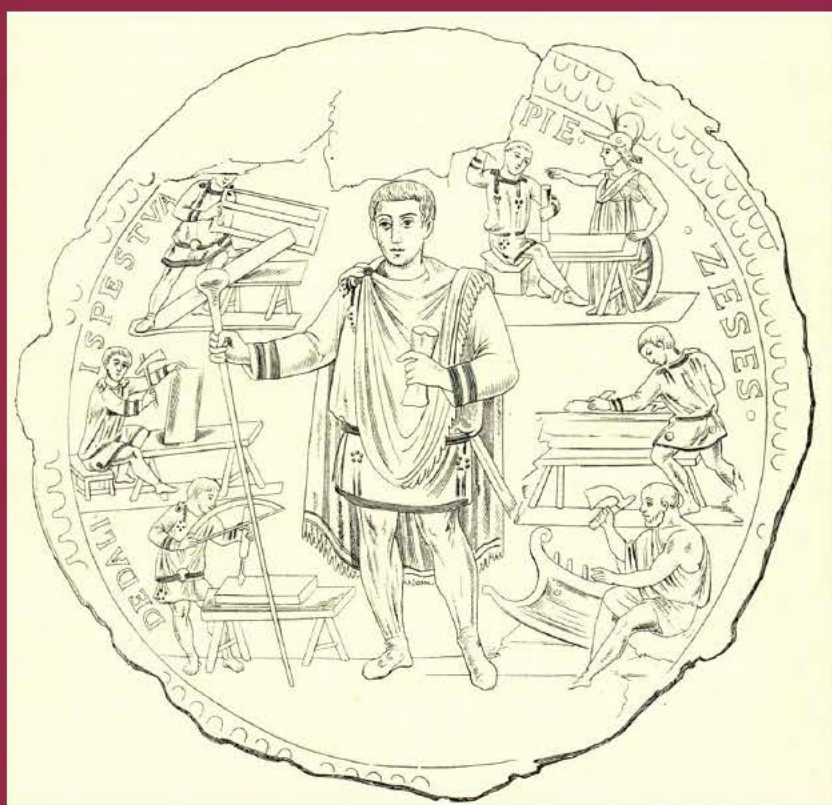


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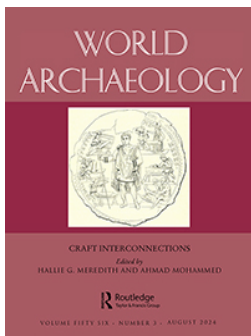
CRAFT INTERCONNECTIONS

Edited by

HALLIE G. MEREDITH AND AHMAD MOHAMMED

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EDITORIAL Craft Interconnections

Hallie G. Meredith & Ahmad Mohammed

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EDITORIAL

Craft Interconnections

Introduction

Today, we generally think of a maker in ancient times as a practitioner who regularly or even exclusively worked in a single medium and repeatedly performed a particular kind of task, such as a carpenter, glassblower, ivory carver, potter or stonemason – in other words, a specialist. Increasingly, however, it appears that such a narrow view of ancient production is more representative of the subdivisions within contemporary archaeological practice and a skewed historical bias regarding pre-industrial societies than it is of the true experiences, skills, or knowledge of makers in that era. This volume turns the idea of the reductive ‘specialist’ craftworker on its head and instead expands this restrictive characterization beyond the limiting idea of a single artisan working with a single material to encompass productive inter-industry relations, or what is often referred to as coproduction, cross-craft, cross-craft interactions, or multicrafts (Brysbaert 2007, 325–359; McGovern et al. 1989; Shimada 2007; recently, Meredith and Murphy 2024b, 138–151).

