

# The Gesture of the Male Bronze Figurine from Katsambas

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*In memory of Aikaterini Mylopotamitaki and Maria Nikoloudi  
Archaeologists dedicated to the protection of the Cretan antiquities  
Beautiful souls departed.*

**Abstract** *This paper investigates the gesture, unique in Minoan iconography, of the male bronze figurine from Katsambas (no. X 1829, currently displayed in the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion). This particular figurine was published by Iossif Chatzidakis and over the years it has attracted the attention of several scholars, such as Arthur Evans, Colette Verlinden, Efi Sapouna-Sakellarakis, and Olivier Pelon, all underlining its importance. This exquisite specimen of Minoan craftsmanship was found by chance at Katsambas near Poros, stripped of context and therefore of valuable data such as chronology, type of context associated, and likely use. However, the figurine bears features – some unique, such as the tall cap and its eloquent gesture – surely comprehensible on sight by any Minoan, but now a subject of discussion. The new reading of the gesture here proposed, is based on insights gained by the study of the anthropomorphic figurines from the peak sanctuary of Kophinas on the Asterousia mountain range and a hands-on examination of the figurine at the Heraklion Museum. The paper concentrates on common features between the figurines from Kophinas and the figurine from Katsambas as a means to define the identity of the male and possibly to unveil the nature of the message its gesture conveys.*

This paper explores the meaning of the gesture of the male bronze figurine (X 1829 in the Heraklion Archaeological Museum) found at Katsambas, near Heraklion, in 1914. It represents a male standing figure with boots, a loincloth, a tall hat and an enigmatic gesture. The figurine was initially published by Iossif Chatzidakis (1916); it was later included in the second volume of *The Palace of Minos* (Evans 1930, 234–235, fig. 132) and in the studies of bronze anthropomorphic figurines by Colette Verlinden (1984, no. 93) and Efi Sapouna-Sakellarakis (1995, no. 97). A more in-depth study was published by Olivier Pelon (1987).

The gesture of the figurine under examination is unique so far. Apart from the obvious impediment this fact creates for our study, there is a series of other handicaps that make the planning of a methodological framework challenging. Its provenance is that of a general area (Katsambas), but no information is clear about its find spot. No excavation was carried out after the figurine was brought to the Ephorate's attention, therefore there is essentially no context. The figurine is undoubtedly a masterpiece of its era. Fortunately, scholars agree on its authenticity (Verlinden 1984, 199; Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1995, 2).

Michael Wedde defines gesture as “a movement performed by one or two hands/arms, while holding the body in one or more specific postures, invested with a meaning that can either be commonly understood by all, or part of codified behavior of a smaller group within a society” (Wedde 1999, 912). If the gesture is indeed invested with a meaning that was understood by all within Minoan society, and if this gesture is unique to us, and thus not easily discernible, then might there be some other element that is able to reveal the original meaning? Consequently, what is left for us to analyze? The present approach focuses on the ‘λαλούντα σύμβολα’, the talking symbols, the components of the figurine itself: namely the body, the stance, the garments and the accessories.

New iconographic evidence from a sanctuary in Crete provided the opportunity for a reconsideration. A close examination of the figurine yielded some observations that could be tested against the iconographic background of the clay anthropomorphic figurines of the peak sanctuary of Kophinas (which is located on the mountain range of Asterousia). The clay figurines, as well as all the pottery of the sanctuary, were trusted to the author by the excavators Alexandra Karetsou and Giorgos Rethemiotakis and by Eleftherios Platon. The majority of the material was examined: more than 3,000 fragments of figurines. Ironically, because of the excessive fragmentation of the material, be it intentional or accidental, gesture is one element of human representation rarely preserved at the sanctuary.

### The Find Place, the Owner, and the Golden Wire

The male bronze figurine from Katsambas was a chance find. It was handed to Chatzidakis by agricultural workers employed by Nikolaos Frantzeskakis on his plot in the area of Katsambas, 1 km east of Heraklion. Chatzidakis published the figurine in 1916 along with his observations: the figurine is not finished, its legs are disproportionately long compared to the rest of his body, the hat has no parallel, and the pose is unusual. The enigmatic gesture must have weighed on his mind for some time, because he eventually wrote – almost in defeat – that “nobody can decipher its meaning” (Chatzidakis 1916, 168).

Some years later Evans included the figurine in the second volume of the *Palace of Minos*, in the chapter about the harbor town of Knossos (Fig. 1). Evans (1930, 235) added that it was found “on the SW flank of the hill that rises immediately above the right bank of this little stream, in an irregular rock vault”. It is still not clear how Evans came across this piece of information that is not mentioned in our primary source of knowledge, Chatzidakis’ article. Sapouna-Sakellarakis (1995, 56) mentions that it was found in a tholos tomb, even though she thinks that a grave is an unusual place to come across a bronze figurine. However, nothing of the sort is mentioned in the primary source.

An attempt was made towards a reevaluation of the topography of Poros-Katsambas by Nota Dimopoulou, in a large area between the hill of Trypiti and the small promontory of Mandraki 1.5 kms east of Heraklion. Her excavations, as well as older ones and chance finds from

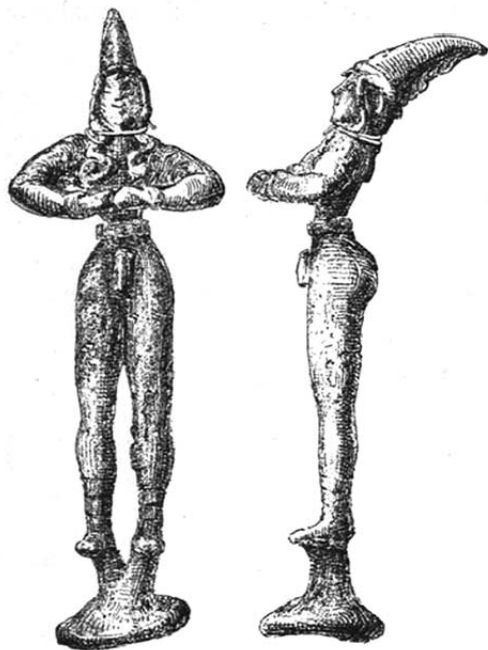


Fig. 1: The drawing of the figure from Katsambas (after Chatzidakis 1916, 168, fig. 3, and Evans 1930, 234, fig. 132).

the area, revealed parts of a Minoan settlement, the area of the cemeteries, the seaport facilities and the workshops. Dimopoulou excavated areas where metallurgical activities took place, such as the plots Sanoudakis, Skantzourakis, Charonitakis and Psychogioudakis (Dimopoulou 1997), as is attested by the abundance of crucibles, slags, tuyeres, ingots, molds, and obsidian unearthed there.

The figurine is not finished: it still has flashings from the mold as well as traces of tools from its partial removal. This means that the product was not yet ready for consumption and was probably closer to the artisan who produced it than to the client who commissioned it. It was arguably never exposed to a wider audience. The truth is that we do not know exactly where the figurine was found, but in all probability, it was not in a burial context, given that clear evidence exists for active metal-smithing workshops operating in the area since EM I (Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2004, 375).

