

# A Review of Copying Techniques in Greco-Roman Sculpture

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# ASMOSIA XI

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# A REVIEW OF COPYING TECHNIQUES IN GRECO-ROMAN SCULPTURE

S  verine Moureaud

Centre Camille Jullian, Aix-en-Provence, France (sevemoureaud@hotmail.com)

## Abstract

This paper deals with the different techniques of copying or reproduction used or probably used in Greco-Roman marble sculpture. It appears that these techniques changed during the course of time. It would be interesting to make an inventory of all possibilities, by taking a historical point, interpreting the analysis of traces on unfinished and on finished statues, placing these techniques in historical and geographical contexts. It will be also necessary to propose new hypotheses with the help of new methodological approaches.

What can we say about the reproduction of models or statues in marble during the Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic and Roman periods? This article first presents the use of modules (drawn or mathematical) during the Archaic period and the different clues to the use of reproduction during that time. Then, it considers the different hypotheses which were proposed for the Classical period and the clues visible on archaeological pieces will be considered. Experimental research of a copying technique observed at Delos and used in the Hellenistic period during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC will be presented. My experimental research at Delos shows the necessity for statuary production to be adapted to a new context of the consumption of statues. We also look at the Roman techniques, the clues and the hypotheses proposed. Consideration of the tools would also be interesting, but the focus here will be on the archaeological objects and their traces. For this purpose, I put store by a methodological analysis of material in the manner of scholars of prehistory. It would be also interesting to try to propose some way to progress on these questions: methodological and comparative analysis, ethno-archaeology, interdisciplinary collaborations.

## Keywords

copy, sculpture, technique

research can perhaps open new issues. I would like to propose methodological points concerning vocabulary, traces and copying techniques and to introduce some new recent research at the same time.

## Vocabulary

There exist many ways to reproduce a model. Three main ways could be proposed and we will see changes in each one of them. First, direct carving uses visual perception and drawing in the reproduction activity. Second, the copy uses only a few main points which are reported from the model to the copy. Third, an exact copy uses many different points which are reported from the model to the copy. Based on all the works of specialized researchers<sup>1</sup> I suggest the following summary of definition for each way/approach of copying:

Direct carving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Carving <i>de visu</i>, without models or just a mental idea tracing or drawing on the block or no.</li> <li>- Carving with a model, without reported points or simply outlining on the block (bi- or tridimensional model, reduced or not, in any kind of material)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>} Umbildung</li> <li>} "Approached idea"</li> </ul>

It seems interesting to focus on copying techniques during Antiquity. Since there are so few archaeological research works concerning copying, the subject requires new approaches and the progress of interdisciplinary

<sup>1</sup> ASHMOLE, YALOURIS 1967, 10; BAUDRY 2000; BL  MEL 1969, 48-61; JOCKEY 1993, 371-373; PALAGIA 2006; ROCKWELL 1993; an important historiography about technics of roman copies in TOUCHLETTE 2000, 351.



Fig. 1. Statues of Cleobis and Biton by Polymedes of Argos (Archaeological Museum, Delphi, Greece), view from behind (photo: Lauraki)

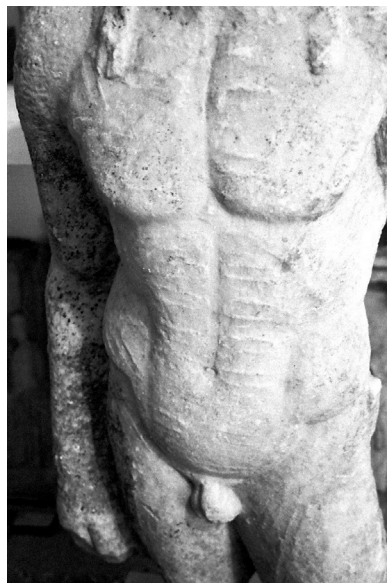


Fig. 4. Unfinished statue of a man in marble, Roman times (inv. 1664, National Museum, Athens, Greece), detail of traces on torso (photo: S. Moureaud)



Fig. 2. Unfinished statuettes from Kyme in marble, 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (461T and 462T, Archaeological Museum, Istanbul, Turkey) view of the right side (photo: S. Moureaud)



Fig. 5. Plaster cast of a hand, Roman (Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei, Napoli, Italia) (photo: Classical Art Research Centre, Oxford)



Fig. 3. A series of statuettes of Ganesh in soap skin (workshop in Mahabalipuram, India) (photo: S. Moureaud)

### Using techniques for reproduction...but what for?

The several goals behind the use of copies can be observed during Antiquity. First, it was a necessity to represent an ideal canon. Certainly that was the case in the Archaic period, to comply with some ideal proportions<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1). Then, a new *proplasma*, which means what is shaped before, could be created by masters and reproduced by some technicians or some other sculptors. Certainly that was the case of the Archaic *kouros* of Paros<sup>3</sup> and these uses were more evident again during Classical<sup>4</sup> and early Hellenistic times. Finally, during the late Hellenistic

