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From antiquity to postmodernity

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**Cultural Biographies of Cretan Storage Jars (*pithoi*):
from Antiquity to Postmodernity**



Visit Crete.

Her Minoan past is your memorable present.

Samantha Ximeri

Cultural Biographies of Cretan Storage Jars (*pithoi*): from Antiquity to Postmodernity

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,

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Abstract

Cultural Biographies of Cretan Storage Jars (pithoi): from Antiquity to Postmodernity.

In a short story entitled ‘*The Jar*’ (*La Giara*, 1909), Luigi Pirandello narrates the cultural biography (making, breaking and mending) of a huge storage jar and the way it represents socio-political and economic realities in a traditional Sicilian village. Inspired by *La Giara*, and integrating material culture theory with ethnoarchaeological, art-historical and science-based approaches, this thesis treats the cultural biographies of Cretan pithoi from antiquity to postmodernity to reveal the intertwined lives of people and artefacts and the dynamics of a very powerful relationship, hinting at the many possibilities and stories which lie behind these vessels.

The body of material discussed includes published and unpublished Cretan pithoi and fragments thereof, which date from the second and the first millennia BC, especially ca. 800-500 BC. This material is examined primarily in the form of case-studies which contextualize the production, distribution and consumption of these vessels in their ancient and modern socio-cultural settings.

In viewing ancient Cretan pithoi as the protagonists in the various episodes of their lives as well as of the lives of the people who interacted with them, this study illustrates the shifting meanings and symbolism of objects and highlights the fluid and ever-changing agency of archaeological artefacts as they move through different contexts. Ultimately, this work hopes to encourage future investigations on other types of durable archaeological objects and to centre discussions on the socially-constituted processes that create meaning in the material world of people.

Samenvatting

Culturele biografieën van Kretenzische voorraadpotten (*pithoi*): vanaf de oudheid tot de postmoderne tijd.

In zijn korte verhaal *De kruik* (*La Giara*, 1909) presenteert Luigi Pirandello eigenlijk de culturele biografie (het maken, het breken en de reparatie) van een grote voorraadkruik, waarmee hij ook de sociaal-politieke en economische situatie van een traditioneel Siciliaans dorp verbeeldt. Geïnspireerd door *La Giara* behandelt dit proefschrift, door ‘material culture theory’ te integreren met ethnoarcheologische, kunsthistorische en natuurwetenschappelijke onderzoeksbenaderingen, de culturele biografieën van van Kretenzische pithoi (grote voorraadpotten) vanaf de oudheid tot de huidige postmoderne tijd. Dit legt bloot hoe levens van mensen en artefacten verstrengeld zijn, toont de dynamiek van die krachtige relatie, en biedt inzichten in de vele mogelijkheden en verhalen die deze potten met zich meedragen.

Het corpus aan materiaal dat in dit proefschrift bestudeerd wordt omvat gepubliceerde en ongepubliceerde Kretenzische pithoi en pithosfragmenten uit het tweede en eerste millennium voor Christus, vooral uit de periode 800-500 voor Christus. Dit materiaal wordt vooral onderzocht via case studies die de productie, verspreiding en consumptie van deze potten in zowel hun historische als hun moderne sociaal-culturele setting contextualiseren.

Door de Kretenzische pithoi uit de oudheid als ‘hoofdpersonen’ te nemen op verschillende momenten van hun eigen levensloop, maar ook van die van de mensen die met ze interacteren, laat deze studie zien hoe de betekenissen en symboliek van objecten verandert en belicht ze de vloeiende, steeds wisselende ‘agency’ van archeologische objecten die zich door verschillende contexten bewegen. Uiteindelijk hoopt dit proefschrift daarmee een inspiratie te zijn voor verder onderzoek naar andere soorten archeologische objecten, en de aandacht te richten op de sociaal bepaalde processen die betekenis geven in de materiële wereld van de mens.

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