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Sculpture workshops: who, where and for whom?

Simon Connor

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THE ARTS OF MAKING IN ANCIENT EGYPT

VOICES, IMAGES, AND OBJECTS OF
MATERIAL PRODUCERS 2000–1550 BC

edited by
Gianluca Miniaci,
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Contents

Introduction	7
Sculpture workshops: <i>who, where and for whom?</i> <i>Simon Connor</i>	11
The Artistic Copying Network Around the Tomb of Pahery in Elkab (EK3): a New Kingdom case study <i>Alisee Devillers</i>	31
Antiquity Bound to Modernity. The significance of Egyptian workers in modern archaeology in Egypt <i>Maximilian Georg</i>	49
Epistemological Things! Mystical Things! Towards an ancient Egyptian ontology <i>Amr El Hawary</i>	67
Centralized and Local Production, Adaptation, and Imitation: Twelfth Dynasty offering tables <i>Alexander Ilin-Tomich</i>	81
To show and to designate: attitudes towards representing craftsmanship and material culture in Middle Kingdom elite tombs <i>Claus Jurman</i>	101
Precious Things? The social construction of value in Egyptian society, from production of objects to their use (mid 3rd – mid 2nd millennium BC) <i>Christelle Mazé</i>	117
Faience Craftsmanship in the Middle Kingdom. A market paradox: inexpensive materials for prestige goods <i>Gianluca Miniaci</i>	139

Leather Processing, Castor Oil, and Desert/Nubian Trade at the Turn of the 3rd/2nd Millennium BC: some speculative thoughts on Egyptian craftsmanship	159
<i>Juan Carlos Moreno García</i>	
Languages of Artists: closed and open channels	175
<i>Stephen Quirke</i>	
Craft Production in the Bronze Age. A comparative view from South Asia	197
<i>Shereen Ratnagar</i>	
The Egyptian Craftsman and the Modern Researcher: the benefits of archeometrical analyses	211
<i>Patricia Rigault and Caroline Thomas</i>	
The Representation of Materials, an Example of Circulations of Formal Models among Workmen. An insight into the New Kingdom practices	225
<i>Karine Seigneau</i>	
Staging Restricted Knowledge: the sculptor Irtysen's self-presentation (ca. 2000 BC)	239
<i>Andréas Stauder</i>	
The Nubian Mudbrick Vault. A Pharaonic building technique in Nubian village dwellings of the early 20th Century	273
<i>Lilli Zabrana</i>	

Sculpture workshops: *who, where and for whom?*

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Abstract

In Egyptology and in Art History in general, certain terms are often used vaguely because they lack a clear definition. In the context of studies on sculpture, the term WORKSHOP is one of them. Giving a definition is not an easy task, but it is a necessary one especially since in the case of art the scholar's approach does not rely on scientific objectivity only, but also on perception, feeling and the "eye" of the art historian. While not all researchers might agree with the same definition, it is important to propose one for the terms employed. Several questions occur to the scholar who studies a corpus of artifacts or works of art. **Where** do the artisans work? **How many** people are involved? Do they **specialize** in a particular production or are they more versatile? In the case of sculptors, do they work in the **quarries** or in their proximity, or in **studios** connected to temples or palaces? Is a group of artisans sedentary or itinerant? Do sculptors all work for the king and the **royal court** or can we identify **regional styles**? Such questions arise when dealing with the corpus of the Late Middle Kingdom statuary. As this paper tries to demonstrate, it appears that different productions are identifiable based on three main factors: the **material** in which the statues are carved, the **architectural context** for which the statues are produced, and the **clientele** to which they are destined. These three factors are closely intertwined and determine the types of sculpture that were realized.

Keywords: Royal statuary, private statuary, stone sculpture, workshops, elite.

The present paper concentrates on stone sculpture produced during the Late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period (c. 1850-1550 BC). The corpus is large (around 1500 statues¹) and comprises different categories of objects:

- Statues of different size: from several meter high colossi to tiny statuettes;
- Statues in a wide range of materials: hard stones (mainly granodiorite, granite, quartzite, graywacke), soft stones (limestone, alabaster, steatite) and, in much lower proportions (probably reflecting conditions of conservation), wood and metal;
- Statues from various contexts: major temples, provincial sanctuaries, monumental tombs and more modest funerary chapels;
- Statues of different quality (from the same reign, and sometimes even for representations of the same individual), from a very carefully proportioned rendering to much cruder appearance.

This diversity makes it likely that there were different production centers specialized in the manufacture of specific types of statues and working for specific clients. Nevertheless, even in the presence of differences in style, one should not conclude too hastily that these are necessarily traceable to distinct groups of sculptors.

The sculptor's "hand" / individuality

Before diving into the concept of "workshop", it must be kept in mind that differences of appearance within a group of statues may be simply due to the individual "hand" of the sculptor(s) who made them. Such individual and most probably unintentional discrepancies appear for example in the three heads of Osirian statues from Medamud, most likely portraying the first king of the 13th dynasty, Amenemhat-Sobekhotep.² Although all three heads follow the same model and show the same individualizing features (features that identify the official portrait of a specific sovereign: in the present case, a prominent square chin, a large smiling mouth, gigantic ears and a vertical furrow between the eyebrows), strong differences are manifest in their rendering. Since the heads are of the same dimensions, are made of the same variety of limestone and clearly belonged to the same architectural structure, it can be assumed that they were produced contemporaneously by sculptors working in the same place. However, the sculptor who produced the Louvre head has proven more capable of rendering the flesh naturalistically, whereas the Beni Suef head shows unnaturally large eyes with sinuous and sharp eyelids, and a rigid mannerist smile. These differences need not be intentional; they are probably simply due to the unconscious individuality of the people who sculpted the statues.

The series of statues of Senwosret III, from Deir el-Bahari (London BM EA 684, 685, 686 and Cairo TR 18/4/22/4), as well as that from Medamud (Suez JE 66569,

1 Around 340 royal and 1150 private statues, according to the results of the research I carried out for my PhD dissertation, defended in 2014 at the Université libre de Bruxelles, under the direction of Pr. Laurent Bavy.

