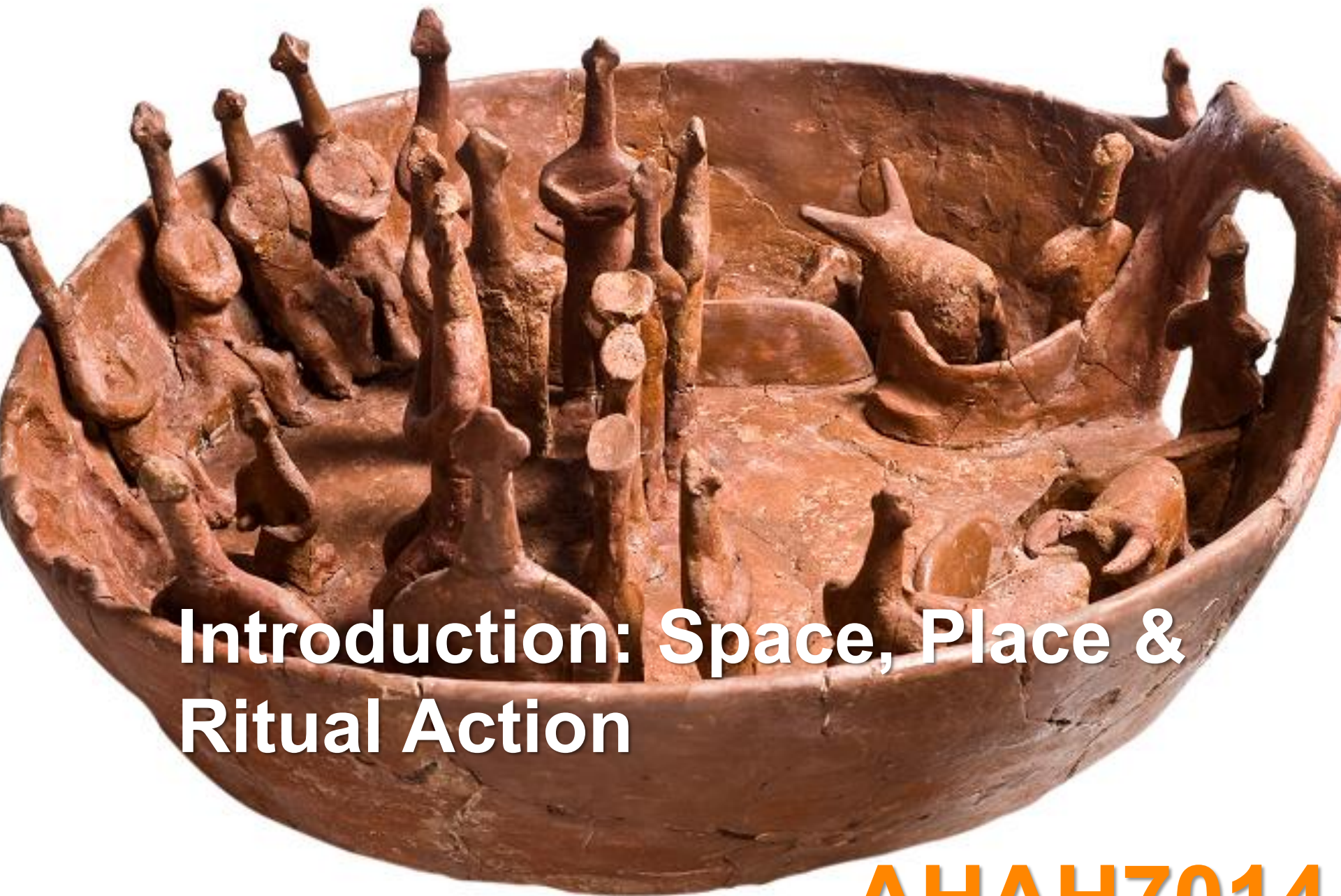




Introduction: Space, Place & Ritual Action

AHAH7014

About the Module

- Exploring ritual action & the creation of sacred space(s)
- Emphasis is the archaeological record:
 - Creating sacred spaces
 - Materialising cult
- Three main sections:
 - Neolithic Near East
 - Bronze Age Cyprus
 - Bronze Age Aegean



Minoan bronze figurine

Assessment: Research Portfolio

- Portfolio focusing on the materiality & spaciality of religion in the Neolithic or Bronze Age of the East Mediterranean (Aegean, Anatolia, Levant, Cyprus)
- Assessment 1: A 1500-word review of a key text (article or book chapter) relevant to your chosen research topic. (25%) Due 21st November 2025
- 2000-word object analysis. (25%) Due 19th December 2025
 - Please choose a religious/cult object relevant to your research topic. You need to provide an analysis of how this was used, viewed, handled, drawing upon the theoretical approaches to the material world covered in the module.
- 4000-word site analysis (50%) Due 27th January 2026
 - Present and discuss an ancient site/space/place significant in religious or cult practices relevant to your research topic. Your discussion might focus on a specific site, or a type of site, or even part of a site. You should consider how space was created, shaped, manipulated and experienced within the religious, cult or ceremonial practices enacted at this site. Your answer should be grounded in the theoretical approaches to interpreting space, place and phenomenology covered in the module.

Conceiving Religion

- Lewis William: 3 dimensions of religion:
 - Experience, belief, practice
- Experience: sensorial: a set of mental states created by human mind
 - Contact with the supernatural
- Religious belief: attempt of codify experiences
- Religious practice: rituals designed to tap into experience & thereby manifest belief
- Experience & practice are where we should intellectually situate space/place & object



Theoretical Approaches

- How can we make sense of ritual action in the ancient Mediterranean? Key themes to examine:
 - Space & place
 - Construction of a ritual landscape
 - Theory of practice: social actions
 - Social memory & embodied actions
 - Materiality

Spaces / Places

- Concepts of space & place
- Primary focus is **people's relationship** with spaces, places, the wider landscape
 - How are these culturally informed?
- Situated in an understanding of embodied action



Gezer, High Space

Spaces / Places

- What do we mean by the terms space & place?
- **Space**: infinite, three-dimensional extent in which all matter exists
- **Place**: a portion of space that is culturally situated
 - Space provides **the context** for places
 - Space derives meaning from particular places
 - An understanding that space is **empty** & waiting to be divided into places



Crete: Mount Iuktas

Space/Place (Casey 1996)

- Place is not subsidiary to space
 - ‘There is no knowing or sensing a place except by being in that place, & to be in place is to be in a position to perceive it’ (Casey 1996: 18)
- Phenomenological approach: embodied knowledges
 - Heidegger’s “dasein”
 - Dwelling

Space/Place

- Phenomenology of space
 - Experienced & known through the movement of the human body
- Empirical (?), sensory perceptions of a place & lived experiences create places



Phenomenology of Landscape

- A set of relationships between named **locales**:
 - Natural or created places
- Naming identifies these as being of cultural significance
- Provide a physical setting for certain social activities
- Part of a wider culturally constructed environment



Atsipadhes, Crete

Phenomenology of Landscape

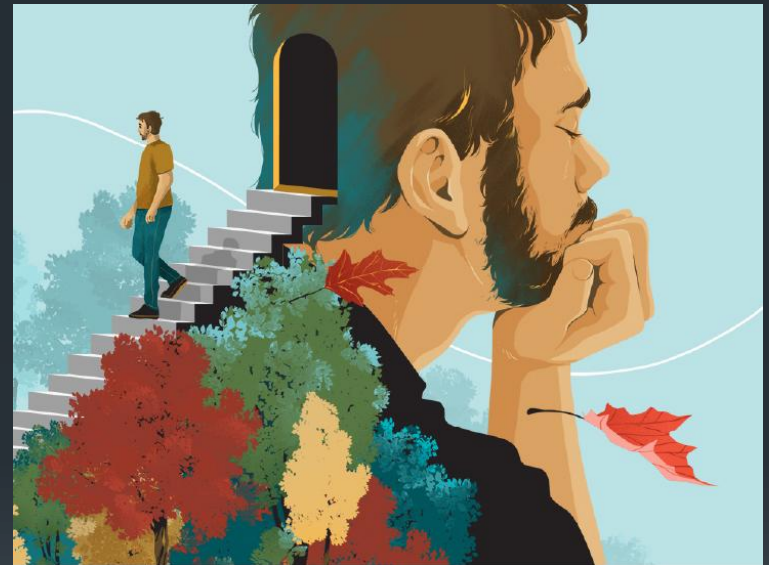
- Landscapes are embedded in sets of space-time relations
- Experienced & known through the movement of the human body
- Meaningful cultural spaces are created through human action & the correlation of memory & movement
 - Visited on a daily basis, incorporated in daily acts of subsistence & interaction,
 - Special places visited only for certain occasions



Göbekli Tepe

Phenomenology of Landscape

- Ingold (1993) emphasises human relations with landscape:
 - People dwell in & are part of the landscape
 - Equally the landscape becomes part of people, shaping their actions & identities
 - Landscape is more than physical space; it is defined through the embodied experiences
- Human knowledge & experience of the physical makes landscape



Phenomenology of Landscape

- “A place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there - to the sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience. And these, in turn, depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people's engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance” (Ingold 1993: 154)



Place, Architecture & Memory

- Use of the landscape to reference the past
 - “inscribed landscapes” used to forge a sense of collective identity through a shared past
 - Human performance at these places: experience as process in creating a sense of place



Göbekli Tepe, Anatolia

Places of Memory

- Places in the landscape or physically created monuments where memory is crystallised & enacted



Kyrenia Mountains



Argive Heraion



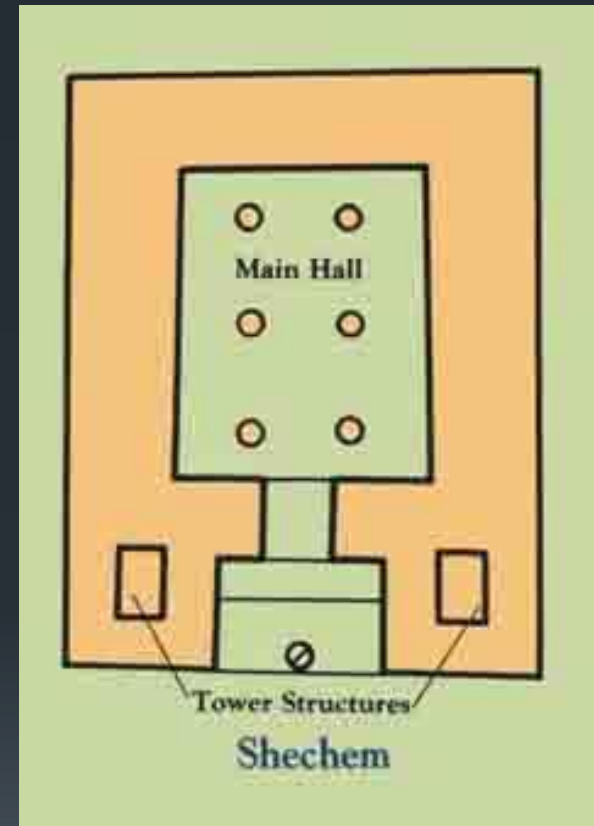
Cofiwch Dryweryn

Culturally Constructed Spaces

- “Places” as locales within landscapes (including urban landscapes)
- In contrast to the initial definition “spaces” will be treated as humanly constructed units within these landscapes – architectural spaces/built environment
- How do we get from archaeological evidence to the people who built them?
- How can we tell what actually went on in different parts of a house/building?

People and Space

- “men gradually discover by experiment how things & persons can be arranged spatially, so defining an idea of space. As such it must find a symbolic vehicle & be expressed” (Childe 1956: 76)
 - Built environment is constructed according to cultural rules
 - People change or modify their built environment through daily use
 - People socially construct space & imbue it with meaning



Canaanite Migdal temple

People and Space

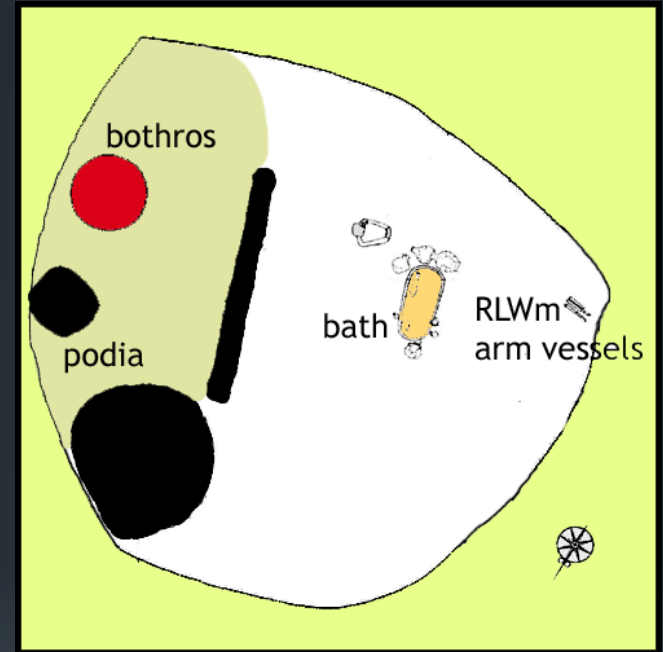
- Space is practice:
 - It is formed through people's actions & given meaning
- “Meanings adhere to a spatial frame only through the medium of human activity” (Parker Pearson & Richards 1994: 5)



Mycenae

Interpreting Spaces

- Archaeological interpretation: architecture & furnishings
- Architecture creates physical boundaries:
 - Interior & exterior spaces.
 - Public & private spaces
- Does space change according to time (date), gender, status?
- Furnishings: fixed & portable, might be used to identify activity areas



Ayios Iakovos, Cyprus

Archaeology and Cult Spaces

- Creation of liminal/sacred places/cult places
- Specialised sacred location:
 - Cult place/shrine/sanctuary or natural landscape (mountain, spring, sacred grove, cave)
- Sacred architecture & ritual paraphernalia
 - Altars, podium, temples, cult statues, grotesque images
- Devices for focusing attention
- Sacred area is likely to be rich in repeated symbols



Myrtou Pigadhes, altar

Summary

- Phenomenological approaches to landscape, space & place:
 - How people create/manifest their spiritual world
- Theoretical approaches to embodied practices allow us to make sense of ritual action in the past from archaeological evidence
- Things to consider
 - How do people move through & experience space?
 - How are they include/excluded, restricted, channelled, gatherer?
 - Number of people & size of place (individual or group experience)
 - How does this impact upon performativity of space?