Object Photography at Minoan Gournia, Crete  
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Abstract

The Archaeological site of Gournia on the northeastern side of the Greek island of Crete is an important site in its long history of continued palatial use. Occupied from the Neolithic period up until early Mycenaean inhabitation of Crete, Gournia presents good examples of material culture from all of the intermittent periods of Minoan civilization. It was my job to photograph artifacts for off-season research and study, making use of the Institute for the Study of Aegean Prehistory of East Crete and its study facilities.

Using the INSTAPEC study center facilities, a Nikon D5100 DSLR camera, and creative photo props, I was able to provide clear and legible study photographs that researchers would be able to use for future reference. Each artifact was at all time accompanied by a catalog sheet which was to be filled out detailing everything about the object—its use, material, and possible use. Each photograph of the object was assigned an individual number for easy access in the dig database (+5000 pictures).

Methods

The focus for the 2012 dig season was looking at the pre-palatial period and how material culture could shed light on how the Minoan palatial structure evolved. Central to this was the finding of a Linear A tablet, confirming that Gournia was an administrative site with a complex social and economic structure.

What to look for in an artifact

Artifacts are not only limited to ceramics, and can include animal and human remains, lithics, shell, and other naturally occurring materials that have been altered by humans.

Researchers rely on study photographs to accurately date artifacts. A ceramicist will look at the material to determine the type of clay used.

This triton shell was used as a drinking vessel called a rhyton, probably for an important ceremonial use.

This bronze nail can also help archeologists put together a better picture of Minoan life. Since wood very rarely survives in the archeological record, metal fasteners can signal a wooden structure.

Evidence of human occupation is not limited to pots and arrowheads—goat bones (from human consumption) are often indicators of diet, and perhaps ritual. Also, each artifact (even if a fragment of a whole) is assigned a specific Object Number that includes the date and in which trench it was found. This makes for easy identification and data-basing.

References:
