



Les Carnets de l'ACoSt

Association for Coroplastic Studies

10 | 2013

Varia

Cretan Peak Sanctuary Figurines: 3D Scanning Project.

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/acost/776>

DOI: 10.4000/acost.776

ISSN: 2431-8574

Publisher

ACoSt

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2013

Electronic reference

Christine Morris and Alan Peatfield, "Cretan Peak Sanctuary Figurines: 3D Scanning Project.", *Les Carnets de l'ACoSt* [Online], 10 | 2013, Online since 10 January 2016, connection on 21 September 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/acost/776> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/acost.776>

This text was automatically generated on 21 September 2021.



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- 1 The largest corpus of terracotta figurines from the Cretan Bronze Age comes from the class of ritual mountain sites, known as peak sanctuaries. Thousands of figurines – anthropomorphic, animal, votive body parts, and more elaborate (but largely fragmentary) models – were deposited on these mountain sites during the Minoan palatial periods (second millennium B.C.). Our work with these handmade figurines encompasses the material from our excavation of the Atsipadhes peak sanctuary in western Crete (Peatfield 1992; Morris and Peatfield 2012), and, more recently, figurines from a number of East Cretan peak sanctuaries, as part of a collaboration with Dr Costis Davaras to publish a corpus of the figurines from his excavations.
- 2 As part of the cataloguing and recording of these large bodies of material, we have developed a project to scan a selection of the terracotta figurines in order to produce 3-D images and make them available online. Our overall aim will be to produce high quality scanned images that can be used effectively in an interactive, online environment where the 3-D images can be rotated by the viewer. Traditionally, these figurines have been studied and then represented in publications through photographs, and less often in technical drawings. Our project explores how 3-D images can complement and enhance these modes of representation. Already, the scanned images have helped us with study of technological features of figurine construction and with typological study of the distinctive stylistic features of the figurines from the different sites.

Digitising Cretan Bronze Age Figurines



- 3 On the practical side, optimum scanning methods using a Next Engine laser scanner were first established using some comparable material in the University College Dublin Classical Museum. For our work in the museums of Crete, performance, speed, and accuracy were evaluated in order to establish best and most effective practice for such work under often hot and dusty conditions. This work was done in collaboration with Dr Will Megarry of the University College Dublin in 2011 and Brendan O'Neill of Trinity College Dublin in 2013, and we have to date scanned sample material from Atsipadhes, Petsofas and Prinias.
- 4 The project is also a case study for exploring wider methodological issues concerning digital representation in archaeology, considering traditional modes of representation in relation to the opportunities offered by newer technologies. Beyond the purely practical issues of time, skill, and accuracy, there are deeper questions of how different methods of representation impact on how the material is studied (e.g. the interaction between archaeologist and artefact) and on how it is represented and communicated in publications for both a specialist and general audience.

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