

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 Porter'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, kourtophos, sacrifice, votives.

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The cultic function of Mycenaean anthropomorphic terracotta figures

By

Helène Whittaker

Abstract

This paper argues that all of the Mycenaean anthropomorphic terracotta figures should be interpreted as representations of deities. It is further suggested that they played a role in validating the legitimacy of the ruling elite. The use of portable images of deities in ritual activity had significant socio-political implications as well as a purely cultic purpose.*

Terracotta statues of human figures, measuring from c. thirty to c. seventy-five centimetres in height, constitute an important part of the moveable finds from Mycenaean cult buildings. Although the Mycenaean terracotta statues cannot be called naturalistic in any real sense of the word, they are clearly anthropomorphic. Within the cult buildings they are found associated with platforms on which they presumably had been displayed. It is arguable that these terracotta statues were expressly manufactured for use in cult activity, and that they played a well-defined role in communication with the supernatural. They can therefore be distinguished, both functionally and typologically, from the smaller standardised Phi and Psi figurines which are widely found in various types of contexts in the Mycenaean area.¹

Several types of terracotta statues have been distinguished. The most widespread is known as Type A (*Fig. 1*). Type A figures are decorated and are clearly female. Examples have been found in the Temple and in the House with the Fresco at Mycenae, in the West Shrine at Phylakopi, in the series of cult buildings at Tiryns, and in several less well-defined contexts² for

example, a terracotta figure was found associated with a Mycenaean house near the Menelaion, while a large fragment of a figure was found at Tsoungiza in the Nemea Valley³ what may have been a sacred deposit. Anthropomorphic pots which have been found at Phylakopi and Mycenae have been related to the Type A figures and are probably but not certainly female (*Fig. 2*).⁴ Other types of female terracotta figures which are not readily classified also occur. Type B figures are monochrome and are not clearly gendered (*Fig. 3*). This type has been found only in the Temple at Mycenae. Definitely male figures have been found only in the West Shrine at Phylakopi (*Fig. 4*).⁴

Archaeological and ethnographic evidence demonstrates that anthropomorphic statues used in cult can represent either human votaries or divine beings and the major problem in the interpretation of the Mycenaean terracotta figures is related to the question of whether they

* I am grateful to the Mycenae Archives, to Dr. Elizabeth French, and to Professor Colin Renfrew for permission to reproduce illustrations of the terracotta figures found at Mycenae and Phylakopi.

¹ French 1981, 173; Catling 1995.

² Catling 1995; Wright 1994, 69; Wright *et al.* 1990, 633–637.

³ Moore & Taylour 1999, 46f.

⁴ French 1985, 202, 209, 1001.

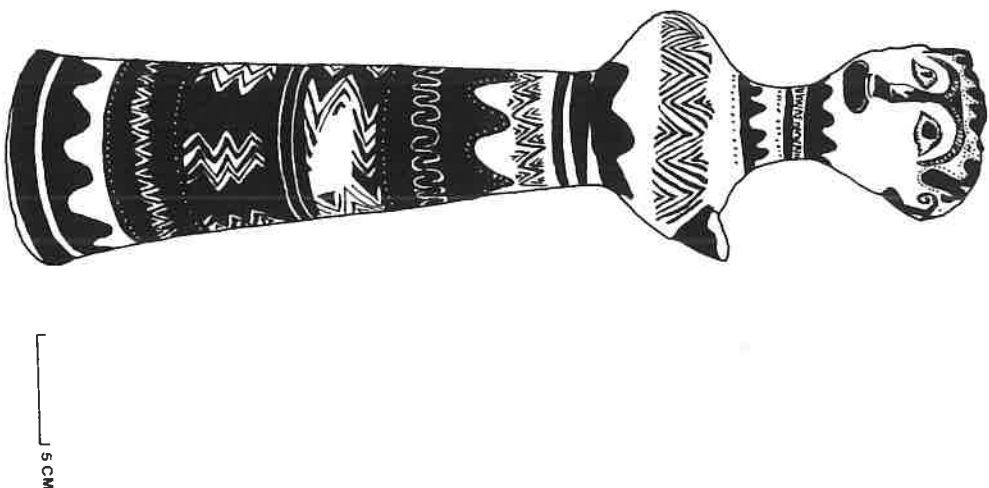


Fig. 1. Type A figure from Phylakopi (SF 2660).

dedications can also represent human votaries and distinctions between representations of humans and gods may not always be clear. The practice of the worshipper dedicating an image of him- or herself within a sanctuary as a way of reminding the deity of his or her existence is also widely attested.