The figurine is depicted in Chatzidakis' article with a wire around its neck, which has now been removed (Fig. 1). Golden accents on metal figurines drawing attention to the face, hands or garments were quite popular in Anatolian art (Aruz et al. 2008, 21, 46, 53 and more). Minoan craftspeople used the same approach on ivory figurines, as is attested by the Palaikastro Kouros, whose loincloth, shoes and bracelets were made of gold (Moak 2000, 74–75), by the remains of an ivory workshop in Knossos Royal Road (Evely 1993, 228), by the ivory deposit from the Temple Treasury (Evans 1932, 428), and possibly by the 'chryselephantine ivory group' from Archanes (Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, 719). However, to our knowledge, golden accents were not used on Minoan bronze figurines. The addition of the wire is not a standard practice and it is not consistent with the fact that the figurine is unfinished. One could also make the logical observation that if the craftsman wanted the figurine to wear a necklace they would have rendered one on the wax prototype, and certainly not in a way where the hair is obscured by its presence.

It was by mere coincidence that some enlightening information about the owner of the plot where the figurine was found presented itself: Kleanthis Sidiropoulos and Manolis Drakakis (2017), along with Eleftheria Christinidou (2016), have undertaken the arduous task of compiling a database of all the citizens of Heraklion between 1863 and 1913 from archival material such as tax records and census and from documents from the Demogerontia Archive and the Municipal Archive of Heraklion. Sidiropoulos was able to trace Nikolaos Frantzeskakis in the data collected and informed the author that he was a jeweller by profession, as was his brother Dimitrios. This possibly explains why the figurine was handed to Chatzidakis with a golden wire around its neck. This supposition of course is not hard evidence, but it does raise concerns over the find spot and of course the golden wire. Maybe that was the reason that at some point the wire was silently removed.

### The Boots, the Headgear, the Loincloth, and the 'Bracelets'

The figurine wears high ankle boots as can be understood by the three parallel incisions around each of its ankles and lower part of the calf. Traces of the use of a sharp tool can be detected, possibly the lines were added after the removal of the piece from its mold (Fig. 2). Similar boots are worn by men as shown in a variety of iconographic media, *e.g.* on the ring *CMS* I, no. 19 from Vapheio, on the sealing *CMS* II 6, no. 15 from Agia Triada, on the ring *CMS* XI, no. 29, currently in Berlin, on the figure of the Pylos Combat Agate seal-stone, on the Boxers Rhyton, and on metallic vases with relief decoration such as the Vapheio cups. A different artistic angle of the

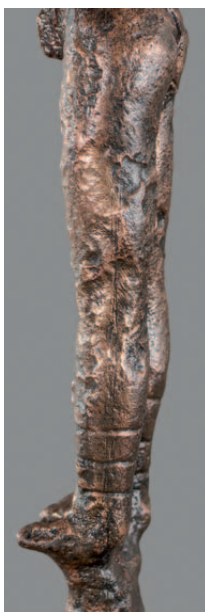


Fig. 3: The figurine from Katsambas, detail of the hat, incisions on left side (photo by Y. Ploumidis-Papadakis).

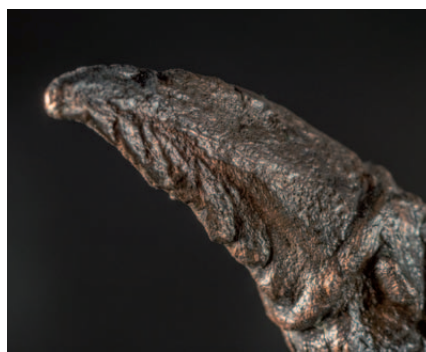


Fig. 4: The figurine from Katsambas, detail of the hat, incisions on right side (photo by Y. Ploumidis-Papadakis).

Fig. 2: Vertical traces of the sharp tooling along the side of the left leg (photo by Y. Ploumidis-Papadakis).



Fig. 5: CMS II 8, no. 237, Knossos (courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 6: CMS II 8, no. 236, Knossos (courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 7: CMS II 6, no. 36, Agia Triada (courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 8: The "Sacred Conversation" ring from Poros (after Dimopoulou-Rethemiotakis 2000, 43 Fig. 4c)

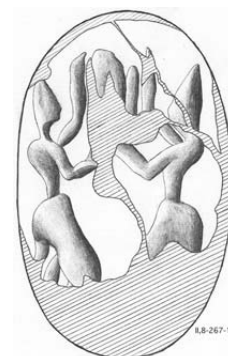


Fig. 9: CMS II 8, no. 267, unknown find place (courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).

Minoan boot is provided by the Egyptian fresco at the tomb of Rekhmire at Thebes (Betancourt 2001, 91). The peak sanctuary of Kophinas has also produced one fragment of a clay foot wearing what seems to be a boot, rendered with added strips of clay (Spiliotopoulou 2018, Vol. A, 142; Vol. B, 111–112, pl. 59, 111). Based then on the iconography, boots are worn by people engaged in all sorts of activities, athletic, hunting, fighting, worshipping, etc.

The tall hat (or tiara as termed by some) consists of three parts: a rounded brim, a pointed peak curving backwards in an arc, resembling an elongated shark fin, and the foliage or plumage along the spine of the hat (consisting of a series of overlapping sections, each one dangling from the spine). There are some cross-hatched incisions on each side of the plumage: made either while cleaning the figurine after the cast or earlier while preparing the wax surface (Figs. 3–4).

Pelon (1987, 433) compared the tall headgear of the figurine to the hat worn by men in two sealings from the Temple Repositories of Knossos, CMS II 8, no. 237 (Fig. 5) and no. 236 (Fig. 6) and one from Agia Triada, CMS II 6, no. 36 (Fig. 7). They all wear a pointed hat, they hold weapons and are accompanied by an animal. The hat worn in CMS II 8, no. 237 does bear a respectable resemblance to the hat under discussion in that it is the sole example of a conical hat with a decoration. The hat worn by the central male figure (Fig. 8) in the 'sacred conversation' ring of Poros (Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis 2000) may very well be another instance. That the Knossos sealing and the Poros hat form a stylistic group can thus be argued for. However, I believe that there are differences between the said group and the Katsambas hat, based on

the size ratio of the hat to the head, its shape and the nature of the dangling plumage. The Poros and Knossos hats are proportionately smaller compared to the head, rather more conical, and the decorative elements, made from a soft material that floats in the air, spring from its very tip. They do not hang down from the spine as in the Katsambas hat. The Poros hat's decoration seems to be bulkier where attached to the hat, and diminishes thereafter, whereas the Katsambas hat has decorative elements that progressively grow smaller towards the pointed end.

Aegean iconography provides a variety of individuals that wear conical hats: *e.g.* the sealing *CMS* II 8, no. 267 (Fig. 9) with two men in a heraldic rendering, the group of two women from the golden ring from Pylos (Davis and Stocker 2016), and the hats of the female figures of *CMS* II 3, no. 236, the warrior from *CMS* I, no. 294 or the conical hat of the bronze figurine from the Metaxas collection that possibly represents a priest (Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1995, 67, no. 114). All of the above have been rejected as comparable material for the Katsambas hat in this study because of stylistic and contextual differences.

The closest parallel for the hat then is one that Rethemiotakis located at the British Museum and identified as coming from the peak sanctuary of Kophinas (Rethemiotakis 2001, fig. 138),<sup>1</sup> rightly so. The figurine here has the same sort of hat with a strip of what seems to be a foliate or plumed band. The clay figurine preserves a hand with a boxing glove resting on its chest. The original gesture was the typical hands-on-chest as can be extrapolated from the broken surface on the right part of the chest. This could then have provided an impressive iconographic parallel by which to identify the Katsambas figurine as a boxer. But a serious flaw exists: the piece is actually two different figurines, glued together. The head is made of a reddish-brown clay, while the clay of the torso has a more orange hue, both being separate types of clay known from the sanctuary of Kophinas. This is a practice performed by looters, as a means to make a figurine larger and with more features, for the obvious reason of gaining a better price. Moreover, the head is obviously smaller than the torso and the angle of the head as joined is distorted, forcing it to tilt forward and not to have its chin raised in the proud stance that most figurines adopt.

Kophinas has ten more head fragments that wear this type of hat, out of a total of 349 head fragments studied. None of these though is directly connected to other boxing paraphernalia, though of course they are all part of a material group with a strong narrative about boxing games.

Colette Verlinden (1984, 125) believes that the tall pointed hat was reserved for divinities and people of rank and royalty. Likewise, Sapouna-Sakellarakis (1995, 56) concludes the tiara is to be understood as the insignium of an office. Pelon (1987, 434) searched Anatolia and the Hittites for a prototype, since conical hats of various forms are worn by Hittite kings, queens, gods, goddesses, priests and heroes at that time and no similar hat had been found or at least published in the iconographic imagery of Minoan or even Aegean art and culture. However, apart from the palpable reason that similar hats have now been detected in Crete and presented in the archaeological literature, there is another cause to avoid comparison with Anatolian art and culture. Basically, it is an unnecessary methodological leap, and one that could introduce dubious distractions.

Pointed hats have been used in multiple cultural contexts worldwide and they are not always associated with gods and kings or even nobles. Sometimes the pointed hat is linked to rites of passage as is the case with the tantoor, a hat that is given as a gift to a Levantine bride. In many other instances conical hats are an indication of provenance or cultural group, as is the case of the Jewish hat or that of the Welsh. In Spain penitents used to wear a capirote with a two-fold purpose: first to draw the attention away from the individual to God and later on for the greater ritual and public humiliation of the penitents. In the United States, the Ku Klux Klan wore the same capirote hats, but for different reasons. And of course, a pointed hat is not always worn with pride, especially if it is a dunce's hat used to discipline a student.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1970-1107-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1970-1107-1).

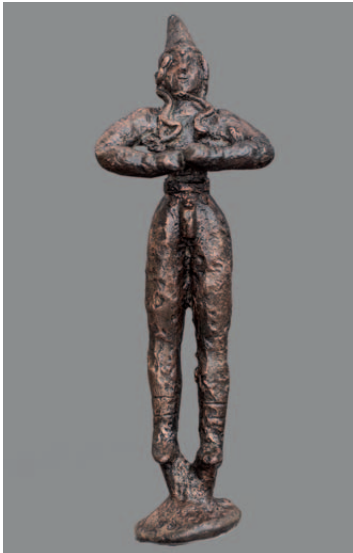


Fig. 10. The figurine from Katsambas, front (photo by Y. Ploumidis-Papadakis).

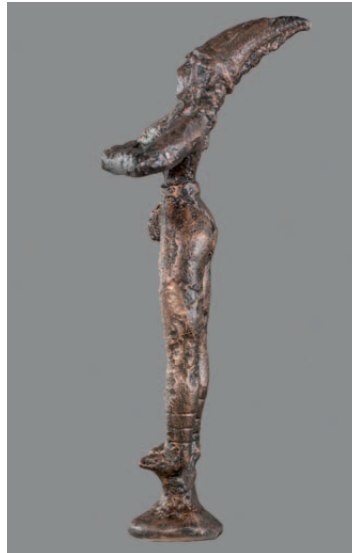


Fig. 11: The figurine from Katsambas, side (photo by Y. Ploumidis-Papadakis).



Fig. 12: The figurine from Katsambas, back (photo by Y. Ploumidis-Papadakis).

The Hittite iconography is – we must admit – full of figures with conical hats, most of them with relief decoration, horns and other insignia attached, which were undoubtedly instantly recognizable to a viewer from the same cultural context (for reference see Bryce 2002, 160; Aruz et al. 2008, 174–175, 179–181). Deities with tall conical hats rendered in relief can be seen in Hittite monuments *e.g.* Yazılıkaya, Fasillar, Fıraktın and of course Boğazköy, to name a few. However, none of the hats share the same shape with plumage and certainly none are accompanied by the same garments, posture and gesture. Reshef, the smiting god, has a very distinct set of attributes. Compared to the Katsambas figurine, Reshef's hat displays more differences than similarities, with the additional discrepancy that his pose, clothes and gesture are not at all relatable.

The body garment of our figurine is a belt that holds an emphasized loincloth/codpiece and a triangular cloth hanging down at the back between the buttocks, leaving them half-covered (Figs. 10–12). According to Sapouna-Sakellarakı (1971, 98) it belongs to her type Γ' that is worn by men, among them pugilists.

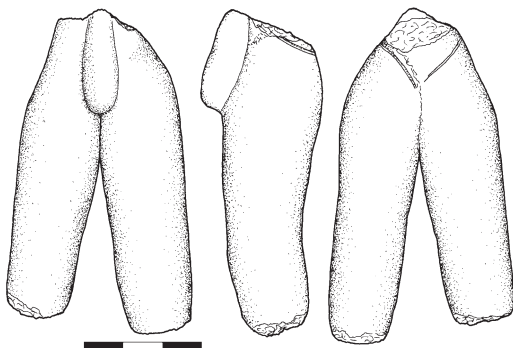


Fig. 13: Clay figurine fragment, peak sanctuary of Kophinas (drawing by the author, after Spiliotopoulou 2018).

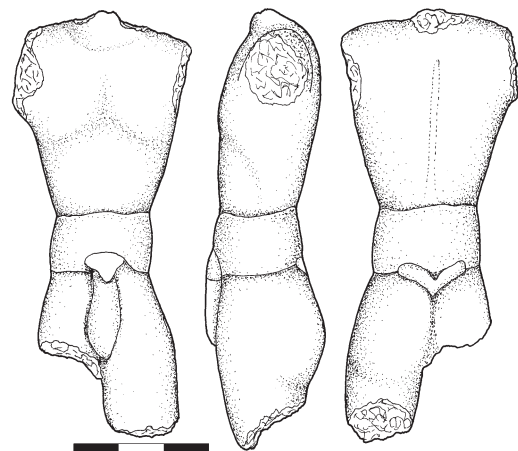


Fig. 14: Clay figurine fragment, peak sanctuary of Kophinas (drawing by the author, after Spiliotopoulou 2018).

