

Methodological Remarks on Studying Pre-historic Greek Religion*

This paper presents a methodological approach to the study of Greek religion of the period which lacks written documents, i.e. prehistory. The assumptions and interpretations of religion of that time have to be based on archaeological material. To me this is not, however, "methodology of religious archaeology" as announced in the preliminary information of this symposium, since the concept "religious archaeology" is methodologically extremely problematic and should not, in fact, be used at all.** In this paper I will firstly give reasons for this view, secondly look at some examples of archaeological interpretations, and finally give my own proposal for a method which can be used in studies of prehistoric religion in archaeology and comparative religion.

As I see it, the term "religious archaeology" implies that a person practicing such a scholarship is intentionally searching for cult places which bear multiple religious aspects or that the scholar is a confessional religious person. Perhaps a religious archaeologist would excavate only in explicitly religious sites. But there should **not** be religious archaeology *per definitionem* since such archaeology is very contradictory to all accepted methods of historical research. Here the intention and expectation to find evidence for cult is at stake. In fact, there has been a tendency to interpret different archaeological remains or places with certain cultural activity as representations of religion and scholars still expect to find 'an early cult place'. K. Fagerström (1988: 160) calls this tendency a "philhleratic attitude".

* I want to express my thanks to Jari Pakkanen, Arja Karivieri, Eeva Maria Viitanen and Riikka Päätaalo for their valuable comments.

** Dr. Arja Karivieri pointed out to me that there is Christian archaeology which includes archaeology of late antiquity, and it is taught in Rome at the Institute of Christian Archaeology (Istituto di Archeologia Christiana) according to the Roman Catholic doctrine. This might be called 'religious archaeology', though there are, of course, archaeologists working on the material from late antiquity without a confessional religious point of view.

This expectation is of course never stated but often implied, and as a hypothesis it may sometimes work. R. Merrifield correctly observes that the further back we go in time the more acceptable ritual behavior as an interpretation seems to become: nearly all types and forms of structures that are attributed to the Neolithic period and to Early to Middle Bronze Age have often been accepted by archaeologists as fulfilling possible ritual purposes (Merrifield 1987: 4–5). The period of my interest in this regard is the Geometric era, the centuries approximately between 900–700 BC, the beginning of which is considered a continuation of the mistakenly called ‘Dark Age’ of Greek history. The surviving buildings of the ‘Dark Age’ are few in number and often poorly preserved but their number is increasing because the period has been of interest to recent archaeological research. At the end of the ‘Dark Age’ the conventions of temple construction slowly emerged: From the middle of the eighth century BC onwards the building activity increased in Greece, but only from the seventh century do we find truly monumental temple architecture which apparently began in north-east Peloponnese. The first known temple with a concept of monumentality is that of Hera on Samos from the first half of the eighth century, and in the seventh century we have monumental temples, like at Isthmia (Poseidon), Corinth (Apollo) and Tegea (Athena Alea) (Coulton 1988: 30–36; Fagerström 1988, 163; Lawrence and Tomlinson 1996: 61–65). The earlier examples, like Perachora (Hera Akraia) and Thermon (Apollo) from the ninth and eighth centuries were far from monumentality, and should not be called temples in the same sense as the later sacral buildings. Thus, the question is: How do we define religion and cultic activity on the basis of primary archaeological material from this period, and which are the methodological tools for this difficult task? By asking questions on the nature and definition of religion and culture scholars of religion have provided us with some methodological apparatus to approach religion of the past in general, but there are models developed by archaeologists as well. Critical combination of these methodological tools leads to the best possible result.

Archaeology studies the material culture of the past. History of religion studies the spiritual culture of the past. In the background the two have important theoretical and even philosophical speculations since they both deal with meanings (of things or practices) and with interpretation. The principle method of historical research should ideally be hypothetico-deductive implying necessary presumptions and models that prevail in contemporary traditions of research. D.L. Clarke (1972: 1–60, esp. p. 2) clarifies that models in archaeology are pieces of machinery that relate observations to theoretical ideas.

