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Religion Seminar on April 12, 2016

*Gifts for the Gods?*  
*Reflections on the role of figurines in Minoan ritual and religion*



In studies of Bronze Age Crete, figurines are treated as objects tightly connected with religion and ritual. This is justified by the thousands of figurines that have been found in extra-urban cult places of Middle and Late Bronze Age Crete. The terracotta and metal figurines deposited at these cult places are interpreted as votives, as offerings to the deities worshipped in the extra-urban sanctuaries. When similar figurines are found in settlements, they are usually considered one of the most certain archaeological indications for the existence of domestic shrines and once again interpreted as votives for deities almost exclusively. In this presentation, the re-examination of the archaeological evidence for the usage of figurines in Minoan settlements questions their unilateral interpretation as indexes of domestic shrines and as votives. It is suggested that figurines can be bearers of multiple meanings and used variously in different social contexts at the same time, and it is exactly these qualities that enable figurines to play multiple roles in Minoan ritual and religion. It is argued that Minoan figurines actually connect what are often considered divergent components of social life, such as public / official religion and private / domestic life, their votive character being only one facet of their complex ritual identities.