It is possible that the Mycenaean terracotta figures could have been used to represent both deities and humans, and that they were used to create scenes showing deities interacting with human worshippers. Renfrew has suggested that the largest of the male and female figures found associated with the platforms in the West Shrine at Phylakopi may have functioned as the cult image and that the accompanying figures are votaries.⁷ The largest female figure, known as the Lady of Phylakopi, is further distinguished by the quality of manufacture. Relative size is a common way of distinguishing between human and divine. The gold ring from Tomb 66 at Mycenae which shows a large seated female, presumably a goddess being approached by a much smaller, probably human, male indicates that this convention was at times used and understood by the Mycenaeans.

As a general characteristic, the Mycenaean terracotta figures demonstrate little interest in human anatomy. The Type B figures are schematic, minimal representations of the human form. The male figures at Phylakopi are designed as such by clearly marked genitals, but are otherwise fairly schematic and ill-proportioned. On the Type A figures, female physical attributes are not particularly emphasised and none of the figures explicitly depicts female physical states such as pregnancy. However, one of the figures found in the Temple at Mycenae is holding her breasts in a manner which could suggest a connection with lactation and



Fig. 2. Anthropomorphic pot from Mycenae (68-1584).

nurture.⁸ At Phylakopi, one of the smaller female figures found with the Lady of Phylakopi has an inverted U applied to the front of her skirt, probably representing the genitalia, which may indicate an association with pregnancy and birth.⁹ It could therefore be hypothesised that some of the female terracotta figures reflect beliefs associated with female physical concerns, or that female fertility was associated with fertility and prosperity in general. The anthropomorphic pots might also be related to concerns of fertility and prosperity.

The Lady of Phylakopi is a Type A figure and there would seem to be general agreement that the Type A figures represent deities and may have functioned as cult images.¹⁰ Attributes of divinity have been seen in painted facial decoration, such as the rosettes on the cheeks of the figure found in the Temple at Mycenae, as well as in the painted jewellery on some of the figures.¹¹ There are, however, few clues to the particular identity of the figures and the beliefs associated with them.



Fig. 3. Type B figure from Mycenae (68-1611).

There would seem to be greater difficulty involved in interpreting the identity and function of the Type B figures. In the most roughgoing analysis of the figures, Moore argued that while the Type A figures found at Mycenae represent deities, the Type B figures should rather be interpreted as representations of cult celebrants.¹² He suggests that the function of the Type B figures was to represent continuous performance of cult activities.

⁸ Moore & Taylour 1999, 91; a similar gesture also evident in a figure found near the West Gate (Midea (Demakopoulou 1999)).

⁹ French 1985, 211; Renfrew 1985, 415. This was seen to make it more likely that this figure represents a goddess rather than a votary (Renfrew 1976).

¹⁰ Cf. Renfrew 1985, 415; Albers 1994, 35.

¹¹ Kilian-Dirlmeier 1978-1979, 29-43; Kilian 1954; Moore & Taylour 1999, 92.

¹² Moore & Taylour 1999, 93-101.

⁵ Cf. Renfrew 1985, 22f.

⁶ Cf. Anth. Pal. 16.164: Σοὶ μορφῆς ἀνέθηκα τῆς περικλυτῆς ὁρχαῖας, Κύπρι, τῆς μορφῆς φέρειν οὐδὲν ἔχον.

⁷ Renfrew 1985, 372f.

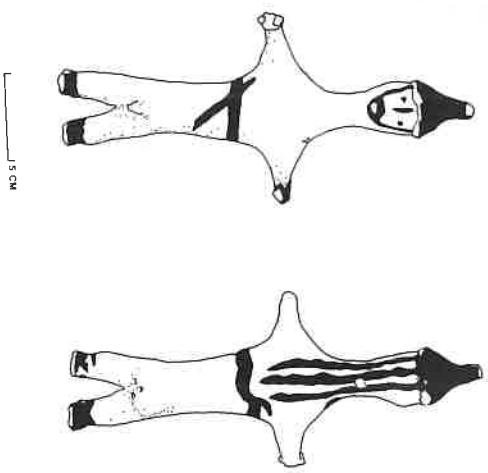


Fig. 4. Male figure from Phylakopi, front and back view (SF 2340).

Moore's interpretation of the Type B statues from the Temple at Mycenae as representations of cult celebrants is based on a typological analysis of the figures. He divides the figures into three groups on the basis of arm position, and emphasises that the poses of the figures seem to be of greater importance than individual identity. The arm positions of two groups show that they were carrying something. As one of the figures is preserved holding aloft a shaft which terminates in an axe-hammer and a separately modelled axe-hammer was found within the Temple, Moore concludes that this is what they all carried. He further argues that the axe-hammers refer to sacrifice and that the figures should accordingly be interpreted as sacrificial attendants. The third group of figures has upraised arms and give the impression of presenting offerings.

Parallels for this interpretation can be found at Tell Asmar and other sites in Mesopotamia where votive statues of worshippers give concrete form to prayer and ensure that it is continuously repeated.¹³ The same custom is also attested in Cypriote sanctuaries in the Iron Age.¹⁴ Furthermore, the much earlier terracotta figure from the Temple at Kea have also been

interpreted in a similar way, and could therefore be considered as possible functional forerunners, indicating the existence of a long-standing Mycenaean or Aegean tradition of dedicating representations of cult celebrants within sanctuaries.¹⁵ Within the Temple at Mycenae, sacrifice and the presentation of offerings could have been symbolically represented through the dedication of the Type B figures.

Although Moore's interpretation is persuasive, it cannot be considered conclusive. The axe-hammer is not necessarily to be interpreted as a sacrificial implement. It can be classified as a weapon and as such it may denote warrior qualities. The possibility that some of the Type B figures could be holding something else is accepted by Moore even if he does not regard it as very likely in the absence of specific evidence. However, a fragment of a roughly circular terracotta object with an outer convex surface is possibly to be identified as part of an attribute of one of the figures.¹⁶ The fragment is very similar to the Type B figures in fabric and paint and was found associated with them. A possible interpretation is that it was part of a shield which had been attached to one of the figures. The object is perforated, and it can be suggested that it may have been decorated with metal studs. French has emphasised that several of the figures have clear marks on the hands and arms from objects which had originally been attached to them.¹⁷ A reconstruction with shields and weapons would seem possible for those figures which have the right arm raised, while the left is bent in front of the body (e.g., Mycenae 68–1572).¹⁸ A comparison with the posture of a metal figurine found at Enkomi on Cyprus

could accordingly be suggested.¹⁹ This figurine, which is wearing a horned helmet, holds a round shield in its left hand and carries a weapon in its right hand, which is upraised as if about to strike. Some of the Type B figures could also have been holding objects such as metal weapons which have not been preserved. At Phylakopi the smaller male figures were definitely carrying something and the possibility that they were holding weapons of some kind in their hands has been suggested.²⁰ This seems particularly likely in view of the fact that one of the figures appears to be wearing a conical helmet. The arm positions of the figures are also very similar to those of Near Eastern figurines carrying weapons in both hands.²¹ Consequently, it can be suggested that the axe-hammers indicate that an emphasis on warrior qualities was of importance in the representation of some of the Type B figures. It is also possible that the axe-hammer could be the attribute of a particular deity or a general symbol of divine power. In Hittite cult a weapon, possibly a mace, was the symbol of a mountain god, and the weather god could be represented by an axe.²² Near Eastern figurines which carry weapons of various sorts are identified as gods, and examples of armed figurines from the Near East have also been found in the Aegean.²³ Although it is difficult to say whether these were associated with specific Mycenaean gods or beliefs, the fact that weapons are associated with deities in Mycenaean iconography could suggest that military attributes were used to express significant aspects of divinity.

Some of the Type B figures have a distinctive hairstyle, consisting of three plaits down the back. Although the figures with long hair were originally identified as female by Taylour, this would seem a doubtful criterion for sex identification as pointed out by Moore.²⁴ In the arrangement of the hair, these figures can be compared to the Type A figure from the Menelaion which is female, but also to one of the male figures from Phylakopi.²⁵ In many cultures hairstyle can have strong symbolic connotations.²⁶

For instance, in the Irish, Greek and Indian epic traditions, long hair functions as a sign of heroic warrior.²⁷ The male figure from Phylakopi is wearing a helmet which could suggest that long hair on male figures was associated with warrior qualities. Among various symbolic connotations, long hair as a beauty marker is commonly associated with forceful beauty, qualities which would also seem particularly relevant to the portrayal of divinity. Long hair associated with a male god occurs in Hittite iconography where it has been interpreted as a symbol of divinity.²⁸ Long hair may also be a marker of high social status in general, personifying the qualities of strength and beauty as prerogatives of the upper class.²⁹ In contrast to Crete, however, there does not seem to be evidence which could suggest that long hair associated with upper class male expressions of the Mycenaean. Although women are commonly portrayed with long flowing hair, men seem to be short-haired. The Lyre-player on the fresco from the megaron of the palace of Pylos has long hair, but he may represent a figure who can therefore be suggested that long hair

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¹⁹ Seeden 1980, pl. 112.

²⁰ Renfrew 1985, 422f.

²¹ E.g., Seeden 1980, pls. 2–9. These are, however, much earlier in date and a direct association is necessarily implied; Renfrew 1985, 422; cf. Aker 1994, 142.

²² Günter 1977, 25f; Günter 1970, 89.

²³ Cf. Renfrew 1985, 304–306.

²⁴ Moore & Taylour 1999, 96.

²⁵ The figure from the Menelaion has two tails plastically rendered hair down the back; the figure from Phylakopi has three tails of painted hair.

²⁶ For a general discussion of hair symbolism, see Firth 1973, 262–298.

²⁷ Miller 1998; cf. *Iliad* 2.11, 2.242, 3.43. See Thelme 1995, 126f.

²⁸ Seeden 1980, 141f.

²⁹ For example, in the *Iliad* the Achaean warriors are described as long-haired and the ugliness of the Trojan Thersites' hair is commented on (φοῖτος κεφαλήν, φεδών) δ' ἐρεμύοιτο Ἀργύην (Il. 2.19). Thucydides (1.6) mentions long hair as a mark of the Athenian aristocratic male.

¹³ Connelly 1989, 211.

¹⁴ Connelly 1989, 1991, 93–100.

¹⁵ Caskey 1981, 133; 1986, 35–42; cf. Moore 1999, 99f.

¹⁶ Moore & Taylour 1999, 70–71, 102.

¹⁷ French 1981, 173.

¹⁸ Moore & Taylour 1999, 55, pl. 15.



Fig. 5. Head of Type B figure from Mycenae (68-1588).

the male figures specifically denotes divine power.

Although they can be considered typologically quite distinct, it seems problematic to distinguish between Types A and B as to function and meaning. The find contexts of both Type A and B figures as well as the male figures at Phylakopi show that all types of terracotta figures had been displayed on platforms. Furthermore, the Type B figures were made using the same technique as the Type A figures and they can be said to share the same basic cylindrical body shape.³⁰ The same gestures are also found in both Type A and Type B figures. Several of the Type B figures have upraised arms. Many of the Type A figures such as the figure from Room 32, as well as the figure from the Menelaion, and most likely the Lady of Phylakopi, seem to have had upraised arms.³¹ Moreover, it is uncertain whether the Type A and B figures in the Temple at Mycenae were displayed together. The Type A figures from the Temple are smaller than the Type B figures. They are probably also earlier in date and it is possible that they had been taken out of use and had been replaced by the Type B figures.³²

and the precise designation of sexual identity in the construction of the figures was clearly not considered necessary. As most other types of figures are clearly male or female, the genderlessness of Type B figures would seem intentional and will have had a definite purpose as stated by French.³³ This may have been because the figures represented deities which were not thought of in terms of male or female. It is, however, also possible that when the figures were deployed in cult, they were designated as male or female in other ways, so that it was not considered necessary to differentiate between male and female in the construction of the figures themselves. The painted decoration on the Type A female figures is suggestive of elaborate clothing and jewellery.³⁴ The male figures from Phylakopi also have painted decoration which suggests items of clothing and attributes such as daggers. The Type B figures, on the other hand, are monochrome. French has suggested that the Type B figures may have been clothed, while Renfrew has suggested that through the addition of various attributes a whole series of deities could be represented on successive occasions.³⁵ The Type B figures have an unfinished appearance and the most reasonable explanation of why they are sexually indeterminate and were left undecorated is that they were intended to be covered with garments and adorned with jewellery, by means of which the identity and cultic purpose of the individual figures will have been precisely signi-

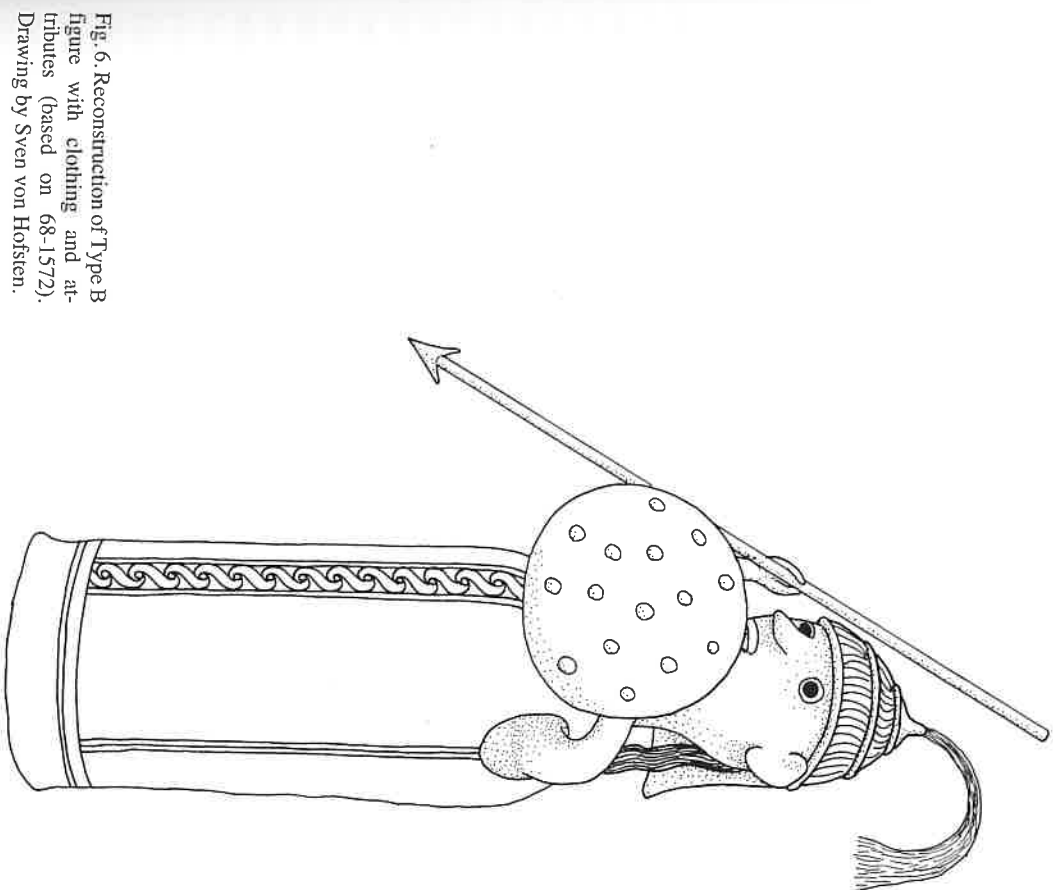


Fig. 6. Reconstruction of Type B figure with clothing and attributes (based on 68-1572). Drawing by Sven von Hofsten.

fied.³⁶ A Type B figure could accordingly be used to represent either a male or a female deity according to requirements. As an analogy, one could cite Mesopotamian cult images where the identity of the deity was established mainly by divine attire and other removable paraphernalia even if the physical details of the figures themselves were not without significance.³⁷ That the Type B figures were not intended to be seen as they have been preserved would seem to be par-

ticularly evident from the treatment of the heads. While some of the figures have applied hair, others are bald and the head of one figure terminates in a knob clearly suggesting that some form of

³⁰ Cf. Moore & Taylor 1999, 48.
³¹ Moore & Taylor 1999, 91.
³² Renfrew 1985, 414. The type A figure from Room 19 has been dated to LH IIIA2/B, the fragments of the two other figures may date to LH IIIA/B and LH IIIB. The dating of the type B figures is uncertain, but a date after the construction of the Temple in LH IIIB seems most reasonable. For a discussion of the date, see Moore 1999, 47-50.
³³ French 1981, 173.
³⁴ Cf. Catling 1995, 187; Demakopoulou 1999, 198, 200.
³⁵ French 1981, 173; Renfrew 1985, 408, 432. See also Chadwick 1976, 101; Albers 1994, 35.

³⁶ The sizeable number of beads found in the Temple could derive from jewellery used to adorn the figures.
³⁷ Omenheim 1964, 184f; 1070-71.

headgear was added separately (Fig. 5). Emphasising the rather careless execution of the Type B figures in comparison with the Type A figures and consequently considering them as cruder and less elaborate may be to miss the point.³⁸ With the addition of richly woven or embroidered clothing, wigs, jewellery, various attributes, and perhaps metal helmets, they may have represented a far more imposing sight (Fig. 6). Consequently, it can be suggested that the Type B figures represent a development at Mycenae towards more elaborate images of deities than the terracotta figures which have painted decoration and which are earlier in date.³⁹

The ritual role of Mycenaean anthropomorphic terracotta figures

Despite variations in size, the Mycenaean terracotta figures are all relatively small and therefore portable and it is likely that this was an important element of their function. It has been argued by Mylonas, Kilian, and Albers that the terracotta statues were carried in processions.⁴⁰ Processions in which the cult image or representations of the deity were carried are known from many traditions. It is, for instance, represented in later Greek cult practice at Samos and at Athens as well as other places from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period. Although the use of wagons as vehicles for the cult statues is recorded, it seems that those images which were paraded in processions were of relatively small size. The cult image of Hera at Samos was a plank, and the statues of Athena which were paraded in processions at Athens and Argos seem also to have been relatively small.⁴¹ Religious processions also played an important part in Hittite cult activity in the Late Bronze Age.

Although scenes of worship generally show life-sized cult images, statues of deities which are mentioned in texts describing religious ceremonies involving processions were clearly small in size and portable. They ranged in height from twenty-two to forty-four centimetres, which makes them comparable in size to

Processions of women carrying votive offerings are a popular theme in Mycenaean wall painting, and the importance of processions in Mycenaean cult activity can therefore hardly be doubted. Although it is not unambiguous, there exists some evidence to support the hypothesis that small statues representing deities were carried in religious processions. At Tiryns a fragment from a fresco of a procession of life-sized women has plausibly been identified as depicting a terracotta figure held by one of the women.⁴² However, as only a small part of the object held by the woman is preserved, the restoration cannot be considered completely certain. A fresco fragment from Mycenae shows a woman carrying a female figure in a similar manner in her hand.⁴³ As the figure in the Mycenaean fragment is not depicted as a terracotta figure but more as a miniature human being, the interpretation of the figure as a terracotta statue of a goddess carried in procession has been questioned. Some further remarks in support of the interpretation of the figure as a terracotta statue can be made.⁴⁵ The use of representations of deities in ritual contexts derives from the belief that there exists some form of identity between the deity and its image. The god is believed to

³⁸ Moore & Taylour 1999, 98. Moore sees the lack of care in production as an additional argument for interpreting them as human rather than divine.

³⁹ Some of the figures' eyes were apparently inlaid with glass or some similar material (Moore & Taylour 1999, 49).

⁴⁰ Mylonas 1972, 29; Kilian 1981, 56; 1992, 15; Albers 1994, 136.

⁴¹ Cf. Burkert 1985, 134, 140; 1997, 24–25.

⁴² Wasilewska 1993, 477; Gurney 1977, 26.

⁴³ Immerwahr 1990, fig. 33.

⁴⁴ Immerwahr 1990, fig. 33; Kontori-Papadopoulou 1996, pl. 93.

⁴⁵ Immerwahr tentatively suggests that what may be depicted is rather the dedication of a child. However, the small figure appears to be wearing a helmet, and there is some evidence that helmets on female figures are to be considered attributes of divinity. For example, a fragment from Mycenae shows a helmeted female figure holding a sphinx (Kontori-Papadopoulou 1996, pl. 95).

be present in its image, either permanently or as a result of particular ritual acts. The iconographic evidence which has been interpreted to show deities or humans interacting with deities strongly suggests that the Mycenaeans in general conceived of their deities as anthropomorphic.⁴⁶ It can therefore be suggested that in representations of cult activity, statues of deities could be depicted as completely human because that is how the Mycenaeans normally thought of their gods. A parallel can be seen in later Greek vase painting, in which the distinction between the portrayal of a god and of its cult statue is not always easy, and representations which clearly refer to cult images do not always show the god as a statue.⁴⁷ In this case, the manner in which the human figure is held with the thumb inside the skirt is consonant with the way in which a terracotta statue might have been held. Furthermore, it is likely that the word *te-o-po-ri-ja* (*theophoria*) which occurs on a Linear B tablet from Knossos also attests to the carrying of statues of gods in ritual processions.⁴⁸ Although the fresco fragments from Mycenae and Tiryns suggest that statues of deities were carried in the hands of worshippers, it might also be possible that at times they were transported on wheeled vehicles. Terracotta chariot groups were found in the sanctuary at Phylakopi and it could be hypothesised that they are dedications which reflect the use of chariots in religious processions.⁴⁹

The purpose of religious processions in which statues of gods are carried around is often the sanctification of an area at recurrent times. This practice is known, for instance, from Mesopotamia, where the cultic relationship between the city and its tutelary god regularly manifested itself when the image of the god was carried in procession through certain streets of the city.⁵⁰ That the Mycenaean citadels were regularly sanctified by ritual processions is perhaps suggested at Mycenae by the processional way which leads from the megaron to the Cult Centre. In Mesopotamia, as well as in Hittite and later Greek religion, processions were also often associated with important public festi-

vals.⁵¹ In Hittite cult the statue of the deity was carried in procession from its temple so that deity could be present at sacrificial ceremonies which took place outside the temple area, often in the countryside in places which were considered sacred to a particular deity. A similar practice can be suggested for Mycenaean cult. Mycenaean cult buildings are built in such way as to exclude large numbers of people from participating in the ritual activity which takes place in them. Textual evidence, however, attests to the existence of public festivals centred on sacrifice and feasting on a large scale.⁵² Furthermore, the tablets from Pylos record names of places which were evidently of cult importance, but are otherwise unknown.⁵³ It would therefore seem not unreasonable to conclude that some forms of public worship took place in open-air areas in the countryside.⁵⁴ The presence of the deity in some form at important public festivals must also be assumed, and can accordingly be suggested that the terracotta statues were carried in religious processions from the cult buildings to the open-air sanctuaries on ritual occasions.⁵⁵ Open-air sanctuaries have been identified archaeologically at Knossos, above Epidauros, and at the sanc-

⁴⁶ As shown for instance by cult scenes on gold rings found on the mainland, or the fresco in Room with the Fresco Complex at Mycenae.

⁴⁷ Cf. Alroth 1992, 10.

⁴⁸ Hiller 1984.

⁴⁹ Cf. Stone 1993, 105, on the meaning and function of chariot models in Mesopotamia.

⁵⁰ Oppenheim 1964, 187.

⁵¹ Oppenheim 1964, 187; 1970, 74; Collins 1986; Gurney 1977, 26; Burkert 1985, 99–101.

⁵² Plietos *et al.* 1990, 103–84; Killen 1994, 67–71.

⁵³ Killen 1994, 78; Hiller in discussion to Hiller 1995, 301.

⁵⁴ Cf. Hägg 1995, 390.

⁵⁵ It is possible that Tablet Tn 316 from Pylos records such a procession (Sacconi 1987).

ary of Aphaia on Aigina.⁵⁶ The fact that a head from a large terracotta figure was found at Kynortion while at the sanctuary of Aphaia there is evidence for several large figures perhaps provides some confirmation for the existence of processions between cult buildings and outlying open-air sanctuaries.⁵⁷

