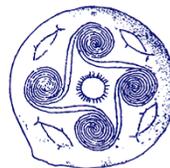




The
University
Of
Sheffield.



MATERIAL WORLDS OF THE AEGEAN

Sheffield Centre for Aegean Archaeology

Sheffield 4th - 6th February 2011

organised by C. Tsoraki, R. Doonan and S. Sherratt

Abstract

As archaeologists we continually work with rich material remains unearthed from prehistoric and historic contexts. Much past and even recent research on these materials either draws on their stylistic characteristics to construct relative chronological sequences or focuses on the technological practices by which they were brought into being. Studies of the material properties of Aegean objects have to date been quite limited: only sporadically do interpretations of material choices in artefact studies embrace a discussion of the material properties of objects and such studies tend to focus on qualities, such as their mechanical properties and performance characteristics, while others such as colour, texture and lustre are often neglected. As a consequence, our appreciation of how the material qualities of objects were perceived and experienced in different historically- and socially-specific contexts is significantly limited. How was value attributed to different and similar materials by Aegean communities at specific times and in particular places? How were objects fabricated and employed to materialise these values? These are questions rarely addressed in our field, a state of affairs that we consider surprising, given how important material qualities are for people to know their worlds.

An overview of archaeological and anthropological literature highlights the symbolic potency of materials and suggests that — across different cultures — materials such as clay and stone are seen as culturally-powerful substances ascribed with qualities that Western perspectives bestow only upon humans/animals. This body of work emphasizes, *inter alia*, the highly variable culturally-mediated conceptualizations of the materials and their qualities, conceptualizations that create a complex web of classifications, associations, proscriptions and prescriptions and have a profound effect on the way people engage with their worlds.

Our goal in organising this Round Table is to seek new ways of addressing the material worlds of the Aegean. We would like to consider how material properties were experienced in the Aegean world; how these had an effect on the creation of value for particular objects and materials; and how meaningful materials arise. Further, it is our intention to move away from the traditional media-based categories that have structured Aegean research thus far, and so move discussion to a consideration of the inter-relationship between materials and an exploration of how material categories may have been constructed in particular social, chronological and spatial contexts.