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Ancient sculptures lost at sea: stories of loss and discovery

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Abstract: This chapter explores stories of loss and discovery of ancient sculptures in the Mediterranean Sea from the period of Classical Antiquity until today. Through the study of archaeological evidence, literary sources, historical records, contemporary art and popular culture, this research demonstrates the continuity in the reception of sculptures from the waters of the Mediterranean Sea over the centuries. From the period of Classical Antiquity to Mediaeval times and from the shipwrecks of the 'Grand Tour' period to the most recent archaeological discoveries, incidents of underwater deposition, discovery or recovery of sculptures have instigated strong feelings of catastrophe, mystery and wonder in both pre-modern and modern narratives. These emotional and conceptual associations have shaped long-term attitudes towards sculptures from under water in the stories and traditions of multiple eras. Through the study of sculptures from under water, this chapter addresses issues of public perception and portrayal of underwater archaeology. The overarching aims of this research are to comprehend more fully human interconnections with the underwater environment and to advocate for greater care in conducting and presenting underwater archaeological research to the public today and in the future.

Introduction

Humanity has always had a special bond and dependence on the sea (Horden and Purcell 2000; Omstedt 2020). Since prehistoric times, the sea has been a space of communication and connection, as well as a divider. It has been a source of both livelihood and disaster. It has had a deep emotional and societal meaning for people, while its mysterious waters have inspired, over the centuries, wondrous adventures and innovations, as well as stories and feelings of catastrophe and chaos (Strang 2004: 50–51; Phelan 2007; Lampinen and Mataix Ferrándiz 2022: 1–8).

Similarly, most cultures have conceived the underwater world as a place of wonder, adventure and risk. This perception of the underwater environment as something extraordinary created thrilling tales of domination during Classical Antiquity. An example is the fascinating story of Alexander the Great going under water in the Mediterranean in a glass bathyscaph to prove his supremacy (see [Pseudo-]Callisthenes, *Historia Alexandri Magni* 2.38); this tale parallels underwater exploration and treasure-seeking narratives of the modern era, especially from the middle of the twentieth century (Bass 1966: 22; Muckelroy 1978: vii; Earle 1986: 68–72; Green 1990: 2–3; Burrows 2010).[1] Despite the efforts of many scholars to define clearly the academic and theoretical background of the discipline of maritime and underwater archaeology in ways which disassociate it from the earlier adventure-seeking and treasure-hunting connections, the thrill which the underwater world incites continues to foster misrepresentations of underwater archaeological discoveries as treasure salvage even today (Du Plat Taylor 1965; Bass 1966; Muckelroy 1978; Adams and Rönnby 2013; Maarleveld *et al*. 2013; Gately and Benjamin 2018).

As George Bass, the pioneer of maritime archaeology, once stated, 'everything made by man was carried at one time or another in a ship or was simply lost at sea somehow, fell accidentally or were placed purposefully in the water' (Bass 1966: 17). Ancient Greek and Roman sculptures have been such objects, lost at sea and recovered from its depths throughout the centuries. From the sixteenth century until today, hundreds of ancient sculptures of various dates, types, sizes and materials have been retrieved from the Mediterranean seabed by early underwater explorers and archaeologists or simply by fishermen, sponge divers and recreational scuba divers (Velentza 2022). Given the special artistic value of these artefacts, sculptures from under water have been seen by scholars and the general public alike as exceptional objects evoking mystery, adventure and lost treasure. The fascinating idea of discovering and recovering ancient sculptural works of art from the water has also stimulated local enthusiasm and pride (*e.g*. Rackl 1978; Stenuit 2002; Petriaggi 2005; Queyrel 2012; Bellingham 2014; Koutsouflakis and Simosi 2015). More recently, the romanticism accompanying underwater

[1] The wider exploration of the underwater world started with the invention of the diving equipment known by its acronym, SCUBA (Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus), and more specifically, with the type known as 'aqualung' invented by Emile Gagnan and Jacques-Yves Cousteau in 1942. This safer and lighter apparatus made it possible for divers to spend more time under water and avoid the life-threatening dangers of helmet diving.

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sculptural finds has inspired contemporary artists, who display their sculptures under water or use the idea of discovering ancient sculptures under water as part of their artistic narratives (*e.g*. Hirst 2017a).

Recent analysis of 110 Mediterranean underwater deposits with ancient sculptures of various types and materials showed these artefacts were lost or deposited under water for various reasons across a wide period of time, ranging from the time of Classical Antiquity to the nineteenth century AD (Velentza 2022: 61–63). The same study showed that most of the ancient Greek and Roman sculptures from the waters of the Mediterranean were found accidentally, by chance rather than in archaeologically organised operations (Velentza 2022: 12–35). These circumstances of discovery, along with the lack of archaeological means for scientifically investigating underwater archaeological contexts until the second half of the twentieth century, have been the main reasons for the different perceptions of sculptures found under water, as compared to artefacts found on land. However, there is evidence that long-term attitudes towards objects found under water, especially sculptures, likely shaped and defined the perception of underwater sculptural finds in modern thought.

