ATELIERS AND ARTISANS IN ROMAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

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Fig. 1. Lid of a sarcophagus from Ephesus with representation of a sculptural workshop, Istanbul Archaeological Museum (author, by permission of the museum).

Fig. 2. The only known workshop inscription from Roman N Africa: *ex officina Muri* inscribed on a plinth of a statuette of Aphrodite from the West Baths at Cherchel (see Landwehr 1993, 30-31, no. 12, Taf. 22).
INTRODUCTION

Ateliers and artisans in Roman art and archaeology

Troels Myrup Kristensen

The contributors to this volume propose a variety of approaches to the study of ateliers or workshops in Roman art and archaeology. The study of workshops (or, less concretely, “schools”) has traditionally been a philological endeavour based on the scrutiny of the ancient written sources. Yet the desire to identify individuals (“artists”) in classical art goes back at least as far as the 17th c. In his Catalogus architectorum etc., originally published in Latin in 1694, the Dutch polymath Franciscus Junius the Younger rummaged ancient authors (especially Pliny) for the names and works of sculptors, painters and architects.1 J.-J. Winckelmann in turn drew heavily on Junius’ work De pictura veterum when writing his Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums (1794), and the attempt to match names with surviving works has been a solemn occupation of many archaeologists and art historians ever since. The study of workshops, however, has to do with much more than the names and biographies of individual artists famed in antiquity. Comprising a basic aspect of the social history of Roman art, it explores the logistics of the marble trade, the transmission and circulation of styles and motifs, as well as the social context in which works of art were produced. The present volume thus aims to present a modern account of how we may understand ateliers as well as their staff (artisans or artists) through both archaeological and written evidence. It also aims to bridge traditional boundaries by taking in not only sculpture and mosaics, but also some other media, such as jewellery and wall-painting. This brief introduction will discuss some of the main themes treated in the volume and raise some general issues pertinent to ateliers and artisans in Roman art and archaeology.

The Roman world lacks any single site that can provide the kind of fascinating and colourful insights into the ordinary lives and routines of individual artisans and craftsmen that can be observed for the Egyptian New Kingdom in the case of the workmen’s village at Deir el-Medina.2 Instead, we have to rely on a variety of fragmentary sources to catch occasional glimpses of the social, logistical and economic contexts in which Roman art was produced and consumed. Those sources include epigraphic evidence, small scraps of literary testimonies, and all-too-rare representations of workshop scenes (fig. 1). Preserved iron tools and remains of the massive infrastructure of the trade in precious stone, including quarries and marble yards, add further knowledge about the technical and economic aspects of that industry.3 Inscribed signatures (e.g., those associated with Aphrodisias and Rhodes) give us names of individual sculptors, and sometimes it is possible to follow several generations of sculptors or identify large-scale commissions from single workshops (fig. 2).4 However, the inscriptions also pose interpretative problems, for it can be difficult to

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1 This important text is available in an English translation as Aldrich 1991.
2 We do, however, get a good sense from surviving ostraca of daily life at quarry sites such as Mons Claudianus: see most recently Bülow-Jacobsen 2009, with the review by J. C. Fant in JRA 23 (2010) 773-79. On the social lives of artisans at Deir el-Medina, see Romer 1981 and Meskell 1999. The Egyptian material includes a large group of representations of sculptors at work (e.g., in the tomb of Rekhmire at Thebes). On Greek and Roman workshops in general, see Heilmeyer 2004.
4 Aphrodisias is an important case (Roueché and Erim 1982; Erim and Reynolds 1989; Smith 2008); Hallett (1998 and 2008) has investigated 4 statues from the workshop of Apollonius Aster presumably commissioned for a public setting near the bouleuterion. For discussion of a group of togati found at Mérida ex
know what precisely was meant by the choice of vocabulary. What exactly was implied by the term officina, which is inscribed on the bases and bodies of numerous sculptures? Did it denote a permanent ‘workshop’? How many artisans did it normally employ, and how did the training of artisans take place? Was it specialized in working in particular media? The epigraphic and literary record can only partially answer such questions: they are worthy of further exploration through other methodologies, such as those applied here by B. Poulsen. We need to explore areas and regions where archaeological and art historical research is not supported by text or epigraphy related to sculpture, as does E. Friedland in her study of sculptural workshops in the Levant, where direct evidence for them is thin on the ground and where proper publication of archaeological contexts is often lacking. Instead, one can try to formulate new approaches to understand the social contexts in which art was produced.