2 Paris Louvre E 12924, Cairo Egyptian Museum JE 54857 and JE 58926 (now in the Beni Suef Museum). For photographs and further details concerning their attribution, I refer to my article in the proceedings of the MeKeTre conference 2013 (Connor 2016, 1-3; 12, fig. 1-3).



Figure 1: statues of Senwosret III from Medamud: (a) Suez JE 66569, (b) Paris E 12962, (c) Paris E 12961, (d) Cairo CG 486.

Paris E 12962, Paris E 12961, Cairo CG 486, *cf.* pl. 1), illustrate a similar variation within homogeneous groups. Here as well, differences in physiognomy and quality between the preserved faces can be observed, and the discrepancies do not seem to be intentional. What was important was that the king be recognizable, and he certainly is, for all the elements of his very peculiar features are present. The observed differences in proportions and rendering are due first and foremost to the difficulty of reproducing the exact same thing in a hard stone such as granodiorite, from blocks which perhaps were not totally equal in size and homogeneity, and probably also to differences in skill between individual sculptors. The chin may be more or less pointed, the furrows more or less accentuated, or more or less naturalistic; in all cases, however, the king is immediately recognizable, and this was probably a sufficient requirement.

As is often the case in archaeology and in Egyptology, we must accept our ignorance concerning the number of people involved in the realization of a group of statues. Was there one sculptor or group of sculptors for each? Or were the same sculptors working

on all the statues, with some of them specialized in specific phases (shaping, engraving, polishing, ...)? It is hard to know. However, the differences in quality and refinement between one piece and another in the same series suggest that there were significant differences in ability and experience between one sculptor and another.

Despite the presence of individualities within a group of sculptors, it is possible to highlight different productions, usually specializing in some materials and intended for specific clients, as will be shown in the following pages.

Different productions: for the court of for the lower elites

When dealing with a very large corpus of statues from a single period, stylistic ensembles can be highlighted. Both royal and non-royal repertoires must be included here because studying them separately would deprive us of enlightening comparisons. In the Late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period corpus, statues can be organized quite clearly in basically two categories: on the one hand, court sculpture for the king and his entourage, and, on the other hand, a more modest production for the lower and intermediary levels of the elite.

When inscribed, statues of larger format worked in hard stones (granodiorite, granite, quartzite, indurated limestone) bear the titles of high officials or individuals with high-ranking titles linking them to the king. These statues show the same quality and often the same physiognomy as the king's, and are often also sculpted in the same materials (although pink granite remains almost exclusively used for the king's statues) and for the same architectural contexts, namely temples. The similarity of stylistic features between royal statues and those of these upper officials often allows dating the latter quite accurately. The development of the royal and private upper-class production seems very homogeneous, to such an extent that it seems reasonable to propose that they were produced by the same groups of sculptors, or by sculptors trained in the same institutions. Among many examples, the statue of the governor of Elephantine Heqaib II (Habachi 1985, 48, pl. 50-57, cat. 17) may be cited. This extremely refined piece, with finely carved details and harmonious proportions, displays the facial features of the official's king Senwosret III; if only the face had been preserved, without the non-royal wig and the body (with rolls of fat), the statue could easily have been attributed to the king himself. The eyes display the same almond-shaped and sinuous movement, with sharp canthi; the sinuous lips show the exact same chiselling; the furrows under the eyes and the cheeks have the same naturalistic rendering; even the eyebrows have the very unusual "ear of wheat" pattern incised on the surface of the statue that is also found on the Karnak granite colossi of Senwosret III (Cairo CG 42011, 42012, and Luxor Museum J. 34).

Similar close comparisons can be drawn between royal statues and representations of other coeval high officials. Examples are given on plate 2 (early 13th dynasty) and 3 (third quarter of the 13th dynasty).

These examples demonstrate a coherent and persistent connection with the royal production, illustrating what I would call the "court style". It is important to notice that no regional style emerges in this category. Close stylistic similarities can thus be observable between statues from different regions of Egypt (see for example the statue of Heqaib II from Elephantine and the colossi of Senwosret III from Karnak),