This chapter explores narratives of loss and discovery of ancient sculptures in the Mediterranean Sea from the period of Classical Antiquity until today. The analysis starts with a discussion of ancient literary sources and pre-modern historical records which refer to underwater depositions or discoveries of sculptural pieces in the Mediterranean region. Stories from preserved ancient and Mediaeval texts, combined with preserved iconographic and material evidence, unveil how people of the Mediterranean past perceived and dealt with the underwater loss and discovery of sculptures. Next, the focus turns to modern accounts of underwater sculptural depositions and discoveries from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. This analysis includes the ‘Grand Tour’ shipwreck of Lord Arundel’s sculptures, Lord Elgin’s sunken sculptural collection, early underwater exploration missions in the ancient Antikythera shipwreck and the site of Artemision and chance sculptural finds such as the Riace bronzes and the ‘Dancing Satyr’ of Mazara del Vallo. As this chapter will demonstrate, the interpretations and stories of catastrophe and wonder attending the discovery of ancient sculptures under water draw immediate connections to pre-modern narratives. The chapter concludes by exploring how the rendering of the sea as both a wondrous and catastrophic sphere has impacted the work of various contemporary artists. Examples such as Damien Hirst’s 2017 exhibition and film ‘Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable’ and Luca Guadagnino’s 2017 film ‘Call Me by Your Name’ present astonishing links to ancient and post-Classical narratives. These works thus illustrate the various influences that the extraordinary underwater archaeological record has had, not just on modern archaeological scholarship but also contemporary art, popular media and culture.

This analysis highlights the continuity in the reception of sculptures from under water throughout time, from the ancient Mediterranean to the modern world. Hence, it shows that the current association of ancient sculptures from the sea with strong feelings of mystery, romance, wonder and pride are not solely based on the modern circumstances of sculptural discoveries. On the contrary, this association has been influenced by pre-modern narratives and earlier considerations of sculptures from under water which have been cultivated by different societies for centuries.

In its conclusion, this chapter addresses more widely the issues of public perception and portrayal of underwater archaeology in the modern era. Through narratives related to sculptures from under water, the study traces more extensive patterns of cultural and conceptual understandings of loss and discovery in the sea. These patterns can help maritime archaeologists understand the deeper human interconnections with the underwater environment across different periods of time, insight which will enable them to portray and safeguard underwater archaeological finds more effectively according to the scientific principles of the discipline.

The loss and discovery of sculptures in classical and pre-modern narratives

Classical Antiquity

Starting with the period of Classical Antiquity, the loss of sculptural artefacts under water due to natural disasters, shipwrecks and human actions are reported in ancient textual sources and iconographical representations.

Strabo, in his work *Geography*, describes how a bronze statue of Poseidon was lost at sea in the strait near the Greek city of Helice in the Peloponnese in 373 BC due to an earthquake and subsequent tsunami. During the incident, the entire city was submerged. Strabo recorded the following:

> For the sea was raised by an earthquake and it submerged Helice, and also the temple of the Heliconian Poseidon …. Helice was submerged by the sea two years before the battle at Leuctra. And Eratosthenes says that he himself saw the place, and that the sailors say there was a bronze Poseidon in the strait, standing erect, holding a hippocampus [seahorse] in his hand, which was perilous for those who fished with nets (Strabo, *Geography* 8.7.2).[2]

One of the most interesting aspects of the story is its description of sailors talking about the statue of Poseidon as a danger for those who fished with nets because of the way it was deposited in the sea. The account is particularly

[2] This passage from Strabo and the other ancient textual sources cited in this section were translated by the author.

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valuable because it reveals how the loss of a sculpture under water survived in seamen's tales. Because statues were considered images and personifications of actual gods in ancient thought, the underwater existence of Poseidon's statue was associated with catastrophe (the earthquake and tsunami), as well as generic danger and fear of how the god might react to the boats sailing over him.

Lucian, in his second-century AD work *Zeuxis*, describes how a 'picture' (*εἰκών* in Greek, usually meaning a sculpture) was wrecked on a ship transporting it as plunder from Athens to Italy after the sack of that city by Sulla in 86 BC:

> There is a copy of the picture now at Athens, taken exactly from the original. The latter is said to have been put on a ship sailing for Italy with the rest of Sulla's art treasures, and to have been lost with them by the sinking of the ship, off Malea, I think it was. (Lucian, *Zeuxis* 3)

The catastrophic shipwreck took place off Cape Maleas in the southern Peloponnese, Greece, a site notorious for its bad weather. Significantly, it is located close to the area where the first-century BC Antikythera shipwreck was discovered in the 1900s. Due to this geographical proximity, Lucian's story has been an important basis for scholarly interpretations of the transport of sculptures found in the Antikythera ship (Velentza 2022: 13–15).

In his *Description of Greece*, written in the second century AD, Pausanias described how the people of Thasos threw the statue of the athlete and Olympian winner Theagenes into the sea after his death because of a 'dispute' between the sculpture and some of Theagenes' enemies:

> When he [Theagenes] departed this life, one of those who were his enemies while he was alive came every night to the statue of Theagenes and whipped the bronze as though he were hurting Theagenes himself. The statue put an end to the outrage by falling on him, but the sons of the dead man prosecuted the statue for murder. So, the Thasians dropped the statue to the bottom of the sea (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 6.11.6–8).

As the story continues, the Oracle of Delphi instructed the Thasians to retrieve the statue from the sea to save the island from famine. It was apparently difficult for the Thasians to conceive of a method of retrieving the statue from under water. When they could not think of a plan and had given up, some fishermen unexpectedly caught the statue in their nets and brought it back to land. Hence, the story by Pausanias presents both the catastrophic but also redemptive nature of depositing a sculpture under water, while at the same time highlighting the challenges and supernatural aspects of a sculpture's recovery from the seabed.