The Gesture of the Male Bronze Figurine from Katsambas

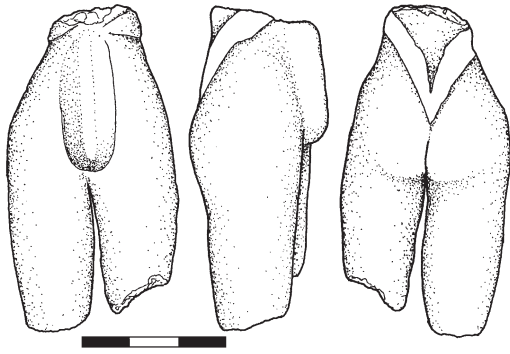


Fig. 15: Clay figurine fragment, peak sanctuary of Kophinas (drawing by the author, after Spiliotopoulou 2018).

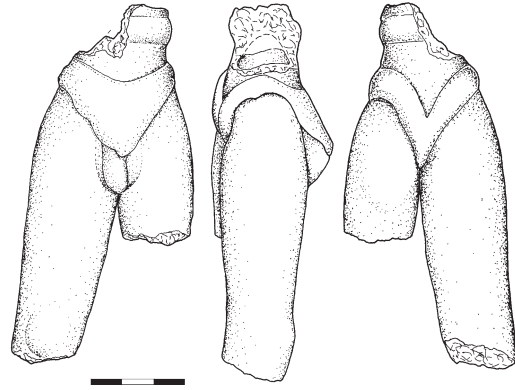


Fig. 16: Clay figurine fragment, peak sanctuary of Kophinas (drawing by the author, after Spiliotopoulou 2018).



Fig. 17: Fragment of a stone vase, Knossos (after Koehl 2006, 647, fig. 768).

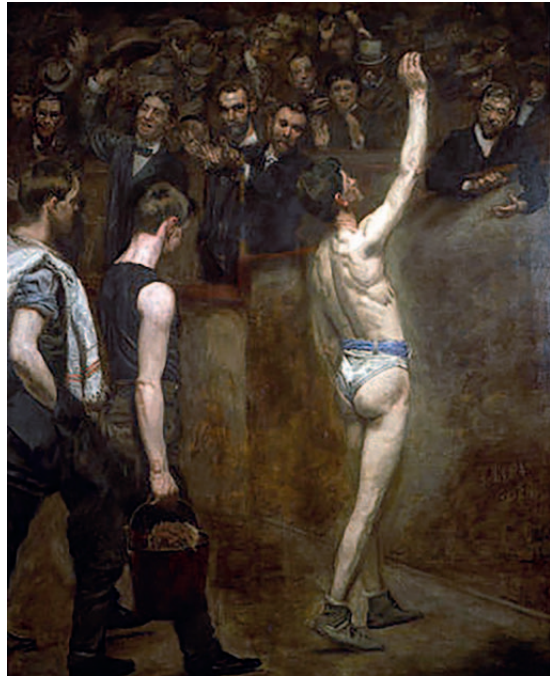


Fig. 18: "Salutat", Thomas Eakins, 1898 ([https://addison.andover.edu/search-the-collection/?embark\\_query=/objects-1/info?query=mfs%20all%20%22salutat%22&sort=0&objectName=Salutat](https://addison.andover.edu/search-the-collection/?embark_query=/objects-1/info?query=mfs%20all%20%22salutat%22&sort=0&objectName=Salutat)).

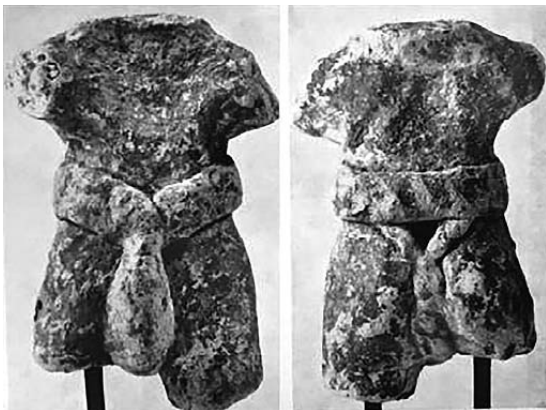


Fig. 19: Clay figurine fragment, Tylissos (after Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1971, 15, middle and right).



Fig. 20: Clay figurine fragment, Vrysinas (after Sfakianakis 2013, fig. 11 a).

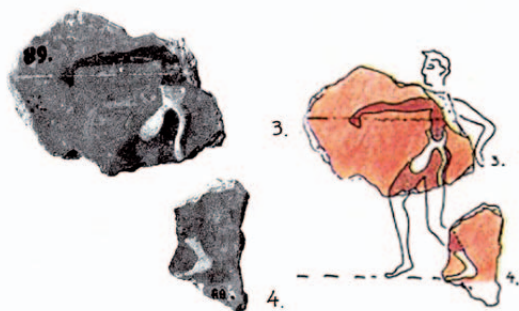


Fig. 21: Fresco from Tyliisos (after Shaw 1972, 174, fig. 3; 184, fig. 13).

Quite a few of the lower body fragments from Kophinas wear a similar garment, which is attributed as the typical attire of the boxers. There are two fragments that depict a triangular cloth on the buttocks (Figs. 13–16). The loincloth is emphasized, sometimes even angular in its projecting form (Figs. 13 and 15). This probably is due to the presence of a kind of a protective codpiece. The fragment from Kophinas in Figure 16 is a rendering in the round of the garment worn by the pugilist on the fragment from the stone vase from Knossos (Fig. 17).

The rounded edges of the cloth seen around the gluteal area could have been formed by tucking in the fabric to leave the buttocks uncovered and so allow maximum freedom of movement. The interpretation was inspired by Thomas Eakin's painting "Salutat", showing a boxer with his shorts pulled upwards in a v-form in the gluteal area (Fig. 18).

There are yet more and varied examples in Minoan art of this type of garment that share the above characteristics. The clay figurines from Tyliisos (Fig. 19) and Vrysinas (Fig. 20) have a strongly emphasised loincloth, as does the figure in the fresco from Tyliisos (Fig. 21) which has been identified as a boxer (Shaw 1972). It is worth pointing out that the special garment drawn in profile in the miniature fresco from Tyliisos also leaves the buttocks uncovered.

Every scholar that has described the arms and hands of the Katsambas figurine mentions that it is wearing bracelets. It is even shown in this way on the first drawing that was published by Chatzidakis and later by Evans, because they so interpreted it. But upon a closer inspection, the feature involved is not applied all around the wrist. Usually, when the craftsperson wants to render bracelets they do so by placing them at and encircling the entire circumference of the wrist, like in the bronze figurine from Tyliisos (Fig. 22).