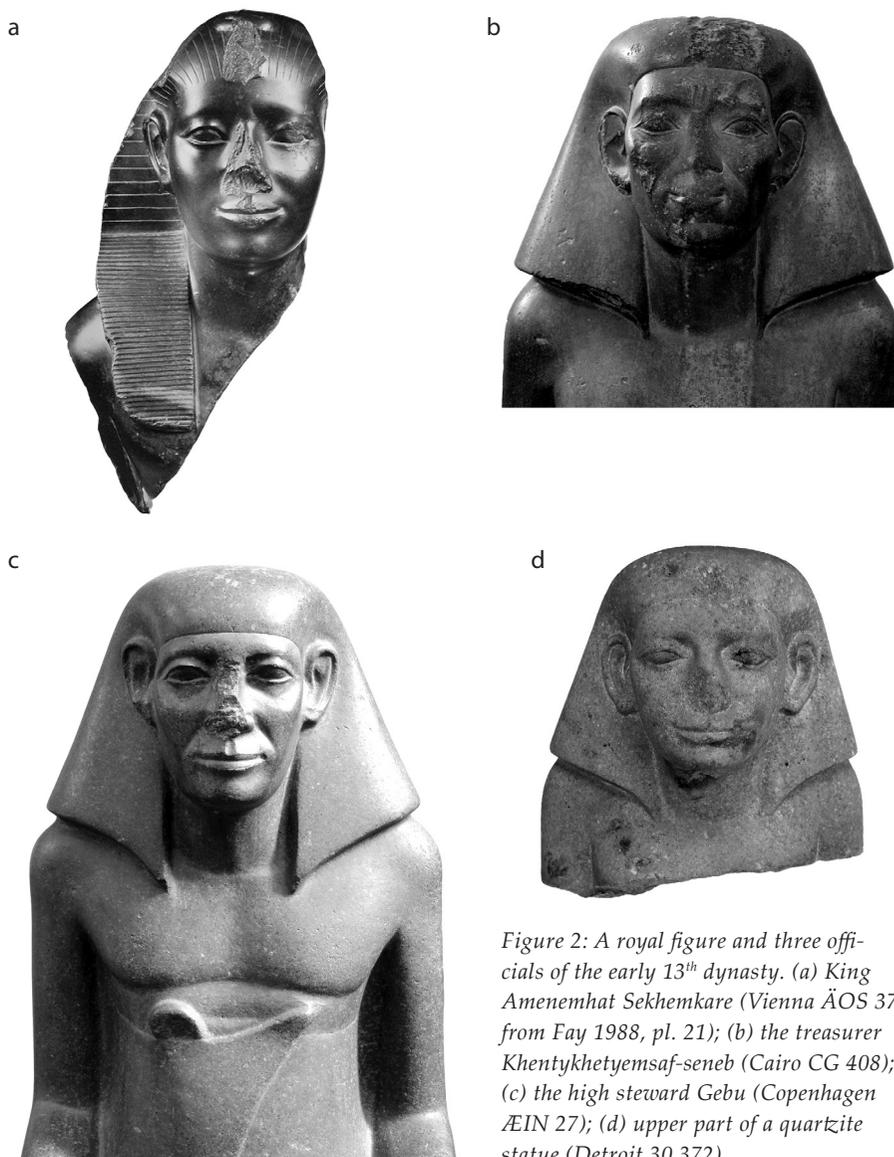


Figure 2: A royal figure and three officials of the early 13th dynasty. (a) King Amenemhat Sekhemkare (Vienna ÄOS 37, from Fay 1988, pl. 21); (b) the treasurer Khentykhetysaf-seneb (Cairo CG 408); (c) the high steward Gebu (Copenhagen ÆIN 27); (d) upper part of a quartzite statue (Detroit 30.372).

while statues of apparently different style but contemporary production appear at the same site (e.g., Lisht, Abydos and Elephantine, where statues of extremely diverse quality have been found, depending on the material used and the social position of the individual represented).

Besides this “court production”, another large corpus includes smaller sculptures, worked mainly in softer stones (limestone, steatite, serpentinite), usually of cruder execution, and bearing names and titles of lower officials or people of more modest social categories – although still within the elite. The vast majority of these statuettes, now in museums or private collections, come from the art market; the few for which

primary archaeological contexts are known derive from cemeteries,³ cenotaphs, private chapels associated with a cult place, or small provincial temples.⁴

These statuettes are often difficult to date precisely due to the usual lack of an archaeological context and because they display stylistic features that are distant from those of royal contemporary sculpture. In some cases, especially for the Second Intermediate Period (c. 1750-1550 BC), some groups can be tentatively traced to specific sites; they possibly represent productions made for local elites who would acquire them for their funerary chapels. Such a group of statues is attested at Abydos, and was probably produced in a local workshop active during the Second Intermediate Period (Marée 2010). Based on a series of epigraphic peculiarities, as well as iconographic or stylistic features such as the unusual way of carving the kilt, the helmet-like curled wig, and the squared shoulders and narrow torso, Marée was able to distinguish a group of statuettes, as well as a whole series of stelae, probably coming from the same atelier.

Another of these groups is also traceable to Abydos and stems from more or less the same period. It consists in standing statuettes of limestone, around 21-22 cm tall, very elongated, with shaved skulls, large hands, *shendjyt* kilts of unusual proportions, accentuated curves and a thick belt. Six of these pieces are without recorded provenance, but two are from Abydos; this may indicate that their place of production, and therefore that of the six unprovenanced specimens similarly, was indeed in that area.

A stylistic variation on this iconography, with a thicker appearance, can be found in a group of limestone statuettes that can probably be situated in the Theban region, given that three of the four pieces come from the necropolis of Dra Abu el-Naga. All four statuettes show strong pectoral muscles placed high on the torso and underlined by a distinct undulating line, thick legs and a sharp line indicating the tibia, and the heavily curved pleated kilt and large hands observed with the Abydos group.

Another of these groups can perhaps be identified in the necropolis of Hu, with stylistic peculiarities such as a very narrow torso and waist contrasting with the wide pelvis, the rounded hips, and the hands, which are even larger than in the figures of the groups from Abydos.

These stylistic groups are of course associated with a site on the basis of just a few pieces with known provenances. This is hardly enough to prove that there were permanent sculpture workshops in Hu or Abydos. Yet, there seems to be at least a case to be made for a local production at certain moments in time during the Second Intermediate Period (16th – 17th dynasties) based on the archaeological context of the few pieces found during excavations, compounded with a certain combination of

3 For example in the northern necropolis of Abydos (Brussels E. 4251, 4252; Cairo CG 461, 468, 476, 480, 481, 482, 483; Kendal 1993.245; Liverpool E. 610; Manchester 3997; Philadelphia E. 9208, 9216; Toronto ROM 905.2.79), in the 13th Dynasty cemetery in front of the pyramid of Amenemhat I in Lisht-North (New York 15.3.54, 15.3.91 (= Caracas R. 58.10.19), 15.3.108, 15.3.224-15.3.230, 15.3.280, 15.3.347-15.3.350, 15.3.575-15.3.592, 22.1.52, 22.1.53, 22.1.78, 22.1.107, 22.1.190-22.1.192, 22.1.199 (= Caracas R. 58.10.37), 22.1.735, 22.1.737), or in the cemeteries of the fortresses in Nubia (Boston 24.891, 24.892; Khartoum 13633, 14068, 14070; Leipzig 6153; Paris E 25576, 25579, 25618; Lille L. 626; Philadelphia E. 10751, E. 11168).

4 For example in the sanctuary of Heqaib in Elephantine (Habachi 1985; Franke 1994), or in the Old Kingdom mastabas and pyramid temples transformed into cult places in the Middle Kingdom (Verbovsek 2004, 477, 486, 498-499, 525-530) or in Abydos (Richards 2010, 157-161).



Figure 3: Two royal figures of the third quarter of the 13th dynasty: (a) Sobekhotep Khaneferre (Paris A 17); (b) Sobekhotep Khahetepre (Berlin ÄM 10645); and two officials: (c) the Elder of the Portal Horaa (Richmond 63-29, contemporary to Sobekhotep Khaneferre, cf. De Meulenaere 1971) and (d) the life-size head of a vizier (Chicago AI 1920.261, recognizable by the shenpu-collar).

iconographic features (both arms stretched out along the body,⁵ the *shendjyt*-kilt, the shaven head or short rounded curly wig) and stylistic ones (the curved pleats of the kilt, the thick belt, the elongated torso, the graphic treatment of the muscles and the tibias). All these groups are datable to the Second Intermediate Period and thus belong to a time of political fragmentation that probably induced a regionalization of sculptural production (which is also much scarcer than during the Late Middle Kingdom).