A similar scenario of a discovery or recovery of a statue from under water is represented by a first-century BC stone sculptural relief found near the temple of Hercules in Ostia, Italy (Museo Ostiense, Inv. No. 157; Boin 2010: 258–264, Fig. 7; Santangelo 2013: 78–79, Fig. 3.1; Kloppenborg 2018: 581, Fig. 4). The relief, which must have been a sculptural dedication, contains a depiction of a group of fishermen who drag a male sculpture from the sea. The sea is represented by sculpted fish and boats. The retrieved statue is depicted in a posture similar to that of other Classical sculptures, including the bronze statue of a god retrieved from the sea off Artemission in Greece (Bass 1966: 72; Rackl 1978: 57; Parker 1992: 60; Hemingway 2004: 35–40; Arata 2005: 146–147; Tzalas 2007: 350–353), the 'Poseidon of Livadostra' (Mattusch 1988: 4–5, 79–80; Kaltsas 2002: 86; Arata 2005: 172; Tzalas 2007: 343–344) and other statuettes of Hercules and Zeus.[3] It is not clear why this depiction was sculpted in the relief or who the sculpture actually represents. Based on its style and features, Hercules or various deities have been suggested (Becatti 1938–1939: 40; Boin 2010: 260–261). It is also not clear from the representation or the inscription why the sculpture was under water. Was this incident a myth or a true event? Was the statue found by accident, was it lost or deposited and then retrieved? And was the sculpture dedicated in Ostia? And if so, was that before or after its recovery from the seabed? Despite all these unanswered questions, the plain existence of this representation on this Ostia relief highlights the importance and wondrous aspects of a sculpture's discovery and/or recovery from under water, as well as the supernormal effort required by the fishermen to bring the statue on land.[4] Additionally, this representation of a retrieval of a statue from the sea by fishermen with their nets confirms the existence of distinct provisions and techniques for the salvage of sculptural material from the Mediterranean seabed in case of an underwater loss.

Mediaeval times

Stories of loss and discovery of ancient sculptures under water are also preserved from the Mediaeval times. For example, Chapter 43 of the eighth- to ninth-century AD text *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai* (*Παραστάσεις σύντομαι χρονικαί*, meaning 'brief historical notes') mentions the theft and subsequent loss at sea of a late antique porphyry statue with three heads depicting the Emperor Constantine and his sons Constans and Constantius (Nicetas Choniates, *Historia* xxiv.181, 648.1751–655.1772; Mango 1963: 55–

[3] For examples, see the bronze statuettes of Hercules in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, accession numbers 96.9.273 and 28.77; the 'Zeus of Ugento' in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Taranto; and 'Zeus, Thunderbearer', Ident. Nr. Ol. 12701, in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

[4] Becatti (1938–1939) suggested the discovery of a statue from under water would have been a *monstrum*, namely, a sign which indicated that the harmony between gods and men was out of balance; such a circumstance would have required the intervention of a priest to interpret the sign and propose a remediative course of action.

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75; Queller and Madden 1997: 138; Cameron and Herrin 1984: 31–34, 48–50, 167–277; Bassett 1991: 87–88). More specifically, the narrative says:

> And the porphyry statue (*zodion*) there of three stones with three heads, which some said was of Constantine the Great in the middle, Constantius on the left and Constans on the right, with two feet, but six hands—a strange spectacle (*theama*) for those who saw it, each one looking in a different direction—and one head. But once there was a fire in this place, and while everyone was busy (so to speak) that extraordinary thing was stolen, in the reign of Theodosius II (408–50) …. Those who dared to do this were not able to remove it to their own country but were overtaken by the emperor's boat and did away with themselves; they cast both the spectacle (*theama*) and themselves into the sea and drowned (*Parastaseis* B 174.43).[5]

Despite the best efforts of sailors 'with rope-baskets' and divers commissioned by the emperor Theodosius, the statue was never retrieved. Its permanent loss at sea was said to have made the emperor extremely angry.

Another story of a Mediaeval underwater deposition and recovery of a late antique statue comes from the Italian town of Barletta on the coast of the Adriatic Sea (Johnson 1925: 20–25; Koch 1926: 20–27, plates 20–21; Kiilerich 2016: Figs. 1 and 3). According to local tradition, a larger-than-life-sized bronze statue of a man known as the 'Colossus of Barletta' was found in a Mediaeval shipwreck, probably a Crusader ship bringing material to Italy after the 1204 sack of Constantinople (Mango 1963: 55, 68; Magoulias 1984; Queller and Madden 1997: 160, 195; Harris 2003: 14, 169, 186; Phillips 2005; Kiilerich 2018: 55–56, 68–70). The statue was supposedly found in the Adriatic Sea in 1309 and brought to the harbour of Barletta shortly afterwards (Kiilerich 2018: 55). Due to the early date of the discovery, the exact origins and circumstances of the underwater deposition were never investigated and thus cannot now be reconstructed with any certainty. However, the mystery and romanticism surrounding the discovery of the Colossus of Barletta have deeply influenced the local culture and traditions (Kiilerich 2018: 69, Figs. 11 and 12). This can be seen through the position given to the now-restored statue, which has stood outside the Basilica del Santo Sepolcro at the centre of the town since the fifteenth century.[6] Moreover, the impact of this underwater sculptural discovery is highlighted by a surviving local folktale about the mysterious giant of Barletta, a beloved character who watches over and protects the city and its inhabitants. An illustrated version of this fascinating local story was published by DePaola (1984).

[5] Translation by Cameron and Herrin 1984: 117–119.

[6] According to Kiilerich (2018: 55, Fig. 2), the statue was initially placed in front of the Sedile del Popolo in 1491, but when the Sedile was demolished in 1923, the statue was moved to its present location in front of the Basilica del Santo Sepolcro.

The loss and discovery of sculptures in the modern era

The stories associated with the submersion and underwater discovery of ancient sculptures do not stop at the Mediaeval era. Since the start of European Antiquarianism and the period of the 'Grand Tour', there are surviving reports of archaeological discoveries of ancient sculptures which were found on land but ended up under water during their transport to northwestern Europe. Additionally, from the sixteenth century onwards, hundreds of ancient sculptures have been discovered, primarily on the Mediterranean seabed in the context of ancient shipwrecks or other sites (Velentza 2022: 12–35). These discoveries have deeply impressed the public imagination in the nearby regions, making the statues objects of local pride. At the same time, as it will be explained, the highly emotional and impactful nature of underwater sculptural discoveries has influenced twenty-first-century artists, who have displayed their works of art under water or included the loss and discovery of sculptures from under water in their artistic storytelling.

