

# Encounters with Mycenaean figures and figurines

Papers presented at a seminar at the  
Swedish Institute at Athens, 27–29 April 2001

edited by

Ann-Louise Schallin  
in collaboration with Petra Pakkanen

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**Abstract**

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This volume presents fourteen articles which discuss Mycenaean figurines from various points of view. They focus on different aspects of the figurines, elaborating on their function, contextual characteristics, production, use-life, classification, topography, and history of scholarship. The articles are based on papers given at a workshop at the Swedish Institute at Athens in April 2001 entitled 'Cultic Space and Mycenaean Figurines'. The idea of having a workshop arose from the fact that several of the participants were involved at the time with the documentation of various figurine types from the so-called Potter's Workshop at Mastos in the Berbati Valley in the Argolid. The number and variety of the Mycenaean figurines from Mastos is impressive, particularly as the excavation had covered only a small area. The excavator, Å. Åkerström, proposed that the site had a cultic function in addition to its role as a production centre. In order to better understand the characteristics and identity of Mastos, scholars were invited to discuss the problems of the function and contextual characteristics of Mycenaean figurines more generally, presenting figurines from different sites so as to provide comparative contexts. Figurines in primary context are naturally considered as especially important since they may further our understanding of the roles of the figurines in religious as well as secular contexts. Issues such as interpreting the social roles of the figurines and considering their relation to other votive offerings, although not necessarily tied to primary contexts, are also discussed in this volume.

*Keywords:* Mycenaean figurines, Mycenaean female figurines, Mycenaean figures, group figurines, figurine types, miniature vessels, Late Bronze Age, Mycenae, Berbati, Mastos, Midea, function, context, cultic, symbolic value, cultic rites, settlements, tombs, sanctuaries, kouroutrophos, sacrifice, votives.

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# Figures and figurines in Mycenaean sanctuaries: patterns of find distributions and contexts

By  
Gabriele Albers

## *Abstract*

The subject of this paper is those figures and figurines, which form actual components of the archaeological material of Mycenaean unequivocal cultic space, namely the ones observed in closed excavation contexts of Mycenaean sanctuaries. The issue of the paper is to investigate to what extent aspects of the function and, consequently, the meaning of the figurines within the cultic space can be derived from particular evidence in the archaeological record, i.e. from specific find distributions and contexts.

The question of definition and methodological inferences regarding the identification and interpretation of find patterns are considered first. Of concern is here also how the figurines found in the sanctuaries may practicably be differentiated by categories and quantities of the finds. Then, the evidence of anthropomorphic figures and figurines, animal figures and figurines, as well as group figurines in the cult buildings is presented. Further, a synopsis of diagnostic find contexts in the buildings is given.

The final comparative evaluation of the find distributions, contexts, and of the evidence of uncommon figures and figurines and/or painted representations comes to the conclusion that a differentiation of the figurines in terms of religious function is possible, namely between 'genuine' *addressees* and 'mere' *means* of cultic veneration in the Mycenaean sanctuaries.

## Introduction: defining patterns of relationship between the find contexts and the cultic function of Mycenaean figurines

The archaeological find contexts evidently play a major role in investigations intended to clarify the relationship between Mycenaean figurines

and cultic space. In order to add to our interpretations, different find contexts of figurines have to be analyzed in relation to one another, i.e. the various contexts have to be compared with each other. Comparison, again, on the basis of the archaeological material that is presently at hand comprises the observation not only of find contexts, but equally of find distributions of the different kinds of figurines in the various contextual settings. That is, the question comes up immanently whether one assemblage was, for example, rather dominated by anthropomorphic figurines, and another assemblage may in the main have consisted of animal figurines. As various attempts to identify *patterns* of spatial distribution and functional context of figurines have been made in the past,<sup>1</sup> the search for such patterns constitutes the theme also of this present paper. However, in view of the incentive of the seminar to gain firmer ideas regarding the function, and respectively the religious meaning of the figurines, special concern shall here be applied to the question of interpretation: namely whether the eventual archaeological patterns are at all—and if, to what extent—likely to reflect a specific relationship between Mycenaean figurine *finds* and cultic space, i.e. whether aspects of the function and, consequently, the religious meaning of the figurines can reasonably be derived from the archaeological evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Renfrew 1985, 370–383, 413–433, with refs.; cf. Albers 1994, 135–142, with refs.

The distributions and contexts of Mycenaean figures and figurines can here, for reason of space as well as coherency of the investigation, not be covered for all Mycenaean archaeological assemblages where figures and figurines are represented. Therefore, this paper shall be limited to the so-called 'public communal sanctuaries in settlement contexts' which up till now are known at Mycenae, Tiryns, Asine, Phylakopi on Melos and Ayia Irini on Keos.<sup>2</sup> A synopsis of the find contexts at these sanctuary sites will be given, and an attempt will be made to compare the distribution of the finds.

