



The Mutilation of the Herms: Unpacking an Ancient Mystery

Debra Hamel

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In 415 B.C. the Athenians woke to find that during the night most of the herms in Athens (priapic statues of the Greek god Hermes) had been vandalized. The damage was too widespread for the act to be dismissed as a youthful prank. What was it, then: a conspiracy brewing against the democracy? Or merely a bad omen for their upcoming expedition to Sicily? The so-called "mutilation of the herms" is an important episode in Athenian history. Nearly 2500 years later, basic questions about the crime continue to exercise scholars—who done it and why they done it. In "The Mutilation of the Herms: Unpacking an Ancient Mystery," Debra Hamel provides a comprehensible account of the vandalism and its aftermath. This booklet is written for an audience of general readers and students. No previous knowledge of the period is assumed. The text could profitably be assigned for undergraduate classes in Greek history. Topics discussed include the Eleusinian Mysteries, the role of drinking groups in the vandalism, Alcibiades' involvement in the affair, and Eva Keuls' feminist take on the episode.

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