

# Owning the Stones: Craft Identity and Ownership in Classical Athenian Sculpture

Helle Hochscheid

Recent scholarship about ancient craft production has increasingly investigated the impact it had on the community and in turn, how communities were affected by craft practice. As is argued by several other participants in this publication as well as in wider scholarship, making things is a particularly formative activity both in a personal and a social sense.<sup>1</sup> This paper argues that the relation between making and makers hinges on the feelings of ownership that are inherent in human interaction with the things that they possess, be they material or immaterial. In particular, the evidence of self-representation of craftsmen in classical Athens suggests that professional association with, or skill in, particular crafts lent considerable sense of self-worth to makers, who seem to have identified quite strongly with their professional craftsmanship. Arguably, this also the case where the socio-political status of craft practitioners was low, e.g. for working women, freedmen or even slaves. Viewing their representations through the lens of ownership uncovers a new perspective on the attitudes of ancient craftspeople towards their crafts and on the meanings their labour may have held to them.

The concept of ownership is derived from psychology and has more recently been studied in cognitive science. Ownership hinges on three engrained human motivations. First, it regards a person's control over the environment; second, it helps generate a sense of belonging; and third, it engenders self-identification.<sup>2</sup> All three of these aspects can tie in with craft production. Making things requires the ability to manipulate materials and tools. The resulting object or the tools used in the process are owned by the maker and are part of their identity; more importantly, so is the craft skill and the body performing the action. Skillful manipulation of material fosters feelings of control over the environment and adds to an embodied sense of self.<sup>3</sup> Being surrounded in daily life by objects that are, through the labour invested, closely connected and intimately known to the craftsman, increases the sense of belonging and grounds them in their environment.

Labour is particularly regarded as grounds for ownership, both economically and on a cognitive level. In an ongoing series of studies, Patricia Kanngiesser has investigated what and how creative labour adds to psychological ownership. In Western societies, ownership tends to be based on first possession, but this is reinforced if labour is invested to alter an object or material.<sup>4</sup> Studies of attitudes of children and adults in various countries show that the higher rating of invested labour than of possession without further action is widely spread across cultures.<sup>5</sup> The value that craft processes add to raw materials is therefore not only measurable in economic terms, but also in social identification, and on a cognitive level, as entanglement: formative responses between humans and things in various constellations.<sup>6</sup>

In classical Athenian votives, tombstones and building accounts, references to crafts reflect ancient craftspeople's awareness of their status as makers. The self-representation in gravestones and on votives is arguably rooted in psychological ownership: for example, Smikythe inscribes her profession of washerwoman on the pedestal of her votive basin. On the grave stele of Xanthippos the shoemaker, he is holding his last as an emblem of his craftsmanship, while the inscription on the gravestone of Mannes literally boasts his skill as a lumberjack.<sup>7</sup> As more of these instances of craft representation in text and image appear on monuments over the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, the group identity of the craft community in classical Athens seems to be increasingly and consciously foregrounded.

Moreover, the building accounts of the Erechtheion famously list both citizen and metic craftsmen, and almost certainly also slaves.<sup>8</sup> The public recognition in the building accounts and the continued presence of the resulting architecture must have raised their sense of ownership considerably, in all three respects of control over the environment, belonging and self-identification. Possibly, the greater number of craftpeople's professional self-representations was influenced by the acknowledgement of their great contribution to the city's appearance both within the craft community and in the polis at large.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Brysbaert elsewhere in this volume; Gauntlett 2011, 32–34, 77–81; Sennett 2009, 9–16.

<sup>2</sup> Pierce et al. 2003, 88–94.

<sup>3</sup> Hodder 2012, 35–37; Pierce et al. 2003, 88–94.

<sup>4</sup> Kanngiesser – Hood 2014a, 354.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.; Kanngiesser et al. 2010. For the influence of raw materials' value, Kanngiesser – Hood 2014b.

<sup>6</sup> Hodder 2012, 88–89.

<sup>7</sup> Smikythe, Akropolis Museum 607; stele of Xanthippos, British Museum, BM 628 1805.7-3.183; stele of Mannes, Louvre, MA 4207.

<sup>8</sup> Silver 2006.

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