5 During the Late Middle Kingdom, standing male statues generally show both arms raised in front of them, with the hands flat on the front of the kilt, while women and children have both arms stretched out along their body, with their hands on their hips. However, in the Second Intermediate Period, the latter position becomes the usual one for adult male sculptures too.

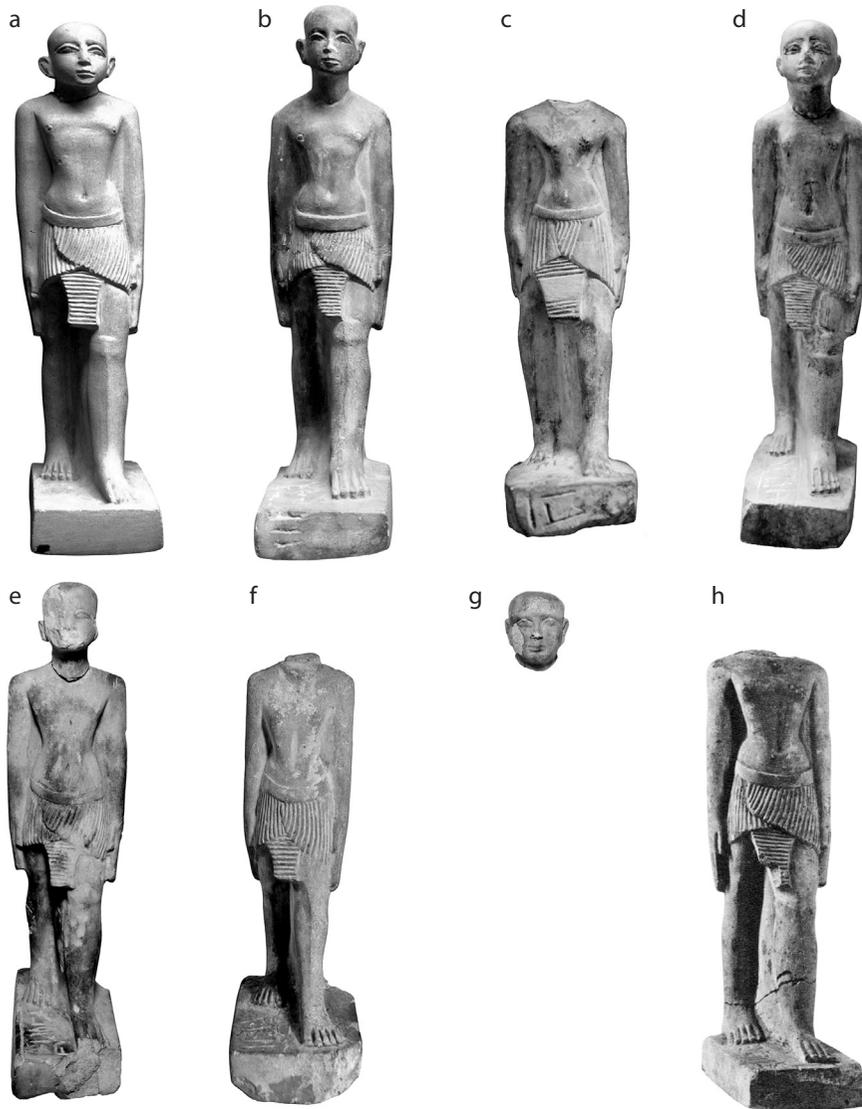


Figure 4: An "Abydos group": (a) Paris E. 18796bis; (b) Paris E. 5358; (c) Paris N 1587; (d) Cairo CG 465; (e) London UC 14619; (f) Philadelphia E. 9958; (g) London UC 8808; (h) Cairo CG 1248 (from Borchardt 1934, pl. 173).

Museum, inv. Nb.	Represented character	Title	Height	Estimated orig. height	Provenance
Cairo CG 465	Weseranuqet	Great of the Ten of Upper Egypt (<i>wr mḏw šmꜣw</i>)	21.5 cm	21.5 cm	Abydos, Kom es-Sultan
Cairo CG 1248	Montunakht	Guardian of the table of the ruler (<i>stw t hks</i>)	22 cm	26.5 cm	Unknown
London UC 8808	Anonymous (only head preserved)	/	3 cm	18 cm	Unknown
London UC 14619	Renefres	<i>wꜣ</i> -priest	20.8 cm	20.8 cm	Unknown
Paris E 18796bis	Siti	Not indicated	21.9 cm	21.9 cm	Unknown
Paris E 5358	Ibia	<i>szb</i>	23.4 cm	23.4 cm	Unknown
Paris N 1587	Sobekhotep	Mouth of Nekhen (<i>szb r Nḫm</i>)	18.7 cm	22 cm	Unknown
Philadelphia E. 9958	Yebi	<i>szb</i>	18.7 cm	21 cm	Abydos, necropolis of el-Amra



Figure 5: The “Dra Abu el-Naga group”: (a) Cairo CG 256; (b) Philadelphia E. 12624; (c) Cairo JE 33481 (photo courtesy Egyptian Museum); (d) Philadelphia E. 29-87-478. The “Hu group”: (e) Baltimore 22.391; (f) Boston 99.744; (g) Chicago OIM 5521 (photo courtesy Oriental Institute); (h) [Hu 1898] (from Petrie and Mace 1901, pl. 26).

Cairo CG 256	Tetikhered	Elder of the portal (<i>smsw hꜣꜣyt</i>)	17 cm	20.5 cm	Dra Abu el-Naga
Cairo JE 33481	Renseneb	<i>sꜣb</i>	21 cm	25 cm	Dra Abu el-Naga
Philadelphia E. 12624	Khonsu	<i>sꜣb</i>	27 cm	31,5 cm	Unknown
Philadelphia E. 29-87-478	Djehuty	Scribe (<i>sꜣ</i>)	19 cm	23 cm	Dra Abu el-Naga
[Hu 1898]*	[...]	[...]			Hu
Chicago OIM 5521	Ity	<i>sꜣb</i>	9.4 cm cm	Hu
Baltimore 22.391	Mar (?)	<i>sꜣb</i>	19.7 cm	19.7 cm	Unknown
Boston 99.744	Taseket	/	20 cm	20 cm	Hu

* Petrie and Mace 1901, 52, pl. 26.