2 PROST 2008.

3 See after and other paper in progress about this unfinished *kouros*.

4 About the use of copy at Olympia: ASHMOLE, YALOURIS 1967, 10; BLÜMEL 1969, 48-61; PALAGIA 2006, 264.



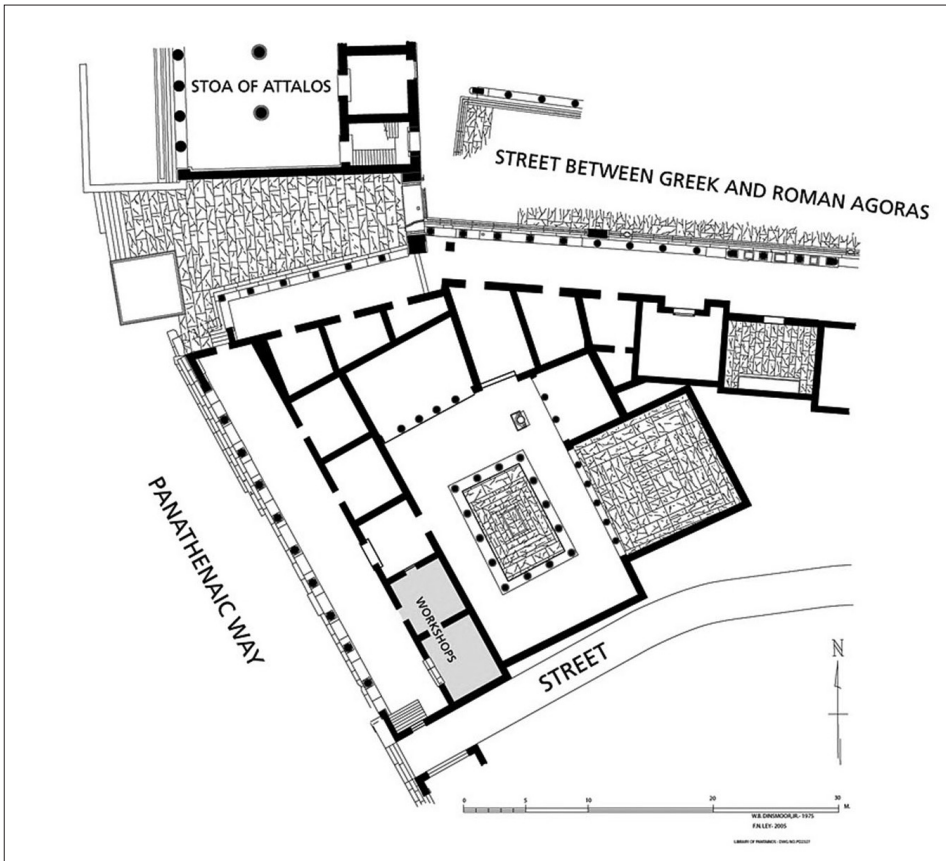


Fig. 6. Plan of the Library of Pantainos, with sculptor's workshop in two of its rooms, 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (Image: <http://agora.ascsa.net/id/agora/image/2009.05.0097>)

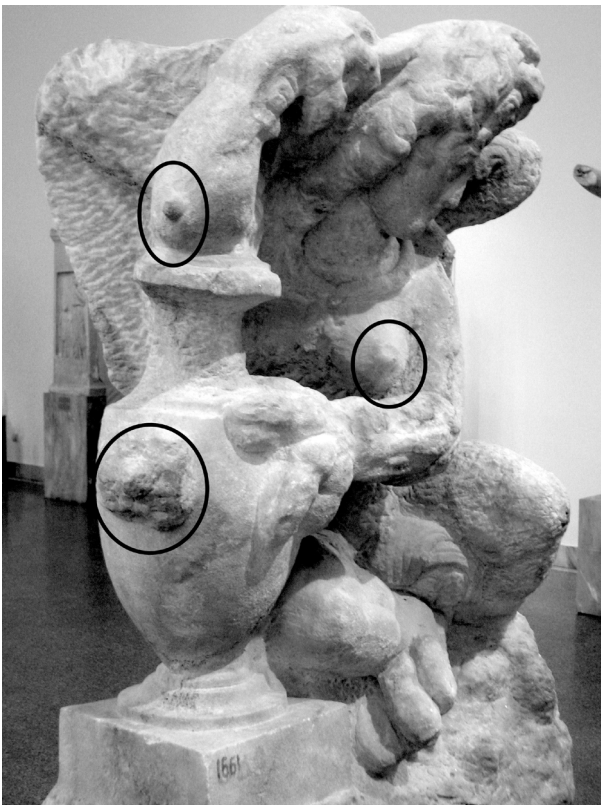


Fig. 7. Funerary Female Sphinx of Rheneia, 2<sup>nd</sup> BC, hump on protruding part (inv. 1661, National Museum, Athens, Greece), three-quarter view (photo: S. Moureaud)

and Roman periods, the production of statues for domestic use and for the imperial cult increased. In those circumstances, the copy was not only used to “create”, but to produce faster<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 2).

#### Archaeological artefacts and traces

What sorts of artefacts can be used to understand the copy in Antiquity? First, a series of statues can be compared to each other by visual observation and by taking measurements ( Fig. 3). Though rare, unfinished sculptures are direct witnesses of techniques with different traces of reproduction and even more rare are unfinished sculptures showing reproduction traces. Most are familiar like pieces from Athens, Fig. 4, from Delos or Rome. Some are less exceptional, from a stylistic point of view, but it is really interesting to deal with some new issues such as innovation centers and means of circulation. We are also interested in plaster models the best examples of which were discovered in the workshop of Baiae (Fig. 5)<sup>6</sup>. Finally, different workshops excavated have let

5 MOUREAUD 2015.

6 <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/CGPrograms/Cast/ASP/Cast.asp?CastNo=B217>. LANDWEHR 1982 and LANDWEHR 1985.

