Sacred space: contributions to the archaeology of belief

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In general, the Cypriot figurines of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic period\(^1\) are commonly accepted as representing ritual devices and are therefore suggestive of an ancient belief system. However, as stated so aptly by Desmond Morris: “But where is the evidence for the worship of a deity in prehistoric Cyprus? There are no temples to the Great Goddess, no remains of huge effigies, no models of the faithful attending her shrine, nothing, not a scrap of hard evidence to support her existence on the island at an early date. All we have is a large number of strange little figurines from tombs and occasionally from excavated settlement.”\(^2\)

Although scholarship does not accept that a Great Goddess was worshiped in Prehistoric Cyprus, the figurines as ritual paraphernalia are indicative of a cult practices. But where did these rituals take place? Eszter Bánffy has demonstrated, that there was not necessarily a clear cut, obvious differentiation between sacred and profane structures during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods of South-East Europe.\(^3\) Similarly there is a lack of recognisable, distinguishable sacred places in pre-Bronze Age Cyprus, thus the aim of this paper is to pursue the issue of where rituals are likely to have taken place, based on the anthropomorphic figurines and the information provided by their contexts.

Before turning to the meaningful contexts of the Prehistoric Cypriot figurines\(^4\) it is worth considering an underlying issue of this investigation. A salient fact is that the vast majority of the figurines in question derive from general settlement contexts, that is, general habitation layers inside and predominantly outside of domestic structures, or from refuse pits.\(^5\) Therefore, most contexts do not provide further insights about the locations the rituals took place in, except for making it likely that ritual performance took place within the boundaries of the inhabited area/settlements.\(^6\) However, there are specific contexts which can serve as indicators for places of ritual activity which shall be discussed in the following chapters.

**THE EVIDENCE FROM THE NEOLITHIC PERIOD (9,000–4,500/4,000 CAL BC)**

Hitherto, barely three schematic anthropomorphic figurines are known from the Cypro-PPNA (or Initial Aceramic Neolithic – 9,000–8,500/8,400 Cal BC).\(^7\) They are all from one site: Ayia Varvara Asprokremnos (Nicosia District). Though these cannot be taken as indicative for the ritual behaviour during this early Neolithic phase, these contexts are nonetheless worth examining.

One of the two stone figurines from the site was retrieved from a burnt soil sediment (unit 427), sealing a semi-subterranean structure which had been previously destroyed and abandoned (F300). This circumstance, i.e., the destruction and abandonment of the habitation in connection with the deliberate deposition of the figurine, led the excavators to reach the conclusion that the anthropomorphic representation played part in a closure event at the end of the use life of this ephemeral building.\(^8\) The same applies to the second stone figurine which was recovered from the site. This artefact was recovered that the figurines had during their use phase. They merely indicate, that these anthropomorphic figures had a certain length of use life, which ended at some point along with their symbolic significance, after which they were apparently regarded as mere rubbish and were simply thrown away along with the general settlement debris (Le Brun 1989a: 177, 1989b: 79–80).

However, it must be stressed that for the time periods under investigation here there is only one known, distinctly segregated burial ground (Souskiou Vathyrkakas) during the Middle Chalcolithic and no other kinds of known prehistoric sites beside the settlements/area of habitation.

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\(^1\) The chosen time frame for this investigation spans c. 9,000–2,500/2,400 BC (after Knapp 2013: 81–82). The previous Epipalaeolithic Period is left out for the simple reason, that anthropomorphic figurines have not been recovered from this earliest phase of human presence on the island.

\(^2\) Morris 1985: 115.


\(^4\) For a full overview of all hitherto known Cypriot figurines, see Winkelmann forthcoming.

\(^5\) Such contexts are not meaningful for my argument in this paper, since they do not provide evidence – or even hint at – the function of the figurines during their use phase. They merely indicate, that these anthropomorphic figures had a certain length of use life, which ended at some point along with their symbolic significance, after which they were apparently regarded as mere rubbish and were simply thrown away along with the general settlement debris (Le Brun 1989a: 177, 1989b: 79–80).

\(^6\) However, it must be stressed that for the time periods under investigation here there is only one known, distinctly segregated burial ground (Souskiou Vathyrkakas) during the Middle Chalcolithic and no other kinds of known prehistoric sites beside the settlements/area of habitation.

\(^7\) Winkelmann forthcoming.

\(^8\) McCartney, Manning and Seward 2010: 80–81; referring to figurine no. G–382.
from a cache, deposited together with other stone items (including a pecked stone sphere and two flat cobbles, one of which had traces of ochre) at the end of the use of another structure. In contrast, the third, fragmented figurine of baked clay was found in the fill of a natural channel. Based on the association with other artefacts and features in the immediate vicinity, the excavators suggest in this case, that we are dealing with a foundation deposit.