Figure 6: Steatite statuettes of the Late Middle Kingdom: Turin C. 3083; C. 3084 (the face is a modern restoration); S. 1225/1; S. 1226/1 (photo Dell'Aquila © Museo Egizio).

For the Late Middle Kingdom proper, by contrast, the evidence for provincial local workshops in the 12th and 13th dynasties remains meagre, being based on just a few specimens. There clearly is a wide production of statuettes for the members of the lower elite, very often made in steatite, in a style that differs from that of the upper elite statues worked in hard stone. Although groups can be highlighted, it is difficult to link these to specific sites in the country. Specimens found in Lisht, Haraga, Abydos, Thebes or in Nubia are very similar, and the similarities between pieces are perhaps due more to a chronological vicinity than to a common regional style.

Hard stones and soft stones are worked in very different ways. For the former, very hard tools must be used, usually hammers-chisels made of even harder rock (ideally dolerite). For the latter, copper tools can be used to extract blocks and sculpt them, and flint shards and sandstone pebbles are also effective shaping tools. It is of course possible for a single sculptor to excel in carving different stones, but the techniques and tools, and the amount of time required, are very different between hard and soft stones, suggesting that at least in some cases sculptors (or workshops) could develop a

specialization in specific materials.⁶ This would be born out by the quality of execution of the statues of the Late Middle Kingdom corpus: while quartzite and granite statues generally display great virtuosity in the rendering of proportions, forms, surface and details, figures in steatite form a homogeneous corpus of more standardized figures, carved with less accuracy (or less skill?), and hence give the impression that they were produced “in series”.

To summarize regarding the Late Middle Kingdom, although it remains difficult to connect productions to specific places, one is clearly dealing with two registers of sculpture: on the one hand, royal and upper-elite statuary, of larger formats, finer and more homogeneous in quality, usually carved in hard stones and installed in temples or other monumental structures; on the other hand, lower-elite statuary, of smaller formats, carved in softer stones, and mostly found in funerary chapels, cenotaphs, or local cult places. The style and quality of the latter type of statuary is very heterogeneous and far removed from those of the statuary of the king and high officials. These are accordingly two different levels of production, with two distinct clienteles.

Where: in the proximity of the quarries or of the construction site?

No workshop (in the sense of a structure housing a sculpture activity) has been found so far during the period of time the present essay is concerned with. While for the New Kingdom the atelier of Thutmose in Amarna is well known, similar archaeological evidence is still lacking for the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period. Textual sources, however, provide some information and attest to the existence of sculptors connected with the court of Itj-tawy:

- Stela Cairo CG 20514, from Abydos (Simpson 1963, 55, B; Quirke 2009, 117). Year 1 of Senwosret I. A lector-priest named Nakht is mentioned, who bears the title of draughtman (*sš ḳdwt*), while his father is director of the goldsmiths (*imy-r mdw*).
- Inscriptions from the sanctuary of Heqaib in Elephantine (Habachi 1985, 38; Franke 1994, 106-107; Quirke 2009, 117-118). Reign of Senwosret I. According to these inscriptions, the nomarch Sarenput I received “hundreds of persons from Lower Egypt” (*šnw nt tpw m mḥw*) from the king to build his tomb and manufacture his grave goods. Sarenput is probably referring to artisans sent from the king’s Residence to cut and decorate his tomb and produce various objects for his grave.
- Stela Los Angeles, Country Museum A. 5141.50-876, probably from Abydos (Simpson 1963, 53, C; Faulkner 1952; Quirke 2009, 117-118). Reign of

6 The case of the villa of the sculptor Thutmose in Tell el-Amarna, comprising the only physical remains of a permanent workshop found so far, is revealing in this regard. In the area of the studio, the fragments of hard and of soft stones were found in separate locations (Phillips 1991). It would appear therefore that, although working in the same space and for the same master, different people were sculpting soft and hard stones. Concerning the Late Middle Kingdom, J. Wegner found possible evidence of a quartzite workshop in an area close to the town of Wah-Sut, founded by Senwosret III (Wegner 2007, 296) – unless the chips of stone found there are actually vestiges of architectural blocks or statues that were cut into pieces at some point of history in order to be reused as construction material.

Senwosret I. Shenseti, director of sculptors (*imy-r3 gnwtyw*), says that he was sent to Abydos, where he built his tomb (perhaps meaning by that one of the cenotaphs on the Terrace of the Great God?): “I acted as a sculptor in Amenemhat-Itjtawy (...) and I came to this temple to work for His Majesty, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Kheperkare, beloved of Khentimentiu, Lord of Abydos (...)”.

- Stela London, British Museum EA 101, probably from Abydos (PM V, 96; Blackman 1935; Franke 1994, 108; Quirke 1996, 674). Reign of Amenemhat III. According to the inscription, on the occasion of the *Sed* festival of his king, Nebipu-Senwosret, acting as a “Chief of the Ten of Upper Egypt” and “priest of Dua-wer”, went to the Residence with the priesthood of the temple of Abydos; the stela was presumably brought back from the Residence to Abydos under the supervision of the elder lector-priest Ibi.
- Stela New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 35.7.55, from Hierakonpolis, tomb of Horemkhawef (Hayes 1947; Franke 1994, 108). 13th dynasty. The “head and high priest of Hierakonpolis and superior of the fields” (*shd hm-ntr tpj hr nhn imy-r 3hwt*) Horemkhawef says that he went to the Residence (*hnw*) by command of the god Horus-who-avenged-his-father in order to bring back Horus of Nekhen and his mother the justified Isis (*i.e.* cult statue of these two deities) (*hrw-nd-it.f (...) r hnw r jn.t hr nhn hnc mwt.f 3st m3c-hrw*). This could mean that, in order to provide the temple of Hierakonpolis with a new cult statue of the local gods, the official went to Itj-tawy, where an atelier for the production place for cult statues, probably of metal or gilt wood, presumably stood.