'Grand Tour' losses and recoveries

The development of European Antiquarianism and the 'Grand Tour' initiated a large-scale shipping of ancient sculptures to northwestern Europe between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (Black 1985: 226–229; Trunk 2003: 257; Coltman 2009: 117–158). The 'Grand Tour' was a touristic movement in which wealthy European elites visited the Mediterranean region to see the monuments of the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations. One of its main elements was the acquisition of ancient art from the places visited (Sweet 2012: 2–3; Spivey 2013: 314). Architectural remains and sculptures were the most popular pieces transported for the collections of touring European elites (Spivey 1996: 225; Sweet 2013: 59–61). The collection and long-distance movement of ancient works of art and sculpture was performed mainly by ships; these sometimes wrecked, taking with them the ancient artefacts which they carried (Coltman 2009: 119).

One of the earliest recorded submersions of this type was the seventeenth-century shipwreck of the Arundel collection. This underwater loss involved ancient stone sculptures from terrestrial sites in Asia Minor lost under water during their transport to London for the collection of Lord Arundel (Velentza 2022: 10–11). William Petty, who was in charge of the collection and oversaw its transportation, shipwrecked somewhere in the Aegean Sea along with the collected sculptures; upon his rescue, he was arrested as a spy (Angelicoussis 2004: 143–159; Vickers 2006: 8). After his release from prison, Petty conducted salvage operations to recover the sunken marbles, which arrived in London in 1627 (Vickers 2007: 29–32). The sculptures of the Arundel collection are currently in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK, and the degradation of their surfaces due to their submersion is still visible.

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Lord Elgin's ship, the *Mentor*, carried 17 crates of antiquities from Greece, including sculptures from the Acropolis of Athens. In the nineteenth century, the *Mentor* suffered a fate similar to that of Lord Arundel's ship. The *Mentor* wrecked off the Greek island of Kythera in 1802, along with her cargo (Throckmorton 1970: 163–168; Lianos 1983: 25; Kourkoumelis and Tourtas 2014: 6–7; Velentza 2022: 11). Although no passengers or crew died in the wreck, the loss of the antiquities she carried was a catastrophic loss and huge financial blow for Lord Elgin, who organised a two-year salvage operation to recover as much of the ship's cargo as possible and transport the sculptures to their final destination in Britain (Throckmorton 1970: 166–168; Lianos 1983: 26). Some marble sculptural pieces from the Parthenon, currently held in the Acropolis Museum in Athens with signs of marine degradation could have been subjects of this underwater deposition during the nineteenth century (Figure 8.1).

These stories of the underwater deposition and later recovery of ancient sculptures are not well known. However, surviving records indicate that the collectors and salvagers involved in these incidents saw the sea as a repository of treasure so valuable it could not be allowed to remain lost. In conjunction with the surviving pre-modern narratives examined previously, these encounters significantly influenced how ancient sculptures from under water were handled and interpreted by scholars and the general public in the context of the archaeological discoveries which surged after the twentieth century.

Underwater archaeological discoveries

Sculptures have been found in the Mediterranean Sea since Classical Antiquity and Mediaeval times. However, the first discovery of an ancient sculpture from under water with antiquarian interest did not occur until the sixteenth century. The incident involved the retrieval of the Livorno sculpture from the sea off Tuscany; the piece was quickly absorbed into the antiquities collection of the Medici family in Florence (Mattusch 1978: 101–104; Arata 2005: 7, 170). It marked the start of several underwater archaeological finds involving ancient sculptures.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, discoveries were scarce and accidental. All the recorded examples were isolated finds retrieved with no information regarding their archaeological context (Velentza 2022: 12–13). In the first half of the twentieth century, a period still well before the invention and broad use of SCUBA, discoveries of sculptures in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea became more frequent but still mostly accidental (Velentza 2022: 13–20). During this time, single sculptures and larger assemblages of sculptural material were found, some coming from shipwreck contexts. The sculptural discoveries of this era astonished contemporary scholars and collectors. In most cases, the sculptural objects were considered valuable treasure of national importance, requiring salvage rather than careful archaeological extraction and investigation. The salvage operations of the time were typically organised by the governments of countries claiming territorial rights to the waters where the sculptures were discovered. Retrieval was extremely

