



A&H



TEXNH*: Making, creating, and agency networks in the Ancient Mediterranean world

Making and crafting is inherent to human behaviour, and the value of the human capacity to make things is uncontested. We identify ourselves often through what we do/make, and it allows us to have some form of control over a tiny aspect of the much bigger world around us. As more of our lives become automated and digital, we see groups and individuals moving back to crafts and taking up knitting, pottery, jewelry-making, gardening and many others as hobbies. This has proven especially useful and even soothing in the difficult times (crises, pandemic) we are going through.

Making and creating are key to human existence, they are embedded in individuals, groups, socio-political and legal institutions, and in society overall. In the last decade, this aspect of ancient life, so vital to individuals and societies, has seen a huge surge in interest. Approaches to crafts and making are diverse, including historical, archaeological, economic, technical and anthropological points of view. Despite these numerous paths of investigation, several of us have felt that we often work too much each in our own (regional and chronological) niche, while we could actively learn much more from joining forces and studying crafts, their practices, resources and people together.

This new lecture-and-discussion forum – called TEXNH – aims to answer this need by focusing on crafting as a set of practices and processes, intricately interwoven with the agency that drives them. Its participants will look at humans and their interaction with the non-human agency of materials and animals through making, and will place these networks of interaction in the context of wider societies and communities. Of interest to us is to observe differences and similarities in different contexts and periods, and to try to explain both such differences and similarities. To avoid remaining in our own niche, this forum will not only bridge the traditional chronological and regional focusses but will also bring together the many disciplines that investigate making and crafting: archaeologists, classicists, historians, epigraphers, philosophers, ethnographers, anthropologists, and craftspeople themselves. In order to limit ourselves to a manageable whole, we will focus, geographically, on the broader Mediterranean, both West and East, and, chronologically, on the period between the Bronze Age and the Later Roman Empire.

Each year we aim to investigate a specific theme from various disciplinary viewpoints in order to open up our own perhaps rather fixed ideas on what crafting should look like. By focusing on specific themes rather than specific crafts or individual materials, we aim to cross-fertilize our research and think well beyond a single craft since craftwork and making practices were not self-standing nor done in isolation. As befits the aims of the forum, the theme of the first series of meetings will be cross-craft interaction.

- *Our TEXNH logo is loosely inspired by: (T) paint brushes, (E) music metronome, (X) Antikythera mechanism, (N) needle work, and (H) carpenter's bench screw*