These contexts indicate ritual behaviour which involved the final deposition of anthropomorphic figurines, either during foundation or closure rites, all of which certainly took place within the inhabited area, in two cases clearly connected to dwellings.

With eight anthropomorphic figurines altogether, the evidence from the subsequent Cypro-PPNB (or Early Aceramic Neolithic – 8,500/8,400–7,000–6,800 Cal BC) is also fairly sparse and can likewise not be taken as indicative for the entire phase. Nonetheless, those few more informative contexts which provide some insights into the ritual behaviour of that time shall be given consideration.

A plaster head of an anthropomorphic figurine was found in Parekklisha Shillourokambos (Limassol District). It was recovered from the fill of one of the abandoned wells from the site (117), and located at a depth of 3.20 m. If this item was deliberately inserted in the fill of the abandoned well, it may have also have been involved in a closure ceremony.

Another find from a comparable context is itself of ambiguous character: a serpentine head with feline ears, which can be interpreted for instance as the representation of a feline (a domestic cat or feline predator), a human wearing a mask of a cat, or a humanized feline (half-human, half-cat). This artefact was also recovered from a fill of a well (66) from the same site, at a depth of 1.85 m.

From Kissonerga Mylouthkia (Paphos District) there is also evidence for the final deposition of a figurine in an abandoned well (133), though the accompanying fill is of a completely different character. The entire content of the feature is outstanding due, on the one hand to an unusual large quantity of ground stone artefacts, as well as the remains of 23 caprines and the bones of at least four human individuals of different ages (infancy to adulthood). The anthropomorphic figurine derives from a fairly low segment of the fill (deposit 282) which has been interpreted as a secondary burial based on the occurrence of human remains and a mace head. Since the excavator, Edgar Peltenburg, assumes that the artefacts included in this feature’s fill were deliberately selected and buried, they must have had a particular meaning, in this context most likely as grave goods accompanying the interments.

Overall, the evidence for ritual activities based on the contexts of figurines during the Cypro-PPNB is connected with wells. Therefore, at least the last stage of these rituals, the final deposition of the artefacts, took place at these features. Though they have not been directly found in association with buildings, all these figurines derive from features related to settlement activity.

Even though the quantity of anthropomorphic figurines is with about 88 specimens distinctly greater during the Late Aceramic Neolithic (7,000/6,800–5,200 Cal BC), the contextual evidence they provide is still fairly limited. This is due to two reasons: 1) many of these artefacts were found during excavations undertaken in the initial years of Cypriot archaeology, at a time when the focus lay on general chronological and typological issues and contexts of artefacts were, unfortunately, largely neglected; 2) several of these figurines are recorded as mere surface finds, and sometimes the information concerning the provenance of certain figurines is even viewed as insecure.

The vast majority of the (clearly identifiable) Late Aceramic Neolithic figurines derives from a single site: Khrokita Vouni (Larnaca District; hitherto 27 examples). Here, they generally occurred in habitation layers outside and between the domestic structures, distributed more or less equally throughout all levels.
Barely four specimens were found inside domestic structures. The fairly well known anthropomorphic head of unbaked clay is merely reported to have been lying on a floor of a habitation\(^{29}\), two further figurines were recovered from fill layers above floors.\(^{30}\) Nonetheless, these finds suggest their probable usage (or at least storage) inside ordinary domestic dwellings. The fourth specimen, however, was found lying on a stone slab which covered a shallow pit dug through a floor (VIII) of a dwelling (“Tholos V”).\(^{31}\) In this case, the figurine was apparently deliberately placed in this location, not permanently deposited in the ground, but ready to be used.

The three anthropomorphic figurines from Petra (Morphou Bay), found during the excavations of the Swedish Cyprus Expedition, are reported as having been found inside buildings lying on floors.\(^{32}\) Two of them are said to derive from or near the “kitchen” area of the respective dwellings.\(^{33}\) This evidence also points to the assumption that the figurines were used, or at least kept, in these domestic structures.

In a hitherto singular instance, a figurine fragment was found in a fairly rich burial of an adult individual (burial III)\(^{34}\), located in “Tholos XVII” (associated with floor II) at Khirokitia. This feature contained, beside a necklace made of dentalium and carnelian beads, a quantity of stone bowl fragments which have been deliberately broken prior to deposition, as well as a quern placed on the chest of the deceased.\(^{35}\) However, due to the inclusion of several stone vessel fragments, it has been considered that the figurine fragment was lying in the grave’s fill merely by chance, an explanation which seems most likely. Otherwise this would be the only evidence for the deposition of a figurine as a grave good in a Late Aceramic Neolithic funerary context discovered so far.