### Explanation of method

Even when we think we are able to trace patterns of archaeological evidence through comparative analysis we can, however, only achieve reflections of patterns of cultural mechanisms of the past: i.e. as archaeological preservation is always circumstantial, our recognition of patterns could prove to be only a matter of coincidence. Thus, in order to establish a cultural-historical validity of the supposed patterns we need to develop an interpretative methodology *on the basis of the actual material*. In the particular case of the various Mycenaean figurine finds observed in a variety of secure sanctuary contexts it is proposed here not merely to look for a suitable explanatory model derived from other, more easily understood cultural-historical contexts and apply the model to the archaeological material which we are dealing with (i.e. to use the deductive, 'hypothesis-testing' method). Instead, the aim here is to take as the starting point for cultural-historical explanation the very same material which we seek to explain (i.e. to apply the empirical, inductive method). In other words, it is attempted to trace potential explanations (wherever such might be inherent) on the basis of the material remains, filter them from effects of the casual conditions of archaeological preservation and observation, as well as to correlate them systematically and in detail, in order to form the basis of the explanatory body which needs to be most carefully and critically

built up from all relevant constituents of the material record.

When the observation of patterns and the empirical explanatory method are derived from the very archaeological material that is investigated it may be possible to draw certain, reasonable conclusions concerning Mycenaean figurines and cultic space: These should then result from actual dynamics in the past, and hence we can formulate the conclusions as tentative cultural-historical concepts.

For the following investigation of distributions and contexts of Mycenaean figurines in cultic space a special problem rises, however, immediately, namely when it comes to specifying the occurrence of figures and figurines of a certain kind in a certain context in terms of exact numbers. As numbers constitute one aspect of the comparative analysis, they *may* also prove a factor in the domain of interpretation, and therefore the numbers in the same way as other observations require careful consideration. However, as a first point only the figurine finds from two of the named cultic contexts have been published so far in final excavation reports (only recently Mycenae, 'House of the Idols', and earlier the sanctuary at Phylakopi).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, to reconstruct exact numbers of figurines which were actually, and at the same time simultaneously, in use in a particular cultic context is even on the basis of final publication hardly ever possible: On one hand, also in sealed 'good' contexts the figurine finds are often only fragmentarily preserved, and it can thus not be specified with any certainty how many figurines are actually represented by the fragments found. Another difficulty is that an archaeologist at a sanctuary site usually faces

<sup>2</sup> See esp. Kilian 1992, 16–23; Albers 1994, with extensive refs. to the original excavation reports and other analyses; Whittaker 1997, 8–31, 163–183.

<sup>3</sup> E. French, 'The figures and figurines', in Renfrew 1985, 209–280; Moore & Taylour 1999, 46–70. All designations of individual cult buildings are in the following used according to Albers 1994; for the designations of various buildings in the 'Cult Centre of Mycenae' see especially 13f., pl. 5, table 2.

Table 1. Relative quantification of figures and figurines in Mycenaean archaeological contexts.

category: quantity:	anthropomorphic and animal figures	anthropomorphic and animal figurines	group figurines/ 'models'
—	[none]	[none]	[none]
1 or 2	1–2	1–2	1–2
several	3–5	3–10/11–20	3–5
many	6–10	over 20	6–10
great/vast numbers	over 10	over 50	over 10

the occurrence of more figurines and fragments of figurines in fills or otherwise non-diagnostic stratigraphic accumulations: Even if these finds belong to secondary contexts as wash-down or other debris, some of them may originally have been in use in the sanctuary as well, and other figurine finds may stem from spatially and functionally different occupational contexts of the site. Each case, however, can not any more be ascertained for the individual finds in the secondary contexts.

Because of the dilemma that is adherent to the question of exact numbers, I shall here even for the 'good' contexts not attempt to determine precisely the amount of the various kinds of figurines found. Instead, in order to specify quantities a system of 'applied relativity' will be used in the following as may empirically prove appropriate for each find category: i.e., an implemental scheme of *average* find quantities is applied which is differentiated in *general* accordance with the archaeological occurrence of the various kinds of figurines in the various kinds of contexts (Table 1). Thus, regarding first anthropomorphic and animal *figures* of the common Mycenaean types, these apparently constitute special finds—and, consequently, scholars put manifold interests in each single figure. The general quantification of the occurrence of anthropomorphic and animal figures in the various contextual settings therefore denotes the findings of:

- (a) no figures,
- (b) 1 or 2 figures,
- (c) 3–5 make several figures,
- (d) 6–10 make many figures,

- (e) over 10 make great numbers of figures in a certain context.

In the case of the anthropomorphic and animal *figurines* of the common Mycenaean types the archaeologist is not equally concerned with each single figurine find, as opposed to the figure finds. The reason is that the figurines occur more frequently—i.e. in numbers of often more than only one or two finds—and also in more varied kinds of contexts. Consequently, a different scheme of quantification needs, in my perception, to be applied when comparing the occurrence of anthropomorphic and animal figurines in the various contextual settings:

- (a) no figurines,
- (b) 1 or 2 figurines,
- (c) 3–20 make several figurines,
- (d) over 20 make many figurines,
- (e) over 50 make great, respectively vast numbers of figurines in a certain context.

