

Trashing the sacred: the use-life of Mycenaean figurines

By

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"It is the archaeologist's frustration to be denied direct access to most contexts, for they are inward and transitory more than palpable and lasting; they are cultural more than material."
Henry Glassie 1999, 48

Abstract

Find contexts of 4593 terracotta figurines from Mycenae and Prosymna offer evidence to reconstruct their use-life through patterns of use, re-use, and discard. Figurines from other sites are used comparatively. Patterns denote that people employed them in ritual activities with beads and with kylikes at transition spaces, such as at and within doorways and by walls surrounding monumental tombs. In addition to objects for the living, Mycenaeans considered them appropriate grave offerings for people of both genders, and of different ages and status. Discontinuity was observed with regard to their introduction in tombs. While the earliest figurines, Naturalistic and Proto-Phi, are rare in tombs at Mycenae and Prosymna, the inhabitants of Pylos, Peristeria, and Chalkis deemed these types appropriate grave offerings. Aside from primary contexts, figurines were re-used as stoppers and as temper in mud-brick, they were recycled in construction fills, and they were discarded in household refuse. Discarding implies either the existence of non-believers as well as believers, or a semantic transformation of the figurines among believers. Mycenaeans did not share a common attitude towards their terracottas. The analysis of find contexts forces us to realize that the multiplicity of contexts must show a multiplicity of meanings of the figurines. This study concludes that their meaning changed from context to context depending on their users and the activities in which they were used throughout their life histories.*

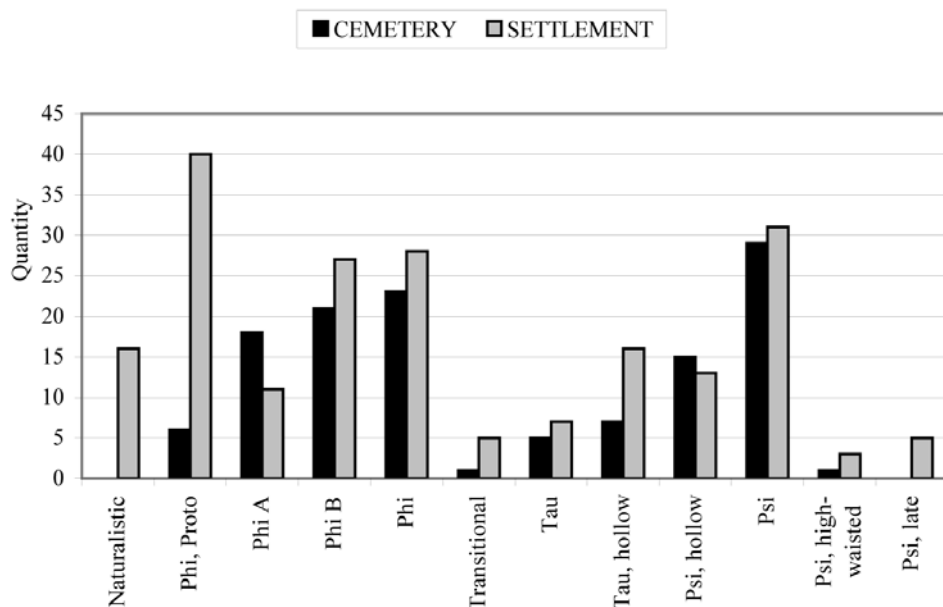
During the First International Symposium held at the Swedish Institute, Elizabeth French proposed

a model that introduced context and its role in the transformation of the meaning of Mycenaean figurines. Her model stated that the figurines take their function from their context.¹ Inspired by

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¹ French 1981, 173.

Table 1. Frequency of female figurines in cemetery and settlement deposits at Mycenae. Reproduced from Tzonou-Herbst 2002, 279, table 9.



French's hypothesis, this research focuses on interpreting the function of Mycenaean figurines through a contextual study of their relationships to other artifacts and spaces. An underlying assumption is that people habitually perform activities in culturally-specific settings that consist of moveable artifacts and architectural space.² Culture and society are abstract, while objects and actions are concrete. Patterns of artifact associations and their distribution may be used to infer systems of activities.³ Activity in this study is defined as an outward, as opposed to contemplative, action, that is expressed grammatically by any transitive verb. The action passes over to an object.⁴ Therefore, even a seemingly passive action, such as wearing a necklace, is an activity. The co-occurrence of objects and people engaged in activities in systems of settings is understandable from within a given culture. The aim of this study is to find traces of culture from excavation contexts, which at best consist of objects in structured space. My task is, first, to "catalogue" patterns of activities and settings in

which Mycenaean used figurines, and, second, to recreate sets of behaviors involving figurines that are typical of Mycenaean culture.

Find contexts, the preservation of the figurines, and their formal features yielded hypotheses concerning the nature of the activities in which Mycenaean employed their terracottas. Contextual analyses of deposits with figurines uncovered the multiple stages in their use-life. A generalized sketch of their use-life is as follows: the figurines were produced and they were used in different occasions and places, and after they had served their purpose, they were sometimes broken, recycled or re-used as something quite different, and then thrown away. Their frequent disposal in household refuse deposits forces us to reconsider their sacredness.

² Rapoport 1990, 13.

³ Rapoport 1990, 12.

⁴ OED 1982, action/ activity 24, transitive 3381.

Context, as defined by Glassie, is a series of occasions belonging to three master classes—creation, communication and consumption—that cumulatively recapitulate the life history of the artifact.⁵ For Schiffer, systemic context is when the artifacts participate in a behavioral system.⁶ As archaeologists, however, we have only the archaeological context of artifacts at our disposal, when the relations of the objects to their living context have been severed, and we try to reconstruct the systemic context. Schiffer⁷ and Hodder⁸ believe that natural and cultural transformations come between the systemic and the archaeological contexts, and intentions, strategies, attitudes, and ideologies, belonging to the systemic context do not survive in the archaeological context. So, how do we infer cultural meanings of things and practices from archaeological contexts? Observation of patterns in material culture may be the first step.

For most of the figurines found in excavations, their archaeological context does not preserve evidence that can help us reconstruct their systemic context. Out of 4593 figurines included in this study, only 350 potentially come from primary contexts. The great majority of them were found in secondary contexts. Most research has considered secondary contexts unhelpful in any reconstruction of the meaning of the figurines, and excluded these contexts from study. On the contrary, this research considers all find contexts of figurines as meaningful for different types of information.⁹ Instead of rejecting the bulk of our evidence, we can use it to reconstruct the different stages in the figurines' use-lives.

From the analysis of this large corpus of data, a great variety of contexts emerged and indicated that the figurines' functions were diverse and complex. Contexts of use in everyday life and in ritual activities, and contexts of discard show the multiplicity of meanings of the figurines. For the various stages in the figurines' use-life we can ask when, where, for whom and how the figurines were useful and meaningful.

Indeed, when the figurines were introduced, they seem to have appeared more in

⁵ Glassie 1999, 48.

⁶ Schiffer 1987, 3; Schiffer 1995.

⁷ Schiffer 1987, 22.

⁸ Hodder 1982, 185–186, 211.

⁹ Tzonou-Herbst 2002. In addition to reviewing the published figurines from Mycenae and Prosymna, this study encompasses all the unpublished examples from the British excavations and some from the Greek excavations at Mycenae. A database was employed to facilitate the research. Morphological information on each figurine includes the figurine type based on French's work, the preservation, and special features of the figurine, bibliographic and archival information. Moreover, the database contains contextual information on the figurines categorized in four types of archaeological context of the artifacts. Many of the figurines found at Mycenae come from post-Mycenaean strata. These figurines can only be assigned to the site as a whole, for we cannot associate them more closely with a specific area where the Bronze Age inhabitants of Mycenae used or discarded them. Figurines from Mycenaean strata are divided to examples that cannot be associated with a specific context and are thus only assigned to an area or a locus; and, figurines that have been found in archaeological contexts that do preserve clues that can help us reconstruct how the people at Mycenae used, re-used or discarded them: that is, their systemic context. These contexts were divided into three types, and contained information on location, date, associated objects including other figurines, and associated pottery. A type 1 context is when the artifacts are essentially in the place where Mycenaeans used them: in other words, a primary context. Figurines found in contexts of this type can be associated with architectural space and an assemblage of objects. Type 2 is a context of re-use and discard of the figurines. Finally, type 3 contexts are fills that preserve neither the use nor the discard of the figurines. These are strata that date to Mycenaean times; figurines in them can only be associated with a location, since they were not moved significantly by later habitation, but not with other objects. In this way, the figurines are grouped according to the level of information preserved in the archaeological record. In addition to this detailed study of figurines from the area of Mycenae, figurines from other Mycenaean settlements and cemeteries supplement this corpus as comparative evidence.

settlement contexts rather than in tombs at Mycenae and Prosymna. Female figurines in settlement deposits in the area of Mycenae far outnumber those found in cemeteries in the same area early in LH IIIA (*Table 1*¹⁰). From 17 Naturalistic¹¹ figurines found in Mycenae, not one was found in a tomb. Unfortunately, many come from Schliemann's and Tsountas' excavations, and in the remaining the find contexts are unhelpful.¹² No Naturalistic figurine was found in Prosymna, even though many tombs contained pottery dating from LH IIB/IIIA1 and LH IIIA1.¹³

With the introduction of Proto-Phi, there are examples from tombs, but they are few compared to the large number of Proto-Phi from the settlement and refuse deposits.¹⁴ As a working hypothesis, I propose that when the people at Mycenae started producing figurines, they used them in activities around the settlement, in kitchens and storerooms, as I discuss below, and they even threw them in

the trash more readily than they put them in their tombs. The evidence from Prosymna (*Table 2*) supports the hypothesis of rare use of figurines in tombs early in LH IIIA. Only one tomb used in LH IIIA1 had figurines in it: Tomb 29 contained three Proto-Phi, one bead, and an animal figurine of the Wavy 1 type.¹⁵ This is a low proportion of tombs with figurines, about 4%: one of 26 tombs used at the time had figurines in it. In contrast to LH IIIA1, between LH IIIA2 and LH IIIB2 the frequency of tombs with figurines ranges between 27% and 37%. In LH IIIA2, 11 of 41 tombs had figurines in them, 9 of 32 in LH IIIB1, and 4 of 11 in LH IIIB2.¹⁶ The constant proportion of tombs with figurines during LH IIIA2–LH IIIB2 throws in stark contrast their rarity in LH IIIA1.¹⁷

While figurines may have been used rarely in tombs at Mycenae and Prosymna early in LH IIIA, at Pylos and Chalkis, for example, the situation seems quite dissimilar. From seven¹⁸ Natu-

¹⁰ The figurine types are arranged roughly chronologically from early to late from left to right along the horizontal axis.

¹¹ The discussion that follows assumes that our chronology and typology of the figurines is valid. If this is the case, if Naturalistic figurines are indeed the earliest figurines to have been produced, then these, the earliest figurines do not seem to appear in tombs at Mycenae and Prosymna.

¹² Naturalistic figurines from Mycenae include one from the House of the Sphinxes, one from the Panaghia Houses, two from the Cyclopean Terrace Building, one from Petsas' House, one from a mud-brick deposit in the Megaron, three from the Citadel House Area, one that Mylonas found in the area of the entrance to the Cult Center, six from Schliemann's excavations, and one from Tsountas' excavations. This list of Naturalistic figurines includes all found in the British Excavations, but only the ones that have been published from the Greek Excavations. I cannot account for any unpublished examples that may indeed completely alter and reject my observations, which are based on the evidence at hand.

¹³ Three tombs contained pottery transitional between LH IIB/LH IIIA1. Twenty-six tombs contained pottery

dating from the LH IIIA1 period (Shelton 1996, 280–281).

¹⁴ Particularly from the Atreus Bothros deposit of household refuse discussed below.

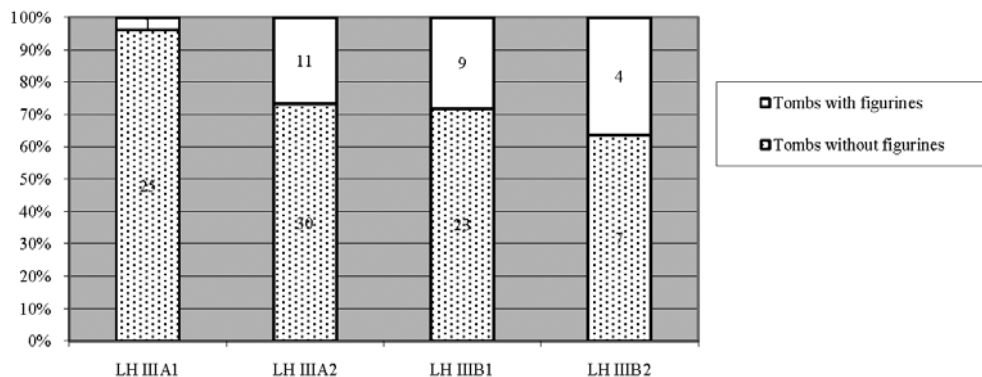
¹⁵ Blegen 1937, 80.

¹⁶ For the tombs, see Blegen 1937 and Shelton 1996.

¹⁷ The absence of early figurines from tombs at Mycenae and Prosymna in contrast with their frequency in settlement deposits is proposed only as a working hypothesis formulated on the basis of the existing evidence. The hypothesis requires further testing. We do not have settlement deposits dating from the earlier parts of LH IIIA, except for the Atreus Bothros deposit. Consequently, the statistical basis of the hypothesis may be incomplete and give an erroneous result regarding the contrast between figurines from settlement versus tomb deposits. The publication of more tombs from the area, and the excavation and publication of more settlement deposits will either support or refute the hypothesis.

¹⁸ This number of Naturalistic figurines is based on French 1971. Further examples have been excavated since, for example the Naturalistic figurine from chamber tomb 6 at Aidonia (Kaza-Papageorgiou 1996, 46).

Table 2. Proportion of tombs with and without figurines at Prosymna. Reproduced from Tzonou-Herbst 2002, 280, table 10.



ralistic figurines found in tombs, five come from the area of Pylos¹⁹ and two from Chalkis.²⁰ Figurines may have been used differently in various areas, especially at their inception.

Later in LH IIIA and in LH IIIB, when Phi and Psi-type figurines come into fashion, their appearance in cemetery and settlement areas is approximately the same (*Table 1*). At that time, the inhabitants of Mycenae started using figurines as much in their tombs as they did in their everyday lives. That the figurines made this transition from objects exclusively for the living to offerings for both the living and the dead indicates one or two

things; one, there was a change in the significance of figurines and/or, two, there was a shift in the idea about death during the time when figurines are deposited in the grave.

In addition to where figurines were found in each period, this research deals with the question of who used them. Many have embraced Blegen's idea of the association of figurines with children. At Prosymna and Eleusis figurines were indeed found in direct association with children,²¹ but they were also placed in burials with adults,²² and with both children and adults.²³ Adult tombs that contained figurines also occur at Argos²⁴ and

¹⁹ Five Naturalistic figurines represent the second largest concentration after Mycenae. From these, one comes from the so-called Grave Circle. The date of the Circle is transitional MH/LH to LH IIIA1, and the burial with the Naturalistic figurine in Pit 2 is considered as the latest. Three figurines come from chamber tombs E4, dating to LH IIIA1, and E6, dating to LH IIIA2 (Blegen *et al.* 1973, 149, 182, 186). Finally, one was found at Peristeria by Marinatos, dated to LH II by French (1971, 109). An additional possible example of a Naturalistic figurine comes from the Kyklos at Peristeria (Korres 1980, 324).

²⁰ Hankey 1952, 87–88.

²¹ At Prosymna, tombs with figurines in direct association with children are Tombs 29, 35, 36, 42, and the tomb excavated by Protonotariou-Deilaki (1965). At Eleusis, they are Tombs Δπ4, Δπ16, Μπ8 (for the tombs, see Blegen 1937 and Mylonas 1975).

²² At Prosymna, tombs with figurines in direct association with adults are Tombs 3, 4, 8, 29, and 38. At Eleusis, Tombs Θπ5, Βπ18 (for the tombs, see Blegen 1937 and Mylonas 1975).

²³ At Prosymna, tombs with figurines in direct association with children and adults are Tombs 10 and 43. At Eleusis, Tombs Θπ4 and Θπ15 (for the tombs, see Blegen 1937 and Mylonas 1975). The figurines in Tomb Θπ4 in Eleusis were placed in the space between the child and the adult female (Mylonas 1975, B, 10–19).

²⁴ Twelve tombs with figurines were excavated at the Deiras in Argos (Deshayes 1966). For nine tombs, information on the skeletal material is not known. From the tombs for which information on the skeletons is recorded, figurines were placed with a child in Tomb XXI, with an adult female in Tomb XXVII, and with an adult and a child in Tomb XXVIII.

Pylos.²⁵ Moreover, in settlements, figurines appear in household activity areas such as kitchens and storerooms, where we would expect children to be present.²⁶ They also occur, however, in areas where we might not expect them, such as in spaces with administrative documents discussed below.

In addition to age, scholars have sought to associate figurines with certain social classes. Archaeological contexts indicate that social status was not a defining criterion. Both poor and wealthy funerary and domestic contexts contain figurines. Following the system used by William Cavanagh and Chris Mee to rank tombs according to presence or absence of 46 categories of grave goods (excluding pottery), over 17% of the richest tombs in Prosymna and

Mycenae have figurines.²⁷ Rich tombs in Nauplio,²⁸ Pylos,²⁹ and Rhodes³⁰ also include them.

Furthermore, a complete animal figurine was found in a primary context in the House of the Oil Merchant.³¹ Other assemblages contain figurines in association with prestige objects and administrative documents. In Building M in the North Quarter at Mycenae, two small fragments of a faience plaque inscribed with the cartouche of Amenhotep III covered an intact Phi figurine.³² Figurines were found with Linear B tablets and sealings in the Kadmeion at Thebes,³³ and with the ivory trio at Prinaria in Mycenae.³⁴ Furthermore, two figurines were sealed along with the figures in the Temple at Mycenae.³⁵ Connections with prestige objects, administrative documents, and objects of the

²⁵ In Pit 2 in the Grave Circle at Pylos, the figurine was found lying face down on the right side of the chest of the extended burial of a young man (Blegen *et al.* 1973, 136, 142).

²⁶ For example, figurines occur in storeroom 17 in Panaghia House II (Mylonas Shear 1987, 37), and in kitchens, such as Room 16 in the House of the Tomb with the Tripods at Mycenae (Onasoglou 1995, 72–73), and Room M1 in the SE House at Peristeria (Korres 1978, 540–545).

²⁷ Cavanagh & Mee 1990. They analyzed 166 tombs from Mycenae, Prosymna, and Dendra, of which 81 belonged to the wealthiest groups 1 and 2. Fourteen tombs out of the wealthiest 81 had figurines in them. These are Tombs 3, 29, 42, 38, and 10 (all Group 1), and Tomb 43 (Group 2) in Prosymna. In Mycenae, they include Tsountas' Tombs 5, 99 (Group 1), 7, 11, 76, 79, 91 (Group 2), and Wace's Tomb 513 (Group 2). For the tombs, see Blegen 1937; Shelton 1996; Wace 1932; and Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985.

²⁸ In Tombs IV and VII, in the area of Evangelistria, figurines were found with gold beads and bronze tools (Dragona-Latsoudi 1979).

²⁹ In Pit 2 of the Grave Circle at Pylos, along with the figurine discussed above, were a bronze mirror and knife, an awl with an ivory handle, and a bronze bowl and scale pan. This is certainly not a poor tomb.

³⁰ In Tomb 3 at Pylona in Rhodes, a man, a woman and a child were buried. A terracotta chariot was among the grave goods, which included a bronze vessel, bronze weapons and tools, and a golden neck-

lace of 15 beads (Karantzali 1998; 1999a; 1999b; 2001, 50f.).

³¹ Tournavitou (1995, 298) most recently interpreted the Ivory Houses, as she called them, as operating under control of the central authority.

³² Mylonas 1966a, pls. 76b, 77a. In Mylonas 1966b, pl. 132b, this Phi figurine is shown with three other figurines, two complete Phi and the upper half of a Tau (?), that come from the same deposit, as Mylonas states on p. 131. There were at least three complete figurines from the same deposit. Cline (1987, 23) interpreted the presence of the plaque at Mycenae as an indication, among other evidence, for the existence of an "official Egyptian embassy," "part of a gift from Amenhotep III." Hankey (1980, 46) argued that the inscribed objects of Amenhotep III and Queen Tiye found in the Aegean "are not traveler's trinkets or the product of casual trade, and are likely to have arrived at Mycenae in a formal manner" and "further investigation may tell us whether there is a link between the plaques ... and a visit from Egypt."

³³ Spyropoulos (Spyropoulos & Chadwick 1975, 18) published a deposit with Linear B tablets and figurines from a room at the corner of Metaxa and Epameinonda Streets. Aravantinos (1998, 172; 1999b, 47) interpreted the room as a wool storeroom and, additionally, mentioned the presence of figurines with tablets in the Archive of Linear B tablets in Pelopidou Street 28 (Aravantinos 1998, 173; 1999a), and with sealings in the Room with the Sealings (Aravantinos 1995, 618).

³⁴ Wace 1949, 83–86; 1957, 197–200.

³⁵ Moore and Taylour 1999, 62, pls. 22b, c.

proposed palatial religion discredit proposals that would regard figurines as mass-produced cheap objects.

The range of archaeological contexts makes it clear that figurines were buried with children but also with adults, in poor tombs but also in wealthy ones. Their utilization in burial ceremonies has led scholars to assume that they had a ritual role. Ritual need not necessarily mean religion since social practices and actions (i.e., people doing things not related to religious beliefs) may be ritual. The intentionally repetitive and patterned structure of actions distinguishes ritual from everyday. Consequently, objects participating in ritual actions are deposited in a controlled and ordered manner; tombs and their contents present an illustrative example of such structured deposition. Apart from burial, figurines played a part in a wide range of other ritual activities. For example, archaeological contexts are beginning to support the frequent association of figurines with kylikes in transition spaces, and with beads. In order to understand activities with figurines, we need to investigate activities involving beads and kylikes, how Mycenaean used them, who used them and what was their significance for them.

It is likely that beads and kylikes had ritual connotations for Mycenaean and figurines were associated with these artifacts. Figurines are recovered in find contexts with beads more frequently than with any other object type. The significance of beads in Mycenaean society has been recently discussed by Hughes-Brock, who concluded that beads were embedded in the processes that help to create power and status, and then legitimate it.³⁶ Bead necklaces adorn women in representations of religious scenes and processions, and the women participants in these ceremonies have been interpreted as priestesses or goddesses.³⁷ Beads occur repeatedly in quantity in cultic areas, such as the Temple at Mycenae,³⁸ the platforms in the Sanctuary at Phylakopi,³⁹ and Rooms 115 and 117 at Tiryns.⁴⁰

Beads and figurines appear together in domestic and funerary contexts. Hundreds of glass, faience and amber beads were excavated

along with complete figurines on the floor of Room II2 in the Northwest Quarter inside the citadel at Mycenae.⁴¹ Beads and figurines occur together in Building M,⁴² in the Prinaria deposit,⁴³ and in a deposit at the entrance to the Cult Center.⁴⁴ Apart from settlement areas, figurines and beads have been found together in tombs. In Tomb 33 at Prosymna, two hundred beads and sixteen figurines were scattered in the right side of the chamber.⁴⁵ Beads and figurines were also among the grave goods in Tombs 524,⁴⁶

³⁶ Hughes-Brock 1999, 291.

³⁷ Younger 1992, 264.

³⁸ Moore & Taylour 1999, 17–19.

³⁹ Renfrew 1985, 317–322.

⁴⁰ Kilian-Dirlmeier 1978–1979, 36.

⁴¹ The finds from the room included Phi and Psi figurines, one Phi completely unpainted, and a tripod seat with a seated figure; further, remains of almonds and olive pits, glass jewelry, tools, and the tooth of a wild boar with holes for attachment to a helmet (Mylonas & Iakovidis 1990, pls. 4a, 7a; Iakovidis 2006, 54–60, 76, 80–83, 115, 118–119, 121, pls. 29–30).

⁴² The deposit with the figurines contained pottery dating to the end of the LH IIIB period, a bronze signet ring, Phi, Psi and animal figurines, and an Egyptian faience plaque (Mylonas 1966a; 1966b, see *supra* n. 32).

⁴³ Among the finds were pottery of the LH IIIB period (lost in the war), a faience cylinder seal, a male head in painted plaster, a sword pommel, inlays in bone, ivory and glass fragments, a pounder, a button, gold pendants, glass, faience and carnelian beads, fragments of tables of offering, and 13 female figurines (see *supra* n. 34).

⁴⁴ The deposit was found along the west retaining wall of the road leading to the door of the Cult Center. LH IIIB2 sherds of an anthropomorphic vase were crushed *in situ*, and were mixed with deep bowl sherds, a headless Naturalistic figurine, and many beads (Mylonas 1977, 157–158).

⁴⁵ Blegen 1937, 106.

⁴⁶ In a heap of two skeletons and in a second assemblage with one skeleton, four Phi figurines and a total of 110 beads were recovered (Wace 1932, 42–43).

30,⁴⁷ and on a bench to the left of the entrance in Tomb 36⁴⁸ in Mycenae.

