

Hips Don't Lie: Labor Hazards and Stress in the Ancient Greek Workshop

Inspecting the hazards of the Greek workplaces is an understudied and important part of the study of ancient craft. Our idea of the ancient workplace is pieced together from a variety of sources, from literary to images on art work, to excavated craft places and tools. These show the processes of production, the materials and tools, and the amount of people generally involved; however, these alone cannot offer a comprehensive view of an ancient workshop, or those who worked within it. Like modern physical labor, ancient craft and agricultural work had a long-term effect on the body, as well as possible short-term hazards, such as stress fractures (Sperduti 1997). Understanding the dangers and long-term effects on laborers is necessary to fully understand the structure of production, the people involved in production, and the overall health of the population.

This study focuses on the six categories of work hazards proposed by America's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA 2002) and applies them to the ancient craft workshop, agricultural scene, or quarry. Throughout the study, I will be considering separately four major categories of labor: creation and decoration of pottery, quarry work and transport, metallurgical work and smelting, and agricultural work. These categories were chosen for several reasons: one, they each have tangible and textual evidence for workshop layout and labor procedures; two, they cover a broad variety of craft and labor that has evidence for the inclusion of both sexes and a variety of ages; and finally, they represent different spheres of activity, both inside and outside of the city, and for both home production and for market. I will construct and analyze the Greek workplace of each of these for obvious hazards and consider the long term stress effects of labor by using OSHA's guidelines and categorization of workplace

hazards as an outline. Finally, presence of stress markers in the material record is discussed alongside discussion of how these studies can affect our overall view of a labor force.

Overall, the study will be extensive, but cannot list every possible hazard. As in modern labor, accidents are common, and the unexpected causes as much damage as the expected. Instead of seeking a comprehensive list of possible hazards, I will outline major hazards and how they may affect the material record of the present, and the social standing and perception of the craftsmen engaging in these arts. There is no doubt that the hazards of crafts were known to the Greeks, even if their causes may not necessarily be. A perfect case study can be seen in the portrayal of Hephaestus in mythology. Although modern diagnostics push for a genetic disorder being the cause of the God's lameness (Bazopoulou 1997), it seems likely that the lameness was symbolic of arsenic poisoning that may have been a serious issue for Greek metalsmiths (Frankenberger 2002).

Bibliography

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