**[title]Mobility and Migration: Issues Concerning Itinerant Sculptors**

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**[A-head]Abstract**

[abstract]

The economic considerations involved in ancient sculptural production share recognizable characteristics with the concerns of sculptors from subsequent periods. Recent study of the modern “creative class” has led scholars of anthropology to examine additional factors affecting employment opportunity, such as cultural, logistical, and legal influences that motivate mobility. These same principles may help us to focus our perception of the ancient sculptors’ trade beyond the fragmentary body of epigraphic, archaeological, and literary evidence. This paper briefly considers the financial pressures upon sites of sculptural production before embarking on an analysis of legal factors that would affect individual sculptors seeking improved employment opportunities throughout the classical world. The wealth of epigraphic information from statue bases on Rhodes and logistical documents at Athens provide a body of evidence ideally suited to study how this broader conception of external pressures relates to sculptors and workshops of antiquity.

[main text]

Our understanding of the ancient sculptor’s profession, like so much of ancient sculpture itself, is fragmentary. The particulars of ephemeral facets such as training and organization come primarily from literary sources, supplemented by meager evidence found at sites of bronze and marble sculpture production. As a result, the clearest picture forms around the major figures of antiquity such as Praxiteles and Pheidias, who, according to ancient accounts, were sought out to complete major works across the Aegean.[[1]](#endnote-1) While we cannot fault encyclopedists, principally Pliny the Elder and Pausanias, for focusing their comments on notable pieces and creators, their perspectives are their own; it is rather our understanding of their accounts that deserves critical reexamination. A passing analysis of these literary accounts skews our understanding of the broader system of employment for all sculptors toward a series of major commissions.[[2]](#endnote-2) It is perhaps more accurate to consider commissions, or *patroned* work, as exceptional highlights rather than reflecting the trademore generally.[[3]](#endnote-3) This perspective raises important questions such as: What would have occupied the intervening years of a patron-less sculptor’s career? Were there periods during which he was actively seeking employment at sites of sculptural production? I will argue that in order to understand *un-patroned* employment and its relation to mobility, it is prudent to turn to approaches typically considered ancillary to the study of art. These include the modern study of migration dynamics as well as logistical and contractual documents within the epigraphic record.[[4]](#endnote-4) Sculptors of the ancient world were, after all, engaged in a commercial enterprise and reliant upon monetizing their material output.[[5]](#endnote-5) In the case of sculpting for large-scale architectural projects, we are fortunate to have documentation pertaining to the experiences of such individuals. This essay draws on these important bodies of evidence, identifying where pay rate, job type, and civic status affected the employment of sculptors and their apparent movement to locations of opportunity. These sources of information can be correlated with epigraphic evidence from Athens and Rhodes, which demonstrate the economic pressures on two diverse types of work settings: architectural projects and static workshops. By identifying common legal and economic catalysts, it becomes possible to broaden our understanding of the working lives of bronze and marble sculptors in antiquity.[[6]](#endnote-6)  
As previously mentioned, our sources on the ephemeral aspects of production are limited; even Lucian’s colorful account of stone sculpting is largely devoid of useful details.[[7]](#endnote-7) We will see in Athens that, in the case of large-scale architectural projects, the practice of documenting expenditures provides valuable information regarding employment of figural sculptors. The temporary nature of such projects adds an additional consideration when contemplating the effect upon workmen with niche skills. The Athenian Building Commission’s records of the Erechtheion’s construction from 409–405 BC, found on fragmentary marble slabs, include individual workman’s roles, pay, period of employment, and civic status (**fig. 12.1**).[[8]](#endnote-8) Richard Randall, Jr., has drawn several important conclusions about the organization of these laborers, sculptors included. First, workmen of mixed status (slave, *metic*, and citizen) labored side-by-side on tasks of similar complexity while earning an equal sum during this third phase of construction.[[9]](#endnote-9) In the case of skilled slave labor, earnings would have been given directly to the slave’s owner.[[10]](#endnote-10) Considering the equality of pay, one must ask what factors affected the initial selection of workmen. Were there factors outside of the familiar facets of opportunity: resources (individuals possessing the necessary skills) and positional factors (availability of workers)? The second interesting piece of information gleaned from the marble fragments is that individual craftsmen engaged in more than one trade. The *metic* Agathanor, for example, worked as a sculptor on two projects (likely carving the Erechtheion’s small frieze figures) and as a wax modeler for the ceiling coffers, as documented by job title and its associated pay (**fig. 12.2**). Randall goes on to point out that Agathanor was not the only individual engaged in multiple trades. These craftsmen sought to capitalize on the availability of work provided by complex multifaceted projects. With this information, one begins to see the value of investigating the context of logistical data as a corrective to preconceived notions of absolute trade specialization and assumptions privileging “artists” over craftspeople.   
Delving further into the numerical data of the Erechtheion construction project, the details of civic status, compensation, and tenure provide clues to the larger picture of the *un-patroned* sculptor’s profession. It should be reiterated that these architectural engagements are by definition temporary; however, the specifics of sculptors’ terms of employment illustrate the necessity of constantly pursuing new opportunities. In this phase of construction attributed to the aforementioned inscriptions, the sculptors were carving small-scale figures for the frieze on the north porch.[[11]](#endnote-11) In Randall’s assessment, these nine sculptors were paid the rather modest sum of sixty drachmae per figure, an amount comparable to what masons were paid for carving a similarly-sized block of stone.[[12]](#endnote-12) In looking at the sculptors on a neighboring project**,** the Parthenon pediment, Alison Burford noted that sculptors were paid a sum comparable to the woodworkers and masons, the equivalent of 1.5 to 2 drachmae per day.[[13]](#endnote-13) Simplifying the numbers in this way leads to the conclusion that workmen were similarly compensated regardless of their technical proficiency. The second point of concern is that the changing terms of payment—that is, wages payable on completion of individual frieze figures versus a contract or daily wage—suggest a day-to-day arrangement that was economically efficient for the project foremen but insecure for the sculptors. Here is where the modern study of migration dynamics can be most effectively applied, helping us understand how similar practices affected opportunity and motivated individuals’ mobility.  
The movement of people for political, social, economic, and other reasons is clearly visible in the historical records of antiquity. Changing circumstances often motivated individuals to relocate to more stable and profitable environs.[[14]](#endnote-14) For those with financial motives, the primary governing factor remains improved opportunity. Scholars of the past decades have sought to elucidate and quantify the extramonetary motives that act upon those seeking permanent working situations, as well as those favoring a transient experience. In his 1984 article “The Logic of Opportunity and Mobility,” John Skvoretz seeks to refine the working model around which social scientists had constructed the study of upward movement within contemporary structured labor environments.[[15]](#endnote-15) Previous studies had been limited to considerations of position availability and numbers of applicants. Skvoretz suggests that additional facets play a significant role in calculating an individual’s potential for movement, principally (1) timing (as a function of periods of high demand versus low demand), (2) skills possessed by the individual, and (3) the availability of positions in a given environment.[[16]](#endnote-16) More recently, scholars have expanded considerations to include dimensions such as gender and race.[[17]](#endnote-17) The original tripartite conception of the governing factors must thus be reconsidered as a matrix of dimensions, each of which exerts a degree of influence upon the modern or ancient laborer’s ability to pursue new opportunities. It is difficult to apply Skvoretz’s statistical models to an ancient context; however, incorporating dimensions of identity including citizenship, ethnicity, and civic status into a sculptor’s *opportunity exposure* allows for a more complex understanding of forces acting upon *un-patroned* practitioners of the sculptural trade.

The machinations of the Athenian bureaucracy would have placed added financial hardship on the *metic* craftsmen residing in the city: foreign merchants and craftspeople were required to pay a special market tax in order to sell their wares on the Agora.[[18]](#endnote-18) While this would not have immediately affected the Erechtheion workmen, their counterparts working in terracotta and with small-scale bronzes would have felt this pressure. Those *metics* who chose to reside in the city for any length of time were also required to pay a yearly poll tax, regardless of their employment status. In his study of mobility in ancient Greece, Robert Garland points to the writings of Xenophon to show that such taxes brought in a considerable sum to the Athenian treasury. These financial pressures contribute to our understanding of the complex matrix of legal and financial forces acting on non-citizen craftsmen. Despite these specific pressures, it appears that workmen were attracted to Athens as a site of employment, even if only on a temporary basis.  
The prevalence of *metics* in artisanal trades is mirrored in the now-familiar records of Erechtheion’s construction.[[19]](#endnote-19) Of the total workforce employed during this phase of construction, *metics* predominate: 42 *metics* versus 24 citizens and 20 slaves (**fig. 12.3**). A useful point of comparison is the construction of another monumental building project, the sanctuary at Eleusis dating between 329/8 and 319/8 BC.[[20]](#endnote-20) According to documentary inscriptions, *metic* workmen once again outnumber citizens, but here only by a small margin.[[21]](#endnote-21) The trend in civic status of workers on these two projects is reflected in the smaller sample of sculptors employed to carve the Erechtheion’s frieze: of 9 total, 5 were *metic*, 3 were citizens, and 1 was of unknown status. The logistical concerns of the Commission’s records provide us with information on these individuals beyond just their names. Randall suggests that the bulk of the *metic* workforce did not remain in Athens waiting for more work.[[22]](#endnote-22) While his assessment is based on the relatively small detail of stylistic comparanda from a single other architectural project, the weight of the aforementioned terms of employment and tax-related concerns provide strong supporting evidence for the sculptors’ itinerant lifestyle.[[23]](#endnote-23) It appears that Pliny’s celebrity sculptors differed from their compatriots not in their ability to travel but in the reasons for their mobility: commissions by wealthy patrons, rather than external financial pressures.

In order to more fully understand the role of financial pressures in sculptors’ mobility, the scope of their settings must be widened to include a second source of non-commission employment: static workshop sites such as Rhodes. Here the potential for sustained employment offered new opportunities to *metic* sculptors in stone and bronze.

In stationary sculptural workshops, the financial concerns were generally similar to those in architectural projects, that is, the costs of materials and labor—of technicians, carvers, and/or painters. In the case of bronze sculpting, these concerns were evident in several measures for cutting material costs, such as hollow casting for large-scale pieces.[[24]](#endnote-24) This and other innovations demonstrate a clear financialconcern in the function of the bronze workshop at sites such as those on Rhodes, documented by Chris Kantzia and Gerhard Zimmer.[[25]](#endnote-25) While literary accounts attest to a high volume of production comparable to major civic centers, Rhodes is unique in that statue bases belonging to locally commissioned pieces providea detailed epigraphic record of production by specific named sculptors. The density of signatory inscriptions has allowed scholars such as Virginia Goodlett to reconstruct several Rhodian family workshops and to calculate the number of local and *metic* sculptors, which appears to be considerable.  
According to Goodlett’s calculations, the height of Rhodes’s sculptural production correlates to a numerical superiority of statue bases bearing foreign sculptors’ signatures (**fig. 12.4**). The profusion of foreign craftsmen suggests an analogous environment of positional opportunity akin to the aforementioned architectural projects. Bronze sculptors were aware of these opportunities in Rhodes and sought to capitalize on the demand.[[26]](#endnote-26) The largest proportion of individuals came from Athens, and later Asia Minor. In the years 250–200 BC, approximately 60 statues were produced and the same number in the following fifty years (**fig. 12.5**).[[27]](#endnote-27) The same periods reveal a sample of 11 citizen versus 19 foreign signatures, and 12 citizen versus 16 foreign signatures, respectively.[[28]](#endnote-28) Goodlett points out that during the specific period of 250–167/6 BC, the *metic* sculptors must have been itinerant, since their signatures appear on only one piece.[[29]](#endnote-29) Once again, we are confronted with the question: what affected these individuals’ short tenure? In this case the circumstances of production did not generate the type of detailed logistical documentation seen at the Erechtheion’s construction; however, the assumption that sculptors on Rhodes were employed under similar circumstances (e.g. per-unit compensation) is suggested by inscriptions detailing individual commissions from the fourth–second centuries.[[30]](#endnote-30) Another contributing factor to the transience of foreign sculptors on Rhodes could have been the island’s economic downturn in the mid-second century BC, which surely affected local demand. The latter circumstance explains the general decrease in production by way of decreased patronage, but does not directly address the short-term stay of itinerant sculptors during the earlier decades of prosperity. Goodlett provides a possible explanation in her analysis of the puzzling numerical inversion of foreign versus Rhodian signatures from 100 to 50 BC.[[31]](#endnote-31) She suggests that the structure of Rhodian citizenship followed Athenian precedent in regard to the exclusivity of land ownership, making it difficult for *metics* to establish permanent workshop facilities. If these administrative systems were as closely related as Goodlett suggests, it is possible that there was an added tax burden on foreigners in Rhodes like the one described by Xenophon for Athens. As a hub of maritime commerce, Rhodes was well positioned to capitalize on this potential tax base of *metic* merchants and craftsmen.[[32]](#endnote-32) With unpredictable opportunities for employment and external financial pressures, sculptors would have felt compelled to keep moving, seeking a more favorable positional opportunity. At this point the notion that mobility was key to sculptors of various media at temporary as well as static production sites becomes more attractive; yet there are far more questions to answer about the trade and other sites.