The feature for Katsambas, however, is shown only on the upper part of the wrist and vanishes on its sides (Figs. 23 and 24). This small detail is the most crucial element the figurine of Katsambas has that could shed some light on his identity. For the same feature occurs on several fragments of hands in the material of Kophinas that have been classified as wearing boxing gloves.

Two ways to cover the three-dimensional hand of a boxer in the material of Kophinas can be detailed. One is by using strips wrapped around the hand and rendered with incised lines and the other is by shaping the whole hand as a hemisphere, sometimes with a small flap at the fingers and with an added feature on the upper part of the wrist (Fig. 25).

One could argue that the present positioning of the hands was not that originally intended for the wax model, where the gesture was actually the well-known 'hands-on-the-chest', but it became altered by accident during the casting procedure. That would explain the bracelets not being rendered as whole encircling bands. This theory was indeed suggested by Verlinden (1984, 124, n. 207) and it should be addressed here. There is no distortion on the figurine's chest as a result of any detachment of the hands and there are also no signs of distortion or malformation on the figurine's arms. The movement required by Verlinden's proposal would also mean that the upper side of the hands would have moved on the same axis and not become twisted, so as to face away from the chest and not upwards. All in all, I believe that this argument cannot be made to work, and so is invalid. The gesture we see now is the one initially intended.



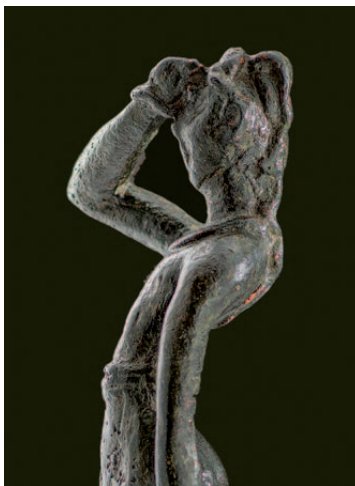


Fig. 22: Bronze figurine from Tyllissos (photo by Y. Ploumidis-Papadakis).



Fig. 23: The figurine from Katsambas, detail (photo by Y. Ploumidis-Papadakis).



Fig. 24: The figurine from Katsambas, detail (photo by Y. Ploumidis-Papadakis).

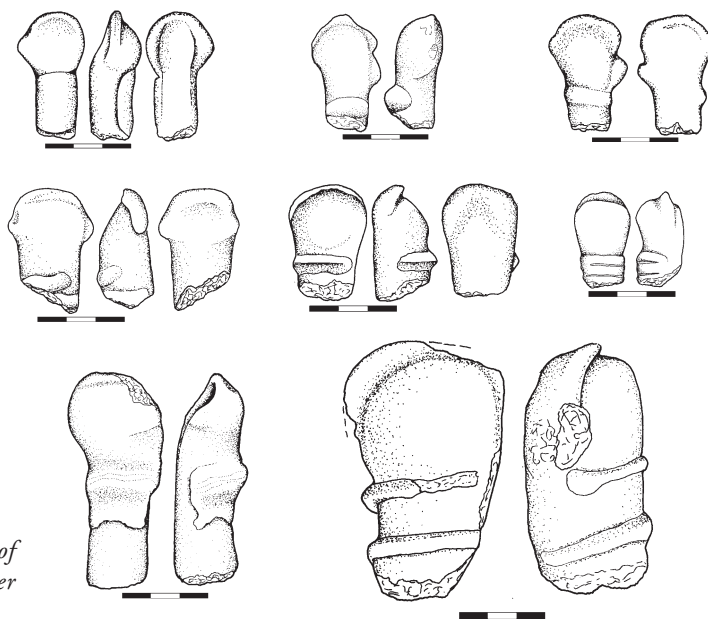


Fig. 25: Boxing gloves, peak sanctuary of Kophinas (drawings by the author, after Spiliotopoulou 2018).

### The Gesture

The gesture of the Katsambas figurine’s hand forms an axis that is perpendicular to the main vertical axis of the body. The elbows are raised and the hands meet on the same horizontal axis as the elbows. The gesture is a closed one but not modest, reserved or introverted. It extends away from the chest and towards the viewer.

Evans describes the figurine’s gesture as being in a “usual ceremonial attitude”, which “along his tiara-like head-piece suggest the possibility that we have here before us the Boy-God” and concludes that “he is in the act of saluting his divine Mother” (Evans 1930, 235). Pelon’s study concludes that the gesture of the arms, by being brought back towards the chest, was not a gesture of greeting but underlined the majesty of the character. Therefore, the figurine represents a male god, borrowing some stylistic elements from the Hittite and general Anatolian tradition (Pelon 1987, 435). However, he admits that its overall spirit is deeply Minoan (Pelon 1987, 436).

The multiple ways the gesture of the Katsambas figurine has been treated in the descriptive systems is an indication of its uniqueness. Chatzidakis calls it unusual. Verlinden on the other hand puts it under gesture 4, “les mains sont repliées sur la poitrine”, being the sole member in the subcategory c), “les coudes sont relevés sur les côtés mais les mains ne touchent pas la poitrine”, while admitting that the placement of the hands is “exceptionnelle dans l’iconographie



Fig. 26: Agia Triada Boxers Rhyton, detail of boxer (after Zervos 1956, 372, fig. 546).



Fig. 27: Agia Triada Boxers Rhyton, detail of boxer (after von Matt et al. 1967, 132).



Fig. 28: Agia Triada Boxers Rhyton, detail bull-leaper (after von Matt et al. 1967, 133).

minoenne” and that it could be interpreted as greeting gesture, albeit one different from the norm (Verlinden 1984, 124). Pelon seems to disagree with this interpretation as he insists on the Anatolian prototypes of figurines with hands set apart from the chest and with a hole to accommodate objects (Pelon 1987, 435). However, there is no such hole on or between hands of the figurine of Katsambas. Sapouna-Sakellaraki (1995, 107) classifies it under Gesture A “Segensgestus”, that is a blessing gesture, but because the arms stretch away from the chest it again belongs to a category of its own, type Ab. Louise Hitchcock (1997, 121) follows Verlinden’s classification. Although she admits that its gesture is unusual, she sees the figurine from Syme as performing the same gesture as the Katsambas one. In Hitchcock’s study the figurine’s gesture is classified under Gesture 4 “both hands are folded in the chest”, which is clearly inaccurate (Hitchcock 1997, 113, 122). The conical hat is stressed because of the rarity of headdresses on bronze figurines, and she regards it as a symbol of divinity or ruler status in the Near East (Hitchcock 1997, 121).

The one all-important question we have to ask ourselves, even if we establish that this person was indeed a pugilist, is whether his gesture belongs to that class alone, or if it belongs to a more general ritual or religious one. Is this a gesture typically to be identified as one performed by a boxer or is this one performed by a worshipper or an adorant who happens to be a boxer, regardless of their expertise or skill, much like the torso of the figurine of the boxer from the British Museum (Rethemiotakis 2001, fig. 138; also British Museum, no. 1970, 1107.1)?

