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DEVELOPING AN INCLUSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH ON MINOAN PEAK SANCTUARY ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURINES

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.

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 practices.² The prevalent interpretation is that they were disposable offerings representing adorants dedicated for communion with the transcendent.³ 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.

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



Philioremos anthropomorphic figurines. Photo: Courtesy of E. Kyriakidis.

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.

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.

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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A GROUP FIND OF NEOLITHIC FIGURINES OF THE VINČA CULTURE FROM STUBLINE, SERBIA



Fig. 1. Magnetometric plan of the site of Stubline (after CRNOBRNJA 2011).

Stubline is a Late Neolithic Vinča-culture settlement built around 4700 BCE on an elevated slope near Serbian’s capital Belgrade. Excavations there revealed an exceptionally well-preserved settlement, with more than 200 above-ground houses arranged in rows, with linear communications, open spaces, and circular ditches surrounding the settlement.¹ As in many other Neolithic villages in the central Balkans, a ground plan of the settlement at Stubline clearly illustrates settlement growth dynamics. We do not know which was the first house built in Stubline and who were its first inhabitants, but, over time the settlement was extended, and two ditches were dug at

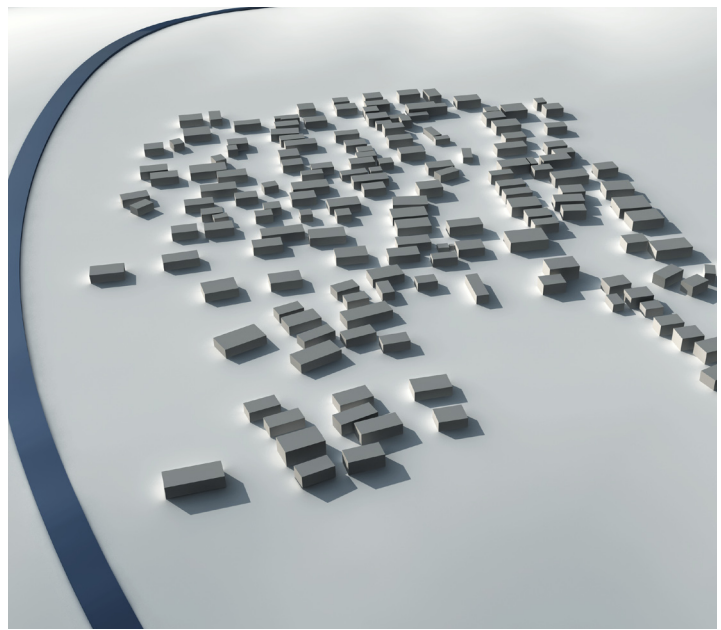


Fig. 2 Ideal reconstruction of the Stubline settlement (after SPASIĆ 2012).

the far western part, either as a symbolic division of space, or to protect the inhabitants and their possessions. As time passed, the community became larger and larger, and, as a result, the two ditches were filled in order to provide the additional space needed for the new construction of houses. The houses were again erected in rows, in the same orientation as the earlier ones. This layout of new buildings enabled the persistence of former communications. New Stubline shows continuity with earlier organizational ideas, which, on a broader scale, reflects the settlement narrative as an enduring, long-term process, rather than an event, or a point in history, a true case of *longue durée*.