These texts suggest that there were craftsmen attached to the royal Residence of Itj-tawy, from where they could travel, depending on construction projects, or to whom provincial officials could turn to in order to obtain a statue. This does not rule out the possibility that provincial workshops actually existed, but it does seem that those of the Residence enjoyed special prestige, especially for their metal works, as these inscriptions suggest.

Additional clues are provided by stylistic analysis. For the early Middle Kingdom, and the reigns of Mentuhotep II and III specifically, R. Freed has highlighted stylistic connections between the reliefs of Elephantine and those of other temples erected by these kings, notably in Tod, and proposed explaining these similarities by the existence of “travelling sculptors” (Freed 1984, 146, 150, 185).

The material analyzed in the current study suggests a similar situation, as pointed out above, for example in the case of the striking similarity of the granodiorite statue of governor Heqaib II (found in the sanctuary of Heqaib at Elephantine) to the granite standing statues of Senwosret III found in Karnak. The stylistic homogeneity of the upper-class style during a single reign speaks in favour of a quite homogeneous production. What these pieces have in common is not their fin-dspot, but the fact that they are all carved for the highest members of the court, in large formats, and mostly in hard stones.

Some coherent groups of statues found in different sites of Egypt attest large-scale projects involving either different workshops or a single atelier for various destina-

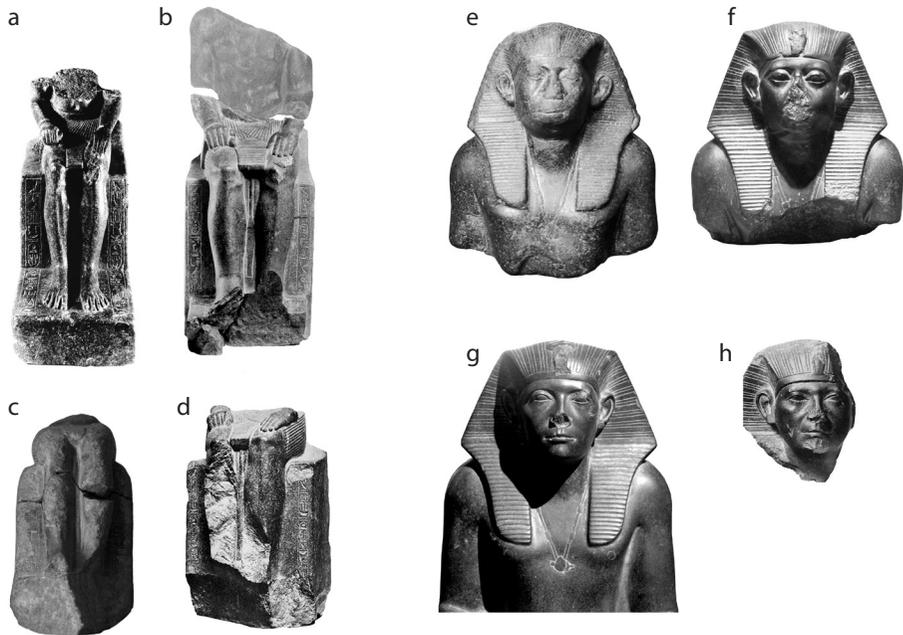


Figure 7: (a) Karnak-Nord (from Jacquet 1971, pl. 41); (b) Elephantine + Boulogne E 33099 (from Delange 2012, pl. 225); (c) London UC 14635; (d) Cairo CG 422 (from Borhardt 1925, pl. 68); (e) Vienna ÄOS 6; (f) Detroit 31.68; (g) Brooklyn 52.1; (h) Lucerne A 96 (from Spanel 1988, 64).

Museum/coll., inv. Nb.	Height	Estimated orig. height	Provenance	Estimated origin	Dedication to a deity
Brooklyn 52.1	54.5 cm	54.5 cm	Unknown	Hierakonpolis	Horus of Nekhen
Cairo CG 422	30 cm	55-60 cm	"Kom el-Ahmar" (bought in 1888)	Gebelein, Hathor temple	Hathor, mistress of Inerty
Detroit 31.68	16.5 cm	50 cm	Unknown	/	/
Elephantine (Habachi 1985, Nb. 102) + Boulogne E 33099	33 + 16.5 cm	60 cm	Elephantine, sanctuary of Heqaib	Elephantine, sanctuary of Heqaib	Satet, mistress of Abu
Karnak-North	33.5 cm	53 cm	Karnak-North	Esna?	Sobek, lord of Senet
London UC 14635	31 cm	54 cm	Unknown		Horus and Seth
Lucerne, coll. Kofler A 96	11.8 cm	55 cm	Unknown	/	/
Vienna ÄOS 6	22.5 cm	55 cm	Unknown	/	/

tions. A noticeable example is a group of statues of Senwosret III, of which, according to their findspot or their inscription, specimens were apparently produced together and planned for different sites. This group, noticed by B. Fay (Fay 1996, 34, n. 160), reunites seated statues of the sovereign of a very fine variety of granodiorite. All are of approximately the same dimensions and depict the king with a softened version of his characteristic expressive features. All represent Senwosret with the *shendjyt* kilt and the bull tail, the talisman pendant necklace on his chest, and a bracelet on the proper right wrist. The king always wears the *nemes*, except on the Elephantine-Boulogne piece, where he has the *khat* headdress. Each statue is dedicated to a deity linked to a specific cult place. The king apparently ordered a whole ensemble of stat-

ues destined to different temples through the country, perhaps at the occasion of his coronation as was suggested by Fay. Their consistency in iconography, material and dimensions leads to identifying a coherent group, produced on the same occasion for different destinations. Some differences of quality within this group should be noted nonetheless, suggesting that different sculptors, of various level of expertise, worked for the same project. If the statues of Brooklyn, Cairo and Elephantine-Boulogne demonstrate a great care in the polishing, the rendering of the proportions and musculature, and the incision of the inscription, the treatment of the Vienna and London statues, as well as that of the fragment from Karnak-North, is considerably rougher, despite the iconographic coherence and the obvious intention of following the same guidelines. It is therefore most likely that different sculptors participated in the same project. However, were they all working in the same atelier (some being “masters” and some “apprentices”?) and were all the statues then sent to the different sanctuaries? Or should one rather consider a common model sent to various ateliers, of different level, through the country for local cult places?