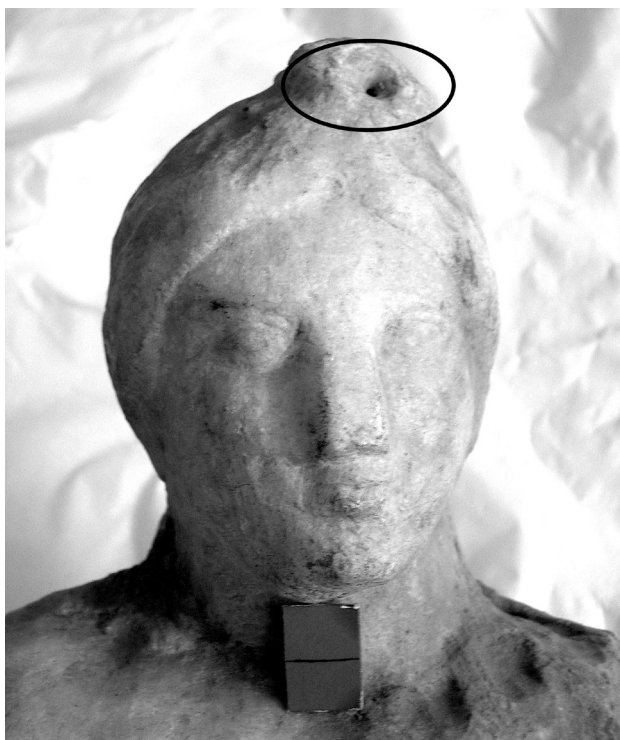


Fig. 8. Unfinished statue of Aphrodite, Hump with drill hole, probably from Rheneia, probably 2<sup>nd</sup> BC (inv. 3188, National Museum, Athens, Greece), detail of the face (photo: S. Moureaud)

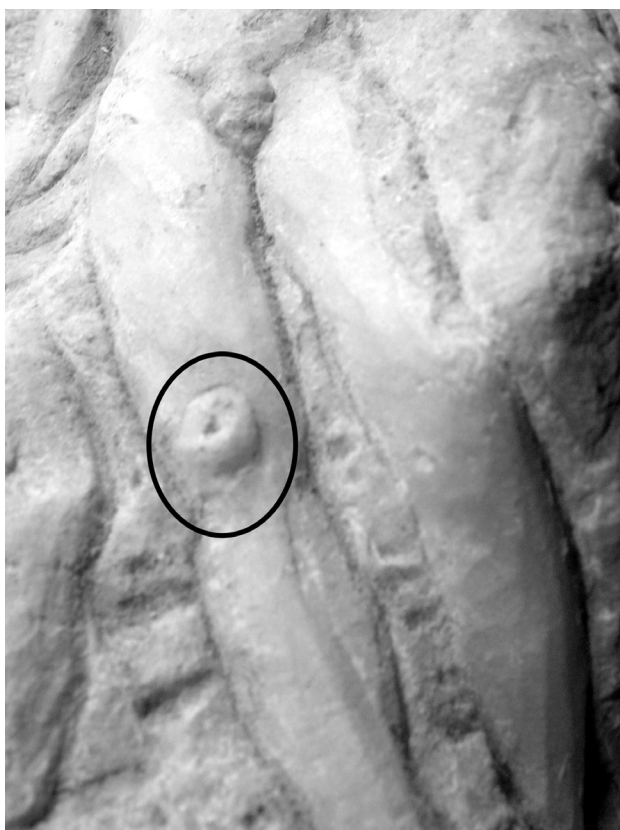


Fig. 9. Unfinished statuette of a young man, hump with hole, Agora of Athens, Roman period (inv. S 918, Agora Museum, Athens, Greece), detail of legs (photo: S. Moureaud)

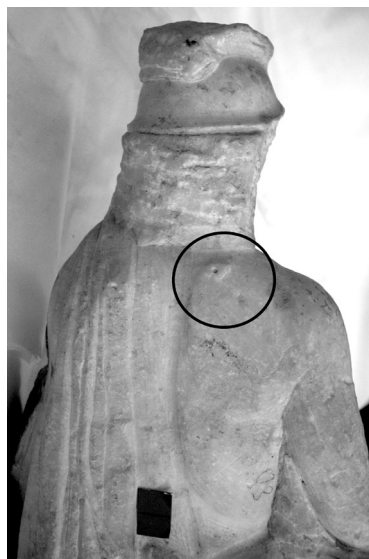


Fig. 10. Unfinished statuette of Hermes, Hump with hole, 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (inv. 2883, National Museum, Athens, Greece), detail of the back of the head (photo: S. Moureaud)

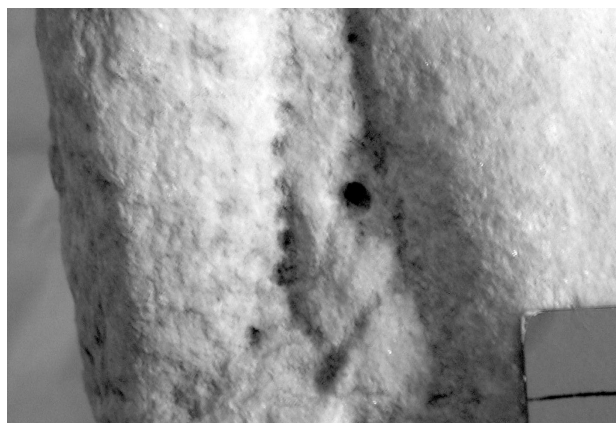


Fig. 11. Unfinished statuette of Dionysus and Satyr, simple hole (inv. 5662, National Museum, Athens, Greece), detail between legs of Dionysus (photo: S. Moureaud)

us understand the organization, as in Athens, Fig. 67, Paros, Delos, Aphrodisias and Pouzzoli from within.

**Traces of reproduction on unfinished statues could appear in many ways**

Different kinds of traces can be observed on unfinished statues. They can be prominent and look like little humps. Most often, the hump is located on a protruding part of the unfinished statue<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 7)<sup>9</sup>. Some other

7 <http://agora.ascsa.net/id/agora/image/2009.05.0097>.

8 A statuette of Aphrodite from Delos presents, Delos Museum, A 3825, Hellenistic times, found south gymnasium, GD 76. MARCADÉ 1996, 148, n° 64.