The association of beads and figurines seems to be strengthened by the relationship between the images depicted in two fresco fragments. The fragments are bound together by spatial proximity and, thus, incorporation in the iconographical program of a single space. The one fragment depicts a woman holding a figurine,⁴⁹ while in the second one, a woman, the famous Μυκηναία, is holding bead necklaces. They were both found in Corridor M in the SW Building at Mycenae.⁵⁰ Mycenaeans used beads in a variety of settings. In frescoes and signet rings, women participants in rituals and in processions wear and offer bead necklaces. Men are rarely depicted wearing them. Beads are ubiquitous as grave goods. It is more difficult to associate them with an age- or gender-specific group in these cases. The recorded evidence is unhelpful and Mycenaeans buried their dead in tombs that they re-used over and over, making secure association of grave goods with individual burials impossible in most cases. In tombs with a single burial, beads appear more frequently with children, but they also occur with women and men.⁵¹ Thus, women are associated with beads in representations, but beads accompany women, men, and children in the grave. Even if the age or gender of bead-owners is difficult to pinpoint from such a preliminary analysis of contexts, beads were used in ritual activities based on their presence in tombs and on their representations. My conclusion is that beads were associated with figurines in a system of related activities, that is, activities which were meaningful together for Mycenaeans.

Figurines and kylikes placed at transition or boundary locations comprise another system of activities performed in a specific type of setting. Figurines are associated with doorways, as Kilian⁵² first observed. An intact figurine was located underneath the rubble wall of the entrance to Tomb 33 in Prosymna.⁵³ Additional examples of figurines in doorways include a triple human figurine in Tomb 79 at Kato Pigadi in Kalkani at Mycenae.⁵⁴ At Panagitsa Chalki-

dos a Psi figurine was in-between the stones of the stomion along with two small stirrup jars.⁵⁵

Association of the figurines with a setting of transition such as a doorway is coupled with an activity using kylikes. Figurines and kylikes

⁴⁷ A female figurine and 24 beads were with a child burial in a cist (for the tomb, see Shelton 1995, 199; Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985).

⁴⁸ An ox and a female figurine were on the bench along with beads. No information is published on any burials or the date of the assemblage (for the tomb, see Shelton 1995, 196; Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985).

⁴⁹ It has been debated whether the representation is that of a figure, a figurine, or a miniature person. Kritseli-Providi (1982, 41) explains it as a figurine, while Immerwahr (1990, 119) believes it to be a simulation of a live figure. Kritseli-Providi believes it is a figurine because of the size of the figure and its proportion in relation to the hand holding it, the position of the figure in the palm of the woman, and the way the hand is holding it. Many figurines are hollow and can be held as is represented. Even though the pose of the figure with the uneven position of the arms is not common among figurines, it exists. French (1971, 148) mentions that there is a "not inconsiderable group of figurines in which the arms are not symmetrical." The specific arm position can also be seen in the figurine published by Karageorghis and Caubet (1996, fig. 1).

⁵⁰ Kritseli-Providi 1982, 18, 37, 41, 80.

⁵¹ Lewartowski 2000, 35. Thirty-eight out of 242 tombs with children and 16 of 167 tombs with adults have beads as grave goods. If we look at the occurrence in terms of percentages, 15.7% of tombs with children and 9.6% of tombs with adults have beads as grave goods. Beads are definitely more frequent with children, but they do occur with adults. Of the 167 tombs with adults, 44 were tombs of men and 36 were tombs of women, while no sex is recorded for 87. Of the 16 tombs with beads and adult burials, we know that three were those of men (all from Kirrha, so it may have been a local custom), one was the tomb of a woman (from Koukou), and one was the tomb of a man and a woman (from Pylos), so we cannot ascribe the beads to the one or the other. The evidence for sex in the adult tombs is inconclusive.

⁵² Kilian 1988, 142.

⁵³ Blegen 1937, 105.

⁵⁴ Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, 220.

⁵⁵ Choremis 1972.

were excavated in front of the entrance to Tomb A in Kalkani at Mycenae. The figurines were complete, while the kylikes were broken.⁵⁶ One hundred and fifty-five figurine fragments, including two horsemen, were placed along with fragments of kylikes and stirrup jars against the wall around the Tomb of Clytemnestra.⁵⁷ The deposit was excavated against the northern end of the wall on earth that had become packed from walking. This group represents the major votive activity in this study. A comparable system of activities in a similar setting may have occurred at Peristeria, where figurines and kylikes were also deposited in the area adjacent to the Kyklos.⁵⁸ Walls⁵⁹ can be considered as transition or boundary spatial features that, contrary to doorways, divide rather than unite spaces. Kylikes and figurines were placed against walls that surround monumental tombs.⁶⁰

Hägg considers kylikes to have been the foremost vessel used in libations by Mycenaeans⁶¹ and they were probably used by celebrants at the palace of Nestor in rituals of feasting on ceremonial occasions.⁶² Due to their ritual uses in animal sacrifice and feasting, and in libations, a hypothesis has been put forward that they may represent state-sponsored mechanisms of regional integration.⁶³ The presence of figurines and kylikes in front of monumental walls and in front of the entrance to tombs shows that pouring of libations or drinking or another activity with liquids, and offering of figurines may have been ritual activities performed at the time of veneration.

Through the examples discussed above, an understanding of the increasingly complex uses of figurines emerges. To comprehend fully the multiplicity of their meanings, however, we need to consider the final stages of their use-life, which include their re-use, recycling, and eventual discard. In certain instances, when their primary purpose was realized, Mycenaeans reshaped and recycled them. Two animal figurines from Mycenae were sharpened to be re-used as stoppers for vessels.⁶⁴ The change in shape and in function is indisputably premeditated in these examples. Other instances of re-

use indicate the intention as well. Mycenaeans incorporated broken figurines in mud-brick as temper knowingly. The mud-brick collapse layers of the walls in the Ivory Houses contained many fragments. They were treated the

⁵⁶ Two complete Phi figurines were found there, along with fragments of kylikes (Verdelis 1966, pl. 76a).

⁵⁷ For the excavation report on the deposit, see Holland & Hood 1953; Hood 1953; Tylour 1955. For the pottery, see French 1966.

⁵⁸ Korres 1978, 521, 532.

⁵⁹ According to Parker Pearson and Richards (1994, 24), by physically dividing up and demarcating space we may classify and control places and relationships more readily. Walls, gateways and entrances serve to mark transitions between domains such as inside/outside, sacred/profane, female/male, public/private, enemy/friend, elite/commoner or initiated/uninitiated. The wall around the Tomb of Clytemnestra is a retaining wall for the tumulus. In addition to its practical function, its symbolic nature can be justified based on a number of arguments. The wall is monumental, even though a simpler wall would have sufficed to perform the retaining function. There was a packed surface up against the wall for people to approach it. Finally, the wall did not need to be circular. By being circular, it formalized and focused attention to the center of the monument underneath and was, in this way, tied to this monument.

⁶⁰ Additional evidence that figurines were placed against walls surrounding monumental tombs comes from Schliemann's notebook entry from October 6th, 1876, "A vast number of Juno idols were found, for the most part inside and outside of the double row of tomb stones" (i.e., the Grave Circle A parapet). I am grateful to Elizabeth French for sending me this reference.

⁶¹ Hägg 1990.

⁶² Davis & Bennet 1999, 110.

⁶³ Galaty 1999, 8.

⁶⁴ I owe the identification of these figurines as stoppers to Elizabeth French. The figurines include a Wavy 2 animal figurine (Excavation Number 1960-133) from Room 4 in the Citadel House Area that was either part of the floor deposit or part of mud-brick, and an animal figurine (Excavation Number 1969-613) from Room 18, Area 2 (Temple) that was part of the mud-brick deposit in the room.

same way as potsherds were in this case. Apart from deliberate re-use, Mycenaean recycled figurines in many construction fills most probably unconsciously, as part of the rubble, perhaps with no awareness of or regard to them in specific. About one-fifth of the figurines that I have collected come from construction fills, such as the fill underneath the floors of the Ivory Houses.

If they did not end up in construction fills, a number of them were discarded in household refuse seemingly unceremoniously. The contexts produced no evidence for ritual trash. Ritual discard, distinct from common, domestic trash, has been distinguished in excavations. The burial of the damaged sculptures in pits on the Athenian Acropolis after the Persian sack is an example of ritual disposal.⁶⁵ In the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore in Corinth, figurines were discarded, after their purpose had been fulfilled, in pits intentionally dug within the limits of the sanctuary.⁶⁶ These examples help us propose criteria necessary for the identification of ritual trash. The deposition of the objects must be structured, that is, patterned in space or stratigraphically patterned to represent the intention of the actors.⁶⁷ Tombs are prime examples of structured deposition in the archaeological record, embodying the ritual of the burial in the spatial distribution and architecture of the tombs, as well as in the positioning of the skeleton and the grave goods.

No pattern or structure exists in secondary refuse deposits of figurines thrown away from their original location of use. I have recorded as many figurines in trash deposits at Mycenae as in votive deposits. The Atreus Bothros deposit⁶⁸ contained, according to Wace, refuse disposed of in the rock crevices from the houses on top of the Atreus ridge. Storage and cooking pots, tools, fresco fragments from remodeling, broken ornaments, and food refuse were associated with 106 broken figurines. There were human and animal figurines, eleven chariot groups, and model furniture. The state of preservation of the objects also indicates that this is a deposit of secondary refuse. No pots were

restorable and nothing was re-usable. The Atreus Bothros deposit shows that the residents of Mycenae threw their figurines in trash in large quantities as early as LH IIIA1.

Discarding of figurines continued in later times. A LH IIIA2 trash deposit with figurines was excavated underneath the Cyclopean Terrace Building in Mycenae.⁶⁹ Twenty-three figurines were recovered. Apart from the figurines, the deposit contained scattered patches of plaster, ash, and clay, along with pottery of domestic character. Unpainted kylikes and bowls, amphoras, kraters, cooking pots, and ladles were common.

Twenty-two figurines were discarded in Room 3 in the Cult Center at Mycenae in LH IIIB1.⁷⁰ Room 3 is a narrow, corridor-like room separating the South House Annex from the Megaron. Concentration of trash in this dead-end area is not unusual, since trash tends to be thrown in areas unimportant for use and access. Broken figurines and domestic pottery were mixed with obsidian, fragments of mother of pearl, a worked boar's tusk and a re-used amphora handle. In LH IIIB2, five figurines were discarded above the Causeway,⁷¹ five in

⁶⁵ Hurwit 1999, 141.

⁶⁶ Bookidis & Stroud 1997, 159, 211, 380.