Some arguments supporting the idea that the gesture of the figurine reflects the level of skill of the represented male will be presented here. First of all, one has to contemplate the essence of the sport and the general rules of the game (that in all probability applied to Minoan sports as a whole); here, *hit but do not get hit*. Offense means going for the head and the torso. An effective defense, one that protects the vulnerable areas, is equally as important.

Pugilistic scenes are our best iconographic source. The Boxers Rhyton depicts three friezes with boxing scenes. Each frieze has different episodes with boxers that are about to win and others that have fallen on their knees and backs. The gestures of the first group fall in two main types: the shoulders and elbows form a straight line, but the hands and lower arms turn in towards the torso thus enclosing the frame (Figs. 26–27). The wrist is not bent and its upper side always faces upwards. This is a majestic gesture that shows off the athlete’s strong torso to the viewer. The artist captured the boxing movements by rendering the athletes with the elbow back as to impart enough kinetic energy for a telling blow, but not too much so as to create a gap in the defense. The other gesture is seen on the upper frieze; a hit on the opponent’s abdomen with the arm moving through a horizontal axis. Both gestures show control, energy, strength and possibly indicate who the victor is.

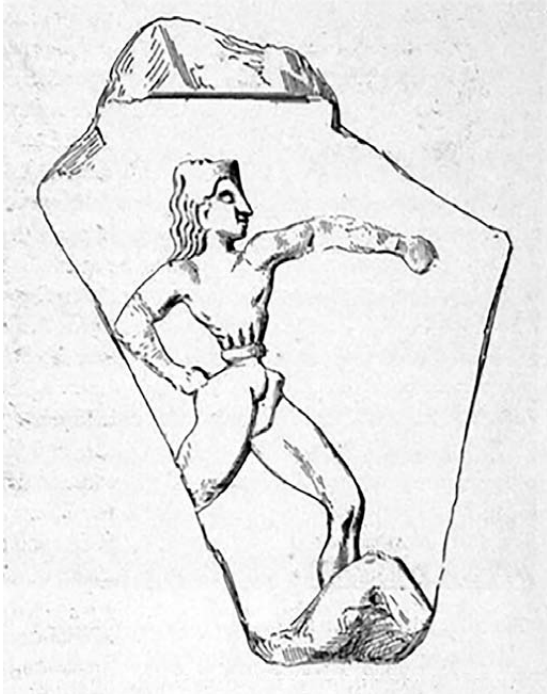


Fig. 29: Fragment of a stone vase, Knossos (after Evans 1921, 689, fig. 510).



Fig. 30: Fragment of a stone vase, Boston (after Miltello 2003, 366, fig. 6).

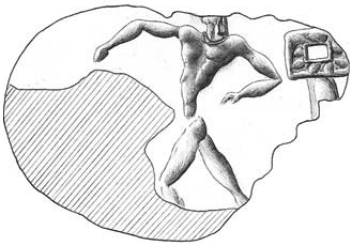


Fig. 31: CMS II 8, no. 280, Knossos (courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg).



Fig. 32: The golden ring from Syme (after Lebessi et al. 2004, table 2).



Fig. 33: Fragment of a stone vase, Knossos (after Evans 1928, 614, fig. 386).

The other group of figures, those who receive hits, are shown mainly falling on their backs or onto their knees. Their gestures reveal a loss of control with the hands flying in the air, an attempt to stand and resume a vertical position, the need to take a breath and manage pain or even to hide the embarrassment. In a similar manner the hands and legs of the acrobat impaled on the bull's horn on the Boxers Rhyton (Fig. 28) and the fallen youth of the Vapheio cup are thrown up into the air with no sign of control, just a flailing reaction to the animal's blow.

Apart from the Agia Triada rhyton there are two other fragments of stone vases with relief decoration and a sealing, that all replicate the same strong gesture with the aligned shoulders and elbows and the closed frame of swift hands, as if copying a prototype. These are a stone vase fragment found at Knossos with a single boxer (Fig. 29), a similar fragment from Boston belonging to the upper frieze of a conical rhyton depicting two boxers (Fig. 30), possibly a forgery, and sealing CMS II 8, no. 280 from Knossos (Fig. 31).

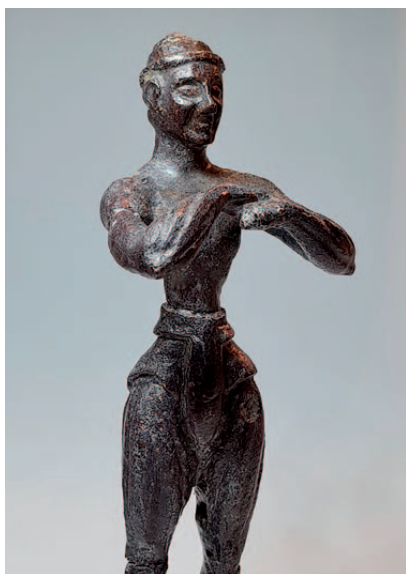
To further understand the movement, a comparison of the boxers' gestures with the ones performed by men engaged in other sports is necessary. The comparison shows that the Minoan craftsman was well aware of the different positioning of the hands pertaining to each sport. The force with which the central figure of the golden ring of Syme (Lebessi et al. 2004) is running, is shown by the wide stride and by the pumping movement of the arms and hands (Fig. 32). The arms stretch outwards in a very open shape in order to increase his velocity. On a different stone fragment from Knossos another athletic scene is captured. The shoulders and elbows of the best-preserved figure are aligned but the hands move outwards and the shape of the gesture is again an open one (Fig. 33). Thus, the pugilists move their hands inwards in order to form an impenetrable shield in front of their face and torso, but the runners employ the hands openly and outwards to facilitate their forward motion.

One could ask at this point why a boxer would be represented by a metal figurine when most of this class show worshippers and adorants. Are there any more such pugilists in metal? The present study has potentially classified at least two more figurines, forming a group that share certain features.

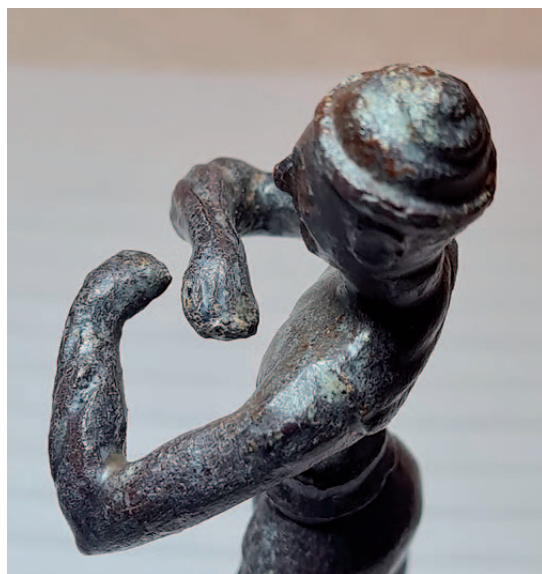
The figurine from Kambos in Messenia (Fig. 34), which was found in a Mycenaean tholos tomb and was published by Christos Tsountas (1891), possibly depicts a boxer. His musculature is extremely developed and rendered in strong relief modelling on his thick thighs and arms: so much so that Tsountas without hesitation dubbed him an athlete. After Tsountas there were various interpretations of this unique gesture that disregarded his athletic body, until Valerios Stais (1909) claimed that the figurine represents a pugilist.

