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Developing an Inclusive Framework for Research on Minoan Peak Sanctuary Anthropomorphic Figurines

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- 1 Currently under completion as a doctoral thesis (University of Kent), this study investigates the benefits of applying a multifaceted and holistic framework to research on Minoan peak sanctuary anthropomorphic figurines. Stemming from an interest in these artefacts' material properties it seeks to reconcile some too frequently divided or opposed theoretical and methodological aspects of this field. The intention is to more deeply explore some of the material processes these figurines underwent throughout the different stages of their 'lives' and ponder the multiple biographies these objects might have had throughout different periods.
- 2 Dating to the palatial periods of Minoan Crete (2nd millennium BCE), Minoan peak sanctuary anthropomorphic figurines have been attested by the thousands in a fragmentary condition at mountain sites throughout the island¹. Usually accompanied by zoomorphic figurines and cooking and drinking vessels, these objects are associated to ritual practices². The prevalent interpretation is that they were disposable offerings representing adorants dedicated for communion with the transcendent³. Made of clay, they measure on average between 8 cm and 20 cm in height and perform a variety of hand gestures. Both male and female examples have been attested. The figurines' clothing, characterised by belts and daggers for the males and bell-skirts and hats for the females often serve to determine gender.
- 3 It is remarkable that, despite the wealth of information about manufacture, material sourcing, craft specialisation, firing, breakage and consumption patterns offered by these fragmentary anthropomorphs, their appearance has been the object of most investigations to date. Employing the anthropomorphic figurines from Gonies-Philioremos as a case-study (under the supervision of E. Kyriakidis), however, this thesis

asks some new questions of these artefacts, namely related to the conditions under which they were produced and consumed. Investigations include considerations of the impact of the material and the environment on human actions, of the levels of the knowledge and experience required to successfully negotiate with the raw material, and of the nature of agent relationships these material and human encounters might have generated.

- 4 The methodological framework developed to address this topic consists of an amalgamation of some previous approaches to peak sanctuary anthropomorphic figurines and some other methods evidenced in other prehistoric figurine studies. Building predominantly upon an experimental model, which allows for multi-sensory engagements with the artefacts, materials and the environments in which the artefacts were produced and consumed, this new framework allows the investigator to acknowledge and experience the influence of elements other than the human agent's decisions. For example, through direct engagement with clay, it becomes possible to understand that the manufacturer maintained a very specific relationship with the material, which in turn dictated the performance of certain movements on the part of the maker. In adopting this approach, this project aims to shift the predominantly anthropocentric character of research to Minoan peak sanctuary anthropomorphic figurines. It seeks to reinstate the importance of materials and surroundings which are all too often overlooked in this field.

Fig. 1 –Philioremos anthropomorphic figurines



PHOTO: COURTESY OF E. KYRIAKIDIS

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NOTES

1. See *e.g.* FAURE 1969; RUTKOWSKI 1986.
 2. See *e.g.* JONES 1999; KYRIAKIDIS 2005; BRIAULT 2007.
 3. See *e.g.* MYRES 1902/3; RUTKOWSKI 1991; MORRIS, PEATFIELD 2012.
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