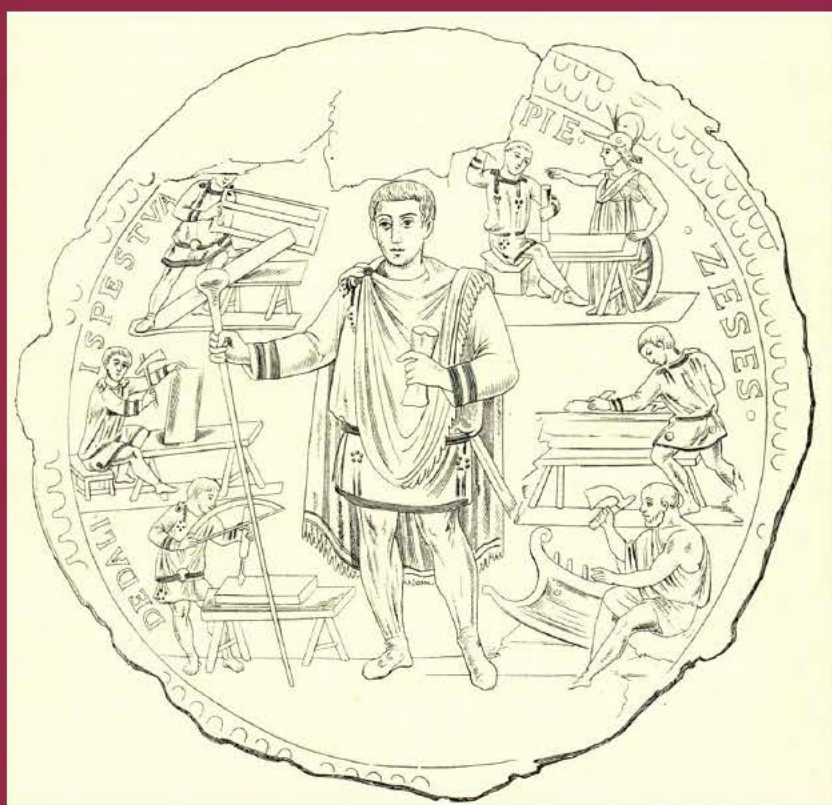


WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY



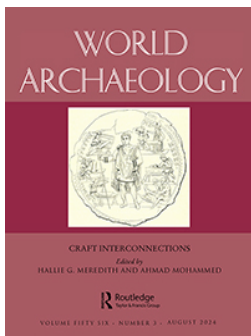
CRAFT INTERCONNECTIONS

Edited by

HALLIE G. MEREDITH AND AHMAD MOHAMMED

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An approach to craft and craftworkers in process: re-examining late 3rd-6th century CE Roman carvings, inscriptions, and engraved symbols

Hallie G. Meredith

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An approach to craft and craftworkers in process: re-examining late 3rd-6th century CE Roman carvings, inscriptions, and engraved symbols

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ABSTRACT

Despite significant archaeological evidence concerning late Roman period craft production, little is known of the experience of craftworkers, their process or their interconnections, whether that refers to division of labor or the social hierarchies that existed within trades and individual workshops. The marginalization of Roman artists, both in antiquity and by scholars, has led to a fundamental gap in our knowledge concerning agency, authorship, and creative manual labor. In response, this article discusses evidence and methodologies with which to investigate these neglected figures via their own production, focused on (1) unfinished artifacts as well as repaired/recycled materials, (2) engraved symbols as a form of purposeful communication by a collective of makers and (3) what all of these suggest about possible inter-industry practices. These types of artistic creations together represent unappreciated evidence of production that was more nuanced and complex in terms of technique, economics, and social structure than previously thought.

KEYWORDS

Craft production;
craftworkers; engravers;
engraving; late Roman;
symbols

Introduction

The late Roman period has a relative wealth of archaeological evidence concerning craft production, but ancient Roman engravers and their production processes have not received very much attention among scholars. However, in-process carving abandoned before completion offers evidence of production (see in particular Meredith 2023a, 119–139), and although very few diagnostic pieces remain, interconnections between engraving workshops in related but distinct craft industries can be identified from recycled materials in their craftwork (Meredith 2024a, 152–178). As this suggests, there is much that can be learned about engravers in the Roman world and beyond by exploring non-traditional types of evidence and adopting neglected or novel methodological approaches.

Late Roman craftworkers were a diverse group that included freeborn, enslaved and manumitted laborers possessing various levels of skill. For instance, it is widely known that enslaved 2nd to 5th century CE Roman craftworkers were often highly trained. Slaves who received training would fetch a higher price and had more social status than those untrained (Meredith forthcoming, “What’s in a Name? Gendered Anonymity, Slavery and the Late Roman Craftworker” in *The Roman Craftworkers of Late Antiquity: A Social History of Glass Production and Related Industries*). A small number of surviving late Roman images of laboring bodies evoke collective production and the economic and social