Finally, the common types of Mycenaean *group figurines* or '*models*' such as chariot groups, groups of driven oxen as well as throne models, constitute a category which on one hand, like the anthropomorphic and animal figurines, occur in a variety of archaeological contexts. On the other hand, the usual amounts of group figurines found in the various contexts altogether equal not those of the anthropomorphic and animal figurines. Instead, the group figurines in terms of quantity constitute a more confined group. Furthermore, their occurrence in the Mycenaean 'public communal sanctuaries in settlement con-

Table 2. Distribution of anthropomorphic figures and figurines in Mycenaean ‘public communal sanctuaries’.

category: context and quantity:		‘Type A’ female figures	female figurines	uncommon figures	uncommon figurines
MYCENAE	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘Building Gamma’	–	–	–	–
	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘Megaron Building’	–	–	–	–
	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘House of the Idols’	several	several	± 25 female and male (?) ‘Type B’ figures	1 ivory male/female (?) seated figurine
	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘House of the Fresco’	1	–	1 ivory male (or sphinx ?) figure head	1 ivory female figurine
TIRYNS	LH IIIB2, ‘cult chamber’ Kw 7	several	vast numbers	–	1 ivory Levantine (?) figurine
	early LH IIIC Early, ‘provisional’ cult room 119	1	several	–	1 lead female figurine
	LH IIIC Early, cult room 117	2	many	–	–
	LH IIIC Middle, cult room 110	several	1	–	–
	LH IIIC Late, cult room 110a	1	–	–	–
ASINE	LH IIIC Late, House G: cult room XXXI–XXXII	(1 ?)	several	(1 sphinx head ?)	–
PHYLAKOPI	LH IIIB to IIIC Early/Middle, cultic precinct	great numbers	several to many	± 5 male figures in ‘W Shrine’	[1 male figurine in ‘E Shrine’ ?]; 1 gold-sheet figurine face in ‘E Shrine’; 2 bronze Levantine ‘Reshef’ figurines
AYIA IRINI	LH IIIA to IIIC, ‘Temple’	–	several	[1 female statue fragment in LH IIIA–IIIB?]	–

texts’ in relation to the human and animal figurines as well as the figures proves quite restricted. Therefore, the finds of group figurines are quantified according to the same general scheme that is used also for the anthropomorphic and animal figures:

- (a) no group figurines,
- (b) 1 or 2 group figurines,
- (c) 3–5 make several group figurines,
- (d) 6–10 make many group figurines,
- (e) over 10 make great numbers of group figurines in a certain context.

The schemes of quantification outlined here

will be applied in the following analysis for common and standardized categories of Mycenaean figures, figurines and group figurines.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, *uncommon* figures and figurines—or more general, representations, as frescoes that likely depict figures of deities ought to be included here—can not reflect any *patterns* in terms of the occurrence in Mycenaean archaeological contexts precisely because they constitute uncommon, i.e. exceptional finds. Rather, the evidence of uncommon figures, figurines as well as painted

<sup>4</sup> See mainly French 1971.

Table 3. Distribution of animal figures and figurines in Mycenaean ‘public communal sanctuaries’.

category: context and quantity:		bovine figures/ ‘hollow bulls’	bovine figurines	uncommon figures	uncommon figurines
MYCENAE	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘Building Gamma’	–	–	–	–
	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘Megaron Building’	–	–	–	–
	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘House of the Idols’	–	–	± 15 coiled snake figures (cf. ‘Type B’)	–
	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘House of the Fresco’	–	–	1 ivory lion figure (or attachment ?)	–
TIRYNS	LH IIIB2, ‘cult chamber’ Kw 7	several/many (?)	many	–	–
	early LH IIIC Early, ‘provisional’ cult room 119	1	several	–	1 stag figurine + 1 sphinx (?) figurine
	LH IIIC Early, cult room 117	several	–	–	–
	LH IIIC Middle, cult room 110	–	1	–	–
	LH IIIC Late, cult room 110a	–	several	–	–
ASINE	LH IIIC Late, House G: cult room XXXI–XXXII	–	± 1 (?)	–	–
PHYLAKOPI	LH IIIB to IIIC Early/Middle, cultic precinct	great numbers	great numbers	–	–
AYIA IRINI	LH IIIA to IIIC, ‘Temple’	± 1	several	–	–

representations in the ‘public communal sanctuaries in settlement contexts’ likely makes for a special, unique component of the particular archaeological record. Consequently, uncommon figures and figurines will not be treated according to the quantitative scheme outlined above but, instead, the attempt is made to adduce exact numbers of the finds.

### Presenting the evidence: distribution of anthropomorphic figures and figurines (Table 2)<sup>5</sup>

Anthropomorphic figures and figurines occur in all five sanctuary settings as listed above.

However, certain striking differences can be observed on the basis of available excavation evidence. In order to illustrate this, distinction has to be made between the following categories of anthropomorphic figures and figurines:

- the common terracotta female figures of the appealing painted type (including the iconographically and technologically related an-

<sup>5</sup> The find distributions in *Tables 2–6* and *Figures 1–2* are given following the analysis in Albers 1994, *passim* with refs. and tab. 6, with the finds from Mycenae updated according to Moore & Taylour 1999, 46–70.



