).

Despite these differences, they all provide a common conclusion, which can be considered a further factor affecting archaeological visibility and recognisability: the lack of interest of archaeologists in specific research topics. All the authors pointed out that only new investigations and the application of novel methodologies (such as GIS and petrography; see Malpica Cuello et al. and Liard in this volume) can shed new light on some invisible archaeological cultures. To summarize: intrinsic aspects of archaeological context (taphonomic processes, mobility, land use) or systemic context ("recognisability") are not the only factors that influence the invisibility of an ancient culture; this depends also on the dearth of focused archaeological investigations and on the use of unsuitable methodological approaches. Therefore, intensity and quality of research affect archaeological interpretation more than the factors listed in the previous paragraphs. As such, the hope the authors share is that more research projects will focus on those archaeological groups/cultures that are still considered partially or totally invisible.

4. Conclusion

The inferences provided enable us to reconsider the problem of archaeological invisibility of ancient cultures. Biases in the archaeological record and in the archaeological interpretation can be overcome with the intensification of fieldwork and with in-depth investigations of the collected data (using new approaches and methods).

Some examples of "invisible" archaeological cultures have been addressed by the authors of the papers in this volume, with a specific focus on the causes of their invisibility. New theoretical approaches and methodologies have been experimented with, in order to find the best way to tackle invisibility. This provided interesting insights that can be used to further interpret similar contexts and to investigate similar topics.

One other interesting thing highlighted by the authors is the important interplay between archaeological and historical information. As already suggested, in some cases historical sources can give hints in the study of invisible ancient cultures. In these cases historical sources are the starting-point, and the challenge is matching archaeological data and historical information. But historical sources may also be the end-point, as the data

provided by archaeological research can be used to verify, question or integrate the historical information. This trade-off enables the improvement of both historical and archaeological interpretation, thus enhancing our comprehension of the past. This final remark explains and justifies the interdisciplinary nature of the volume. A more structured interaction between historiography and archaeology in the study of invisible cultures is highly desirable, and this volume hopes to be an interesting contribution in this direction.

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PART I:

POPULATIONS

WHAT HAS BECOME OF DAMAS? THE INVISIBLE (IM)MIGRANTS OF THE EARLY EMPIRE BETWEEN EXCLUSION AND ASSIMILATION

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1. Introduction

The *Cena Trimalchionis*, the narration of which is contained in chapters 26–78 of the famous *Satyricon* by Petronius Arbiter,[1] is a literary piece of uneasy categorization which has been profitably studied in several fields and disciplines, and from many points of view.[2] Among other themes, it keeps evidence of the social category of the *liberti* (freedmen),[3]

* Though the content of the present contribution has been developed together by the authors, Nicola Reggiani and Maria Elena Galaverna have in particular chosen and edited the passages for the discussion in the central part of the article (respectively the first and the second part of §2), while Davide Astori has dealt with the general frame of the matter (§§1 and 3).

[1] For a recent overview on this work see Martin 2009.

[2] It will be sufficient to refer to Vannini 2007.

[3] "According to the literary and epigraphic sources, the Roman Empire involved various people and languages and its social fabric was very complex. Despite the hierarchical structure, there was a real upward social mobility both in Rome and in the provinces, as Alföldy 1987, 206–7 shows. This opportunity of emancipation led foreigners and lower classes to imitate upper classes education and modes of speech: Latin was the language of the State and of the governing class and it became the most prestigious one. However, the natural loyalty of the emerging class to their native language–most of all Greek–and their lack of liberal education produced an imperfect linguistic and cultural acquisition. The *Cena*, which probably took place in a provincial town in Campania, offers a meaningful picture of this attitude staging some upstarts, whose names reveal a humble foreign origin (As Priuli 1975, 25 explains, all other freedmen have a non-Latin and typical of