Limited as the evidence still is, an overall estimation has shown that approximately two thirds of the Late Aceramic Neolithic figurines derive from extra-mural deposits, whereas the remaining examples come from intra-mural, domestic contexts, where they are often reported as having been found either lying on the floor of the dwellings, or from the fills above floors. A single specimen could present a possible grave good (though it seems fairly unlikely).\(^{36}\) Alain Le Brun has noticed (regarding the finds from Khirokitia and Petra) that it seems most probable that the Late Aceramic Neolithic anthropomorphic figurines were mainly used in domestic contexts inside the dwellings.\(^{37}\) At least, they were kept there while not in active use.

Unfortunately, the number of figurines, and with it the number of known contexts, decreases considerably during the subsequent Ceramic Neolithic (5,200/5,000–4,500/4,000 Cal BC). Barely six clearly identifiable anthropomorphic figurines can be attributed to the whole period.\(^{38}\) However, it is quite surprising that at least four of these figurines, alongside further possible anthropomorphic representations\(^{40}\), were detected in association with buildings.

At Sotira Teppes (Limassol District), the only known Neolithic anthropomorphic figurine made of bone discovered so far was found in House 35, and lay between floors I and II of the domestic structure.\(^{41}\)

A unique stone head of an anthropomorphic figurine was discovered in the north-western corner on the floor of House 12 at Paralimni Nissia (Ammochostos District).\(^{42}\) Apart from that, some further possible anthropomorphic or zoomorphic figurines were found on this site (though their identification is unclear or ambiguous); three of them were also found inside dwellings,\(^{43}\) and five other possible figurines or figurine fragments derive from extra-mural contexts.\(^{44}\)

It is also worth considering a possible fragment of a figurine from Ayios Epiktitos Vrysi (Kerynia District), that has been found in association with the wall collapse of a structure (Unit 118 of H2A)\(^{45}\) that has been interpreted as an axe-workshop.\(^{46}\) The only clearly identifiable an-

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\(^{29}\) Dikaios 1953: 181, 183 (Kh 1063): from Tholos XLVI, floor II.

\(^{30}\) Dikaios 1953: 183 (Kh 1175b): from Tholos XLVII, from layer between floor I and II. Dikaios 1953: 155 (Kh 1089): from Tholos XXXV, layer overlying the (single) floor.

\(^{31}\) Dikaios 1953: 60, 65 (Kh 1401); on page 60 the find circumstance seems to be incorrectly described as the figurine was lying under the slab, but the drawing/plan section of floor VIII (p. 61, fig. 29) as well as the photo (pl. XVI a) taken during excavation indicate that the object in fact lay on top of this slab as correctly pointed out by Peltenburg and Thomas in Peltenburg et al. 1991: 9.

\(^{32}\) Åström 2003: 32 (PLT 27, PLT 42); Archaeologia Viva 1, 1969: 10 (PLT 27).

\(^{33}\) Åström 2003: 32; referring to figurines no. PLT 42 and PLT 72.

\(^{34}\) On page 300 (Dikaios 1953, with regard to figurine Kh 822) the context is probably wrongly given as burial I.

\(^{35}\) Dikaios 1953: 106, 109; registration no. of necklace: Kh 560; registration no. of stone bowl fragments: Kh 810-812, registration no. of quern: Kh 1148.

An anthropomorphic figurine from Ayios Epiktitos Vrysi came from a depression in the lower SE section of another building (H 7.2) which has not been further described.\textsuperscript{47} It was associated with a dense concentration of other artefacts including needles, chipped stones, lamps and vessels.\textsuperscript{48} However, the excavation report does not state whether this cavity was artificially created (like a pit, for instance) or if the artefacts were either deliberately or accidentally deposited in it.

A so far unique context concerning an anthropomorphic figurine is evidenced in House 5 at Sotira Teppes (Limassol District).\textsuperscript{49} The structure itself is located approximately at the centre of the densely inhabited plateau. It differs from the other buildings with regard to some individual features\textsuperscript{50}, among which is an unusual installation: in the north-eastern corner of the domestic structure there is a low, slightly curved enclosure wall, separating this part from the main floor area. The compartment held two fills, the lower layer of which comprised the anthropomorphic figurine alongside a quantity of vessel fragments. Porphyrios Dikaios assumed that the purpose of this feature was to store the items deposited inside.\textsuperscript{51} However, it must be noted that the building itself does not differ from other contemporary ones for instance with regard to size or position within the built-up area.\textsuperscript{52} Therefore, the evidence suggests that this structure had in general an ordinary domestic function.\textsuperscript{53} The particular context including the figurine, an assumed storage feature, leads to the suggestion that the figurine (and other special items)\textsuperscript{54} could have been kept for a while until they were taken out to serve their intended purpose.