The Kambos figurine imitates a prototype of earlier times according to Sapouna-Sakellaraki (1993, 141), who suggests that the prototype was Minoan, and that the later figure probably has a similar disposition and meaning as that of its prototype.

When placed side by side the Kambos figurine does display a degree of resemblance with the figurine of Katsambas. The first wears a humbler variation of the garment, albeit with a still emphasized loincloth. It does not bear any gloves or shoes, or any other accessories apart from a hat that is also conical but much shorter. One could say that its gesture is close to the Katsambas' one. However, the hands do not meet, though one is closer to the chest than the other, forming an asymmetrical shape (Fig. 35). The gesture is again a rather closed one but not reserved. The figure presents its athletic and toned arms to flaunt its power. The form of the body and the gesture as well as the assertiveness of the two figurines seems strikingly similar.



*Fig. 34: The lead figurine from Kambos, Messenia (National Archaeological Museum, photo by the author).*



*Fig. 35: The lead figurine from Kambos, Messenia, detail (National Archaeological Museum, photo by the author).*

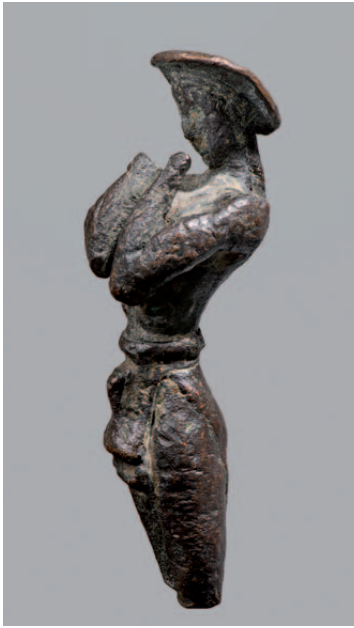


Fig. 36: The bronze figurine from the area of Phaistos (photo by Robbert Jan Looman, National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden).

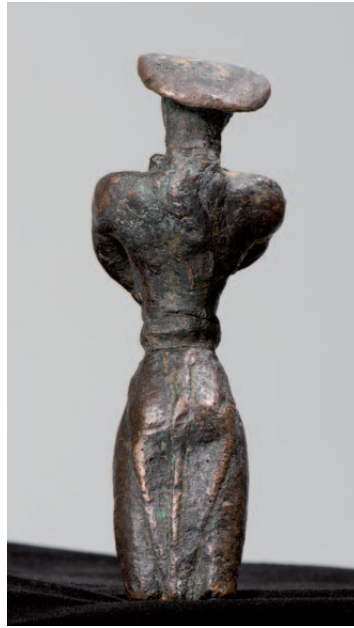


Fig. 37: The bronze figurine from the area of Phaistos, back (photo by Robbert Jan Looman, National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden).



Fig. 38: The bronze figurine from the area of Phaistos, detail (photo by Robbert Jan Looman, National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden).

The last figurine of the group is the one from the Museum of Leiden (Figs. 36–38). This is a figurine that was given to the Museum in 1904 with a brief account of the provenance: the area of Phaistos. The figurine from Leiden comprises of a set of interesting and – again – unique features. Unfortunately, the hands and the legs from the knees down are not preserved. It wears a garment that is long in the back with a line in the middle which could be either a seam or the two ends of the cloth (Fig. 37). The front part has a piece of fabric overlapping the loincloth, as if it is folded over (Fig. 36). This is a feature that is known so far only in the material of Kophinas (Spiliotopoulou 2018), as is also mentioned by Sapouna-Sakellarakı (1971, 89, fig. 17). It still remains a valid observation.

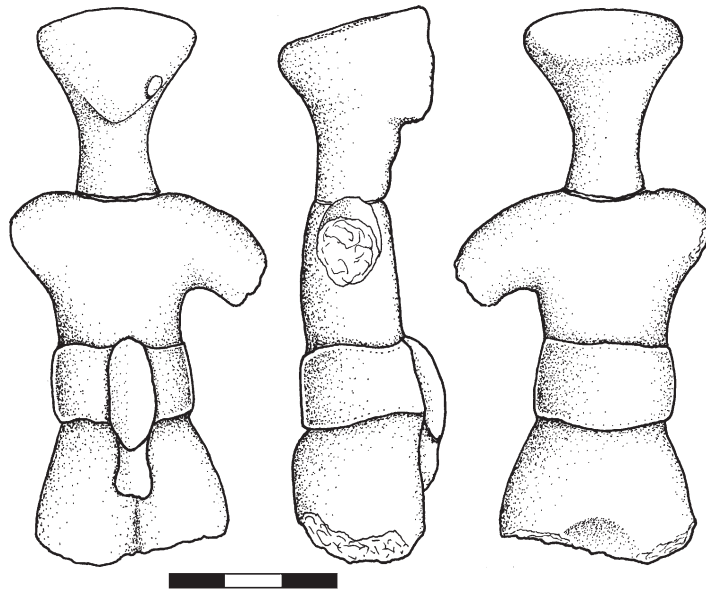


Fig. 39: Clay figurine fragment, peak sanctuary of Kophinas (drawing by the author, after Spiliotopoulou 2018).

Sometimes the overlapping cloth can be seen on lower body fragments from Kophinas combined with the triangular fabric at the gluteal area (Figs. 13–14, 16), an arrangement that was defined through correlations as the attire of the pugilists in the material of Kophinas (Spiliotopoulou 2018, 137). The long fabric in the back of the Leiden figurine (Fig. 37) is rare,

but it seems to agree with the length of the fabrics worn by the boxers of Agia Triada and of the fresco from Tylissos (Fig. 21).

The beret worn by the figurine of Leiden finds its iconographic parallel once more in the material of Kophinas. There are two heads of figurines from the sanctuary that possibly wear the same style of headgear. One of them even sports a raiment with the overlapping cloth over the loincloth (Fig. 39). The more modest medium of clay and the poor preservation of the clay figurine from Kophinas makes the certain recognition and acceptance that these two figurines depict the same iconographic type difficult to grasp.

Lastly, the Leiden gesture is again one of a kind. The arms are bent at the elbow with the forearms raised close together in front of the face of the figurine. This is a rare instance where a figurine has its chin tucked closer to the chest, not lifted for a prouder stance. This combination of features, the chin and the arms in front of the face is another expression of a boxing gesture, but this time a defensive one.