The Mycenaean terracotta figures can be considered elaborate versions of the smaller figurines, even if the functional relationship between them is not clear.⁵⁸ Their size and restricted distribution, however, suggest restricted use. The earliest examples of Mycenaean terracotta statues are from the Late Helladic IIIA period, and it is plausible that the occurrence at this time of portable statues of deities represents a new development within Mycenaean cult.⁵⁹ It can be argued that in stratified societies important religious innovations are dependent on elite acceptance, and that new forms of worship therefore reflect elite interests.⁶⁰ The elaboration of religious beliefs and rituals seems to have played a not insignificant role in the development of Mycenaean ruler ideology, and the end of the Late Helladic II and the beginning of the Late Helladic III period can be seen as a time in which there is an increased interest of the elite in equating political authority with supernatural power.⁶¹ Since it is probable that the Mycenaean cult buildings were a part of official cult, the meaning and function of the large anthropomorphic terracotta statues should be interpreted as representing the religious expression of the elite and associated with developments within Mycenaean ruler ideology.⁶²

DeMarrais, Castillo, and Earle have argued that ideology as a source of social and political power becomes particularly effective through materialisation in the form of, for instance, ceremonies and symbolic objects.⁶³ It can be suggested that a special relationship between the divine sphere and the ruling elite was articulated and thereby reinforced through the ritual use of anthropomorphic terracotta figures representing deities. Accordingly, the terracotta

and represent not only the materialisation of religious beliefs and cult activity, but also of the social and political power of the ruling elite. The elaborate clothing, jewellery, and weapons which are associated with representations of deities are also very clearly Mycenaean status symbols. Warrior ideology played an important role in the legitimisation of Mycenaean power, and military objects and representations thereof, in particular weapons, were used by the Mycenaean elite as symbols of status and authority.⁶⁴ Elaborate clothing and jewellery are general symbols of wealth and power, and may also have had a direct relationship with status and materialised important non-warrior dimensions of elite ideology.⁶⁵ The Mycenaean terracotta statues of deities can therefore in themselves be said to express the close association between the Mycenaean elite and the divine sphere. The Linear B tablets indicate, for the end of the Mycenaean period at least, that public religious festivals functioned to structure relations be-

tween the ruling elite and the rest of the population.⁶⁶ The use of anthropomorphic statues to represent gods on ritual occasions would have served to naturalise and cement the social and political position of the Mycenaean ruling elite. As several of the Mycenaean terracotta statues antedate the construction of cult buildings, it can be proposed that the original function of the terracotta figures of deities was related to public display in religious processions and at important festivals.

The find contexts of the Mycenaean terracotta statues of deities show that they also played a role in ritual activity which took place within the cult buildings. Finds of lamps and braziers suggest the use of light and incense to call upon or signal the deity's presence within his or her sanctuary. The most abundant evidence for cult activity can be connected with eating and drinking. This is indicated by the bowls and *kylikes* which are common in the pottery assemblages. Cooking ware was also found in several of the sanctuaries. The occurrence of hearths within some of the sanctuaries indicates that food was cooked or that offerings were burnt.

From the Middle Helladic period, drinking vessels occur in high-status burials, and Wright has discussed the ceremonial importance of drinking among the elite.⁶⁷ The abundance of drinking vessels in Mycenaean cult contexts would seem to demonstrate that ceremonial drinking also had clear ritual connotations. The evidence for libations in the Mycenaean cult buildings as well as the finds of offering tables at Mycenae and possibly at Phylakopi suggest

that the Mycenaean deities were ritually fed and that food was placed in front of images of deities.⁶⁸ The custom of dining with the gods known for instance from the later Greek practice of *theosévia* and from the Roman *histernium*. It is also known from official Hittite cult, where the king and queen took part in cultic meals in the inner room of the temple at food and wine had been placed in front of cult image.⁶⁹ Chadwick has suggested that spreading of the couches which is mentioned in connection with Poseidon on a Linear B tablet may refer to divine banquets at which food was served to images of the gods.⁷⁰ The small size of the Mycenaean cult buildings indicates that some principle of exclusion was at work: that access to ritual activity was restricted. It can be suggested that the Mycenaean elite enhanced their status and power by participating in ritual activity within closed sanctuaries, which only they had access. By sharing food and drink with the gods, whose presence was represented by the terracotta statues which were displayed on the platforms, their legitimacy was repeatedly confirmed.

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- Drinking cups are commonly found in Mycenaean cult contexts and may have been used also for libations. Rhyta were found at Phylakopi, Tiryns and Methana. For a discussion of libations in Mycenaean cult buildings, see Whittaker 1997.
- Gurney 1977, 32–34.
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- Cf. Moore & Taylor 1999, 82f., 114f.; Renfrew 1985, 300; Kilian 1992, 70.

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