This leads us to wonder where statues were produced: in the quarries? in the royal Residence workshops, with blocks coming from different quarries and regions of Egypt? or directly at the site of destination? Were sculptors always itinerant? Did they travel from one site to the other according to the needs of building or decorating projects, or did they work in or near the quarries, to be closer to their source of raw material? (Which, incidentally, would explain the stylistic proximity between statues clearly intended for architectural contexts that were geographically far apart.)

Probably no definitive answer can be given, and all these scenarios may actually have occurred at one time or another. In stone quarries in Egypt and Sudan one finds abandoned pieces, either unfinished or broken. None of them, however, can so far be dated certainly to the Middle Kingdom. This may mean that in some periods at least some pieces -at least the heavier ones- were produced, completely or partially, at the quarry.

In stone quarries close to the Nile this would certainly have been a viable option, since the more or less finished piece would have been relatively easy to transport from there by boat. Regarding stones that were available only far away from the Nile Valley, like graywacke, serpentine, steatite or alabaster, the place of production or at least of the finishing of sculptures would conceivably have been rather in a more liveable place than the middle of the desert. Giving the statue its rough shape before transportation would have allowed a reduction of its weight, especially in the case of colossi, and thereby have facilitated its transportation on the long route towards the Nile; yet, it would also have made the block more fragile, increasing the risk of breakage before reaching destination.

It is therefore possible that in many cases blocks were first roughly shaped at the quarry (or in its proximity) but properly sculpted and finished only in the vicinity of their final destination.

In the case of important centers where many Middle Kingdom statues and statuettes have been found, like Abydos, Lisht-North or Haraga, one is tempted to assume that they housed a local workshop producing these sculptures for the local elite (or for the people coming there to build a cenotaph); so far, this remains an hypothesis only, since no regional style can presently be identified in the centuries preceding the Second Intermediate Period.

How: in series or to order?

In the case of the upper levels of society, statuary seems therefore to be the product of specialized sculptors linked to the court, although it remains difficult to know whether these artisans were systematically itinerant or whether statues were transported from their place of production to their site of destination. Concerning the statues of the lower levels of the elite, it seems on the other hand that more or less local productions are conceivable, perhaps linked to some important urban or religious centers.

The next question is whether statues were made to order for specific purposes, or whether they were at least partly produced in series, to be acquired by anyone who could afford one? Probably both are true. In the case of statues of special shapes, with unusual positions or attributes, one is most likely dealing with works created for specific purposes, commissioned by the king or high officials to fit in a definite architectural or decorative context. However, clear cases of individualization are not so common.

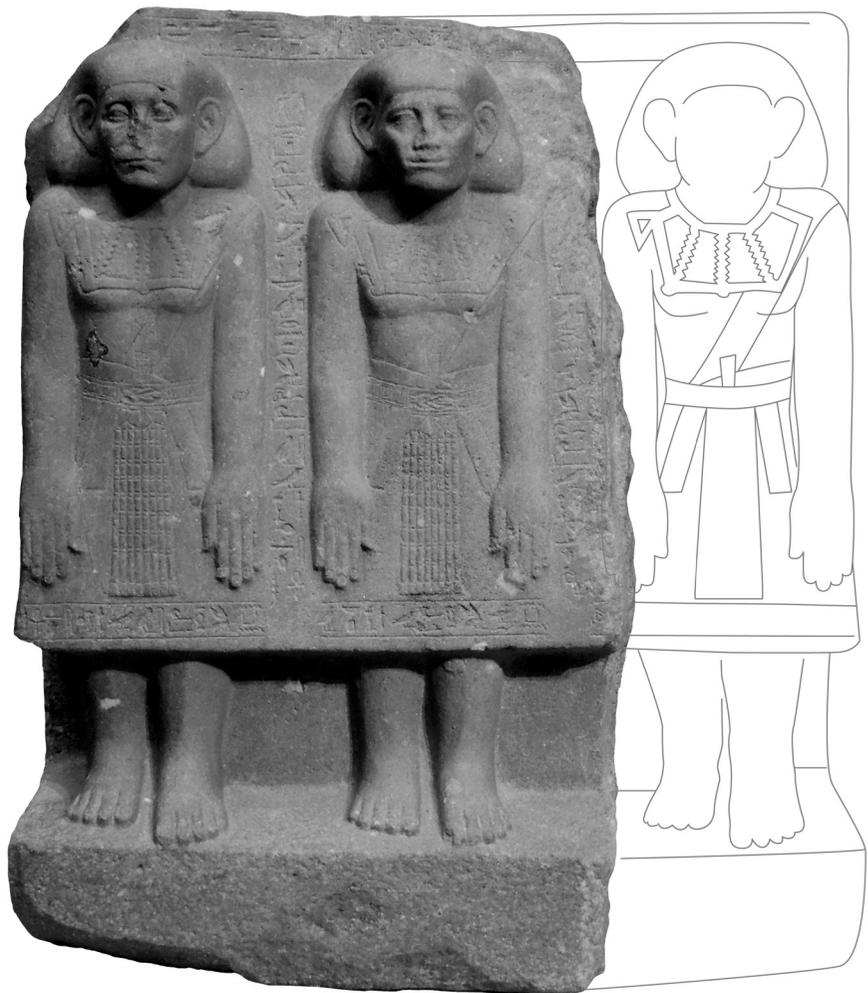
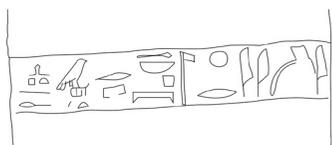
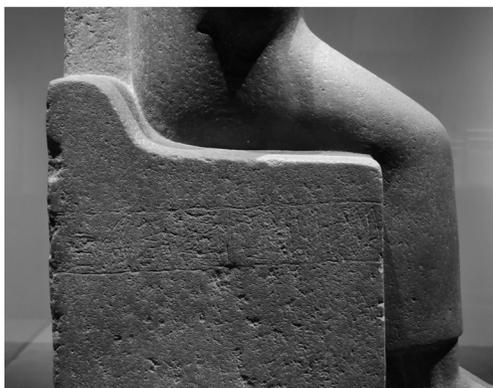


Figure 8: Triad of the high priests of Ptah Nebpu, Sehetepibre-ankh-nedjem and Sehetepibre-khered (Paris A 47).

a



b



c



Figure 9: (a) detail of the proper right side of the seat of Nemtyhotep (Berlin ÄM 15700); (b) steatite statuette of the director of the temple Senwosret (Cairo CG 481); (c) triad of the guardian Wadjnefer (Stockholm 1993:3, from George 1994).