They are often partial representations which simplify the complex observations by the selective elimination of detail incidental to the purpose of the model. Observation of models implies also possible changes in paradigms in the Kuhnian sense (Kuhn 1970: esp. 77–85) because change, of course, presupposes prevailing tradition to be criticized. The process of interpreting material culture depends on the following facts: 1) signification is grounded in tradition; 2) signification is rooted in social relations and social structures; 3) signs will differ according to their degree of polysemy and the social context in which they are used; 4) signification in material culture is usually much simpler than in either spoken or written language (Tilley 1991: 95). Modern theoretical archaeology has achieved important results and raised essential questions on interpretation, but it often operates on a level far beyond material remains even without direct references to them. That is why my attempt is to bear in mind the key role of the objects themselves and combine their existence with speculations of meaning and interpretation. I am aware that there is often plurality of meanings of things and relations between them. In fact, it is often the relations that provide the meanings, not the things in themselves (Tilley 1991: 53). To be a bit provocative I point out that history itself is a mirror of speculations that leads up to and justifies how things are now. This explains why everywhere each generation finds it necessary to rewrite history to fit it to the changing value systems of the evolving present; history is simply a reverse transformation of what we now know to be the case (cf. Leach 1977: 167). In this light the prevailing trend to interpret different archaeological objects easily as religious ones can also be considered as paradigmatic. The behavioral conventions of a group of practitioners keep up the super (or supra) models. The group delineates, focuses upon and recognizes a limited subset of data and experimental achievements within their much wider disciplinary field. Within this field the community of scholars emphasizes certain solutions (Kuhn 1970: 84–85; Clarke 1972: 5). I have sometimes even felt that this to find the religion of our more remote past somehow reflects the ambiguous religious thoughts of today's scholars. There is perhaps a religiously oriented need to reduce and reflect a more or less lost religious sphere of life in the excavated material and scientific data which comment in a mute way on the past life of human beings. In the discussion of methodology at least some controlling models for interpretation are needed (see Clarke 1972: 5–7), and for the present problem such may be provided by the theoretical speculations of scholars of religion.

But let me now go into details, first theory, then practice. In archaeology the category of sacred must be empirically verifiable, tied down, based on the immediate experience of the object since archaeology is, and has always been, dominated by varieties of empiricism and questions of social meaning and significance of material representations of past life (Tilley 1991: 14; also Hodder 1982: 152–154; Barrett 1991: 6). If we talk about some 'laws' or 'general rules' in archaeology it should be noted that the laws which seem to be most properly characterized as those of archaeology are the regularities or empirical generalizations that relate various items of material culture to one another, or connect aspects of material culture with patterns of human behavior (Salmon 1982: 20).

Identification of religious objects in archaeology is reduced methodologically to observation of analogies. One of the most common issues of analogical reasoning is to infer similar functions, too, for archaeologically found items from observed similarities between these items and others whose functions are known from past's or today's practices. The principle which permits inference from similar form to similar function regardless of the case is very rude and must be rejected (and luckily, it is often is rejected by modern archaeologists). Instead, the relevance of an object and its context should be explained, and its role in analogies must be demonstrated. The arguments used to establish these claims have to be carefully evaluated. An archaeologist should ask whether analogies are required either for discovery of religious functions or for justifying their ascription to archaeological objects (Salmon 1982: 56–59). There are some drawbacks in analogical reasoning, since many items have no analogies and a single item may be analogous in different respects to several distinct things that do not have overlapping functions. Thus, a possible inference of analogies is limited (Salmon 1982: 31). It could be possible to accuse me of relativism and to ask what is the alternative for analogous reasoning in finding meanings. But I regard analogous reasoning as an evident tool towards definitions of prehistoric objects, a tool which has positive aspects if its problems are observed and accepted. This means that departing from analogous thinking we have to add a strong sensitivity to context which in turn may open a universe of possibilities completely different from the initial analogies. Analogies may then turn out to be keys for new and different interpretations of meanings of excavated objects (I specify this below, p. 211). In this sense relativism, not an absolute relativism, though, has a fair amount of advantages: the so called epistemic relativism holds that knowledge is rooted in particular time and culture, and that facts and objectivity are construed (Shanks and Hodder 1995: 19–22).