9 Funerary Female Sphinx of Rheneia, National museum, Athens, 1661, 2<sup>nd</sup> BC, PALAGIA 2006, 269, fig. 77, n. 6.



Fig. 12. Unfinished statuette from Kyme in marble, round diggings on the surface scraped by a round chisel, 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (461T, Archaeological Museum, Istanbul, Turkey), detail of the body (photo: S. Moureaud)

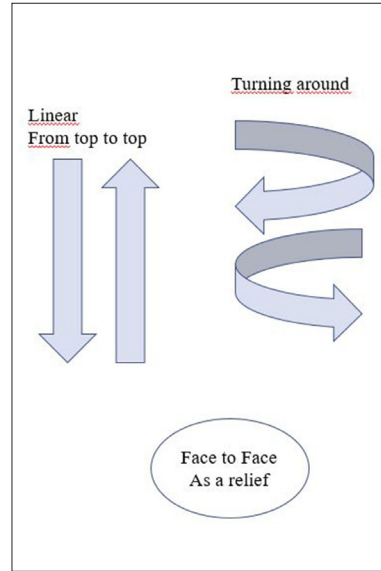


Fig. 15. Different progression of carving observed on unfinished statues



Fig. 13. Unfinished statue of a young man from Rheneia, surface gouged with a round chisel, Hellenistic period (inv. 1660, National Museum, Athens, Greece), detail of traces on the torso (photo: S. Moureaud)



Fig. 16. Unfinished kouros in Naxian marble, homogeneous progression, 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (inv. 14, National Museum, Athens, Greece), detail of the body (photo: S. Moureaud)

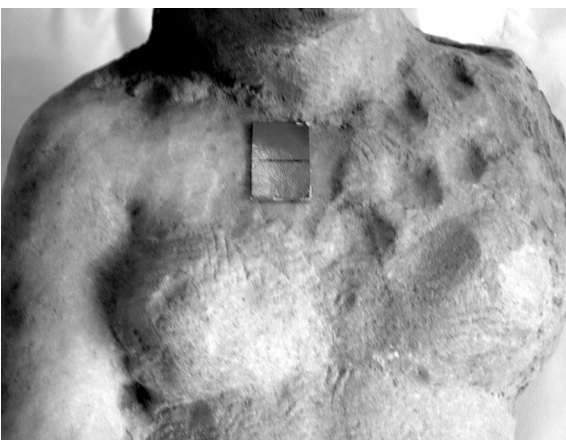


Fig. 14. Unfinished statue of Aphrodite, surface gouged with a round chisel, probably from Rheneia, probably 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (inv. 3188, National museum, Athens, Greece), detail torso (photo: S. Moureaud)



Fig. 17. Unfinished kouros of Paros, non-homogeneous progression, 530 BC (inv. 1377, Paros Museum, Greece), detail of the body (photo: S. Moureaud)



Fig. 18. Unfinished statue of a young man from Rhe-neia, progression from top to top, Hellenistic period (inv. 1660, National Museum, Athens, Greece), part of the body (photo: S. Moureaud)

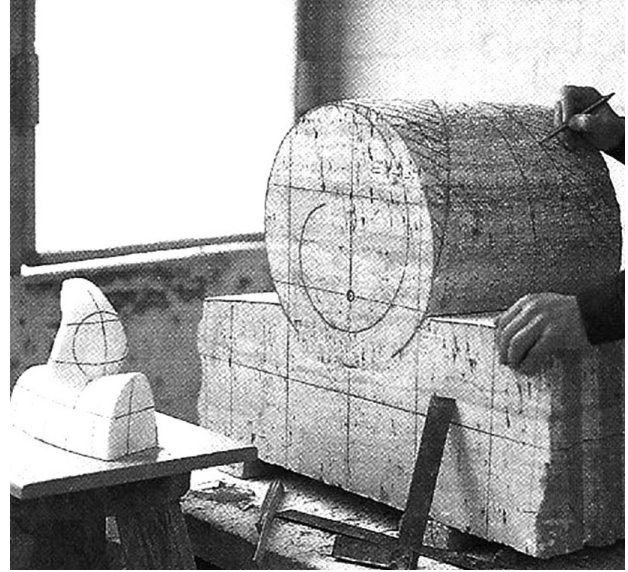


Fig. 20. Use of a cubit to reproduce a sculpture (photo: J. C. Santamera)



Fig. 19. Preliminary draft of a statuette of Osiris in limestone with a bitumen coating, Grid-pattern with 21 squares 1/4, Khenti Imentet, 664 -332 BC (inv. E 27140, Louvre Museum, Paris, France) (photo: BAUDRY 2000, fig. 73 p. 399)

types of humps can have a small drill hole<sup>10</sup> in the center in which to place the point of the calipers or to drive in a nail (Figs. 8, 9, 10). In that case, they are also called *puntelli*. Reproduction traces can also appear as a more or less deep and large simple hole, Fig. 11. It could be made by a drill or by a point chisel. Some kinds of round concavities on the surface scraped by a round chisel can be observed. The diameter of these concavities is never more than 2 or 3 cm (Fig. 12, 13, 14). Finally, no traces on the object have proved whether the sculptor used a scale module. There are no drawings to be observed for the Greek period, as there were in Egyptian times<sup>11</sup>.

### Progression of carving

When a sculpture is unfinished, it is necessary to observe how the carving progresses in the stone. The piece can be rotated or progress can be made as if it were a relief (one face after the other) or linear (Fig. 15). Progression could also be homogeneous (Fig. 16) or inhomogeneous (Fig. 17). Most of the time, we observed an inhomogeneous progression for sculptures made by reproduction. Indeed, the technician was only interested in “measuring points”. So he did not use global progression to clarify the surface. Many states of carving and many different traces are observed on the surfaces. We observed them only for some Hellenistic sculptures from

10 Most of the time it's a drill hole but it happens sometimes to recognize just a fine point hole trace.

11 PROST 2008, 386-387. Also a point on Samian cubit, echo to royal Egyptian cubit, p. 385-386. SPIVEY 1996, 69.





Fig. 23. Caliper and triangulation process in a workshop of Mahabalipuram, India (photo: S. Moureaud)

about a Samian *kouros*<sup>19</sup>. Also, Francis Prost proposes recognizing the use of an empirical reproduction system in a workshop of Naxian *kouroi* in Delos<sup>20</sup>. He supposes the use of a changing system of proportions in order to modify scales. The results of the technique appear to be approximate copies rather than exact ones. Indeed, just the most important volumes seem to have been reproduced, and the details change from a statue to another.

The Archaic period shows an interesting example the study of which is in progress. Indeed, we hypothesize the use of a technique of reproduction for the unfinished *kouros* of Paros (Fig. 22). In addition to Francis Croissant's study that considers this sculpture as a new original stylistic creation from Paros<sup>21</sup>, we propose recognizing

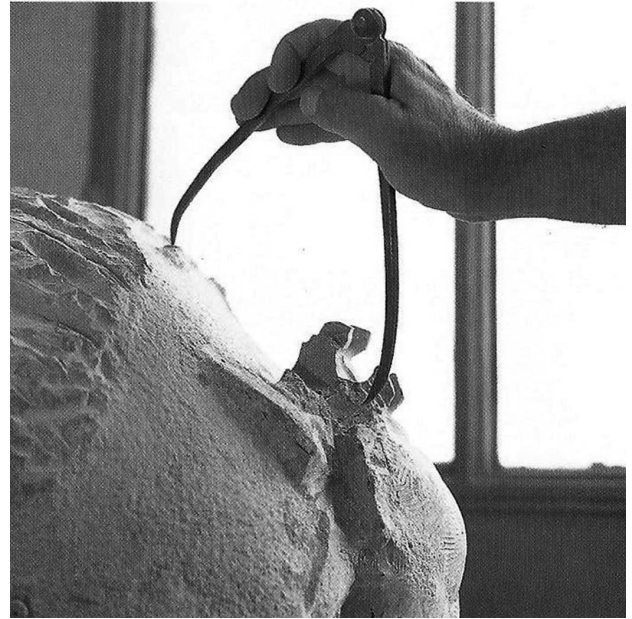


Fig. 24. Use of callipers for triangulation process (photo: J. C. Santamera)

the use of a new reproduction process in it. It left traces of a very specific inhomogeneous progression of carving. All steps of implementation can be observed all around the surface of the *kouros*. This is really unusual for unfinished Archaic statues which present most of the time an homogeneous surface testifying to a linear progression<sup>22</sup>.

- Sight-size process<sup>23</sup>

Elements of these methods were used since Leon Battista Alberti in the fifteenth century. By positioning a small-scale clay model at a specific distance between the life model and the observation point on both, the work and the model are visually the same size, and a 'side by side' comparison can be made to check accuracy and proportion. This process is being practiced again in art schools in Italy or in France. I learned this method during my training as a sculptor.

- The three-caliper process or triangulation process

This method using a triangulation pointing process is the best-known process. It was explained by many researchers, particularly by Marie-Thérèse Baudry<sup>24</sup> on general sculpture. This process was recognized by Peter

19 KYRIELEIS 1996, 30-44, fig. 7 and fig. 8. Vitruvius, book III, 1, about rationality. Cf. also MENARD 1882, 493-497: he quotes a commentary of scientists of the expedition of Bonaparte, about Karnak's monuments: "L'examen attentif de ces sculptures nous a donné lieu de remarquer que l'artiste, dans leur exécution, ne s'est pas toujours astreint à suivre le trait primitif, qui était ordinairement tracé à l'encre rouge [il fait référence à des œuvres ébauchées de Médinet-Abou, présentant des tracés] ; mais que, le modifiant à son gré, sans s'écarter toutefois des règles reçues, il se laissait, en quelques sortes, guider par les effets qu'il voyait naître sous ses mains. Le mur de la salle hypostyle présente particulièrement la preuve de ce que nous avançons : on y remarque de très grandes sculptures, dans lesquelles le trait du ciseau s'éloigne plus ou moins de l'esquisse. Il résulte de cette observation que les sculpteurs égyptiens ne se servaient point de patrons dans l'exécution de leurs dessins, qui n'étaient pas tous parfaitement conformes, ainsi qu'un examen superficiel pourrait le faire croire.", 495-496.

20 PROST 2008.

21 CROISSANT 2008-2009.

22 This work is in progress and the details will be published shortly.

23 ARKLES 2007.

24 BAUDRY, 2000, 172-174.

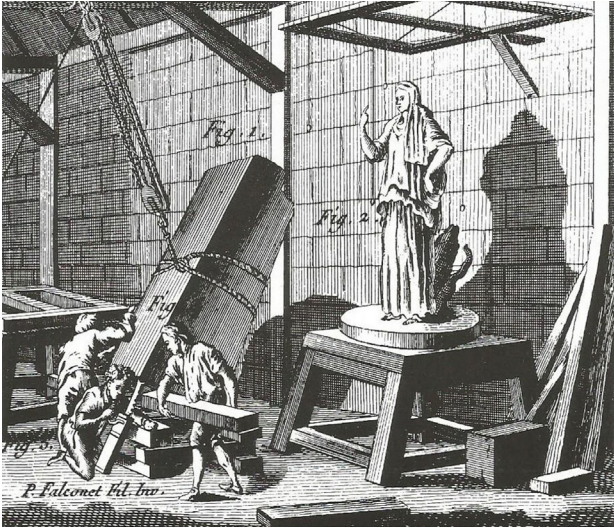


Fig. 25. Use of a frame and plumb lines for reproduction purposes (drawing of *Encyclopédie de Dairemberg et Saglio*)