In the Late Middle Kingdom, indeed, only the vizier (with the *shenpu*-collar) and the high priests of Ptah (with a peculiar apron, *cf.* Maystre 1992) display attributes which indicate their specific functions.

However, in some cases at least, there are arguments that speak to a production in series of statues,⁷ even for the upper elite repertoire. A telling example is the statue of the steward Nemtyhotep (Berlin ÄM 15700, *cf.* Oppenheim 2015, 128-130, cat. 63; Connor 2015), a rather large sculpture made of quartzite – a hard stone almost exclusively used for the upper levels of the elite – sculpted with great care and showing close

⁷ A similar situation appears in the Old Kingdom repertoire (*cf.* discussion in Vymazalová and Pieke 2017).

stylistic similarities to, and a quality comparable with, the corpus of Amenemhat III. The time and skills required for such a piece is considerable, probably several dozens or even hundreds of hours. However, absolutely nothing in the appearance of the official would allow us to identify his function or his person. The face is that of the reigning king and no distinctive attributes of his role appear, so that this could be any non-royal person. The statue is almost finished, except perhaps only for a last fine polishing, yet it does not bear the usual inscription on the front of the seat on either side of the legs, or on the mantle. The only visible inscription, roughly incised on the proper right side of the seat (in an unusual position), is the basic dedicatory formula with the title and name of the recipient of the statue (*imꜣhy hr nꜥr ʿꜣ nb pt imy-rꜣ pr nmty-ḥtp*). The lines of hieroglyphs are roughly carved and deviate markedly from the horizontal. They seem to have been quickly and improvisedly incised, not as the definitive inscription but only as a memorandum, probably to be replaced by a definitive inscription which, however, was never executed. I would see this as a kind of labelling of the statue, once it was made and ready to be chosen from a stock in the royal workshops, which would explain its high quality, the prestige of the stone, and the similarity of the sculpture to contemporary royal “portraits”. It was at some point chosen to be acquired by the steward Nemtyhotep, but it would have been fit for any other high official of his time.

Another example of an apparently quickly and carelessly incised inscription is the steatite statuette of the director of the temple Senwosret (Cairo CG 481), which bears a roughly carved inscription on the torso, in this case as well in a very unusual position.

As a last example, the small steatite triad of the guardian Wadjnefer (Stockholm, Medelhavsmuseet 1993:3, *cf.* George 1994) may be cited. The inscription, crudely incised on the back panel and, due to lack of space, continuing in one column along the front, identifies a man, his mother and his wife. However, the sculpture represents two men and a female! It would seem that the statuette was acquired as a “ready-made” product, even though the figures did not fully match the sex of the recipients, since the inscription would be sufficient anyway to identify them.

Preliminary conclusions

In the **Second Intermediate Period** (16th – 17th dynasties), it seems that one is dealing with several local productions of statuettes for local funerary chapels (those whose archaeological context is known all come from cemeteries). At least in Abydos, Thebes, and probably also in Hu, it seems that pieces have come survived in sufficient numbers to suggest the existence of local productions. At the same time, it must be born in mind that the royal repertoire is considerably reduced compared to the Late Middle Kingdom.

Concerning the previous period, the **Late Middle Kingdom** (second half 12th – 13th dynasties), two main levels of production are identifiable. On the one hand, there is a court production of statues for the upper elite, in hard stone, usually in larger formats, and often intended for temples. Both royal and non-royal statues are in the same official style and share the same quality and features. On the other hand, there is a vast production of smaller statues, often of less refined quality (including some very crude

pieces), intended for the members of the lower elite, as their inscriptions bear out, and usually deriving from cemeteries.

For the upper elite statuary, there is no evidence of regional styles, since statues with different provenances show consistent features. These statues seem to have been produced either in the same workshop or by itinerant sculptors trained in the same place. Regarding the lower elite statuettes, usually of limestone or steatite, local productions seem to be linked to regional sites, according to the evidence found in cemeteries. Everything is done in order to make them look like the statues of the upper officials: same colours, types, positions, garments and attributes; however, they differ in dimensions, stone and quality.

Getting back to the definition of sculpture “workshop”, I would propose a definition based on the evidence provided by the Late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period corpus. A “workshop” can, but need not necessarily, correspond to an actual permanent working site, a studio. The term is in all likelihood better defined as identifying a “group of craftsmen/artists producing works in a common and coherent style”, possibly itinerant, at least in some situations. “Workshops” are identified by recurrent stylistic specificities which allow us to single out distinctive groups within the corpus of the same period. Pieces with such homogeneous stylistic particularities may have in common their place of extraction or production, the nature and hardness of their material, but more than anything else the people who commissioned them.

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THE ARTS OF MAKING IN ANCIENT EGYPT

This book provides an innovative analysis of the conditions of ancient Egyptian craftsmanship in the light of the archaeology of production, linguistic analysis, visual representation and ethnographic research.

During the past decades, the “imaginative” figure of ancient Egyptian material producers has moved from “workers” to “artisans” and, most recently, to “artists”. In a search for a fuller understanding of the pragmatics of material production in past societies, and moving away from a series of modern preconceptions, this volume aims to analyse the mechanisms of material production in Egypt during the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1550 BC), to approach the profile of ancient Egyptian craftsmen through their own words, images and artefacts, and to trace possible modes of circulation of ideas among craftsmen in material production.

The studies in the volume address the mechanisms of ancient production in Middle Bronze Age Egypt, the circulation of ideas among craftsmen, and the profiles of the people involved, based on the material traces, including depictions and writings, the ancient craftsmen themselves left and produced.



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