Another context is noteworthy in this particular respect, though it does not involve an anthropomorphic figurine, but pillar-figures. It concerns House 1 at Ayios Epiktitos Vrysi (Kerynia District), which shows general similarities to the above described domestic structure at Sotira. In House 1 at Vrysi there is a comparable low partition wall constructed in the north-western part of the dwelling separating the floor space. This enclosure held, besides other artefacts, three self-supporting pillar-figures (height about 60 cm), one of which has a phallic shape. On the surfaces of these pillar-figures traces of organic material have been detected, suggesting that they were once wrapped. Based on these two examples from Sotira and Vrysi, Peltenburg has put forward the suggestion that ritual practices changed during the Ceramic Neolithic and were now connected with particular buildings (within the settlements).\textsuperscript{55}

Hitherto, all Ceramic Neolithic figurines from meaningful contexts derive exclusively from intra-mural deposits, again pointing to an active use or at least storage within domestic structures.

Overall, we lack explicit information about how and where ritual activities took place during the Neolithic.\textsuperscript{56} The fact, that no distinguishable sacred areas or buildings have been uncovered so far does not generally argue against their existence. They might, for instance, not protrude from the archaeological record by exceptional architecture or other features in contrast to common residential buildings and are therefore hard to distinguish.

Whereas the contexts of some of the very early figurines from the initial and Early Aceramic Neolithic suggest a rather respectful secondary treatment, indicated by the deposition during foundation or closure acts, or as a grave good, the behaviour appears to have changed in the Late Aceramic and Ceramic Neolithic. Though the vast majority of these anthropomorphic figurines again derive from secondary contexts, they only offer insights with regard to the treatment of the figures after they apparently fulfilled their primary purpose. Regarding those Late Aceramic and Ceramic Neolithic items from the more meaningful contexts for the investigation undertaken here, they likewise unfortunately do not provide any further insights about the primary function and purpose of the anthropomorphic representations. For instance, no kinds of installations whatsoever for their display or the like could be detected so far that would provide direct evidence for their utilization. The only aspect they have in common is that they generally do not come from burials and therefore had no funerary function. Since some of the Late Aceramic Neolithic figures were discovered in regular domestic structures, the context seems to indicate a use within the realms of some individual household units. However, not every household appears to have had a figurine. Rather the contrary seems to be the case. And the respective buildings do not stand out among the overall settlement plans.

The same applies for the figurines of the Ceramic Neolithic in general (though far fewer items are known, indicating some kind of restriction in their distribution). Only in the case of Sotira Teppes a figurine is associated with a particular installation of a structure. In conjunction with the context of some pillar-figures of Ayios Epiktitos Vrysi, this association led Peltenburg to the assumption that ritual activities were connected with particular buildings during the Ceramic Neolithic.\textsuperscript{57} However, the evidence is hitherto scarce and in both cases they are

\textsuperscript{47} Peltenburg 1982: 33; referring to figurine no. AEV 353.
\textsuperscript{48} Peltenburg 1982: 102, 335; no further information with regard to specific finds delivered in general discussion on p. 219–220.
\textsuperscript{49} Dikaios 1962: 202; referring to figurine no. 106.
\textsuperscript{50} Dikaios 1961: 41, pl. 20; Peltenburg et al. 1991: 92.
\textsuperscript{51} Dikaios 1961: 42, pls. 20, 41 b/c, 42 b, 43 b; Dikaios 1962: 42, 167.
\textsuperscript{52} Buchholz and Karageorghis 1971: 160.
\textsuperscript{53} Peltenburg 1978: 61.
\textsuperscript{54} The pottery found within the enclosure was of high quality (Stanley Price 1979: 78–79).
\textsuperscript{55} Peltenburg 1989: 110–113. These changes also include mortuary rites; graves are now locally separated from dwellings (Peltenburg 1991b: 105).
\textsuperscript{56} Karageorghis 1977: 17.
\textsuperscript{57} Peltenburg 1989: 110–113.
linked to overall ordinary dwellings. The Sotira context nonetheless speaks for the storage of particular, ritual artefacts while not in active use for instance during ceremonies.

Overall, there is no evidence so far from the archaeological record for such cultural phenomena as communal ritual activities or segregated, exclusive sacred areas whatsoever. There does not seem to have existed a distinct, clear-cut distinction between the sacred and the profane, but rather the rituals appear to having been practiced within the realms of the inhabited area.

**The evidence from the Chalcolithic Period (4,000/3,900–2,500/2,400 cal BC)**

As during the previous Neolithic period, the Cypriot Chalcolithic stone and pottery figurines from secure contexts are generally found during settlement excavations where they derive from habitation layers inside and outside of domestic structures or from pit fills. The whole hitherto known assemblage comprises of 87 stone and 193 pottery figurines (along further possible examples).

