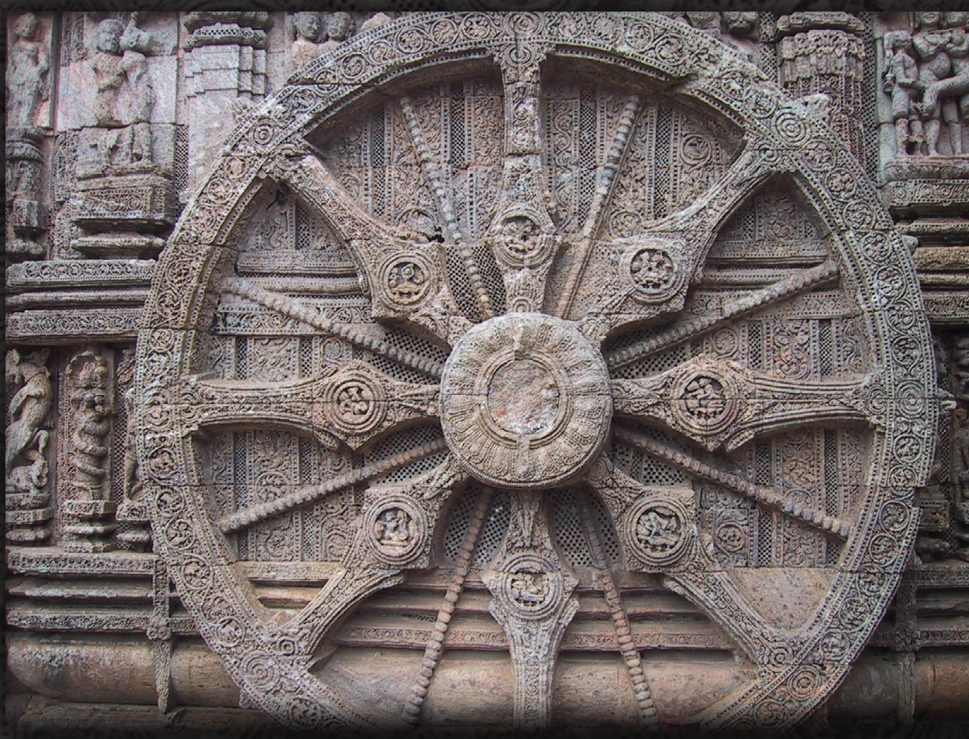
The Archaeology of Ritual



Edited by

Evangelos Kyriakidis

Cotsen Advanced Seminar 3
Cotsen Institute of Archaeology
University of California, Los Angeles

The Archaeology of Ritual

Cotsen Advanced Seminars 3

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To Chip for his 50th birthday

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E. Kyriakidis
Canterbury 2007

1.
In Search of Ritual

Evangelos Kyriakidis

This book is the fruit of the third Cotsen Advanced Seminar conducted at UCLA in January 2004. A wide spectrum of scholars, historians, art historians, anthropologists, students of performance and of religion, archaeologists, cognitive scientists, and linguists were all asked to think about and comment on how ritual can be traced in archaeology and also to suggest possible directions for ritual research in the discipline. The product is a fairly accurate representation of research on ritual and the archaeology of ritual: scholars from various disciplines and backgrounds putting forward sober and well-considered arguments, yet with little agreement among them. So this volume should not be seen as presenting one unified attitude toward ritual and its study in archaeology. Rather, it should be viewed as exemplifying the discourse on the archaeology of ritual today. The outcome is a collection of papers, which are individually thought provoking, often controversial, but always of extremely high quality.

It is worth stressing from the outset that the use of "ritual" in the title of this work does not imply any consensus as to what this term means. In my view, the lack of an agreed-upon definition of "ritual" has been a barrier to scholarship, as without a fixed point of reference, the exchange and cross-pollination of ideas is hindered. One of the aims of this book's concluding chapter, then, is to tentatively formulate a definition of "ritual" that begins to reconcile some of the major views on the subject.

Ritual is, by its nature, a fascinating and exciting subject. Its lure, however, can be damaging to its study in many different ways. As a category of activity, it tends to draw scholarly attention exclusively to itself and away from other related activities. Yet, when isolated from its context, ritual cannot be studied fully. As a social activity, ritual is defined by the society that practices it; as such, it should be studied in its proper social and material contexts.

The very appeal of ritual for both archaeologists and their audience can lead to a distorted picture of the archaeological record. That is, an archaeologist drawn to the subject may tend to interpret other "crystallized" (culturally encoded) activities such as sports and games[1]—and even perfectly mundane items or activities—as ritual.

