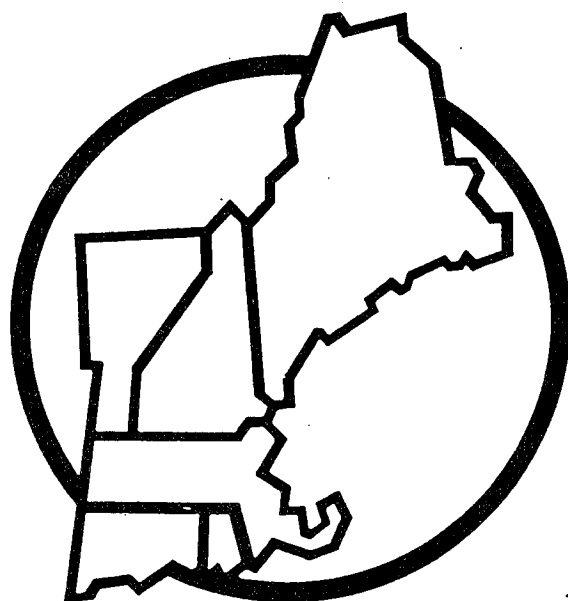


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BRONZEWORERS IN THE ATHENIAN AGORA. "Excavations of the Athenian Agora Picture Books," no. 20. American School of Classical Studies at Athens; obtainable from Publications Committee, American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ 08540. 1982. 32 pp., paperback, illustrated. ISBN 87661-624-4. \$1.50.

Metalworkers were among the ancient craftsmen who looked to Hephaestus (Vulcan), god of fire, as their patron deity. In Athens, his temple, which he shared with Athena, still stands on a hill beside the Agora Excavations and testifies to the importance of the Agora area as a center for the making of pottery and the working of metals, especially bronze. Carol Mattusch, who prepared this, the twentieth in the series of Athenian Agora Picture Books, provides the reader with a fascinating glimpse of the bronze industry of ancient Athens.

The focus of the book is on Athenian bronze sculpture, especially on the large statues that exist today only in fragments (an ear here, an eyelash there) or in pictures on ancient vases or in descriptions by ancient writers. We learn that Athenian artists often preferred hollow-cast bronze to stone for large statues, since the metal was easier to work and in many ways more pleasing to the eye than stone. But what one century cherishes another treats with contempt. The life-size, sometimes colossal, statues which reflected the glory of Athens when times were prosperous were melted down and made into weapons, belt buckles, keys, nails, and bowls in periods of austerity. Small everyday objects comprise, in fact, the chief bronze finds in the excavations of the Athenian Agora. Mattusch illustrates some of them and describes them briefly, but her chief interest is in the now-vanished large statues of bronze and in the lost-wax process by which they were produced.

A highpoint of the book is the description of a casting pit that was excavated in the Agora in front of the small temple of Apollo Patroos. It is the earliest archaeological find illustrating how the Greeks made bronze statues. When uncovered, the pit was found to contain fragments of clay molds doubtless used in the casting of a cult statue of Apollo for the little temple. Other lost or fragmentary bronze statues, some of them even gold-plated, are also described in this brief but informative survey of the Athenian bronze industry. It is interesting to note, as the author points out, that the metalworking tradition still survives in the vicinity of the Agora. The reader who has visited Athens will be reminded of the metallic ringing sounds that emanate from the metalworkers' shops bordering the Agora Excavations today.

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