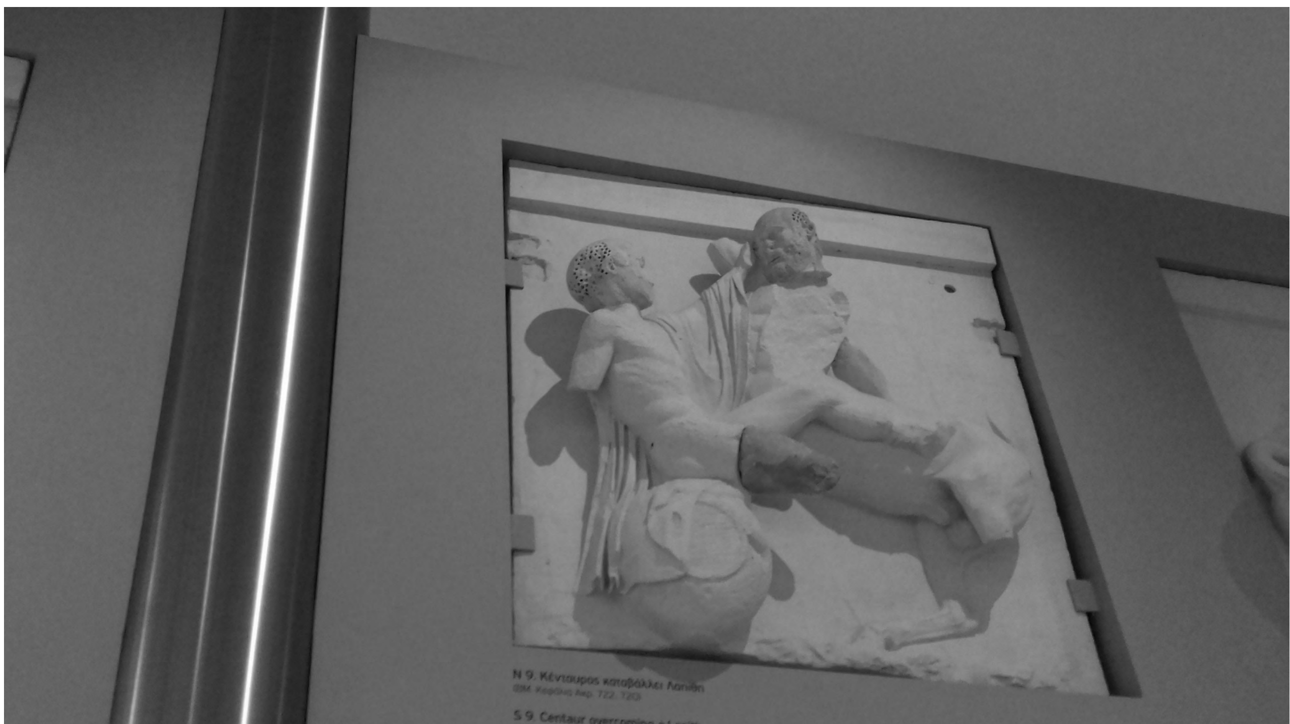

Figure 8.1. Fragments of a marble metope from the Parthenon with signs of marine degradation, from the collection of the Acropolis Museum in Athens. Photograph by the author.

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dangerous, and several people perished in the efforts to bring ancient sculptures to the surface.

One such story comes from the Antikythera shipwreck, the first ancient wreck found in the Mediterranean Sea and the first big concentration of ancient sculptures (Muckelroy 1978: 12). In 1900, the wreck was found accidentally by Greek sponge divers who were fleeing a storm during their return from operations in Northern Africa (Bass 1966: 74–75; Throckmorton 1970: 113–168; Rackl 1978: 15–36; Tzalas 2007: 344–346). After the sculptural discoveries were reported to local authorities, the Greek government conducted salvage operations between 1900 and 1901. Over the course of many months, archaeologists worked from the surface on ships of the Greek navy, while sponge divers went under water to retrieve as many sculptures as they could (Tsiropoulou *et al*. 2012: 18–28). This massive undertaking was arduous and disastrous. Bad weather, the significant depth of the site and the lack of safe diving equipment combined to make conditions hazardous. Some heavy sculptures were lost in greater depths, one sponge diver died and two others were permanently paralysed (Bass 1966: 29; 'Return to Antikythera' 2021).[7]

Similar incidents occurred during salvage operations of the underwater site at Cape Artemision in the Aegean Sea. From this site, two bronze sculptures—the 'God (Zeus or Poseidon) of Artemision' (Hemingway 2004: Fig. 22, Fig. 26) and the 'Horse and Jockey' (Hemingway 2004: Fig. 23–24, Fig. 30–33)—were retrieved in fragments in 1926–1929 and in 1936 (Bass 1966: 169; Rackl 1978: 57; Parker 1992: 60; Hemingway 2004: 35–40; Arata 2005: 146–147; Tzalas 2007: 350–353; Koutsouflakis 2017). Similar to the circumstances of the Antikythera wreck, fragments of the Artemision sculptures appeared accidentally, as chance finds in fishermen's nets (Hemingway 2004: 35–43). The local archaeological authorities immediately interpreted the sculptural fragments as precious works of art created by great masters of ancient Greek sculpture. This reaction, along with the potential for illicit salvage, inspired Greek authorities to organise rescue operations. However, during this process and amid bad weather, several of the helmeted divers died from embolism as the result of rising to the surface too rapidly (Bass 1966: 72). Following these deaths, the salvage work at Artemision was halted, and the exact location of the underwater site became forgotten over time.

Overall, early archaeological and scholarly conceptions of ancient sculptures found under water were based largely on the experience of these salvage operations, instigating feelings of thrill and wonder, awe and fear. These elements fit with pre-modern conceptions of the underwater environment as a dangerous realm which cannot be accessed without risk (Frost 1968), and they evoke even earlier stories of sculptural loss and discovery. These factors decidedly shaped how early modern discoverers, archaeologists and scholars understood and interpreted ancient Greek and Roman sculptures from under water. The artefacts were seen as valuable treasure whose salvage from the underwater world involved arduous labour and personal danger.

The methods, techniques, equipment and knowledge of underwater archaeology have vastly improved since the early twentieth century. Nonetheless, even today, ancient sculptures from under water are mostly found by accident and without archaeological context.[8] For example, the Riace statues, two large-scale bronze sculptures of male warriors, were found in 1972 off the coast of Riace Marina, near Porto Farticchio in southern Italy, by a recreational diver who reported his discovery to the local archaeological superintendency (Lattanzi 1986: 13–14; Gianfrotta 1986: 25; Arata 2005: 186–188). The Lošinj sculpture, also known as the 'Croatian Apoxyomenos' or 'Apoxyomenos of Vela Orjule', was found in 1996 in the Lošinj archipelago in Croatia, close to Vela Orjule, by a tourist (Stenuit 2002: 41–44; Arata 2005: 172–173). The Mazara del Vallo 'Dancing Satyr' (Figure 8.2) was discovered in fragments during 1997 and 1998 in the nets of local fishermen operating a motor trawler at the sea off Sicily, between the island Pantelleria and the African coast (Arata 2005: 154; Petriaggi 2005: 74–76). In 1999, another bronze sculptural fragment, a life-size bronze elephant foot, was brought to the surface, with no contextual information, by the same fishermen from Mazara del Vallo (Arata 2005: 154; Lapatin 2018: 159–168). The fishermen who discovered these sculptures—the crew of the *Captain Ciccio* fishing boat and especially their captain—have been praised as local heroes by the Museo del Satiro in Mazara del Vallo (Velentza 2022: 639–644). The museum exhibit presents the efforts to bring these works of art onto land with awe, despite the use of outdated investigative methods and the obvious lack of proper contextual analysis and systematic archaeological investigation. In similar fashion, at least seven fragments of ancient bronze sculptures were found between 1994 and 2009 around the island of Kalymnos, Greece, by local fishermen who reported and surrendered their striking discoveries to the Greek archaeological services (Koutsouflakis 2007: 48–49; Koutsouflakis and Simosi 2015: 74–75; Koutsouflakis 2017).