It is a task, then, to construct meanings based on material data and to try to see if there are some other interpretative possibilities than the traditionally accepted ones. This is creating meanings, in Gadamerian sense it is 'effective history' which involves: 1) an awareness of one's own hermeneutic situation and the socio-historical horizon in which it is imbedded, i.e. in my case the tradition of interpreting cult in archaeology, and 2) a dialogue between the interpreter and the interpreted materia (cf. Tilley 1991: 115–118). The hermeneutic task consists of bringing forward the tension between the past and the present, not to sublimate it. "Archaeological interpretation deals with the meanings of the past for the present, so it is perhaps better to think of *making sense*", to quote M. Shanks and I. Hodder (1995: 18).

Conventionally, in other than burial contexts, three different arguments based on archaeological material are used as evidence for the supposed existence of early cult activity.

Firstly, continuity of cult is searched for in places where we have evidence for the existence of a cult in later periods, usually known through ancient literature and other literary sources, such as inscriptions. "The well-known fact [is] that a new temple was usually as far as possible erected on the site of an earlier temple" writes B. Bergqvist (1967: 46). Continuation can be argued for, but it should never be taken for granted: historical development is often contingent (cf. Gero 1995: 176–177). For example, in K. Fagerström's (1988) corpus of some 70 Geometric buildings in Greece continuity is clearly the commonest argument used for the sanctity of a building (12 out of 28) and in B. Bergqvist's study (1967) on 19 archaic *temene* only 3 (Rhamnous, Thassos and Troizen) are 'new' temples not erected on Geometric or even earlier cult places (in the cases of Argos and Athens she argues for the continuity of a holy place on the preceding Mycenaean *megaron*). But internal rules of social behavior of Geometric communities may have been different from those in later periods: the character of a sacred place could have changed from, or to, profane depending on other changes in social and environmental conditions (cf. Reynolds and Tanner 1983: 68). It is reasonable to ask why there is insistence on likeness outweighing differences, especially with respect to typology of early cult places (Gero 1995: 177). It is not unusual that once a 'fact' (like prehistoric cult places located at the sites where later temples stand) is arrived at, it is quickly freed from the circumstances and loses some of the historical reference to the social and contextual conditions (Jameson 1988: 164). Direct continuity in religious practice does not imply lack of change in that practice, and certainly cannot be taken as evidence of constancy of meaning. Continuation presupposes causal order which may be troublesome be-

cause there usually are multiple interacting causes in the development of religion, and that is why it is especially important to be aware of alternative hypotheses (Salmon 1982: 56). The religious systems of a given (prehistoric) period have to be interpreted primarily in the light of all the evidence available for that period, and not on the basis of subsequent belief systems, however well documented (Renfrew 1985: 3). The idea of mechanical continuity of cult should not be accepted without caution. Continuity is thus a model of interpretation which sometimes, but not always, may lead to better understanding of the past. F. de Polignac (1994: 8–9) writes: "...One should not see a Bronze Age sanctuary under every Geometric sanctuary: on the contrary, the same recent discoveries show that one must quit this game of balancing two opposed theses and instead try to discover how different forms of continuity and of rupture combine in the history of cults."