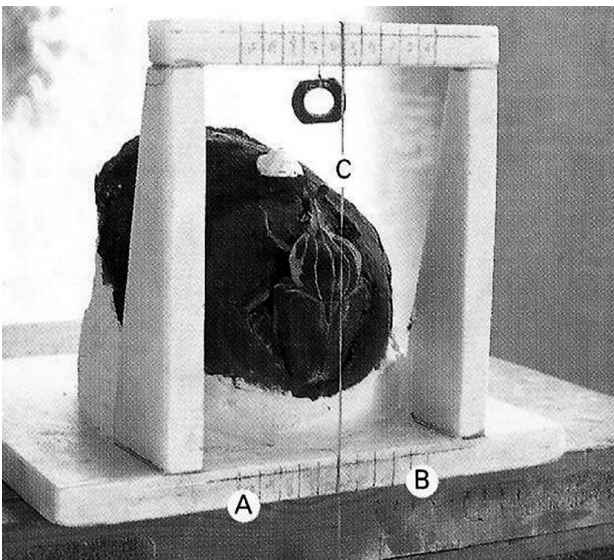


Fig. 26. Use of a graduated frame and plumb lines for reproduction purposes (photo: J. C. Santamera)

Rockwell for reliefs of the Pediment of Aphaia temple<sup>25</sup> and by Olga Palagia for reliefs of the temple of Olympia<sup>26</sup>. Some calipers were discovered in Delos<sup>27</sup>. As we can see in India, this process is still used to copy in stone the clay model created by the master (Fig. 23); also used in Carrara (Fig. 24).

25 ROCKWELL 1993, 117.

26 PALAGIA 2006.

27 South Agora of the Italians (GD 52) in backfill of Antigone's Portico (GD 29), W. Deonna, "Le mobilier délien", EAD XVIII, Paris, 1938, 214, fig. 246 and pl. 578.



Fig. 27. Pointing machine in the workshop of a portraitist, Tinos, Greece (photo: S. Moureaud)



Fig. 28. Pointing machine in the Museum of Marble Craft, Tinos, Greece (photo: S. Moureaud)

- The stick process

Proposed by Leonardo da Vinci, this process consists in placing the model in a box, taking measures with sticks. After that, you have to place the block in the same box and to report the different points traced on batons<sup>28</sup>.

- The chassis (frame) and plumb-line process

A frame is placed above the model, where plumb-lines are suspended<sup>29</sup>. This process also needs the use of calipers and some kind of set squares (Figs. 25 and 26)<sup>30</sup>.

- Profile process

This process was proposed by Mickael Pfanner<sup>31</sup> to understand mass production of imperial portraits. It is an intermediate process between an exact and an approximate copy. For him, only the profile is copied exactly with calipers and the rest is made by free interpretation.

- Some other propositions<sup>32</sup>

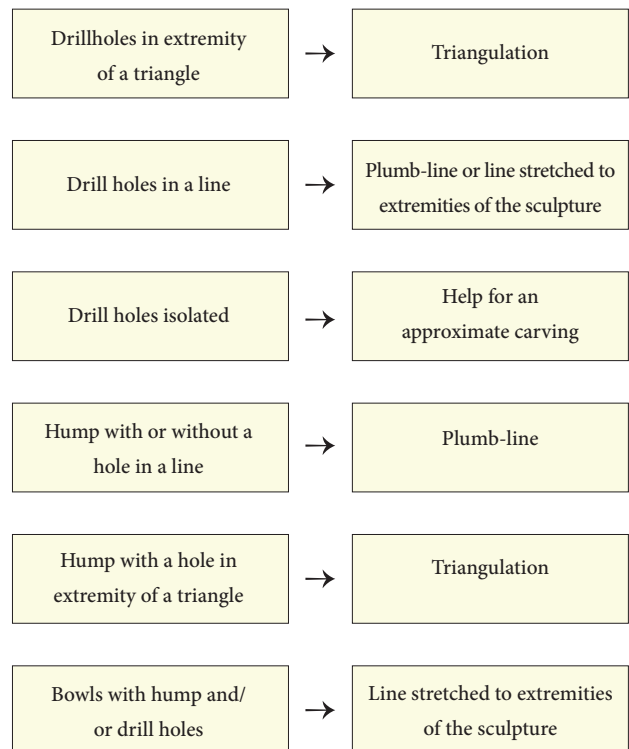
A line stretched between the two extremities of the statue of a young man of Rheneia was suggested by Carl Blumel<sup>33</sup>. The use of a simple plumb line or an axis of symmetry and a caliper was also proposed for different pieces<sup>34</sup>.

- The pointing machine

An early device of the pointing machine was published by Nicolas Gatteaux in the beginning of the 19th century (Figs. 27 and 28). We all agreed that even if the Greeks and Romans did develop different ways to reproduce statues, traces and unfinished statues do not

give us evidence about the use of them<sup>35</sup>. Hence, the following questions are raised: do we know exact series of copies for those periods? Did the Hellenistic and Roman sculptors need an exact pointing process when we know how often they adapt the copies? Even molds of plaster and copies discovered at Baiae show us that they did not mold the copy exactly<sup>36</sup>.

**The following diagram matches the traces and the processes mentioned above:**



28 BAUDRY 2000, 175.

29 BAUDRY 2000, 176.

30 SANTAMERA CAMI 2001, 99.

31 PFANNER 1989, 204-222.

32 Different methods observed and proposed for the reproduction of sculpture must prompt reflection about a period of experimentations. Some methods were tried, compared and abandoned, PFANNER 1989, 187-190. I will talk about a period of experimentation than I observed in Delos during the end of the Hellenistic times.

33 PALAGIA, 2006, 269; BLÜMEL 1969, 46, BLÜMEL 1927, 57.

34 ROCKWELL 1993, 118; BLÜMEL 1969, 53-54, fig. 42.

35 Difficult to recognize exact copies, but some researchers appear to believe in the use of a pointing machine during the Roman times: RICHTER 1965, 290, pl.LXII and CLARIDGE 1985.