Table 4. Distribution of group figurines or ‘models’ in Mycenaean ‘public communal sanctuaries’.

category: context and quantity:		chariot groups	groups of driven oxen	throne models
MYCENAE	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘Building Gamma’	–	–	–
	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘Megaron Building’	–	–	–
	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘House of the Idols’	–	–	–
	LH IIIB Middle to IIIB2, ‘House of the Fresco’	–	–	–
TIRYNS	LH IIIB2, ‘cult chamber’ Kw 7	several	± 1	many
	early LH IIIC Early, ‘provisional’ cult room 119	–	–	–
	LH IIIC Early, cult room 117	–	–	–
	LH IIIC Middle, cult room 110	–	–	–
	LH IIIC Late, cult room 110a	–	–	–
ASINE	LH IIIC Late, House G: cult room XXXI–XXXII	–	–	–
PHYLAKOPI	LH IIIB to IIIC Early/Middle, cultic precinct	many	many	several
AYIA IRINI	LH IIIA to IIIC, ‘Temple’	several	–	several

thropomorphic ‘vessels’ which do not have a base but, like the figures, have an open stand; E. French’s ‘Type A’);<sup>6</sup>

- the common terracotta female figurines of the ‘naturalistic’, ‘Tau’, ‘Proto-Phi’, ‘Phi’ and ‘Psi’ types, intermediate figure–figurine variants and other related forms;
- uncommon figures;
- uncommon figurines.

### Distribution of animal figures and figurines (*Table 3*)

Animal figures and figurines occur in four of the five sanctuary settings. However, again certain striking differences can be observed. In order to illustrate these, distinction has to be made between the following categories of animal figures and figurines:

- the common terracotta bovine figures/‘hollow bulls’ and/or bull rhyta and other zoomorphic vessels;<sup>7</sup>
- the common terracotta bovine figurines, as well as intermediate figure–figurine variants;
- uncommon figures;
- uncommon figurines.

### Distribution of group figurines or ‘models’ (*Table 4*)

Group figurines or ‘models’ of the following categories occur in three of the five sanctuary settings:

- the common terracotta chariot groups;
- the common terracotta groups of driven oxen;
- the common terracotta throne models.

### Synopsis of the find contexts

As the archaeological evidence covered here is confined to the Mycenaean ‘public communal sanctuaries in settlement contexts’, I need not discuss the question of the cultic or non-cultic character of the find contexts (or of the particular figurine finds—as the context has often been taken as determining the cultic function of

<sup>6</sup> French 1981.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. esp. the presentation in Damm 1997, 191–213, 222, 228–231; for the numbers of finds of bovine figures/‘hollow bulls’ from contexts of the cult buildings at Tiryns see *ibid.* 216–219.

Table 5. Diagnostic find contexts of figures, figurines and painted representations in Mycenaean ‘public communal sanctuaries’.

context: category:		on platforms or benches in single/main room	on dais (?) in corner of rear room	in ‘cache’ of rear room/areas	in ‘cache’ of single/ main room
REPRESENTATIONS	[fresco of ‘Sword Goddess’] stucco pinax with ‘Shield Goddess’	1 [above platform]		1	
FIGURES	‘Type A’ female figures	1/several	1/1+1 ‘crude’	several	1
	female and male (?) ‘Type B’ figures	1 (female)		± 24	
	ivory male (or sphinx ?) figure head				1
	bovine figures/‘hollow bulls’			several	several
	coiled snake figures (cf. ‘Type B’)			± 15	
	ivory lion figure (or attachment ?)				1
FIGURINES	female figurines	1 or 2		several	several
	[male figurine ?]				[1]
	ivory male/female (?) seated figurine			1 (in bowl)	
	bovine figurines	1			many
GROUP FIGURINES	chariot groups groups of driven oxen				1/several (?) 1

the figurines). Instead, since the cultic character of the finds and the contexts is acceptable as a precondition, the task is to collect and classify all contexts that indicate how the various kinds of figurines were handled in each particular realm of the cultic space.

In the Mycenaean ‘public communal sanctuaries in settlement contexts’ the following specific find contexts of figures and figurines as well as of painted representations can be differentiated (*Table 5*).

#### 1. Platforms or benches mostly at the rear wall

of the one single or the main room of the cult building: with these the following kinds of figures and figurines are closely associated, in that they were probably placed on or before the platforms or benches:

- the common terracotta female figures (‘Type A’);<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Tiryns, LH IIIC Middle cult room 110: 5 examples (in the following: ex./exs.); IIIC Late cult room 110a: 1 ex.; Phylakopi, LH IIIC Early/Middle ‘West Shrine’, ‘Assemblage K’: 1 ex. (?).

- 1 uncommon, large terracotta monochrome female figure ('Type B');<sup>9</sup>
- the common terracotta female figurines;<sup>10</sup>
- the common terracotta bovine figurines.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the fresco representing a 'Sword Goddess' that was preserved *in situ* above the platform in the 'House of the Fresco' dated to LH IIIB Middle–IIIB2 at Mycenae also has to be mentioned here.