Ritual also catches the imagination of students and incites them to reconstruct the ritual being studied even when the material at hand is insufficient for such reconstructions. The search for fame, the thirst of readers, the needs of the tourist industry, and nationalistic claims can all exacerbate this tendency. The following two excerpts exemplify the urge to reconstruct the rituals at Stonehenge:

> The faces of the celebrants would be turned in the direction of the sunset at the winter solstice. It may be supposed, then, that Stonehenge was erected after enormous labour to commemorate annually at midwinter the death of some great divinity. [Abercromby 1912:95]

> Equally, the sarsens may have been put up to be the everlasting house of such a deity whose role it was to safeguard the dead. . . . [O]ne can imagine supplicants holding axes aloft, the other hand raised with fingers outstretched, saluting the sun. [Burl 1987:214]

Such overreaching has, in turn, discouraged a great number of scholars who, by contrast, consistently avoid all reference to ritual. Thus, in archaeology, ritual activities tend to be either over-imaginatively reconstructed or avoided entirely. A "rational" approach has recently gained strength, and many of the imaginative reconstructions have been ousted from the mainstream archaeological literature.

Unfortunately, these tendencies have distracted us from what can be genuinely learned about rituals and what they can teach us about a given society when the material is dealt with soberly. For example, rituals can be seen as a mechanism for the shaping of beliefs, ideologies, and identities; or as a source of social power for those who participate in, control, or create them, thus revealing a great deal about the given society and its dynamics (Kyriakidis 2005:69–75). They can also be seen as a focal node of social networks, or as a means of illuminating the hopes and desires of a given society. There is a need for research that takes the middle line and focuses on ritual as an important and informative class of action.

The extreme approaches also have lacked a theoretical basis (Flannery 1976), whether implicit or explicit. Thus, archaeology could benefit from a greater focus on the development of theory in its study of ritual. There are a few archaeologists studying various rituals around the world whose valuable work deserves to be acknowledged (Drennan 1983: 30–32; Marcus and Flannery 1994:55–74). But being few in number and cut off from the research of current archaeological theory, their contributions cannot be compared and contrasted and their findings are not readily transferable to other areas and disciplines. With the exception of a few theorists (Bruck 1999:313–344; Renfrew 1985; Richards and Thomas 1984:189–218), most archaeologists follow an implicit theoretical approach which does not lend itself to testing and reproduction of results.

While the implicit theories share the view that ritual is a special activity, this is not sufficient for attribution because non-ritual activities can also be considered special. Often, the studies inspired by implicit theories must rely on non-archaeological evidence to make their case. Thus, Mesoamerican and South American archaeology draw on ethnohistory, the ethnographic and historical record of the Spanish colonials who recorded what they saw or were told. Greek prehistoric archaeology often makes reference to the Homeric epics or Hesiod, though these have little credibility as straightforward accounts of historic events. Classical Greek and Roman archaeology make use of historical texts to reconstruct rituals; as a consequence, the archaeological record may be slanted to comply with the historic sources. In the archaeology of the Indian subcontinent, the notion of continuity is used to such an exaggerated extent that any pattern observed in Neolithic excavation layers that has even a slight similarity to a modern ritual may be sufficient to argue for the existence of such a ritual in antiquity.

The archaeology of every region and of every period has its distinct problems, peculiarities, and needs; and each has approached ritual in a particular way and can contribute to its study in its own fashion. Archaeologists working on ritual in different parts of the world have unique experiences, and their collaboration can be very fruitful. Moreover, there is a growing number of disciplines with relevance to the study of ritual in archaeology, such as cognitive and performance studies, or paleo-ethnobotany; each comes with its own agendas and prejudices. Their incorporation into archaeological discourse not only enlivens but also enriches the discussion. And such an interdisciplinary approach is indeed one of the virtues of this volume.

This book is loosely divided into two sections. The first primarily concerns archaeological material and practice, while the second concentrates mainly on theoretical issues and could apply to other disciplines as well. The boundaries, however, are not altogether sharp, as all of the papers with primary material concerns also have significant theoretical sections. The papers in the first section are mainly reactions to the material itself, or to previous studies of it, as well as more wide-ranging critiques aimed at the study of ritual in archaeology.

The volume begins with a chapter introducing the challenges peculiar to the archaeology of ritual (chapter 2). In it, I draw attention to the similarities of individual rituals within a system, the common use of one space for the performance of multiple rituals, the disjunction between ritual practice and belief, the inseparability of the ritual and the mundane spheres, and the finding of ritual items in secondary contexts. I argue that awareness of these issues can "calibrate" the evidence and help steer research in fruitful directions.