The full reality of the ancient sculptors’ trade is difficult to discern from the meager evidence left to us. Scholars have wrestled with literary testimony, visual documentation, and physical evidence associated with the constructive process. In many cases it has proven invaluable to our understanding of physical materials, yet the greater challenge remains in explaining the ephemeral facets of the trade. By adopting new approaches such as migration dynamics and analyzing ancillary data at sites of production, we can begin to reconstitute the working lives of sculptors and their mobility through their environment. These *un-patroned* individuals certainly constitute a larger proportion of the workforce than those we know from literary accounts. After all, it was the *un-patroned* sculptors and technicians whose assistance was required in the creation of Pliny’s masterworks.

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[A-head]Acknowledgments

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1. Pliny *Naturalis historia* 36.20, 34.69; Pausanias 8.9.1, 1.23.7, 10.37.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The passing accounts of familial workshops such as those of Polykleitos and Polykles detail specific works and their varied locations. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The use of the term *patroned* refers to the active pursuit of a sculptor by a patron. Conversely, the *un-patroned* individual is the active party seeking work from a patron. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Bennett 2010 and Boren and Young 2013 approach the subject of creatives’ mobility as a function of attracting said individuals. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Here the distinction between sustained sponsorship by a patron and specific commissions must be elucidated. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Classical Athens and Hellenistic Rhodes are notably distinct; however, their shared model of governance and legal distinctions allows for important comparisons to be drawn. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Lucian *Somnium* 130: 222–23. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. *IG* 1.324. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Randall 1953, 203. Burford 1974, 34, comes to the same conclusion in her later study of the Parthenon construction. Mossé 1969 expresses the same sentiment, though he conflates several contributing factors. Randall addresses the high proportion of non-citizen workmen, suggesting that naval engagements drew from the reserves of citizen workmen, contributing to the reliance upon *metic* laborers. Garland 2014, 163, suggests that *metic* men of were also pressed into service by the Athenian state in times of war.. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Mossé 1969, 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Randall 1953, 199. The famous caryatid porch had already been completed by this point. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Randall 1953, 207. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Burford 1974, 34. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. MacDonald 1981 provides a contrast between utilitarian (and more accessible) pottery and the luxury of sculpture, which must be considered. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Skvoretz 1984 analyzes several competing theories but this discussion is limited to his critique of Sørensen 1976, Cohen 1972, and White 1970. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Skvoretz 1984, 73. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Skvoretz (1984, 74) points out that mathematical models such as Sørensen’s (1976) assume potential movement only within these individual groups. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Garland 2014, 156. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Randall 1953, 203. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Sargent 1924, 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. *IG* 2.834b–c; 4.2.834b. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Randall 1953, 203. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Randall’s assertion is based on commentary by Dinsmoor 1950, who noted a correlation in building construction between the Erechtheion and the Nereid Monument at Xanthos. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Stewart 2015, 43. Stewart and Ma 2013 provide a general idea of material costs, though exact conclusions are difficult to draw due to the small sample of available data. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Kantzia 1989; Zimmer 1990. Materials left behind in the pits suggest that they were used on multiple occasions. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Goodlett 1991, 676, points out that the Mnasitimos family hired outside sculptors Menippos of Kos and Eukles of Mylasa. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Pliny *Naturalis historia* 34.36 asserts that 3,000 bronze statues remained on Rhodes in the first century AD, some two hundred years after the city’s fall from power. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. There is a brief spike in Rhodian sculptors from 100 to 50 BE, which Goodlett attributes to *metic* sculptors gaining citizenship, a rare event. Rostovtzeff ([1941] 1953, 689) argues against any precedent of full citizenship. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Goodlett 1991, 675. The small size of Goodlett’s sample raises important questions; however, I would suggest that her general hypotheses remain sound. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. *IG* 12.9.196, 198. Ma (2013, 244) lists numerous instances in which specific costs appear on the associated statue base. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Goodlett 1991, 679. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. See Gabrielsen 1997. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)