36 LANDWEHR 1982, 23. For that matter, I reproduce here a short extract of a workshop concerning copies that took place in Oxford in October 2015, intitled Replicas in Roman Art: Redeeming the Copy?: "It has become clear that the Romans who used 'copies' were not always -- indeed not normally -- motivated by the desire to reproduce famous works; the artists did not copy mechanically and their work was more creative and less concerned with accuracy than had been believed; replication in art was motivated by a range of factors besides mere art-appreciation, including notions of domestic decorum, religious sensibilities, and the practicalities of artists' workshops." <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/events/Replicas%20Workshop%20Abstract.pdf>.





Inhomogeneous progression  
with also variation from one to  
other piece

Fig. 29. First group from Delos presented a non-homogeneous progression with some variations from one piece to another. From left to right: Statuette of Aphrodite (inv. A 3825, Delos Museum, Greece), Female Sphinx of Rheneia (inv. 1661, National Museum, Athens, Greece), Bust of Serapis (inv. A 4023, Delos Museum, Greece), Relief of the Homeric Hymn of Demeter (inv. A 3194, Delos Museum, Greece) (photo S. Moureaud and P. Jockey)



Fig. 30.  
Second group from  
Delos presented a  
homogeneous  
progression, Statue of  
Aphrodite, probably  
from Rheneia, probably  
2<sup>nd</sup> century BC  
(inv. 3188, National  
Museum, Athens,  
Greece) (photo: S.  
Moureaud)

## Some analysis and new problematics

### *Experimental times*

It appears that during the Antiquity, many kinds of processes could be used to copy a *proplasma* (what is shaped before) before the invention of the pointing machine. This appears to be even more true at the end of the Hellenistic times. Indeed, between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, many unfinished statues from Delos and Rheneia present a variety of traces of copying. It is possible to gather them in different groups according to the different traces and ways of making. A first group presents an inhomogeneous progression with also many variations from one piece to another, Fig. 29. A second group presents a uniform and linear progression, Figs. 30 and 18. There is no doubt that we have evidence of an experimental period during which workshops tried to develop their techniques to adapt their production to increasing demand. In fact, during that specific period in Delos<sup>37</sup>, the production of sculpture increased due to a general domestic use.

37 MOUREAUD 2009 and 2015.

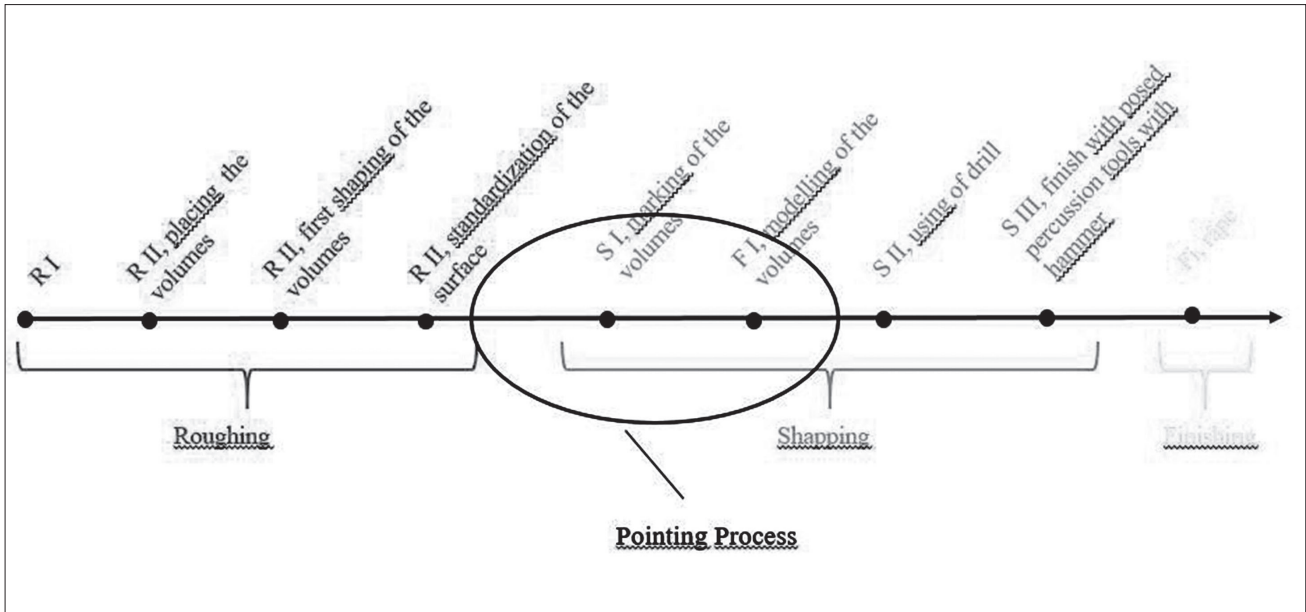


Fig. 31. Use of reproduction only after a first step of roughing out general forms in the "chaîne opératoire"

