# Capturing the meaning of Roman sculpture

## Abstract

The "Art of Making in Antiquity: Stone Carving and Carvers in the Roman World" (http://www.artofmaking.ac.uk/) is a two-year project funded by the Leverhulme Trust which started in July 2011. The project develops an innovative approach to Roman sculpture by interpreting carving techniques through the lens of practical craft expertise.

In particular, the project aims at building an innovative web resource around an unpublished photographic collection assembled by Peter Rockwell, a sculptor and expert on stone carving. The project is concerned with the relationship between mark and tool but, as importantly, with the sequence in which the marks were made. The aim is to enhance our understanding of the physical sculptural process and to investigate the relationship between the surviving objects and their makers.

The Art of Making constitutes a different approach to most studies which group tools separately, thus failing to show how they might be used in the course of a single piece of work. This attention to process is extended yet further by including quarry sites, thus visualizing the actions from material acquisition to the completed object.

From a digital humanities perspective, such an approach implies using data capture and representation methodologies that go beyond the standard metadata for describing images or cultural heritage objects (such as Dublin Core or Getty vocabularies). In fact, although these well-known metadata schemes could provide us with a quick solution to the problem of classifying the subject and features of an object (so to support better searches online), they tend to offer an overly simplified (i.e. 'flat') characterization of the object identity.

We could argue that standard metadata schemes are less suited for representing the more 'historical' dimensions of a cultural heritage object, that is, the network of decisions and contextual circumstances that have determined its creation and existence as we see it nowadays. It is precisely this rich historical dimension that we aim at making explicit instead: by means of a more elaborate and detailed computational model of the sculpture domain, the Art of Making web resource will let users explore questions concerning the materials and processes typical of Roman sculpture, the specific carving techniques being used, their role in the sculpting process and the recognizable traditions emerging from such practices.

As a result, the sculpture images that will be made available on our website will become one among many other entry points to a richly interconnected database. Even if we are still in the first year of the project, at the symposium we would like to report and gather feedback on the general approach being used and, more specifically, on the conceptual model and software environment for data capture we created.