Altogether six, possibly seven stone figurines and four possible stone figurine fragments, as well as 13 pottery figurines and four possible pottery figurine fragments were detected inside domestic structures. They were found at Kissonerga Mosphilia, Lemba Lakkous, Kissonerga Mylouthkia and Kalavasos Pamboules.

At least nineteen, and possibly as many as 26 stone figurines derive from pits from Kissonerga Mosphilia, Kissonerga Mylouthkia, Kalavasos Ayious and Geronisos. Thereof, nine plus seven possible stone figurines were detected in the ritual deposit Unit 1015 at Kissonerga Mosphilia alone. Overall, the majority (12, plus seven possible stone figurines) come from this site (Kissonerga Mosphilia). The number of pottery specimens from pits is even higher: 64, possibly 66 pottery figurines, as well as nine possible pottery figurine fragments were retrieved from such facilities. Again, eight items likewise come from the above mentioned ritual deposit Unit 1015. Overall, 38 pottery figurines, plus one possible pottery figurine fragment derive from Kissonerga Mosphilia, 26, plus two possible pottery figurine fragments come from Kalavasos Ayious and 24, plus six possible pottery figurine fragments were recovered at Kissonerga Mylouthkia.

Additionally, two stone figures might derive ultimately from graves, as well as one pottery figurine. But such an origin is not secure. Only two other specimens, both pottery artefacts, stem indeed from burial facilities. However, even in these instances they are unlikely to represent intentionally inserted grave goods. Hitherto, only two anthropomorphic vessels in shape of pregnant females can be viewed as intentionally deposited in burials.

In contrast, the well-known Cypriot figurines, the so-called cruciforms, usually come from graves, where they were deliberately placed during the funerary rites; otherwise, they derive from settlements, indicating the location of production and, more importantly, their use during life.

In the following only those figurines and their contexts will be mentioned that are more conclusive with regard to the overall question of where rituals (besides those connected with burials) were conducted.

**Figurines from buildings**

At Lemba (Paphos District), altogether three female stone figurines were found in three different dwellings. However, only in one case, the context is of interest here.

The so-called “Lemba Lady” derives from a building (81.1 F10), which was only partially preserved. The surviving section was divided into two segments by a radiating, pebble-lined groove. The preserved areas are furthermore demarcated by different floor treatments; the northern section had an earthen floor, whereas the floor of the southern section had been plastered. Overall, the structure is a typical Middle Chalcolithic dwelling by

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59 Winkelmann forthcoming.
60 Winkelmann forthcoming. Apart from these, a certain quantity of items is without any or insecure information about their provenance, most of which are chance finds.
design. The figurine was found lying on its back next to the wall of the building behind some storage jars in the most eastern part of the northern section. It appears to have been deliberately placed in this lying position, since the figurine is not self-supporting and no pedestal for its placement or pedestal to place it in an upright position was detectable.

Unfortunately, the context does not hint at the primary function or purpose of this anthropomorphic representation. Regarding the structure it was found in, in contrast to the contemporary buildings, it remains uncertain whether it had a particular significance. Its isolated location, described as “perched on the lip of the Upper Terrace” in Area I, sets it apart from the other dwellings which are densely clustered at the back of terraces. Though the building is surrounded by pit burials to the east, they all seem to be of an earlier date. Also, the inventory of the structure comprised, besides stored commodities, the usual domestic features. Overall, it remains uncertain whether the building itself had a special significance within the settlement, but it seems likely. As stated by Peltenburg, it could be the earliest known Cypriot example of a “sacred place”. Nonetheless, the structure does not stand out architectonically, solely by its location and the fact, that the “Lemba Lady” was found inside.

Another building (IXb), excavated at Erimi (Limassol District), is of particular interest, though there is no direct connection with figurines. However, Diane Bolger mentions two circular, paved platforms located inside this structure, which could have served as pedestals for the display of items such as figurines.

In three other cases figurines were found inside buildings in association with hearths. For instance, at Kissonerga Mosphilia (Paphos District), a stone figurine was recovered from a hearth (1563) of a structure (Ridge Building 1565), together with a complete stone bowl and a burnt bowl fragment. The same building also yielded a badly damaged pottery figurine fragment (Floor 1). Based on this association, Goring has put forward the hypothesis that the figurine is not self-supporting and no pedestal for its placement or pedestal to place it in an upright position was detectable.

In another case, a single pottery figurine fragment was likewise detected in association with a hearth (951) of another domestic structure (Ridge Building 855, floor 1) at Kissonerga Mosphilia. Finally, at nearby Kissonerga Mylouthkia, again several figurines of different materials were found associated with a hearth (1.02), comprising one stone figurine and two pottery specimens.