⁶⁷ Richards & Thomas 1984.

⁶⁸ Wace published a detailed description of this deposit (Wace 1949, 119–131, esp. 124–128). Plans of the trenches dug, and a section through the deposit can be found in Wace 1949, pls. 8–9, 45–48. French briefly described the material in Wace 1954, 289–290. She studied the pottery and figurines in 1957 and 1962, and published the results of her study in French 1963 (in summary), and French 1964 (comprehensively).

⁶⁹ Wace 1954.

⁷⁰ Wardle 1969.

⁷¹ “There was, perhaps, a tip of household refuse, including pottery, against a wooden fence or paling along the edge of the terrace above the causeway which collapsed in the fire and allowed the tip to fall down the slope” (Wardle 1973, 303–304).

a deposit in Prehistoric Cemetery East,⁷² and 20 figurines in Trench L against the Great Poros Wall.⁷³

The trash deposits described above contained an unstructured mixture of heterogeneous objects that were broken and not re-usable. The pottery is of domestic character. Nothing in the contents, form, or location indicates that these deposits may have been ritually buried. The inhabitants at Mycenae were throwing figurines in the trash from LH IIIA to LHIIIB, as these deposits clearly show.

Even when figurines are found in trash and away from their scenes of use, they are “incarnations of the intention of the users.”⁷⁴ Perhaps a functional transformation occurred during the use-life of the figurines. That is, their significance was altered, and after a period of use, Mycenaeans were “allowed” to throw them out. Alternatively, occurrence in trash may indicate discontinuity among Mycenaean society; that is, some Mycenaeans believed in the powers of the figurines and placed them in the Temple with the figures, while others did not believe in them. Discarding implies a transformation of the figurines among believers or the existence of different groups of believers and non-believers.

From trash, terrace fills, and mud-brick deposits we can infer that after the figurines had passed the functional stage of their use-life, they were discarded in large enough amounts to be used in construction fills; furthermore, people had no objection to cutting them up, throwing them away or using them in mud-brick. These instances may be interpreted variously. Perhaps the meaning of the figurines was transformed when the figurines were broken, altered, or disposed of.⁷⁵ One probable hypothesis, among many, could be that when the individual owning/using his/her figurines died, they lost their power. Alternatively, their meaning could still be the same for their original user, even if the person affecting their destruction did not believe in that meaning. We do not know that all Mycenaeans shared the same beliefs.

An additional argument can be made that figurines were not uniformly sacred for all Myce-

naeans at all times if we compare them with the figures. It is telling to contrast the structure of assemblages and spaces in which figurines and figures occur. The deposition of figurines is random and un-patterned compared with that of the figures, which is structured. While figurines have been found in great abundance in a wide variety of settings, figures have been uncovered in very specific locations only. Unlike figurines, figures are not found regularly and readily in Mycenaean houses. No figures have been excavated in deposits of household refuse, in which figurines abound. The difference in the find contexts between the two types of Mycenaean objects could be compared to icons in Modern Greek churches and those in households. While the icons in the church are extraordinary objects that everybody in the community worships, the icons in each household are ordinary and insignificant to anyone other than the occupants of the house, who tend them daily.⁷⁶

I believe there is no simple, monolithic answer to the meaning of Mycenaean figurines. Rather, different members of the society perceived them differently. As French proposed, context and function are closely related. Interpretations of meaning and function transform

⁷² Wace *et al.* 1957. French (1963, 51) interpreted this deposit as domestic refuse. The deposit included domestic pottery, such as cooking pots, coarse storage jars, cups, mugs, kraters, bowls, and stirrup jars. Spindle whorls, a stopper, headless Psi and Tau figurines, two stems, a female body, and an animal horn were among the small finds.

⁷³ French (1969, 72) thought the deposit was a pottery dump or dumped construction/ foundation fill for the walls that were built on top of the Great Poros Wall after the destruction at the end of LH IIIB2.

⁷⁴ Glassie 1999, 64–65.

⁷⁵ Tringham & Conkey 1998, 28.

⁷⁶ This example is not intended to be taken as a direct analogy to Mycenaean practice. It is instructive of the difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary, and figurines could have been the one or the other depending on the user.

from context to context across the use-life of the figurines, according to the group or individual who participated in activities with them.

Documentation and analysis of the contextual relationships does not lead to the meaning of the figurines in the thoughts of the individual people of Mycenae. Nevertheless, we have a better idea of how, to whom, why and in what contexts figurines were meaningful⁷⁷ through patterns of use and discard. For Mycenaeans, figurines were ordinary objects that occurred with luxury and administrative objects. They were buried in poor and in rich tombs, with adults and with children. They were disposed of in household trash, but they were also stored in the Temple and were offered at the wall around the Tholos of Clytemnestra.

Find contexts, use-life, and discard of figurines must qualify our ideas of their sacredness. If they were holy objects, we must acknowledge that they were also found in many profane contexts. We cannot deduce from the mere presence of figurines that a context is related to religion. Many figurines ended their presumably sacred use-lives in household trash or were sometimes re-used in utilitarian ways. A simple dichotomy between sacred and profane does not apply to Mycenaean figurines. If they had religious connotations for some Mycenaeans, they did not for others.

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⁷⁷ Conkey 1993, 101.

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