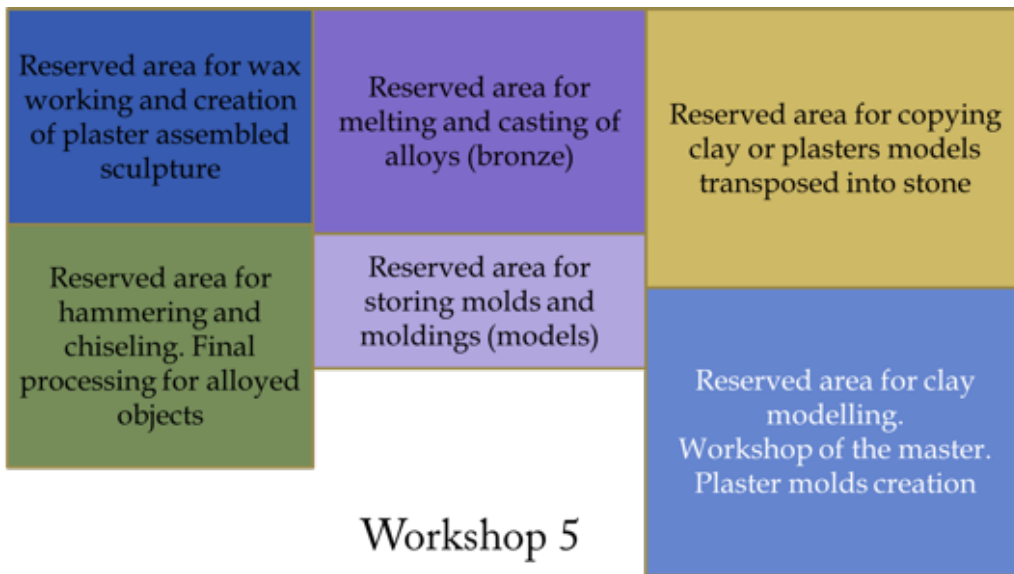


Fig. 32. Spatial organisation in the workshop of a craftsman in Mahabalipuram, India

**Ways of diffusion**

In three cases we notice the link between the technique of reproduction progress and the necessity to create a new type of production. That was the case concerning the Parian *kouros*, Fig. 22, which presents a different way of making than used for previous *kouros*. Obviously, a new technique was employed to create a new type *kouros*, which was directly inspired by the type of Parian *kore*<sup>38</sup>. That was also the case for early Classical

reliefs. On the pediment of Olympia, Peter Rockwell noticed a correction due to a mistake in reporting points<sup>39</sup>. He stated that it was obvious that the technique had not yet been mastered. Similarly, it was necessary for Delian sculptors to find new ways to produce more, by trying different copying processes. We can note that evolutions of the technique of copying are linked to some specific places for a specific goal. By these observations we can propose some places of innovation. The recognition of innovation places can also allow some ways of diffusion of a technique as we can see in a new example. Two unfinished statuettes

38 CROISSANT 2008-2009. An article is also in progress concerning a technical analysis of that *kouros*.

39 ROCKWELL 1993, 117, note 16.



Fig. 33. Wax working area in the workshop of a craftsman in Mahabalipuram, India (photo: S. Moureaud)

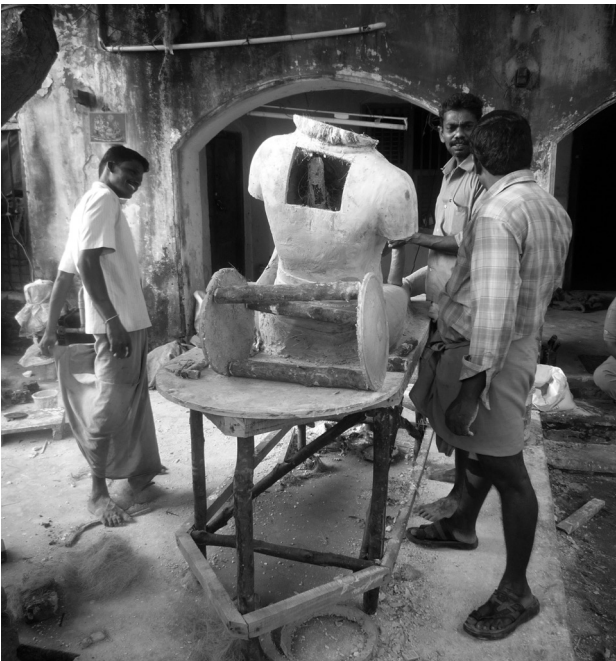


Fig. 34. Area for the creation of plaster-assembled sculpture in the workshop of a craftsman in Mahabalipuram, India (photo: S. Moureaud)



Fig. 35. Area for the melting and casting of alloys (bronze) in the workshop of a craftsman in Mahabalipuram, India (photo: S. Moureaud)



Fig. 36. Area for the modelling (master craftsman) and plastering of moulds creation in the workshop of a craftsman in Mahabalipuram, India (photo: S. Moureaud)



Fig. 37. Area for the storing of moulds and mouldings in the workshop of a craftsman in Mahabalipuram, India (photo: S. Moureaud)



Fig. 38. Hammering and chasing area in the workshop of a craftsman in Mahabalipuram, India (photo: S. Moureaud)



Fig. 39. Area for the copying of clay and the plastering of stone models in the workshop of a craftsman in Mahabalipuram, India (photo: S. Moureaud)

of Eros the archer from Kime (Fig. 2), presenting some similar traces of reproduction as observed in Delos (same use of the tooth chisel and same kind of concavities) could give us evidences of the diffusion of technique of copy invented on the island during the late Hellenistic times<sup>40</sup>.

### *Comparative study of unfinished pieces*

A systematic comparative study of unfinished pieces<sup>41</sup> showed that the technique of copying in sculpture was used only after a first step of roughing out general forms (Fig. 31).

### *Ethno-archaeological approach*

Finally, I would like to briefly discuss the use of an ethno-archaeological approach in India and in Tinos, by showing their different traditional and contemporary styles of craftsmanship. This allows the observation of a hierarchical and spatial organization in workshops, the place of the master, the itinerant craftsmen, the social origins of the technicians and their tasks. For example, I have briefly presented the bronze and marble workshop of a famous Indian sculptor in India, Fig. 32. The master only made models using clay or wax. The remaining tasks were left to the specialized technicians in allocated areas (Fig. 33-39). Even if there are some cultural differences, that approach has given us some new ways to propose new problem areas or to find some parallels between ancient sources and traditional contemporary observations. This research is currently in progress.

To conclude, this brief overview about copy in Antiquity shows that we can propose new hypothesis with new interdisciplinary approaches. Even if sculptures with reproduction traces or ancient texts about technique are rare, it is possible to approach this subject by other ways.

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40 MOUREAUD 2015.

41 MOUREAUD 2009, 228-234.

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