A particular and so far unique case is represented by a fragmentary figurine interpreted by Elizabeth Goring as an applique (due to the shape of its back) once attached to the wall of another structure (Red Building 206) at Kissonerga Mosphilia. This building is the so far largest excavated structure (diameter ca. 14.5 m, interior ca. 132.7 m²) of the site, located next to and linked with the “Ceremonial Area” (see below). Moreover, this so-called “Red Building” had special features, such as walls and a floor (Floor 1) in red colour alongside a paved section (room 970), differentiated at one side by a radial wall, as well as a white plastered floor (Floor 2) and contemporary white walls, additionally furnished with pink inlays. However, it is so far the only Chalcolithic building directly connected with anthropomorphic figurines that possessed outstanding architectonical features.

**Figurines from pits**

Besides those figurines detected in association with buildings, several stone and quite a lot of pottery figurines were found in pits. In many cases it is impossible to decide if their deposition in these facilities has to be regarded as deliberate and meaningful, since there are no clear indicators to interpret these facilities as prehistoric ritual depositions; on the contrary, they usually represent mere rubbish pits. However, at least in two instances pits are reasonably interpreted as ritual deposits.

Turning first to pits used for the deposition of settlement refuse, altogether nine stone figurines were found in eight pits at three different sites (Early Chalcolithic Kissonerga Mylouthkia and Kalavasos Ayious, Middle Chalcolithic Kissonerga Mosphilia). The remaining ten...
stone figurines, as well as seven possible stone figures, derive from the two above mentioned ritual deposits; moreover, all but one were found together in one pit (unit 1015) at Kissonerga Mosphilia, where they were deposited with several pottery figurines (see below).

Twenty-six, possibly even 28 pottery figures (as well as a single stone figurine fragment) derive from different features of the pit-and-tunnel system in the NW Area of Early Chalcolithic Kalavasos Ayious (Larnaca District).87 Unfortunately, the primary function of these negative features remains unknown.88 At a later point in time, these subterranean facilities were apparently rather rapidly filled with rubbish deposits (including the anthropomorphic figurines).89 Therefore, there is in general no relation deducible between the artefacts recovered from the pit and tunnel fills and the negative features themselves90 and consequently, the contexts from which the figurines derive do not provide any evidence of their primary function. It barely indicates their careless discard after the end of their use life91, and hints at their previous usage near this part of the site.92

In contrast, a damaged and re-worked stone figurine fragment came from a pit (16, fill 16.04) at Kissonerga Mylouthkia stands in contrast.93 Due to the nature of the fills and their contents it has been suggested that this feature possibly had some symbolic significance.94 Therefore, the context could hint at some kind of ritual behaviour as evidenced at Kissonerga (see below); but this cannot be taken for certain in this case.

In contrast, the most intriguing and insightful information regarding ritual activities of Prehistoric Cyprus is provided by the so-called “Ceremonial Area” at Kissonerga Mosphilia including the Ritual Deposit Unit 1015, dating to the Middle Chalcolithic period. The “Ceremonial Area” is an open (unroofed), extra-mural yard, confined in its initial phase by four adjacent structures (B 2, B 4, B 206 [the ‘Red Building’ mentioned above] and B 1000); it yielded a series of four successive white plastered surfaces (1289, 1239, 985, 169) into which divers pits have been dug at different times (mainly containing ash and heat-cracked stones), among which are the single-phase pits Unit 1225 and, of particular interest regarding figurines, Unit 1015.95 The latter (Unit 1015) was a quite large, sub-circular pit (1.12 x 0.88 m, depth 0.36 m) with a flat bottom. It held besides the 18 figurines and other items, arranged in and around a building pit, which was utilized in the best possible way.102 Owing to the composition of the artefacts and their contemporary disposition Peltenburg suggested that they once belonged to a related set and were probably also used together.103

Based on the overall evidence, the following sequence of events, presenting a multi-faceted ceremony, are assumed to have been taken place in the “Ceremonial Area”, probably also including the largest building of the