So far archaeology has been of relatively limited use in furthering our understanding of the organisation of ateliers and of working processes. Only a very small number of workshops have been explored through excavation, and these can be very difficult to connect to a ‘school’ as defined by stylistic analysis. This issue is discussed below in relation to Aphrodisias by J. Van Voorhis. Among other promising sites for the exploration of the social lives of artisans and marble workers is a possible officina marmorum excavated at Simithus (Chemtou). While only limited marble sculpture can be identified with this building, conveniently located near the important quarries where marmor numidicum (giallo antico) was extracted, its architecture and the finds made therein are helpful for exploring working conditions in at least one particular kind of workshop affiliated with an imperial quarry. It would seem that the labour force consisted of free workers (rather than unfree or penal workers). The recent find of a sculptural workshop of the 1st c. B.C./1st c. A.D. beneath the New Acropolis Museum in Athens represents a very different kind of model. Lying in what has otherwise been interpreted as a domestic quarter, it was presumably responsible for small-scale production within a mixed working/residential context, as opposed to the almost industrial-scale operation at Simithus. An atelier discovered by J. Lassus at Antioch in 1937 also appears to have been producing (and selling?) marble statuettes within a fairly densely populated urban environment.

Art-historical scholarship has identified individual ‘schools’ or workshops based on stylistic analysis or close studies of workmanship. As is evident from several of the present contributions, these can be more difficult to pinpoint in time and space. In several publications of specific monuments the question of workshop attribution is often left open for further work. A vagueness of terminology can also be observed in the discussions: workshops, ateliers, studios, and so on, are often used as synonyms with few or no clearly-defined working definitions. Several of the present contributors aim to overcome this vagueness by confronting directly the issues involved in the use of terminology. Paying closer attention to the use of terminology is an important step towards

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5 See, e.g., Feifer 2008, 308-9, on the various meanings of the Latin term officina.
6 Mackensen 2005.
7 Eleutheratou 2008, 186-87.
8 Stillwell 1941, 118; also Friedland, this volume.
9 For some identifications of individual workshops in Hellenistic and Roman times, based mainly on stylistic analyses, see Erim 1967 and 1986, 133-52 (Aphrodisias); Suardi 1943 and 1983 (Aphrodisias); Sturgeon 1989 (Corinthia); Merker 1973 (Rhodes); Cain and Dräger 1994 (‘Neoattic’); Phillips 1976 (Carlisle); Fittschen 2001 (Athenian portraits). Many (often controversial) attempts (notably Frel 1972 and Graeve 1970) have been made to tie individual (famous) works to a specific workshop tradition. The conference on provincial art held at Arles in 2007 and published as Gaggadis-Robin et al. 2009 was devoted to the study of regional workshops.
formulating a model of how *ateliers* were organised and how their labour force approached the carving of sculpture or producing other media.

Mobility is another important factor in artisanal working processes and the organisation of workshops.\textsuperscript{11} Itinerant sculptural workshops have been identified in the case of Gaul. At Berenike on Egypt’s Red Sea coast, recent excavations have a revealed the work of a sculptor from Palmyra.\textsuperscript{12} Itinerant workshops have been suggested for several other regions. It is likely that artisans travelled for commissions, especially to large urban centres such as Rome (as in the case of the Esquiline Group that was produced by Aphrodisian sculptors) and Antioch. Workshops were dependent on other parts of the marble trade, such as quarries and marble yards, and that partly limited their mobility. Yet within the confines of one city the working practices of artisans may not have been limited to just one particular setting: the distribution of trial pieces across a large part of Aphrodisias could suggest that apprentices carried back their ‘homework’, as it were, although this information needs to handled carefully since the majority of the trial pieces come from secondary contexts (fig. 3).\textsuperscript{13} In that sense a workshop was perhaps not always necessarily fixed in space, but

\textsuperscript{11} On the mobility of sculptors, see also Conlin 1997, 34-36.