There are dozens of similar accounts of non-archaeological retrievals of ancient sculptural artefacts from under water, even as late as the 2010s (Velentza 2022: 20–35). All

[7] Since then, the site of the Antikythera shipwreck has been revisited, first by Jacques-Yves Cousteau with short surveys and excavations in 1953 and 1976, and since 2014, by the team of the 'Return to Antikythera' project organised by the Hellenic Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities (see Parker 1992: 55–56; Arata 2005: 144–146; Kaltsas *et al*. 2012: 14–15, 36).

[8] Of 110 underwater deposits examined in a recent study by Velentza (2022: 63, Fig. 26), approximately 64 (more than 58% of the recorded data) lack a known underwater archaeological context or a potential date for their underwater deposition. This circumstance is related to the discovery of the sculptures as isolated finds and their recovery from sites which are undated and not surveyed.

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Figure 8.2. The bronze statue of the 'Dancing Satyr' of Mazara del Vallo, displayed in the Museo del Satiro Danzante in Sicily. Photograph by the author.

have been accompanied by elements of mystery, surprise, excitement and pride. Frequently, these incidents appear in local news and other popular media accompanied by interviews and descriptions of how the discoverers realised they had found an ancient sculpture under water, thus intensifying the thrill of these extraordinary recoveries. These circumstances of discovery, combined with the catastrophic loss and wondrous, supernatural discovery associated with sculptures from under water since Classical Antiquity, keep alive the concept of salvaging ancient treasure.

This outdated antiquarian approach has obstructed the analysis of these sculptural artefacts within well-defined archaeological contexts, frequently leading to misinterpretations (Velentza 2022: 41–45). One such example is the case of the Riace sculptures mentioned earlier. These two sculptures were found by a recreational scuba diver in 1972. The Diving Unit of the Carabinieri salvaged the reported sculptural fragments without putting a specialized framework for underwater archaeological research into place (Gianfrotta 1986: 25; Lattanzi 1986: 15; Arata 2005: 186–188), despite the many academic underwater archaeological projects which were taking place in Italy at the time (*e.g*. Owen 1971; Eiseman and Ridgway 1987). Only a year after the salvage of the Riace statues, an archaeological investigation was organised for the discovery site. During this survey, more bronze fragments fitting the already retrieved sculptures were found, though according to the archaeological reports, no ship wreckage was detected. However, more recent examination of the recovered archaeological material, survey reports and seabed photographs have given scholars a different perspective. As Lattanzi (1986: 16) and Gianfrotta (1986: 28–29) have observed, during the salvage and surveys of the site, a large quantity of amphorae fragments was found, especially under the armpit of Statue A, as was a fairly thick piece of amphora wedged between the arm and the torso of one of the statues. Additionally, small pieces of wood and several lead rings were found during salvage operations. These contextual artefacts and data, though included in the archaeological publications of the underwater operations, have not yet been used in a methodological study of the underwater site, nor have they been taken into account in interpreting the statues and their maritime transport. Simply, the opportunity to understand the exact archaeological context of these artefacts has been lost through the thrill and excitement of underwater

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salvage. As a result, most scholars can examine the Riace bronzes only from an art historical perspective (Busignani 1981; Boardman 1985: 53; Mattusch 1997; Neer 2010: 148–155).

The same idea is promoted by the display of these statues in the gallery of the Museo Nazionale della Magna Grecia in Reggio Calabria. The Riace sculptures are exhibited next to sculptures from the Porticello shipwreck as works of art, with no information about the site or the conditions of their underwater discovery (Figure 8.3). Because of this presentation and the lack of information, most scholarly interpretations of these sculptural artefacts regarding their original land context, primary function, transportation and underwater deposition have been based on purely hypothetical theories which draw conclusions from art-historical analyses and mentions in ancient sources. This practice has promoted significant misunderstandings of the provenance and use of the Riace sculptures. The most prevalent theory sees the sculptures as booty stolen in the Roman era from a Greek sanctuary, probably Delphi, with the intention of transporting them to Italy (Mattusch 1996: ix-x, 47, 64–65 and 193–194; Mattusch 2002: 111–114; Jenkins and Turner 2009: 29–30; Neer 2010: 148–155; Bellingham 2014: 209–219). In reality, there is no documented archaeological evidence to support any of the dates, places or activities mentioned in these hypotheses.

From the examples cited above, it is clear that the various concepts and emotions associated with discovering sculptures under water, from Classical Antiquity until today, have prevailed over the need for careful archaeological investigation and interpretation. This has masked any contextual data, which are frequently considered unimportant. This, in turn, has perpetuated the misrepresentation of underwater archaeological finds as treasure goods, worthy only of salvage rather than archaeological investigation. As Gately and Benjamin (2018) analyse in depth, this portrayal of underwater archaeological research as a treasure hunting endeavour is a problem with which maritime archaeologists still struggle. Moreover, the lack of methodological research and contextual analysis of the sculptures from under water is a reason why these artefacts are frequently subjects of illicit trafficking. Examples include the sculptural head from the Porticello shipwreck, which appears in the gallery adjacent to the Riace sculptures in Figure 8.3; the Fano sculpture, also known as 'Statue of a Victorious Youth' or 'Getty Bronze' (Figure 8.4), currently held in the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum; and most recently,

Figure 8.3. The Riace bronze statues (left) and one of the Porticello shipwreck bronze sculptures (right), displayed in the Museo Nazionale della Magna Grecia in Reggio Calabria. Photograph by the author.