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87 South 1985: 67, 2004: 193. Not a single example derives for any of the other excavated areas (SW or E Central; South 2004: 193).
93 Goring 2003: 170, 174, referring to figurine no. KMyl 165. It is also a mixed context (Goring 2003: 169).
94 Peltenburg 2003b: 265–266.
95 Peltenburg and Thomas 1991: 1–3, figs 10, 11.
96 Peltenburg and Thomas 1991: 5, table 1, figs 12, 14.
99 Peltenburg and Thomas 1991: 5–6, table 1; Goring 1991: 39; referring to stone figurines KM 1448, KM 1455, KM 1467, KM 1469, KM 1470, KM 1471, KM 1472, KM 1473 and KM 1474; possible naturally shaped stone “figurines” KM 1468, KM 1479, KM 1484, KM 1490, KM 1491, KM 1499 and KM 1500; potter figurines KM 1442, KM 1443, KM 1451, KM 1460, KM 1463 and KM 1464+1476; as well as hollow figurines/anthropomorphic vessels KM 1449, KM 1446 and KM 1475. It is noteworthy that this deposit did not yield a single picrolite figurine (or other artefact made of this particular stone); cf. Goring 1991: 54.
100 Peltenburg and Thomas 1991: 5, 12, 14.
101 Only in some exceptions their placement might have had a distinct significance. For instance, the spatial separation of similarly rendered specimens (e.g., figurines no. KM 1442 and KM 1460; cf. Goring 1991: 48, 53) inside, respectively outside the building model (KM 1446). Furthermore, Goring assumes that the placing of the most detailed example of the birth figurines (figurine no. KM 1541), lying face down, was possibly either chosen to protect or to hide the birth scene on the lower panel between the legs; cf. Goring 1991: 49. Additionally, the birth vessel (figurine no. KM 1475) was wedged in between the side of the pit and the building model (KM 1446); here, the artefact faces inside the building model and also blocks its entrance (Goring 1991: 49).
site (“Red Building” B 206, associated with the applique figurine) southwest of the open space. Within the secluded yard, earth ovens were constructed, pits were dug and some posts were installed. The food, which was cooked in these earth ovens, was presumably beforehand prepared and later consumed in this area, possibly even in the outstanding “Red Building”. Probably the main event is represented by the deliberate destruction, the intentional “killing”, of some of the figurines, all of which were afterwards deposited in the pit Unit 1015 along with heat-cracked stones and cooled down ash from the earth ovens. Presumably at about the same time the erected posts were removed and the remaining holes likewise filled with the debris from the food preparation.103

After some time had passed, a new building (B 994) was constructed at the site above the two more salient pits 1015 and 1225, the location of which were still recognizable above ground104: the rims of some of the buried bowls were still protruding through the current occupation layer and were left unharmed during the construction activities indicating the still present awareness of the special character of this open area, even after some time had passed after the ceremonies had taken place.105

Another (probable) ritual deposit including a stone figurine was uncovered on the island of Geronisos, located off-shore the western coast of Cyprus near Agios Georgios on the mainland. It has been ascribed to visitors’ presence on the islet during the Early Chalcolithic period.106 Here, a large, shallow pit (max. diameter 1.10 m, depth ca 0.20 m) dug through a Chalcolithic floor was found underneath the much later East Building (Hellenistic to Byzantine period). The ashy fill of the feature contained, besides the figurine, pottery, chipped stone, ground stone tools, the fragment of a stone bowl and a jasper chip at the lowest level.107 Based on the slightly damaged state of preservation of the figurine and its deliberate deposition in a “sealed” pit the feature has been interpreted as evidence of a ritual behaviour culminating in the Middle Chalcolithic period in the ritual deposit discussed above (Unit 1015) at Kissonerga.108

Figurines from burial features

At the cemetery of Souskiou Vathyrkakas, a pottery figurine head was found at the “very top of [the] pit fill above [the] shaft” of a grave (T.29).109 But there was no apparent association detectable between this pottery specimen and any of the other buried artefacts (e.g., the anthropomorphic bone pendants) or the interment itself. Based on its position within the feature, it is more than questionable whether this head represents a grave good at all. However, the nearby settlement is located on the opposite side of the ravine. Therefore, the figurine fragment cannot have ended up here, for instance, by being included in the debris of the settlement, by mere chance. It must at least have been intentionally brought to the cemetery, though its use or function here remains uncertain.

The circumstances of discovery of a another stone figurine from Maa Palaeokastro are also uncertain. It was found in a pit (J, Unit 67) that was apparently intended as a rock-cut tomb. This feature also yielded small stones, cobbles and stone bowl fragments. However, no skeletal remains were detected, nor were any primary deposits found, suggesting that this depression had never been actually used as a burial feature.110 Therefore, it is likely that the figurine was washed into the pit accidently at some point rather than being deliberately deposited as a grave good.