2. A corner in the small rear room ('religious store-room'/'holy-of-holies') behind the main room of the cult building: with this the following kinds of figures and figurines are closely associated, in that they were perhaps also put up on a small clay or wooden dais in the corner of the room:

- the common terracotta female figures ('Type A').<sup>12</sup>

3. The small rear room ('religious store-room'/'holy-of-holies') and occasionally also another area ('alcove', 'niche') behind the main room of the cult building: with these the following kinds of figures and figurines are closely associated, in that they were probably laid down/deposited/sealed away in a 'cache':

- the common terracotta female figures ('Type A');<sup>13</sup>
- 24 or less uncommon, large terracotta monochrome female and male (?) figures ('Type B');<sup>14</sup>
- the common terracotta female figurines;<sup>15</sup>
- 1 uncommon, seated male or female (?) figurine of ivory;<sup>16</sup>
- the common terracotta bovine figures/'hol-low bulls';<sup>17</sup>
- 15 or less uncommon, terracotta coiled snake figures of the same general design as the 'Type B' anthropomorphic figures.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, the painted stucco pinax with the representation of a 'Shield Goddess' in 'Build-

ing Gamma' dated to LH IIIB Middle–IIIB2 at Mycenae also has to be mentioned here.

4. The area of a platform or bench at the rear wall of the one single or the main room of the cult building: with this the following kinds of figures and figurines are closely associated, in that they were probably sealed away in a 'cache':

- the common terracotta female figures ('Type A');<sup>19</sup>
- 1 uncommon, male (or sphinx?) figure head of ivory;<sup>20</sup>
- the common terracotta female figurines;<sup>21</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Mycenae, LH IIIB Middle–IIIB2 'House of the Idols'.

<sup>10</sup> Tiryns, LH IIIC Middle cult room 110: 1 ex.; Phylakopi, LH IIIC Early/Middle 'West Shrine', 'Assemblage B': 2 exs. + 'Assemblage K': 1 ex. (?).

<sup>11</sup> Phylakopi, LH IIIC Early/Middle 'West Shrine', 'Assemblage J': 1 ex.

<sup>12</sup> Mycenae, LH IIIB Middle–IIIB2 'House of the Fresco': 1 ex.; Phylakopi, LH IIIC Early/Middle 'West Shrine', 'Assemblage C': 1 ex. + 1 'crude', local figure.

<sup>13</sup> Mycenae, LH IIIB Middle–IIIB2 'House of the Idols', room 19 and 'alcove': 3 (4?) exs. + 1 vessel-shaped; Phylakopi, LH IIIC Early/Middle 'West Shrine', room A and 'niche' 'Assemblage C': 2 exs. (?) + 2 exs. (?).

<sup>14</sup> Mycenae, LH IIIB Middle–IIIB2 'House of the Idols', room 19 and 'alcove'.

<sup>15</sup> Mycenae, LH IIIB Middle–IIIB2 'House of the Idols', room 19 and 'alcove': 2 exs. + 1 ex. (?).

<sup>16</sup> Mycenae, LH IIIB Middle–IIIB2 'House of the Idols', room 19 in bowl.

<sup>17</sup> Phylakopi, LH IIIC Early/Middle 'West Shrine', room A and 'niche' 'Assemblage C': 1 ex. + 4 exs.

<sup>18</sup> Mycenae, LH IIIB Middle–IIIB2 'House of the Idols', room 19 and 'alcove' (1 figure fragment found on stairs to room 19).

<sup>19</sup> Asine, LH IIIC Late cult room XXXI–XXXII in House G: 1 ex. (or sphinx head [?]).

<sup>20</sup> Mycenae, LH IIIB Middle–IIIB2 'House of the Fresco'.

<sup>21</sup> Asine, LH IIIC Late cult room XXXI–XXXII in House G: 5 exs.

