

# Thinking About Objects



HPAR4005

# Why Objects?

- East Mediterranean very rich in material remains
  - Surface survey
  - Excavation
- What might this material tell us about past societies?



Restored pottery from Arediou

# Why Objects?

- "...all societies, complex as well as primitive, externalize the ideas they hold about the physical & metaphysical universes, & about social relations within their own society, by making & manipulating artifacts" (Leach 1983: 243)



Base Ring figurine

# What Can Artefacts Tell Us?

- Archaeologists tend to think about production & function:
  - Ancient technologies available to a society
  - Past activities at a site
- Focus was traditionally on material sciences
- But increasingly archaeologists are engaging with social aspects



LBA querns from Cyprus

# Social Life of Things

- Humans ascribe meaning & value to things
- How do archaeologists access these meanings?
  - Distribution of artefacts – where found, how common etc
  - Materials used: rarity or easily accessible
  - Skills involved in creating objects
  - Decorative or plain



Sacral knots, Mycenae

# Social Life of Things

- Recursive relationship between people and things:
  - An understanding that objects shape people as much as people shape objects
  - Objects are embedded in the ways in which we shape our social worlds



Bronze mirror,  
Griffin Warrior Tomb Pylos

# Objects: The Basics

- Describe clearly in your own words
  - Material
  - Size
  - Form
  - Decoration
- Comparisons
- Analysis...
- Illustrations: cite your sources
- References



Stirrup jar, Arediou

# Identifying Objects



- How do archaeologists determine the function of an object?
- What am I?

# Interpreting Objects

- Use and meaning
  - What story does the object tell us?
  - How was it made? And by whom?
  - How was it handled?
  - Utilitarian or ceremonial
  - Value, social significance, identities?



Base Ring bull

# Summary

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- Looking at objects will tell us about past societies
- We need to ask:
  - Where they were found
  - What they are made of
  - The degree of preservation
- This should tell us what they were, how they were used & how they were valued