Directly related to this is the underlying question of how to access the kinds of non-discursive embodied knowledge acquired and honed by trained and experienced pre-modern craft producers and their wider cross-craft networks. One answer lies in archaeologically and historically informed experimentation. There is great potential for questions centered on ‘doing’ (such as problem solving; see Marchand 2016) to expand archaeological approaches to the *chaîne opératoire* beyond the linear sequence of production from the sourcing of materials to the finished object. Expanding production sequences to account for test pieces, discards, and unfinished material offers insights into how manufacturing was approached. Examples of this would include the traces of production on discarded late Roman ivory carvings (St. Clair 2003) or unfinished late Roman glass carvings (Meredith 2023, 119–139), which suggest that networks of ancient producers were not necessarily restricted to working in a particular or even a single material (Meredith 2024, 152–178), and that material categories in any case may have been organized along different axes (Bentz and Helms 2018; Meredith and Murphy 2024a). Potentially rich areas warranting further research as part of cross-craft studies include disability and bodily difference in craftworking; play and the involvement of children; ethnographic, anthropological, bioarchaeological, and historical evidence in discussions of the scope and timing of apprenticeship; the impact of craft production generally on human health; and contemporary debates on sustainability and resilience.

Moreover, archaeological studies have yet to fully integrate the insights gained from embodied learning, experimental archaeology, sustainability studies, or those of modern practitioners. These areas and sources remain at the margins of interpretative frameworks compared to traditional approaches.

Experimental data concerning the spatial dynamics implied by tools or materials (such as that gleaned from varying the length of a glass blowpipe), recycling of mutable materials, and possible parallels with the contemporary practice of traditional crafts (such as throwing on the wheel, metal

forging, or porcelain production at a site like Jingdezhen, China, going back to the sixth century CE) are among the most promising avenues of exploration, but there remains vast potential for researchers in these fields to escape their material and period silos and benefit from one another's knowledge. Recent valuable work has been done, for example, on fuels, infrastructure, and what may have been recycling practices in different cultures and historic eras (Duckworth and Wilson 2020; Höpken, Birkenhagen, and Brüggler 2021; Veal and Leitch 2019).

However, such studies rarely approach these interdisciplinary topics with a theoretical framework focused on the extent to which craft practice in a given context was shaped by relations across industries (for notable correctives of this concerning the Late Antique period, see Murphy 2015, 221–239; Murphy and Poblome 2021, 101–115). Was the responsibility for controlling an aspect of production, such as fire in pyrotechnologies, ever seen by pre-modern practitioners as a specialization? Can we identify specialists – such as mould makers or engravers – that are more likely to have transcended the boundaries of production traditions, and what role did inter-industry relations play in the transfer of knowledge and skills? These are some of the core questions posed in the following papers.

The pivotal nature of knowledge transfer among craft practices is also a central consideration, one that highlights technological adaptability. The articles in this collection also address contemporary approaches to pre-modern craft interconnections. Taken together, the contributions show how ancient productive relationships in craftwork were embedded within broader inter-industry relationships.

Interconnections of knowledge and technological adaptability

While fluctuations in demand – whether seasonal or based on need, the extent of mass production, and so on – might explain when and why varied objects were produced in the pre-modern era, the quantities of goods produced clearly influenced the number of producers at a given time, and in turn the scale of production and size of the workforce were both likely changeable. A dynamic market and flexible approach to production required a high level of craftworker knowledge and experience. Several papers in this issue consider the role of local knowledge and the potential for knowledge transfer via collaborations and how these serve as a fundamental basis for technological adaptability.

Investigating dynamic networks between and among craftworkers, Hallie G. Meredith outlines a two-part methodological approach focusing primarily on engravings from the 4th to 6th centuries CE from throughout the Mediterranean area. Meredith examines the visual culture made by and of craftworkers – that is, unfinished artefacts and finished pieces – in order to access a web of relations between craftworkers themselves.

Robert Nyamushosho challenges the notion that technological innovations occurred exclusively in large urban centres. Examining the Iron Age (CE 200–1900) Zimbabwean site of Chumungwa in southern Africa, Nyamushosho highlights indigenous knowledge in small-scale, quotidian craft production in carving (namely, bone and soapstone), metalworking, leatherworking, pottery production, and weaving. He argues that craftworkers at Chumungwa were independent and well-versed in multi-craft production.

