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Mystery on the Mountain

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Oral Presentation O11.1

MYSTERY ON THE MOUNTAIN

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Peak sanctuaries are outdoor holy places located on the peaks of mountains. Prevalent during the Pre- and Proto-Palatial periods of Bronze Age Crete, they probably served a religious ritual function. We know these sites were visited, and we know the visitors left objects. But who were these people? What were they leaving and why? The most notable feature of the divine in the peak sanctuaries was its absence. Among thousands of adorant figurines, no image of the deity exists. Since no written language provides a text to aid this investigation into the religion, I will use artifacts from the sites and artwork depicting these sites as my starting point. I will examine offering bearers and their offerings at peak sanctuaries using ceramics, painting, and seals along with archeological information already available. I will study at the Zakros stone rhyton, complemented by the Gypsades rhyton, the Ayia Triadha sarcophagus, and the Mistress of the Mountain sealing from Knossos. I will argue that religious rituals were directed to a nurturing goddess to ease communal concerns over death and the subsequent renewal of life and the continued welfare of the human and his environment.