The second argument for the existence of early cult is votive, *anathema*, meaning a gift for a deity as an appeal for help or expression of thanksgiving or reverence. Votives make a site cult place. Thus, they are seen as minima criteria in archaeology for a cult place, and usually correctly so. But the problem is that no profound definition of a votive has been given, and the theme is rarely discussed in recent literature (except for e.g. P. Ucko, see below). The only monograph on Greek votive offerings is written by W.H.D. Rouse in 1902; his definition of votive clearly shows that the comprehension of a votive is all embracing and ambiguous. It reads: "Whatever is given of freewill to beings conceived as superhumans is to speak strictly of votive offering. The motive [for giving a votive] is simple, but not always the same" (Rouse 1902: 1; cf. the definition given by I. Malkin in the Oxford Classical Dictionary [Malkin 1996]). This leads to a situation where almost anything can be defined as a votive and thus used as justification of a cult. Ceramics, anthropomorphic and animal figurines, house models, bones, jewelry etc. count as votives. True, in *Anthologia Graeca* we can read of various different objects from pine cones to buildings given to deities as votives in Classical and Hellenistic times. But in the context where written sources are lacking, we should be extremely cautious in relying too much on 'votive evidence' of a cult.

"On what ground, for instance, is one pit with animal bones and a few artifacts, dismissed as domestic refuse, while another is seen as a ritual deposit with evidence of sacrifice? In which circumstances shall we regard small terracotta representations of animals and men as figurines intended as offerings to the deity, and when shall we view them as mere toys for the amusement of children?" asks C. Ren-

frew (1985: 2). In many cases various things that ought to be explained in more mundane ways are called religious. One criterion in favor of identifying an object as a votive dedication would be the discovery of quantities of the same class of non-domestic objects in one single area. Isolated items, even exceptionally valuable, like fine pottery or jewelry, pins and fibulae etc., could have equally been personal belongings (Mazarakis-Ainian 1997: 285–286).

Human and animal figurines are usually enigmatic. Especially female figurines are often interpreted as representations of deities, even mother goddesses, deified abstractions of nature and fertility. (Hole and Heizer 1969: 348; Alroth 1989: 15–64, 106–108 on the figurines representing deities.) But it is dangerous to derive agricultural fertility from female fertility since any assumption regarding the desirability of numerous children may be misleading, since desirability of female fertility in agricultural society as a given fact may well be a mistake in the case of certain prehistoric societies (Ucko 1962: 30). P. Ucko (1962: 38–54) discusses profoundly and critically the theme ‘mother goddess’ figurines which at the time was the first treatment in trying to break the tradition that regarded small Neolithic and Paleolithic female figurines one-sidedly as representations of fertility and natural power, as omnipotent religious expressions, the view which virtually had become accepted (see e.g. James 1957: 162–165, and about the tradition Finley 1990: 88–90). P. Ucko (1962: 47) suggests correctly other possibilities to interpret the function of certain female figurines: they might have been used 1) as dolls, made by or for children, 2) as teaching devices to instruct initiates to various ritual purposes, 3) as vehicles for sympathetic magic. This shows that the simple (mother) goddess hypothesis as the meaning of female figurines must be considered thoroughly, because contextual evidence may sometimes rule it out. An initial definition for religion must be given and it should be applicable to fertility cult which itself is very ambiguous and as a pragmatic cult most doubtful. At the Ashmolean museum in Oxford I was looking at the Cypriot (from Kition) terracotta statuettes which are dated to ca. 700–600 BC (Myres and Ohnefalsch-Richter 1899: cat. Nos. 5501–5569). They are medium sized, frontally standing human figures, either male or female playing a tambourine, harp, or carrying various objects like a bird, a calf, a flower, a dish of cakes or a bowl of wine. Two females carry an infant in their arms. These statuettes represent votaries, they do not show deities or indicate a deity as ‘nursing mother’ even if a female is shown with her baby. They might have been religious objects, but they are clearly not cult idols (Myres and Ohnefalsch-Richter 1899: 153). This opinion gets support from A. Pilali-Pa-

pasteriou's study on Cretan figurines; she states (1989: 97): "The main offerings in peak sanctuaries in Crete ca. 2000 BC were male and female figurines. Their size, gesture, dress and absence of other specific attributes strengthen the suggestion that they represent votaries and not cult idols". These objects could be counted as ideotechnic artifacts which have their primary functional context in the ideological component of the social system. Formal diversity in the structural complexity and functional classes of these items must generally be related to changes in the structures of the society, and hence the explanations must be sought in the local adaptive situation (cf. Binford 1962: 219–220).