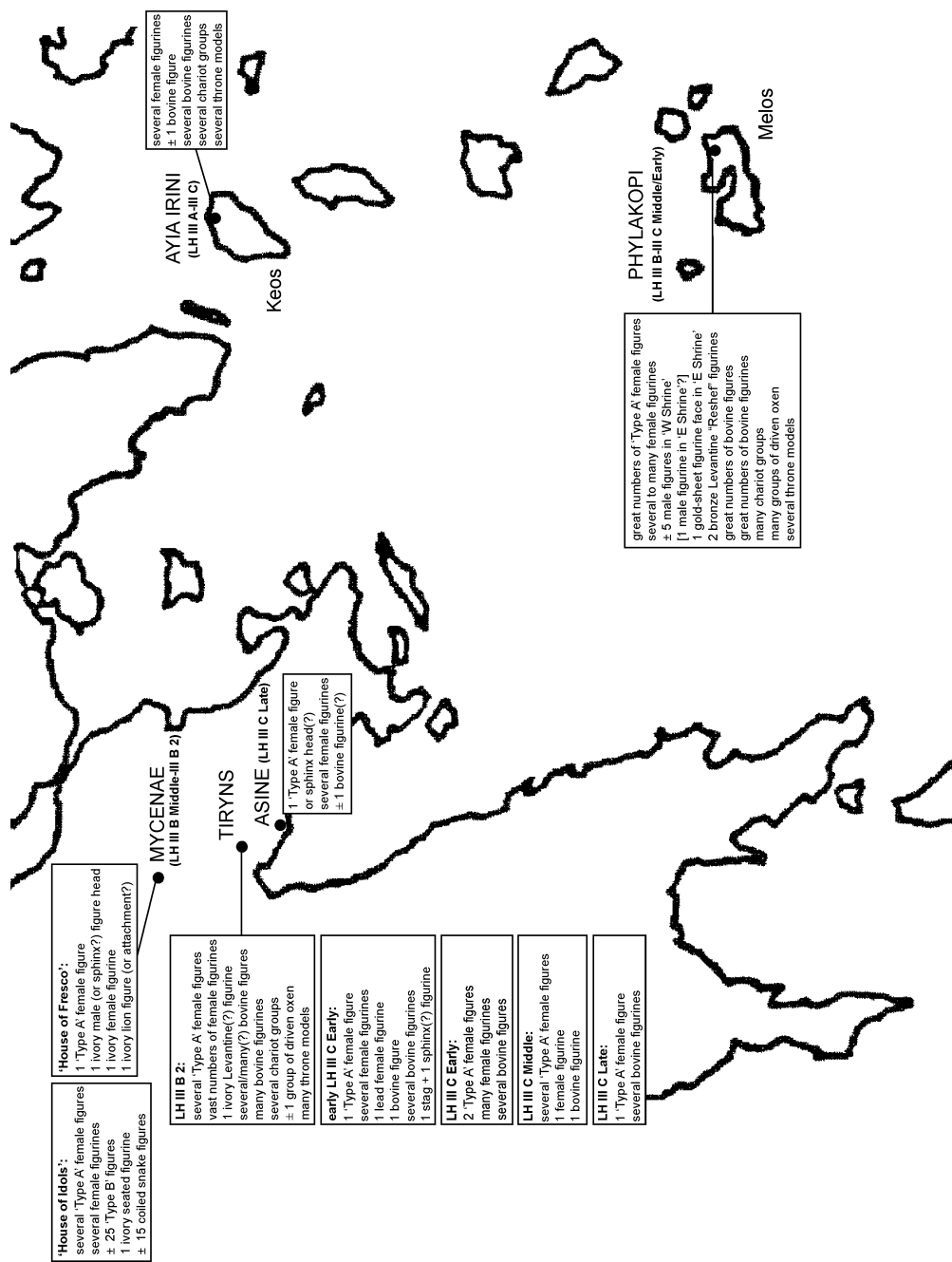


Fig. 1. Figures and figurines in Mycenaean 'public communal sanctuaries': find distributions.