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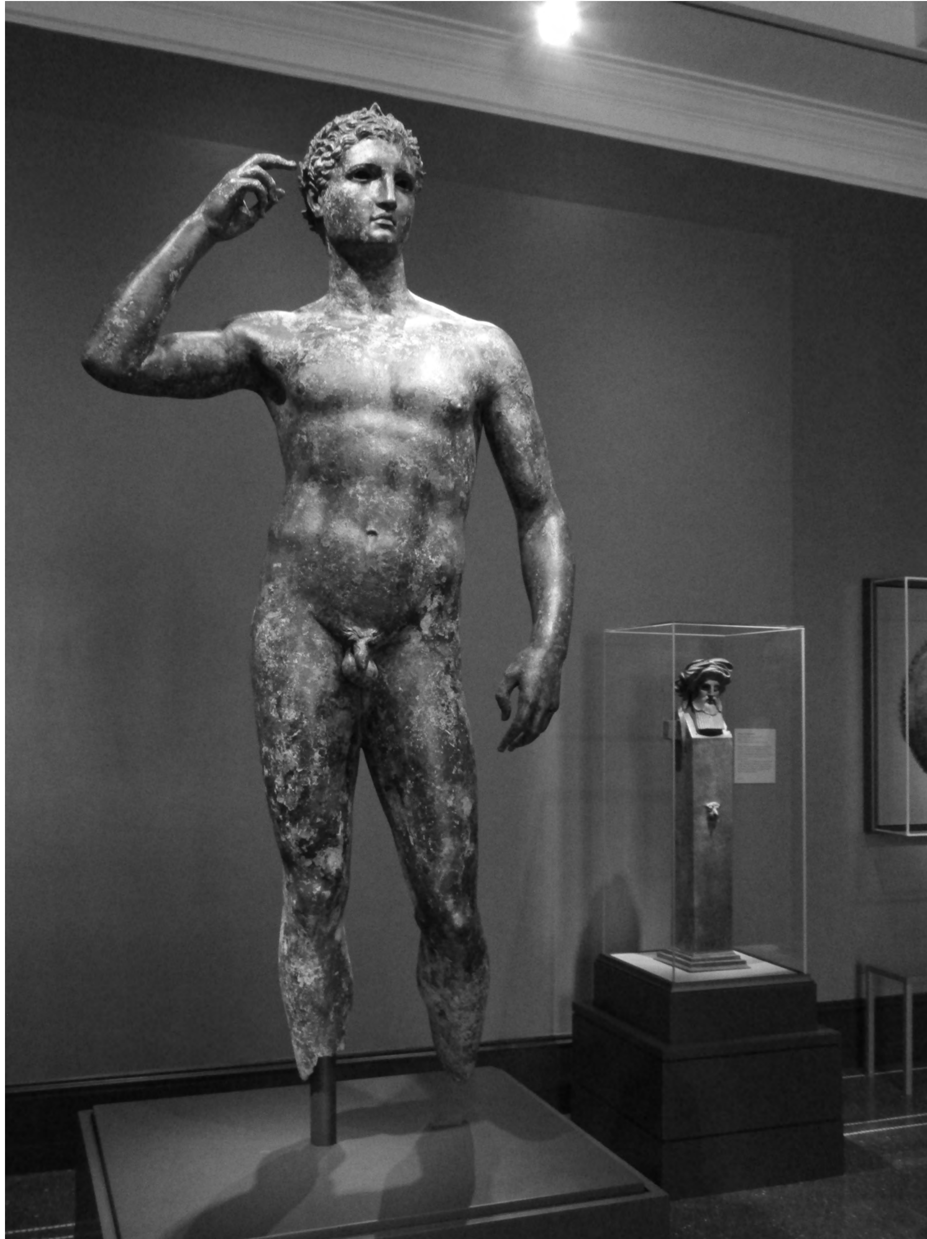

Figure 8.4. The smaller-than-life-size bronze male sculpture found off Fano, Italy, displayed in the Getty Villa in Los Angeles. Photograph by the author.

a large-scale bronze statue found off the coast of Gaza, which was sold through eBay after its out-of-context discovery (Velentza 2022: 44–45).

Modern reception and inspiration

The romanticism and mystery surrounding ancient sculptures from under water have had an interesting impact on the work of contemporary artists. In recent years, several artists have exhibited their sculptural creations under water, thus developing underwater sculpture museums visited by diving tourists. For example, the Museo Subacuático de Arte in Cancún, Mexico, is an underwater museum which exhibits a wide range of underwater sculptures to visitors who can dive, snorkel or see the underwater galleries from glass-bottomed boats. The museum promotes its concept and visiting experience as a unique adventure and opportunity to view the ocean in a way unlike anything visitors have ever seen before (MUSA 2023). One of the artists exhibiting his sculptures there, Jason deCaires Taylor, describes being under water as a 'deeply personal, liberating and otherworldly experience' (deCaires Taylor *et al*. 2014: 6–9). He explains that by choosing to display his sculptural works under water, he both expresses his adventurous personality and encourages insights into human relationships and experiences with watery environments.