The third argument for the existence of early cult lies in architectural remains. It is connected with the idea of continuity, but deserves a notion of its own. Excavated prehistoric buildings with orientation in relation to the later temples (usually Archaic or Classical) have often been seen as probable early cult places. These buildings are usually very modest, clay huts, small or medium sized stone or wooden structures, and often at least some of the objects that have turned up in them have been defined as votives. For example, in K. Fagerström's (1988) corpus which is collected from over 30 sites in Greece, 28 architectural structures from 24 sites have been considered to have been sacred ones. Fagerström correctly criticizes this in seven cases (Eleusis, Heroon of Akademos and oval structures in Athens, Tsikkalario, Xombourgo and Antissa) (Fagerström 1988: 21–97, esp. 160–164). The same concerns the architectural structures found recently at Tegea in the Peloponnese underneath the Archaic and late Classical temples: modest Geometric buildings are defined as primitive temples, since their position, precisely underneath of two later temples, and the exact east-west orientation confirms that they are early links in a long architectural temple tradition (Østby 1994: 58–59).

As a model for these 'early temples' have been seen the small terracotta houses with sharply ridged roof found for example in Agrive Heraion close to Argos and Perachora, dated to ca. 750–700 BC. They are claimed to be temple models given as votives to Hera (on the models in general, see Payne et al. 1940: 42–52; Markman 1951: 259; Biers 1996: 113–114; Lawrence and Tomlinson 1996: 62). But why temples? The conventions of Greek temple architecture developed slowly at the end of the Geometric era (see p. 202 above), and it should be remembered that a traditional Greek temple was a building with cella, pronaos, columns and a large door turned usually towards the rising sun, constructed for a god but it was not, however, necessarily an edifice for ritual and cult (Roux 1984: 159). The clay

models show no more indications of the Doric order than any other primitive building (Coulton 1988: 38–39). Equally well the terracotta house models found in the sanctuaries of Hera could be models of ordinary houses, they are not necessarily temple models (Fagerström 1988: 155–157).

As a predecessor of the Greek temple is sometimes seen the *megaron*, a Mycenaean type of great royal hall (on the *megaron* in general, see Dinsmoor 1985: 6–18; Lawrence and Tomlinson 1996: 44–55). Chieftain's dwellings are thus seen as early cult centers. W.B. Dinsmoor (1985: 8) writes: "An Aigaeon king furthermore was a predecessor of the Greek god. ... The Greek temple, if not the linear descendant of the Mycenaean palace, at least had an ancestry in common." But there is a problem: if a chieftain's dwelling was a temple or a cult place, was the chief a leader or a priest of a cult? Was he/she him/herself worshipped as a god? If his/her dwelling was a sacred place where ritual meals took place, was a cult, then, very elitist in character excluding common people? Was the leader of a community worshipped in Prehistoric Greece in these small houses at the same locations where the Olympian gods were worshipped later on? It is possible, like A. Mazarakis-Ainian suggests (1997: 378), that approximately from the late Helladic period until at least the middle of the eight century BC and in certain places even later the rulers presumably had competence in religious matters. But it should be remembered as well that the ruler's dwelling was not regarded as a cult building as such: there was no cult image in it and the character of "votives" may be interpreted in many ways (cf. Mazarakis-Ainian 1997: 378–379; see, with different tone, Mazarakis-Ainian 1988: 105–119). We must, however, remember that it is very hard to define 'a priest' in Greek religion even of the Archaic and Classical times. Ritual meal is not the only possibility for meals including animal meat if it took place in a house where the ruling elite gathered. We should remember that a large or perhaps a 'monumental' building found at a site did not necessarily serve as a temple. Why should cult places be permanent over the centuries if there is no exceptional natural phenomenon to differentiate it radically from the surroundings or if the finds do not clearly justify it? It is noteworthy that within architectural remains there are some other factors used as indicators for sacrality of a building besides those mentioned above, but all of them need to be looked at very critically: Apsidal end of the discovered Geometric building was sometimes regarded proof enough favoring the identification of the remains as sacral building (see e.g. Lamb 1931–32: 45). But apsidal form was equally common both in domestic and sacral architecture (Fagerström 1988: 77, 80). Instead, the total