Challenging assumptions about the makers of tools critical to pyrotechnologies, Justine Bayley and Carlotta Gardner examine evidence of ceramic crucibles from the British Isles to consider the craft industries that actually produced them. In their survey of crucibles from the Roman period (1st to 5th centuries CE) into the mediaeval period (until the 11th

century) and beyond, Bayley and Gardner consider the history of crucible production and material evidence of cross-craft interactions between three industries (glassworking, metallurgy, and pottery). Their article underscores the ongoing relationship and impact of changing scales of production on multicraft.

Moreover, in studies concerning the *chaîne opératoire*, standardization and customization are often approached as independent production models. While customization has long been understood as varied, specialization has not. Specialization, however, is not a homogenous category (Kuijpers 2018). In their article, Justyna Baron and Kamil Nowak demonstrate this through early Bronze Age metallurgy (2300–800 BCE) in present-day Poland. They consider standardization in cast moulds in tandem with either custom-made tools produced for left-handed users or objects designed for various hand sizes. Baron and Nowak conclude that the evidence of both standardized and custom-made objects indicates an array of cross-craft skills among knowledgeable Bronze Age craft producers. Instead of strict specialization, the true picture is one of technological adaptability.

Contemporary approaches to pre-modern craft interconnections

The articles discussed above focus on networks among ancient craft producers. In contrast, several papers in this special issue consider interconnected methodologies as well. The authors present compelling arguments concerning the vital roles that can be played by experimental approaches that incorporate present-day collaborations in the form of contemporary practice, ethnoarchaeological work, and/or experimental archaeology. As these papers show, such interdisciplinary collaborations have the potential for a greater depth of understanding across cultures and historical periods.

In his ethnoarchaeological study of pottery production at El-Nazlah (Fayoum, Egypt), Ahmad Mohammed explores how kinship and social organization structure artisanal practice. Based on interviews, audiovisual documentation, and GIS-based spatial analysis (2022–2023), he identifies five workshop models ranging from hierarchical to autonomous. Extending the ‘crafting landscapes’ framework (Erb-Satullo 2022) to micro- and meso-scales, Mohammed shows how logics of partiality, exclusivity, and temporality materialize in workshop layouts and collaboration. Additionally, a comparative case from Greco-Roman El-Kab illustrates similar kin-based clustering, offering a vital contemporary analogue for interpreting ancient socio-spatial systems.

Examining the application of varied contemporary means (specifically contemporary practice, embodied learning, and experimental archaeology), Inês Coutinho, Alexandra Rodrigues, Márcia Vilarigues, and Robert Wiley approach the study of historic producers not as isolated specialists but rather as a network sharing knowledge. Using experimental work to reproduce the chemical compositions of historic glassware, the authors examine glass in circulation in 15th to 18th-century Portugal including a glass collection gathered by King Ferdinand II and a distinctive gourd-shaped vessel collected from some archaeological sites dating to this time period. An expert glassblower then shaped and worked the glass to study production methods and processes. Significant effects of compositional variations on the physical characteristics of the glassware were thus translated into practical differences. This study offers a promising new approach of knowledge to coproduction by developing an interdisciplinary methodology that dovetails in a novel way with their subject matter.

Conclusion

As a whole, this special issue seeks to dispel the reductive stereotype of the specialist craftworker by focusing on productive inter-industry relations, particularly through questions prompted by *doing*. By examining complementary approaches and evidence, there is considerable potential to further rethink and refine how we conceive of pre-industrial specializations, in the process transcending or disrupting either archaeologically imposed divisions or real past divisions in craft production. Collectively, these papers highlight fundamental craft interconnections – whether in Bronze Age metallurgy, Roman workshop marks, or the kinship-based pottery workshops of contemporary El-Nazlah, Egypt – showing that cross-craft expertise is central to both ancient and modern practice. Our aim is to reconceive making and historical inquiry, no longer as separate approaches but as a dynamic, multi-laned, and better-integrated pathway for future research.

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