Lars Fogelin (chapter 3) condemns the obsession with tracing the ancestry of specific gods or rituals back to the distant Indian past. He challenges the value of such an approach, which commonly takes continuity for granted and has insufficient evidence to support it. In doing so, he also casts doubt on the value of uncritical ethnography and demonstrates, with a case study on the distribution of some intriguing Buddhist cairns, how a methodical contextual approach in archaeology can enlighten our understanding of past rituals and religious landscapes.

Joyce Marcus (chapter 4) calls for a diligent, method-driven, testable study of ritual in archaeology that avoids speculation. She looks at various definitions and classifications of rituals, such as calendric versus non-calendric, and discusses their repetitive character. Marcus looks at Mesoamerican rituals and draws out their eight basic components. She opts for studying "ritual's key principles," be they at the conceptual, structural, or hierarchical level. Marcus uses Vogt's ritual replication theory (1965:342–353) and discusses these with particular reference to Aztec cosmological principles. Finally, she argues that archaeologists should look carefully for ritual regularities and patterns that will assist them in the discovery and documentation of further rituals.

Christine Hastorf (chapter 5) presents evidence for ritual in the Lake Titicaca Basin, commenting on the ways ritual has been attributed and discussed in Andean archaeology. Although she concentrates mainly on the difference between performance- and liturgy-centered rituals, which

reflects different degrees of ritual establishment, she also raises many other issues, such as how ethnography and ethnohistory have been used to reconstruct ritual, how we can see the effects of ritual boundaries, and how ritual interacts with daily practice.

Colin Renfrew (chapter 6) acknowledges the existence of both religious and secular rituals, pointing out the relevance of his own previous work on religious ritual (cult) (1985, 1994:47–54) to the work of ritual in general. In so doing, he brings forth various issues related to the study of ritual: the study of the "co-evolution" of ritual and society (Flannery and Marcus 1994; Marcus and Flannery 2004; Marcus, here chapter 4) as well as the institutional role of ritual, a role that brings into being "institutional facts." Renfrew also analyzes the element of time in ritual, that is, as a repetitive as well as a time-structured activity.

Terence Ranger (chapter 7) reflects on the themes of this book and gives a lively account of the major ritual sites of the Matopos Hills and Great Zimbabwe, looking at the ways in which these sites have played both active and passive roles in the local politics, being important sites of recognition, conflict, and participation. His account is a prime example of how the roles of the historian, the archaeologist, and the anthropologist can merge.

Alessandra Lopez y Royo (chapter 8) discusses how archaeological reconstructions in India have influenced the creation of new rituals, a phenomenon that has important repercussions for our viewing of the past, as well as for the tourist industry and history itself. By looking at the ritual Odissi dance, the negotiations between its purported history and what we observe it to be, as well as the role archaeology plays in such a negotiation, Lopez y Royo reveals some of the motives and factors involved in the fabrication of a rite and its "exoticization."

Marianna Nikolaidou (chapter 9) treats technology and craft as "fields of ritually encoded action." She looks at technology as a social phenomenon that combines the social, the material, and the symbolic, as it structures the world through a nexus of links and associations. In this way, she proposes to apply the analytical tools used for ritual to the study of technology. She goes on to comment on the ritual aspects of a craftsperson's life, discussing the ritual dimension of specific materials, roles, and even the strategies of production in the technological process.

Robert McCauley and Thomas Lawson (chapter 10) offer a summary of their recent book (2002), somewhat adapted to address the purposes of archaeology and to tackle recent criticisms. McCauley and Lawson take

ritual to be exclusively religious[2] and introduce several concepts relating mainly to the memorization of ritual, the use of sense arousal, and the interlinking of rituals; they also propose several avenues in which archaeology could benefit from the study of ritual.

Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw (chapter 11) repeat their argument that "ritual" is a quality that any action can come to have, reminding us that understanding what is distinct about ritual is separate from understanding the nature of the acts or processes that are ritualized (1994:65–67). In this article, they look at the Mongol *taxilag*, an activity that can be described by the term "sacrifice," arguing that "sacrifice and ritualization should be understood as separate processes." They make the point that although the entire sequence of a taxilag may be considered a "ritual," it does not necessarily follow that the killing of the animal is in itself a ritual, presenting relevant evidence from the Urad tradition. They describe, for example, how various Mongol rituals have been incorporated into the Buddhist tradition and how one can discern detachable or "movable ritual acts" that can be seen in various different ritual ceremonies of the same or other traditions, much like the common denominators that I present (in chapter 2).

Catherine Bell (chapter 12), on the antipode, offers her thoughts on definitions and their usefulness, particularly for the term "ritual," arguing that it is less important to define what ritual is than to delineate what ritual does. She claims that the study of ritual is in fact hampered by strict and formal rules or definitions. However, she does believe that, if anything, ritual is exclusively religious. Her views are a reminder that nothing should be taken for granted in ritual research.