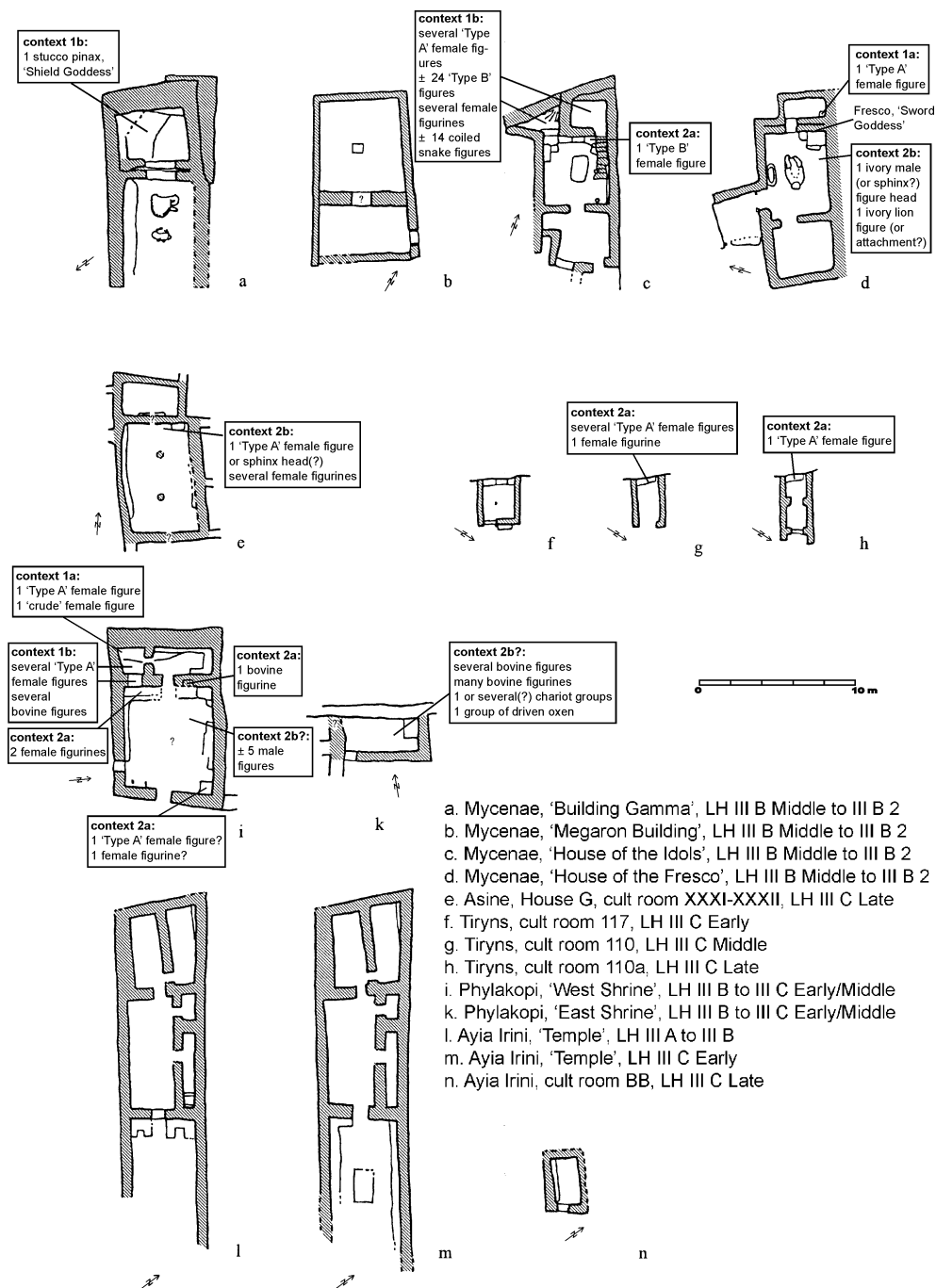


Fig. 2. Figures and figurines in Mycenaean 'public communal sanctuaries': diagnostic find contexts.

- 1 uncommon possible terracotta male figurine (?);<sup>22</sup>
- the common terracotta bovine figures/‘hollow bulls’;<sup>23</sup>
- 1 uncommon lion figure (or attachment?) of ivory;<sup>24</sup>
- the common terracotta bovine figurines;<sup>25</sup>
- the common terracotta chariot groups;<sup>26</sup>
- the common terracotta groups of driven oxen.<sup>27</sup>

### Comparative evaluation of the find distributions, contexts, and the evidence of uncommon figures and figurines and/or painted representations

The most obvious conclusion from the analysis of the material as presented above is that the *evidence* is altogether highly ambiguous: In the first place, the overall picture thus needs to be estimated as symptomatic for the casual and the fragmentary character of the archaeological findings. However, in referring to the methodological considerations explained at the outset the following observations may duly permit cultural-historical conclusions:

1. The complete absence of the common terracotta bovine figures/‘hollow bulls’, bovine figurines as well as of group figurines or ‘models’ in the various find contexts within the cult buildings forming the ‘Cult Centre of Mycenae’ appears conspicuous (although such finds *are* known from debris layers) (*Fig. 1*). Moreover, there are only two, maximum three examples of the common female figurines preserved in the ‘House of the Idols’. Taken together with the circumstance that the ‘House of the Idols’ and the ‘House of the Fresco’, and possibly also ‘Building Gamma’, are characterized by uncommon anthropomorphic and animal *figures* and/or painted representations, the overall observation reflects more than only circumstances of preservation and observation: i.e. these contexts at Mycenae are *unique* as compared to other Mycenaean sanctuaries. One starting point

for interpretation ought, therefore, to be precisely seen by means of the evidence at Mycenae: Namely, the occurrence of *uncommon* figures and representations indicates a special connotation of the cult practiced in the particular building, and it perhaps even *excludes* the presence of most of the more common figures and figurines other than the ‘Type A’ female figures and in one case the female figurines.

With this observation in mind, the same consideration about special connotations of the cult is due in regard of also the other contexts of figurine finds. Besides the ‘Cult Centre of Mycenae’ there is, at least, one other case in which substantial evidence of uncommon figures occurs—if, however, in a much different context which I specify below: namely the several terracotta male figures in the ‘West Shrine’ at Phylakopi.

2. The complete absence of the common terracotta bovine *figurines* as well as of *group figurines* or ‘models’, and further the at least striking scarcity of female *figurines* in the find contexts within the small rear room (‘religious store-room’/‘holy-of-holies’) and possibly in another area (‘alcove’, ‘niche’) behind the main room of several cult buildings appear conspicuous (*Fig. 2*). These assemblages contain mostly the common ‘Type A’ female figures securely or likely put up on a small clay or perhaps wooden dais. Otherwise, only in the ‘West Shrine’ at Phylakopi were found also bovine *figures*, and in the ‘House of the Idols’ at Mycenae were found uncommon anthropomorphic and animal *figures* in this kind of context. In addition, the respective

<sup>22</sup> Phylakopi, LH IIIC Early/Middle ‘East Shrine’, ‘Assemblage D’.

<sup>23</sup> Phylakopi, LH IIIC Early/Middle ‘East Shrine’, ‘Assemblage D’: several exs.

<sup>24</sup> Mycenae, LH IIIB Middle–IIIB2 ‘House of the Fresco’.

<sup>25</sup> Phylakopi, LH IIIC Early/Middle ‘East Shrine’, ‘Assemblage D’: many exs.

