Summary of the proposed research

The fired clay model boats from Iron Age Cyprus (c.800 to 500 BC) in the Museum’s collection are some of the few three-dimensional representations of ancient Mediterranean ships not only in the BM, but in collections world wide. This studentship will research the lives of the BM Iron Age Cypriot boat models, building on previous research (Westerberg 1983; Basch 1987; Karageorghis 1996) to approach a comprehensive assessment of the boat models, within the context in which they were constructed, used and eventually deposited. The stories they can tell therefore have the potential to carry considerable ‘weight’ in future exhibitions or new galleries etc. about maritime connections across the eastern Mediterranean. This studentship will help shape the future career of a curator, lecturer and/or maritime archaeologist.

Model clay boats are known from Bronze Age contexts on Cyprus, but are more common from the Iron Age. Models of both warships and merchant ships are known, some with elaborate detail of both naval features and human figures. Examples can be found in Museums in Cyprus, Europe, Israel and USA (e.g. the Louvre, Vienna, the Met, Haifa). These models form part of a larger tradition of the production of clay models on the island and in the central Levantine region, a focus of growing research into terracotta figurine models, and the regional transmission and adoption of model types and styles, with which this research will also engage (Insoll 2017). Model boats, like other miniatures, have been found in burials and shrines on Cyprus, as well as a few recovered from the seafloor. There are some finds of Cypriot boat models outside of Cyprus. A large number of boat models from the island come from the port site of Amathus and to a lesser extent Salamis and Kition, which may reflect the importance of ships for these ports, and reflect the role of these ports in the region at the time. The model boats have been used as evidence to discuss full size vessels, to discuss ancient Mediterranean seafaring, and to reflect on Cypriot maritime culture, this is despite the lack of detailed study of these particular models, their chronology, typology and contexts. Finally, this research could also contribute to the debate on the role of Cyprus in Iron Age maritime networks and regional political frameworks, and ‘re-examine the supposedly/traditionally dominant role of the Phoenicians’.

The studentship aims to undertake a thorough assessment of the boat models. Four broad research questions form the focus of this research – giving scope for the student to concentrate on some questions more than others depending on the material and the student’s interests;

Why were these models made, used and deposited – was it different to ‘lives’ of other Cypriot models of the same period? Indeed how reflective were these models of their Cypriot cultural label?

Do the concentration of these models at the city of Amathus and Salamis represent a real concentration in the past, or is it a product of collection history and sampling strategies?

What do the models reveal about the cultural and symbolic importance of maritime activities and the sea in Cypriot cultural at the time?

Can these models tell us about the shape, manufacture and use of the full sized vessels they represent?

Answering these questions will involve the student comparing boat models to other models of the region and period, as well as broadly considering other Iron Age boat models and boat imagery in Phoenicia (the Levant Coast). The boats will be recorded using laser scanners to produce 3D models that can be tested to determine hull stability and the reality of the full size vessels they may represent.

In the first year the student will record the BM models, carry out relevant background reading and undertake an initial visit to Cypriot collections to define the thesis. In years 2
and 3 a further visit(s) to Cyprus, potentially Lebanon, and to collections in Europe are likely. The studentship will benefit from close links that Blue and Kiely have with museums in Cyprus, the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute, and the Department of History and Archaeology, University of Cyprus.