absence of internal divisions and extreme elongation in relation to building's width are much better indicators of sacral functions (Mazarakis-Ainian 1997: 277) since they mark the difference from the ordinary. The following structures may serve as examples: the so called sanctuary of Apollo in Eretria from ca. 750 BC (Schefold 1972: 357–359), the so called 'Heraion' on Samos from the Late Geometric period (Buschor and Schleif 1933: 146–168; Fagerström 1988: 85–86, fig. 87; Mazarakis-Ainian 1997: fig. 387) and the so called temple of Artemis Orthia in Sparta from ca. 700 BC (Boardman 1963: 1–7; Fagerström 1988: 31–31, fig. 11; Mazarakis-Ainian 1997: fig. 276). The existence of hearth/s is seen as an indication of sacral function as well. But there is actually no need to impose a sacrificial function on something which is needed in every household (Fagerström 1988: 130–131, 162; Mazarakis-Ainian 1997: 280). Instead, the existence of an altar would be a better indicator of a cult. It must be remembered, however, that an altar as a necessary part of a temple also is a convention belonging especially to traditional Greek temples, and since we do not exactly know how cults functioned in the Geometric period, we should not always expect an altar. Moreover, benches are found frequently inside the remains of Geometric buildings and are often interpreted as serving cult purposes (votives laid on them, participants sitting on them etc.), but they could have been used for habitational purposes instead or along with the cultic ones (Mazarakis-Ainian 1997: 280–281; Fagerström 1988: 133–137). A building found under a later temple or a large building could equally well be seen simply as a meeting place for people, a place where the surrounding communities gathered, exchanged items, ran fairs, or a location for entertainment, an early 'restaurant', a big farm house, a storage building. Are all the important buildings always cult buildings? Those who say yes usually draw their conclusion from the general belief that prehistoric (thus primitive) societies were more occupied with religious activities than modern (thus civilized) ones (cf. Wasilewska 1994: 68–69).

After criticizing these conventions I have to make some methodological proposals for defining an early cult. They have to be based on the notion that material culture bears meanings and signs construct the system of understanding.

Sign systems have an inherent tendency to polysemy (sets of different meanings) and a condensation of meaning within an individual signifier. The same material sign may change its meaning across time and space depending mainly on context. There are different material significations. Signs do not occur in isolation but always in paradigmatic series and syntagmatic chains where their meanings

depend on similarities or differences from others and these series and chains cross-cut and inform each other (Comstock 1984: 310–314; Tilley 1991: 96). R. Jacobson (1958: 89) writes: “Paradigmatic series has its basis in a recognition of similarity whereas syntagmatic chain is one based on contiguity or a set of spatial relations.” In the language of material culture we can distinguish a paradigmatic series as being made up by relations of affinity vertically and a syntagmatic chain as horizontal relations between different entities (Tilley 1991: 22). Syntagmatic connections are important since they stress the possibility of difference, they are based on contiguity rather than similarity, on metonymic rather than metaphoric connections. “Metaphorical relations between words give us verbal facility; metonymic connections add to our knowledge”, writes W.R. Comstock (1984: 512). C. Tilley states that “meaning is not seen, it is production” (Tilley 1991: 14; also Barrett 1991: 2). With early cult the search for cult does not take us very far. Rather the very openness to other possibilities in interpretation must be carried along through the process since the greatest danger to truth is in the minds of excavators of a cult place (Alexander 1970: 181). Ideally, in addition to telling only what possibly happened, an archaeologist must relate also the activities which did not occur (Thomas 1974: 3; Barrett 1991: 2–3). The definition of religion emerges from openness, openness also to discover something non-religious. This means that for discovering religion there has to be an initial definition of it, and it must be open in character: it is a process of continuous interrogation rather than a definitive answer provided in advance of the empirical research that it initiates. It is a point of departure, not a conclusion. Definitions of religion are themselves the products of ‘texts’ (in the wide sense of the word) that have proceeded and initiated them (Comstock 1984: 310).