To date, the most fascinating contemporary art adaptation of underwater sculptural discoveries is Damien Hirst's exhibition and mockumentary film, 'Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable', which presented the tale

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of a fictional Roman shipwreck full of sculptures from an imaginary ancient collector. The exhibition was first presented in 2017 at the Palazzo Grassi and the Punta della Dogana in the Venice Biennale, and then in a 2017 film produced by Netflix. For the exhibition and film, Hirst submerged several of his own sculptures in the Indian Ocean and then filmed their retrieval as if they were newly found archaeological discoveries. Impersonating a scientific patron, Hirst then restored, catalogued, interpreted and curated the retrieved sculptures to be presented to the public in Venice (Greene and Leidwanger 2017: 2–11; Hirst 2017a, 2017b). Moreover, as Greene and Leidwanger (2017: 4–6) note, some of Hirst's sculptures resemble well-known ancient sculptures retrieved from under water, including a colossal statue, called 'Demon with a Bowl', which mimicked the form and posture of the Riace statues. This imaginary narrative and counterfeit story of loss and adventurous discovery was the basis of an unprecedented, highly exciting and engaging artistic project which juxtaposed truth and fiction, mystery and wonder and the ancient and the modern.

The artistic curiosity inspired by ancient sculptures from under water was also featured in the 2017 film 'Call Me by Your Name', directed by Luca Guadagnino and based on André Aciman's 2007 novel of the same name. This film, rich with classical references, presents pictures of ancient Greek and Roman bronze sculptures in its opening titles, including several pieces found under water (Stevens 2018). The most notable sculptures are the Marathon sculpture (Bass 1966: 74 and 169; Parker 1992: 259; Mattusch 1997: 15–16; Arata 2005: 178) and the 'Dancing Satyr' of Mazara del Vallo (shown in Figure 8.2). Importantly, the film features an underwater sculptural discovery in detail. The two main characters, Elio and Oliver, join Elio's father, Professor Perlman, to retrieve an ancient bronze sculpture from Lake Garda. In this scene, after the statue is removed from the water by divers, the characters examine its fragments. The professor suggests the statue was a Hellenistic copy of one of Praxiteles' originals from the fourth century BC, noting that it must also have been a gift from a Count Lechi to his lover, the contralto Adelaide Malanotte (Melnikova 2020: 387). The bronze statue presented in the film resembles the sculptural type and posture of the Fano sculpture (Figure 8.4), which was found under water somewhere in the Adriatic Sea and has been part of the J. Paul Getty collection since 1977 (Mattusch 1997: 1–3). Overall, the sculptures from under water featured in the film are Guadagnino's inventions; they do not appear in Aciman's original novel, which frequently mentions figures from ancient literature, history and myth. However, as Stevens (2018) notes, the novel seldom refers to ancient art history or archaeology. Hence, the film director likely used ancient bronze sculptures—especially those from under water—to represent visually the novel's references to ancient literary texts (Melnikova 2020). Anachronistically, the 'Dancing Satyr', which appears in the opening titles, was discovered in 1997–1998, several years after the novel's fictional setting. Undoubtedly, the specific choice of the scene of the underwater sculptural retrieval and the thrilling emotions of excitement, wonder, mystery and romance that overtake the two main characters were chosen deliberately by the director to assist in the peak of their romantic idyl of Elio and Oliver and contribute to the film's visualisation of desire, nostalgia and adventure.

Conclusion

This study highlights an interesting continuity in the reception of sculptural loss and discovery in the Mediterranean Sea. From the period of Classical Antiquity to Mediaeval times and from the shipwreck losses of the 'Grand Tour' to the most recent archaeological discoveries, incidents of underwater deposition, discovery or recovery of sculptures have been associated with intense emotions and cultural concepts of mystery and adventure in both pre-modern and modern narratives. These concepts have created long-held reactions to sculptures from under water in the stories and traditions of multiple eras, deeply influencing modern scholarship and art as well. This realization reveals that there are certain attitudes towards sculptures from the sea which have been shaped over centuries. In modern times, these attitudes—combined with the abrupt and sometimes difficult circumstances of discovery and salvage of underwater sculptures—have influenced the level of analysis and understanding feasible for these archaeological artefacts. As the present analysis has demonstrated, diachronic concepts associated with sculptures from under water have decidedly interfered with the way sculptural discoveries have been perceived, not just by scholars, archaeologists and art historians but also by the general public, the media and contemporary artists.

This realisation highlights the dynamic role of the sea as a space of lived experiences where polar opposites—catastrophe and utopia, chaos and wonder—co-exist. More widely, the narratives and incidents of sculptures lost and found under water also provide insight into long-term conceptual processes which have influenced academic and public perceptions of maritime archaeology and underwater archaeological finds in the modern era. With this deeper understanding of why things have been viewed and presented in certain ways, practitioners of maritime archaeology can work towards advancing the public understanding of the sea and underwater environment. Greater care in portraying maritime and underwater archaeological discoveries is necessary, as suggested by Gately and Benjamin (2018), along with building the capacity for better approaches, processes and methodologies. Targeted education on the subjects of maritime archaeology and maritime heritage in schools and academic settings, but also for divers and heritage authorities would also help to improve the understanding of maritime archaeological finds in the public sphere (Staniforth 2008).

For the case of sculptures from under water, efforts for capacity building and expanding education will enhance

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public awareness of the underwater archaeological contexts where sculptures are found (*e.g.* shipwrecks, deposits of jettisoned objects and ritual depositions; some of these are currently invisible in the archaeological record due to the lack of data). Additionally, better and more strict methodologies should be followed in researching and recovering sculptures from underwater deposits, following the guidelines and frameworks developed by prominent scholars and organisations of the discipline (*e.g.* Muckelroy 1978; Adams and Rönnby 2013; Maarleveld *et al*. 2013). These initiatives will help the field move away from the outdated antiquarian practice of treasure salvage, while also safeguarding archaeological objects from potential antiquities trafficking.

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The archaeology of ships and boats

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