\textsuperscript{13} This idea was first suggested to me by S. Birk. Also discussed by Smith 2008, 112.
more like a mobile community that could carry out its training and work both in relation to other
routines and in a variety of locales.

Workshops must have played an important rôle in the transmission of artisanal knowledge and
the transfer of different styles and motifs between regions. If we knew more about their organi-
sation, we would be able to provide better models of the stylistic development of Roman art, as
well as issues of patronage and consumption (discussed here by S. Birk). As workshops are often
believed to have been family affairs, the craft being handed down from generation to generation,
we would expect some degree of conservatism in terms of style and technique — or at least that
certain characteristic traits appear over an extended period and are able to be identified by close
analysis. This also raises questions about the nature of apprenticeships. In Lucian’s curious auto-
biographical tale, The Dream, his short-lived career as a sculptor began rather late in his youth, and
only after other formal training. He describes the harsh, formal training that he receives from his
uncle, but his case may be rather special. Birk suggests that the workers in an atelier specialised in
carving particular features on sculptures and sarcophagi. This will complicate efforts to identify
individual hands, but would be an important step towards understanding some practical aspects
of workshop production, namely their organisation and the nature of apprenticeships.

The contributors have sought to explore a wide range of further issues related to the study of
Roman ateliers and artisans. S. Birk looks at the flexibility of artisans in working with different
sculptural media and a number of key issues related to workshop production, including the avail-
bility of marble blocks and the layout of sarcophagus reliefs. She proposes that bases constitute one
parameter for identifying individual workshops. J. Van Voorhis investigates the archaeologically-
documented sculptural workshop at the important production centre of Aphrodisias, the repertoire
of sculpture that it produced, and the working procedures involved in carving and re-carving stat-
ues. E. Friedland turns to the Near East to explore the possibility of identifying sculptural workshops
in a region where all marble was imported from elsewhere, while also revealing that this informs of
us the interaction between Greco-Roman and local traditions. Syria, for example supplies an inscrip-
tion mentioning a pair of female sculptors active in the Hauran. N. Hannestad offers an overview of
the workshops that can be identified for the production of mythological marble sculpture and of
the impact of the changing marble trade in late antiquity. M. Henig argues passionately for the existence
in Britain of a number of Roman workshops, producing mosaics, sculpture, jewellery, silver and wall-
paintings. B. Poulsen closes in on the evidence from the Theodosian Code for the status of artis-
sans in late antiquity before turning to mosaics chiefly from Halikarnassos in order to identify
specific workshops. D. Zohar focuses on the region of Mount Nebo to apply her distinct method-
ology for understanding the production procedures of late-antique mosaics. In the final chapter,
W. Wootton takes us to the site of Badminton Park, Gloucestershire, where recent excavations
have yielded new knowledge about the working processes of a 4th-c. mosaic workshop in Britain.

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14 Grossman 2003, 114. That workshops could be family affairs is clear from signatures on mosaics: cf.
Poulsen, this volume.
15 On identifying individual hands, see, e.g., Yaylah 1976, 55-105, on the frieze of the Artemision at Magne-
sia ad Meandrum, identifying “Künstler 1-7” in the process.
Introduction: Ateliers and artisans in Roman art and archaeology

Zohar all kindly agreed to add their research in order to create a wider-ranging volume on the topic of workshops in the Roman world. We would also like to thank John Humphrey for his editorial work, as well as Janet Huskinson and Jesper Carlsen.

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