## Discussion

The corpus of the anthropomorphic figurines from the peak sanctuary of Kophinas has revealed about 100 fragments of hands with boxing gloves and a series of clay representations of boxing men with various hats on, in both a passive adorant attitude and in a more energetic and active pose as figures of compositions inside of clay models (Spiliotopoulou 2018). The prospect that this was the first time a relatively detailed and three-dimensional rendering of boxing gloves was encountered led the author to search for overlooked details in the corpus of the bronze figurines, especially those figurines that bear similar attributes to the Kophinas boxers. The search was successful as two more metal figurines are highlighted, all with unique gestures, attire and hats: the one from Kambos in Messenia and the one from the Museum of Leiden with an alleged origin of the wider area of Phaistos, and possibly thus from Kophinas.

The comparison of the Katsambas figurine against the iconographic wealth of the instances at Kophinas has not only assisted in the understanding of its identity but also unveiled the methodological shortcomings of previous scholars in their attempts to decipher the unique features of the hat and the gesture. If one encounters a feature that is unique and cannot be understood through iconographical parallels within its immediate geographical and temporal limits and within its cultural context (where it provoked instant recognition within the people who conceived, created and conferred on it a meaning), it seems unsound to be looking for ‘similarities’ in material from other cultural contexts, with no regard to the composition of the object as a whole.

There are several types of conical hats in Minoan imagery worn by various individuals. They exhibit differences and need to be examined individually. There is also an abundance of conical hats in Hittite imagery, worn by gods and men. However, none of the interpretations of the Katsambas figurine takes into account that a) there are no hats in Hittite imagery that look exactly the same as the Minoan one(s) and b) none of the other attributes demonstrated by the Hittite individuals with conical hats are reproduced on the Katsambas figurine. Diamantis Panagiotopoulos addresses the issue in his insightful review of the history of research of Minoan images: “The main problem with this approach, which has been quite popular, is that scholars isolated specific pictorial themes or single motifs and studied their distribution in space and time across different media, paying less attention to their meaningful association within the overall composition, its medium and spatial context” (Panagiotopoulos 2020, 387). In this particular case the spatial context might be lost but the figurine is meaningful in a cultural context where not only boxing is celebrated, but also other sports or competitions, as can be seen on ceremonial vases, frescoes, figurines, and so forth.

Boxing was one of the sporting activities that, along with running, hunting and bull-leaping, the Minoans chose to depict through several artistic media in a way suited to their culture (for an overview see Militello 2003; Panagiotopoulos 2004; Platon 2008). The best-known depiction of these sort of events is demonstrated in three out of the four friezes of a truly remarkable

and elaborately decorated object, the Agia Triada Boxers Rhyton. There are pugilistic scenes on other fragments of Knossian stone vases, objects of value that were in all probability used in ceremonial rituals of rites of passage. Boxing scenes were decorating frescoes at Tyllissos, possibly the Palace of Knossos, if we are to accept the observations made on the fresco of the Prince of Lilies (Coulomb 1979, 1981, 1985) and the alternative reconstruction of the Staircase Procession Fresco that Fritz Blakolmer (2018) has offered.

The last potential strand of a connection with the Hittites or Anatolia in the related bibliography, namely the golden wire around the figurine's neck, has been removed or at least questioned by the circumstances of its discovery as presented here. The figurine has a Minoan personality, or as Pelon puts it 'a Minoan allure'.

Douglass Bailey defined the prerequisites of the way to "read" a figurine: "... the *methodology* for accurately reading prehistoric figurines depends on the visual examination of the figurine, the identification of the subject of representation and a thorough knowledge of the archaeological and social context of both figurine and its represented subject" (Bailey 1994, 323). Are we certain about what it is we see? If not, how can we possibly proceed to the next step, the "identification", and even more so, to the interpretation and the theoretical construction – with such built-in inaccuracies? The present study of the Katsambas figurine has presented arguments focusing on the "visual examination of the figurine". Both the Katsambas and the Kambos figurines, as well as other bronze figurines of the Heraklion Museum, were examined and observed not from old published photographs or secondary sources, but from up close and with one's own eyes.

Corresponding to that argument is the inaccurate first drawing of the figurine. Most archaeologists are familiar with the concept that the drawing of an artifact is just another form of interpretation. The artifacts are not always made of specific shapes with clean lines. There is decay, distortion, surface wear, gaps and holes, and unfamiliar elements that the draughtsperson or the skilled archaeologist needs to sort out in order to produce a comprehensible image. The gap is usually filled with the archaeologist's assumption, at best an educated guess drawn from a bank of personal knowledge, however adequate or inadequate, accurate or distorted it may be. Sometimes all it takes is a change to one small line and the meaning assigned becomes a totally different one. In the case of the Katsambas figurine the first drawing shows a man wearing thick bracelets because the archaeologist interpreted them as such, ignoring the fact that the element on top of the wrist does not continue to its inner and side surfaces. Once so interpreted, the accepted description of the figurine was as one with bracelets. That is, of course, quite understandable at the time, since there were not any three-dimensional boxers and boxing gloves then known.

All three figurines were found some time before and after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. None is burdened with a suspicion of forgery, because when they were brought to the surface, their iconographic types were not known. They are all one of a kind in their own rights, but seem to form a broad group with a common meaning: one that could probably be recognized by the original viewers, one that was meaningful in Minoan society – showing the strength of well-built and athletic men, an idea that is consistent with other aspects of Aegean iconography in other media.

The Katsambas figurine is shown in a standing and static body posture – he is not captured in action. His gesture is one that is meaningful and consistent with boxing imagery; firm, strong and proud. The gesture of this male could be seen as a pose, a salute or a greeting, a pre-fight ritual, a post-fight celebration, all intended to remind the viewer of his strength, his athletic training, and his skill that makes him stand out. On a more abstract level of interpretation this could yet be seen as a gesture of adoration, one performed by a worshipper, as most bronze figurines are.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers for inviting me to contribute this paper. I would like to thank the participants for all their useful comments and recommendations. I owe my appreciation to Alexandra Karetsou and Giorgos Rethemiotakis for allowing me to study not only the pottery of the peak sanctuary of Kophinas but also the anthropomorphic figurines, a material full of revelations. I wish to also thank the Heraklion Archaeological Museum and the National Archaeological Museum for facilitating my study of the figurines of Katsambas and Kambos respectively, as well as Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden and photographer Robert Jan Looman for providing new photographs of the figurine supposed to come from the Phaistos area. I am further indebted to the Heraklion Ephorate's photographer Yiannis Ploumidis-Papadakis for the outstanding photographs of the Katsambas and the Tylissos figurines and to Kleanthis Sidiropoulos who volunteered to run through his project's data in order to locate information about M. Frantzeskakis. Thanks are due to Don Evely who was kind and patient enough to edit the text and to Kostis Christakis for facilitating my study at the library of the British School at Knossos. I would finally like to express my deepest gratitude for their support to Eleftherios Platon, to Athanasia Kanta, to Calliope Galanaki, to Maria Roussaki, to friends Céline Murphy and Danae Kontopodi, to all my colleagues at the Heraklion Ephorate of Antiquities, and of course to my husband, George Kapnas.

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