In the case of ‘establishing’ prehistoric religion in Greece we must have at least some initial minima criteria for religion. But these criteria are connected to each other by family resemblances, i.e. the same elements found in different entities: the members of the family are separate, but share a common element which bind them to the same family. There is necessarily not one characteristic that every member of the family must have (see Anttonen 1996: 22–23; Pakkanen 1996: 18–19; Pyysiäinen 1996: 11; with references to the Wittgensteinian principle of family resemblances in religion, see McDermott 1970: 390–395; Bianchi 1972: 25; Bianchi 1994: 119–120; Smart 1979: 26–28; Hicks 1989: 3–5.). I regard those criteria of prehistoric cult referred to above as insufficient: isolated objects seen as votives is too vague an argument, and continuity, which is connected to ar-

chitectural remains, is often hazardous. Instead, I would suggest that when researching a possible prehistoric cult place in Greece, the archaeologist (hopefully with the help of cultural scientists) would look for distinctive, unusual, out-of-every-day elements and objects to come closer to religion which is always something different from the ordinary, marked by borders whether symbolic (rituals) or concrete (physical structures) in nature to separate its sphere from the ordinary (*horos*-stones of later *temene*, for example, serve as such in a concrete way). Natural boundaries in the landscape, in Greece particularly water courses, always seem to have been important in defining the margins of sacred space (cf. Tilley 1996: 174). But in the nature many boundaries are ambiguous in the sense that they both connect and separate (Leach 1979: 33–35, 72; Pyysiäinen 1996: 21). Building of religious monuments, on the other hand, marks the ritual and mythological significance of a particular place. They stabilize cultural memory of a place by marking also resource of power (Tilley 1994: 204–205). Common vessels, pottery for every-day use, even isolated figurines do not necessarily serve as votives if they are found in a place which could have been an ordinary settlement. This means, of course, that a large area must be excavated in order to get a proper knowledge of the surroundings. (A possible alternative is to use non-destructive archaeological methods such as ground penetrating radar, as has been done often in recent projects.) A building with unusual plan and finds or a building underneath a later sanctuary may not be defined as a cult place without knowledge of the nature of surrounding buildings and finds from them. There must have been in the past some symbolic markers for dividing sacred from profane, but unfortunately they have often vanished during the millennia or they are so different in nature that it is impossible for us to obtain their meaning any more. Spatial ordering is mapped in terms of space, and thus ritualization is connected with territorial distinction-making. Various habitation groups mark their boundaries when they form their own society in a certain place and developed their own social, economic and political modes to act (Anttonen 1996: 13). Religion and ritual are situated in relation to the social and ecological settings; it is not to be separated as a sphere of its own.

I have used above the word “establishing” prehistoric religion intentionally. All knowledge emerges from investigator’s place within the tradition of understanding which itself is derived from the past and from which prejudices arise. What a subject regards as worth knowing is itself determined by research traditions (Barrett 1991: 4; Tilley 1991: 115–116). Jonathan Smith (1982: xi) writes:

...While there is a staggering amount of data, of phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized by one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religious – *there is no data for religion*. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from academy.

The truth is that in archaeology interpretations are multivocal: different interpretations of the same field are possible, and their plurality is suited to differing purposes and desires since there is no definitive account of the past as it was (Shanks and Hodder 1995: 5). Whether man makes his gods or the gods make man, but in the case of prehistoric religion in Greece it is the scholars that make 'religion' since we do not *find* religion, we only choose to view something as religion (cf. Comstock 1984: 504; Pyysiäinen 1996: 11). Being aware of paradigms and prevailing conventions of interpretation is desirable and opens the possibility to change it, if needed.

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