Finally, a head and neck fragment of a pottery figurine was recovered from an undisturbed grave (Gr. 520, burial KM 1066) at Kissonerga, which also contained a burnisher.111 However, Goring has reasonably pointed out that this association should rather be viewed as accidental, since the figurine only survived in a fragmentary state of preservation and, more importantly, since (solid) pottery figurines generally do not represent grave goods.112

Only two anthropomorphic pottery artefacts, which are not solid figurines but vessels in shape of pregnant females, represent actual grave goods from this period. Both derive from an undisturbed sector of a partly looted tomb feature at Souskiou Vathyrkakas.113 The restorable vessel belonged to an undisturbed burial deposit (fill 86.1) which lay next to, and thereby was associated with, the skull (5231) of an adult of 20–25 years of age, which was deposited together with other grave goods. The second anthropomorphic example, was broadly similar but only survived as a fragment from the grave’s fill.114 It is worth noting, that only these two examples were found in a burial and can therefore be interpreted as deliberately and unequivocally deposited grave goods. This is even more remarkable, as in contrast solid pot-

104 Peltenburg and Thomas 1991: 2–3, fig. 12.
105 Peltenburg 1991b: 90.
106 Connelly and McCartney 2004: 19; referring to figurine no. 86.1.
109 Goring 2006: 80; referring to figurine SVP 29/1; see also Peltenburg in Peltenburg and Christou 2006: 16.
110 Thomas 1988: 271; referring to figurine no. 696.
113 Bolger 2006: 111; referring to anthropomorphic vessels SVP 86/20 and SVP 86/26.
tery figurines of the Chalcolithic generally to not occur in sepulchral contexts.

The Cypriot Chalcolithic stone and pottery figurines were found in settlements, where they usually come from different domestic contexts like habitation layers inside and outside buildings as well as ordinary refuse pits. Only the cruciform figurines as a group can generally be regarded as being intentional grave goods.

The majority of find contexts, which are general habitation layers and refuse pits, only give us information about the secondary treatment of the Cypriot stone and pottery figurines: after being used by the living and having fulfilled their primary function, they apparently lost their ritual significance completely and were regarded as mere rubbish, as indicated by the rather disrespectful way, in which they were discarded together with settlement debris.

Some of the figurines, that were discovered inside buildings, were found in association with hearths. The structures, in which these figurines were found, generally represent ordinary dwellings. Exceptions include a few structures which were somewhat exceptional either due to their location within the inhabited area as a whole or particular construction features. However, they were all used as dwellings.

As stated above, almost all pits yielding figurines are ordinary refuse pits, a unique exception is represented by the Ritual Deposit of Kissonerga Mosphilia (Unit 1015), which allows for the partial comprehension of its ritual background. While access to the particular area, in which this feature was located, was somewhat restricted and it was furthermore denoted by particular architectural features (e.g., the size of structures, floor and wall treatment), all indicating a special status of the residents of the buildings, the associated structures were, nonetheless, also used as dwellings.

**CONCLUSION**

Up to now no exclusive sacred places or structures have been detected in the archaeological record of pre-Bronze Age Cyprus. The most extensive group of ritual devises is represented by the anthropomorphic figurines of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. Although many were found within the boundaries of the inhabited area of settlements, most contexts do not inform us about their primary function or where they had been actively used. The majority of the figurines were found in general habitation layers inside and outside buildings or refuse pits.

The number of the figurines discovered inside the dwellings indicate that not nearly every household possessed its own figurine, and therefore their use was somehow restricted. However, all structures yielding figurines were generally used as dwellings by the living; only few were marked as special by outstanding features or their location. There is, however, no general link between these special structures and the figurines. The apparent special status of the architectonically outstanding Chalcolithic structure at Kissonerga Mosphilia was probably first and foremost related to their residents. Moreover, as pointed out by Peltenburg, even the unique building model (KM 1446) that was closely associated with a large quantity of figurines mirrors a typical, standardized house of the Middle Chalcolithic period. In some cases, the storage of the figurines is suggested during times they were not in active use. In other cases, they were found in association with hearths, but again no general link is apparent.

To judge from the contexts described above, it appears that anthropomorphic figurines were used during rituals that generally took place either inside regular domestic structures, or outside, possibly in courtyards or other open spaces within the inhabited area, which overall neither show particular features for identification or separation from profane places. Sacred spaces in general were apparently not visibly marked, at least not detectable to us in the archaeological record. Overall, there was apparently no clear-cut distinction between the sacred and the profane in pre-Bronze Age Cyprus, a result also detected by Bánffy in her study on South-East Europe. This conclusion is supported in particular by the building model (KM 1446) from the ritual deposit at Kissonerga Mosphilia, associated with a distinct set of ritual implements. As so correctly pointed out by Peltenburg, it should be viewed as a special structure due to its association with cult paraphernalia and its uniqueness. However, it also represents the typical, standardised Middle Chalcolithic house. This “apparent paradox of an ordinary yet special building” seems to be solely a contradiction to the present-day observer. And, moreover, suggests that the building had only sometimes a cult-related function connected with ritual activities carried out here every once in a while on certain occasions.

Beyond this, the possibility must be kept in mind, that ritual activities could also have been conducted in other places which remain elusive – possible sacred places outside settlements, for instance at naturally defined locations such as rock massifs, forest glades or water bodies – and have not been detected so far.

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120 Peltenburg 1991b: 99; also 103–104.
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