

Reconstructing Scales of Production in the Ancient Greek World: Producers, Processes, Products, People

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Introduction

Scholars have adopted an array of approaches, both traditional and experimental, to approximate the scale of craft production, which has always been central to the study of ancient economies. This panel examines these new methods, for estimating the workshop crew size, the workshop physical space, the time requirements for the chaîne opératoire for each product, the needs of the population for different goods, or the percentage of ancient products surviving to this day. These new approaches, some borrowed from related disciplines, should help us overcome the paucity of archaeological evidence. By employing social network analysis, individual worker's output, architectural energetics, and production-consumption ratios, we aim to improve our understanding of the scale of craft production in the ancient Greek world, both in the Greek mainland and in the Greek colonies in Sicily. Archaeologists and ancient economists are using new approaches to study the ancient economy at a micro-level, taking into consideration several variables, such as raw material procurement, labor investment, cross-craft dependencies, apprenticeship periods, and product demand, to name a few.

Our test cases range chronologically from Prehistoric to Classical times, and geographically from Athens (Hasaki and Cline; Rocco; Sapirstein; Stissi), to the Argolid and central Greece (Jazwa; Fitzsimons), the Aegean (Cecconi) and Selinous in Italy (Bentz). The industries covered are pottery-making, vase-painting, tile works, mosaic construction, and monumental construction. This panel will show how the labor investment for tiling a roof (Jazwa) or for building a monumental tomb in Bronze Age Greece (Fitzsimons) reveals the economic complexity of ancient societies in craft specialization, workforce mobilization, and financing models (Cecconi). Moreover, estimating the sizes of ancient ceramic workshops can lead to better reconstruction of the economic cycles of production and consumption, which in turn helps us understand the range of scales for imported and exported ceramics.

Our discussant, Peter Acton, a business economist, has studied manufacturing operations in Classical Athens. With his micro-level focus he has demonstrated how economic considerations determined enterprise size and profitability in different industries.

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