



Carving at the margins: making low-end sculpture in fifth-century Athens

Studies on Classical sculpture as a rule focus either on aesthetics or on the socio-political meanings of sculpture. While the latter approach in particular is fully warranted for the architectural sculpture of fifth-century Athens, it is questionable whether it applies to the same degree for private sculpture, that is, monuments ordered by private individuals commemorating private events.

The relative abundance of primary evidence for Athenian sculpture in the Classical period allows for a bottom-up approach to interpreting this corpus, and especially the dual question of how it was commissioned and produced. Focusing on stelai, this lecture will trace the process of creating private sculpture in fifth-century Athens, from the moment of commission through various production phases to the final effect in sanctuaries or burial grounds.

The evidence from workshops and quarries suggests that the practicalities of production, of supply and demand and a relatively specialized labour market in sculpture were strong influences on the look of Athenian sculpture in this period. By examining the appearance of 'average' stelai and their quantitative development over time, it will be proposed that such practical aspects weighed more heavily with Athenian patrons than considerations of status display or political motivations.

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