<sup>26</sup> Phylakopi, LH IIIC Early/Middle ‘East Shrine’, ‘Assemblage D’: 1 or several exs.

<sup>27</sup> Phylakopi, LH IIIC Early/Middle ‘East Shrine’, ‘Assemblage D’: 1 ex.

Table 6. Figures and figurines (distinct kinds only) in Mycenaean 'public communal sanctuaries', in order of diagnostic contexts.

context: category:		type 1a: on dais (?) in corner of rear room	type 1b: in 'cache' of rear room/areas	type 2a: on platforms or benches in single/ main room	type 2b: in 'cache' of single/ main room
anthropomorphic + animal figures	'TYPE A' FEMALE FIGURES female + male (?) 'Type B' figures BOVINE FIGURES/ 'HOLLOW BULLS' coiled snake figures (cf. 'Type B')	1/1+1 'crude'	several  ± 24 several  ± 15	1/several  1 (female)	1   several
female figurines	FEMALE FIGURINES		several	1 or 2	several
animal figurines	BOVINE FIGURINES			1	many
anthropomorphic + animal figures	ivory male (or sphinx ?) figure head ivory lion figure (or attachment ?)				1 1
group figurines	CHARIOT GROUPS GROUPS OF DRIVEN OXEN				1/several (?) 1

assemblage in 'Building Gamma' at Mycenae on one hand lacks even the common 'Type A' female figures but contains the so far unique stucco pinax with the representation of a 'Shield Goddess'. Hence, the Mycenaeans appear to have been bothered with either putting up or laying down/depositing/sealing away anthropomorphic and animal *figures* of the common and of uncommon types in the areas behind the main room. However, this is *not* the case with the common female and bovine *figurines*, with the only exception of the few female figurines in the 'House of the Idols' at Mycenae. Further, the common group figurines or 'models' apparently were not in use in those areas behind the main room. In the cult buildings at Mycenae the group figurines seem to be lacking altogether, and this is why this point cannot be further elaborated here. However, at least in the case of the 'West Shrine' at Phylakopi the group figurines definitely occur only in the main room, but not in the areas containing the female and the bovine figures behind the main room.

Consequently, the evidence described may reflect that the function of the anthropomorphic

and animal *figurines* and the *group figurines* within the cultic space was confined to areas of the one single or the main room of the cult building where a platform or bench at the rear wall mostly functioned as the 'attention-focusing device'.<sup>28</sup> On or perhaps in front of the platform or bench the cultic paraphernalia were placed (Table 6, context type 2a), and in this aspect of the cultic function the figurines and group figurines equal that of the anthropomorphic and animal figures. However, perhaps at the periodical ends of the cultic proceedings the figurines—with the exception only of the female figurines—and the group figurines were *not* treated in the same way as the figures, since they were neither put up nor laid down/deposited/sealed away in the small rear room and in another area behind the main room. In addition to the figurines and group figurines, one further group known so far from the Mycenaean sanctuaries did *not* receive the treatment described:

<sup>28</sup> Renfrew 1985, 18.



namely the several terracotta *male figures* in the 'West Shrine' at Phylakopi.

3. Consequently of the observations made above, though in statistical terms the basis of evidence is limited,<sup>29</sup> I believe that the analysis of the find distributions and find contexts points to a special function and, thus, religious meaning of the following kinds of figures and figurines in the Mycenaean sanctuaries. The special function is reflected by find contexts of Types 1a and 1b (*Table 6*):

- the common 'Type A' female figures;
- the common bovine figures/'hollow bulls';
- uncommon anthropomorphic and animal figures as well as painted representations;
- the common female figurines.

Obviously, on the basis of the evidence of the find contexts, a religious significance *appears* to have been adherent to these kinds of figures and figurines that was much different from the common bovine figurines, various group figurines and uncommon figurines, as well as also from the male figures at Phylakopi. Thus, a dividing line *may* prove to be discernible between female ('Type A') and 'Type B' figures, female figurines and animal figures, on the one hand, in that these groups in terms of their religious character could be characterised as *addressees* of cultic veneration. On the other hand, male figures, animal figurines, group figurines and uncommon figurines were probably handled exclusively as votives in the cult, i.e. thus constituted *means* of cultic veneration through ritual action.

4. Drawing all adduced contextual observations together one diagnostic context, however, may reflect an immanent awe of the Mycenaean with regard to the figures and figurines venerated

or dedicated in cultic acts in the sanctuaries. This context is the one of the objects apparently sealed away as a 'cache' in the area of a platform or bench at the rear wall of the one single or the main room of the cult building (*Table 6*, context type 2b). In my opinion, we can genuinely trace here the phenomenon of 'sacred burial' as a common treatment of figures, figurines and other objects which otherwise fulfilled different cultic roles: i.e. the final act of sacredly burying them was here equally applied to the addressees *and* the means of cultic veneration and religious beliefs in the Mycenaean world.

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<sup>29</sup> But this is all we have for the moment; Ayios Konstantinos, however, remains to be analyzed: see now Konsolaki-Yannopoulou 1999; *eadem* 2001, esp. 213–217; *eadem* 2004.



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