In the final chapter (chapter 13), I conclude by proposing a definition for ritual activity that aims to reconcile many of the various views. I offer a discussion of and commentary on this great collection of papers and propose several topics that were touched on throughout the volume as inspirations for future research.

NOTES

1. Unpredictable outcomes are integral to sports and games; this is not the case for rituals, which are largely set; rituals should thus be considered a distinct type of "crystallized" action.
2. The conference was divided on the issue of whether there is such a thing as a secular ritual. McCauley, Lawson, and Bell argued for the existence of religious rituals only, whereas Renfrew, Humphrey, Laidlaw, and Kyriakidis maintained that secular rituals exist alongside religious rituals, examples being graduations, birthday celebrations, and inaugurations. For more on this issue, see the final chapter (chapter 13) of this volume.

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2.

Finding Ritual: Calibrating the Evidence

Evangelos Kyriakidis

This paper draws attention to the challenges archaeologists face in the study of ritual evidence. Issues include the similarity of individual rituals within a system, the common use of one space for the performance of multiple rituals, the disjunction between ritual practice and belief, the inseparability of the ritual and the mundane spheres, and the finding of ritual items in secondary contexts.

An awareness of the potential complications in the archaeological record, and of the need to calibrate the evidence, should facilitate secure attributions of ritual activity in archaeology.

Reconstructing any type of ancient practice is a challenging task for archaeology. Only a minute fraction of human actions can be represented materially. In many instances, action does not effect any perceptible change on material culture, and even when it does, the affected remains often perish long before the archaeologist has the chance to observe them. Moreover, archaeologists have only a few analytical tools to discern the actions behind a certain change in material culture, and the validity of these tools has been questioned by different factions within the discipline.

In general, archaeology attempts reconstructions on the basis of observed patterns and, as a result, traces mainly repeated activity. Ritual, like other forms of crystallized action,[1] is most often a repeated activity, the material remains of which may create patterns. In this, it has an advantage over other types of less repetitive action. Thus, in the few instances where ritual has an effect on material culture, it has a greater chance of being traced than many other activities. Without claiming that the identification of ritual in archaeology has been rigorous, this may go some way toward explaining the overwhelming presence of rituals in archaeological reconstructions. This presence may not necessarily reflect the dominant role of rituals in past societies, but rather the more physical and thus more traceable effect they had on material culture.

In the archaeology of ritual, as elsewhere, however, we should be aware of the ways in which the evidence can be misleading, so as to calibrate our data. Drawing on the author's own experience working at ritual sites, this chapter aims to facilitate secure attributions of ritual activity in archaeology, through raising awareness of frequent complications and challenges posed by the evidence.

But before we come to the issues concerning the archaeology of ritual, we should briefly address the problem of definition. The lack of an accepted definition leaves scholarly discourse without a fixed point of reference. In chapter 13, the problem and a tentative solution are discussed in greater detail. Here it will suffice to propose that "ritual" can be defined as an etic category that refers to set activities with a special (non-normal) intention-in-action, which are specific to a group of people. Until now, the main guidance for defining ritual was offered by the overlapping and graded traits proposed by Bell—that is, repetition, invariance, rule governance, formalism, and the air of tradition and symbolism (Bell 1997:138). Although Bell called these traits "non-definitive," it can be said that all of them, save symbolism, can be linked to the above definition, as they are all aspects of a "set" activity; all these traits contribute to the crystallization of activity. (For a lengthier discussion of these traits of ritual and their relation to the establishment of an activity, see Kyriakidis 2005: 32–40, 68–74.)

Beyond the inherent problems of definition—which, it is hoped, are sufficiently addressed in chapter 13—the archaeologist faces a variety of challenges in the study of ritual evidence. Issues include the similarity of individual rituals within a system, the common use of one space for the performance of multiple rituals, the disjunction between ritual practice and belief, the inseparability of the ritual and the mundane spheres, and the finding of ritual items in secondary contexts. These issues will be considered in turn.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN RITUALS WITHIN A SYSTEM

My main experience with ancient ritual sites has been at the Minoan peak sanctuaries. These bleak mountaintop sites are widely regarded as the most indisputable religious ritual sites in Minoan Crete (figure 2.1). The excavations there have uncovered dozens of animal and human figurines as well as drinking cups, bowls, serving jugs, and storage vessels. As a group, the material clearly points to ritual, especially compared with similar finds from non-ritual sites (for example, the figurine material is proportionally and absolutely much greater than figurine material found in settlements)

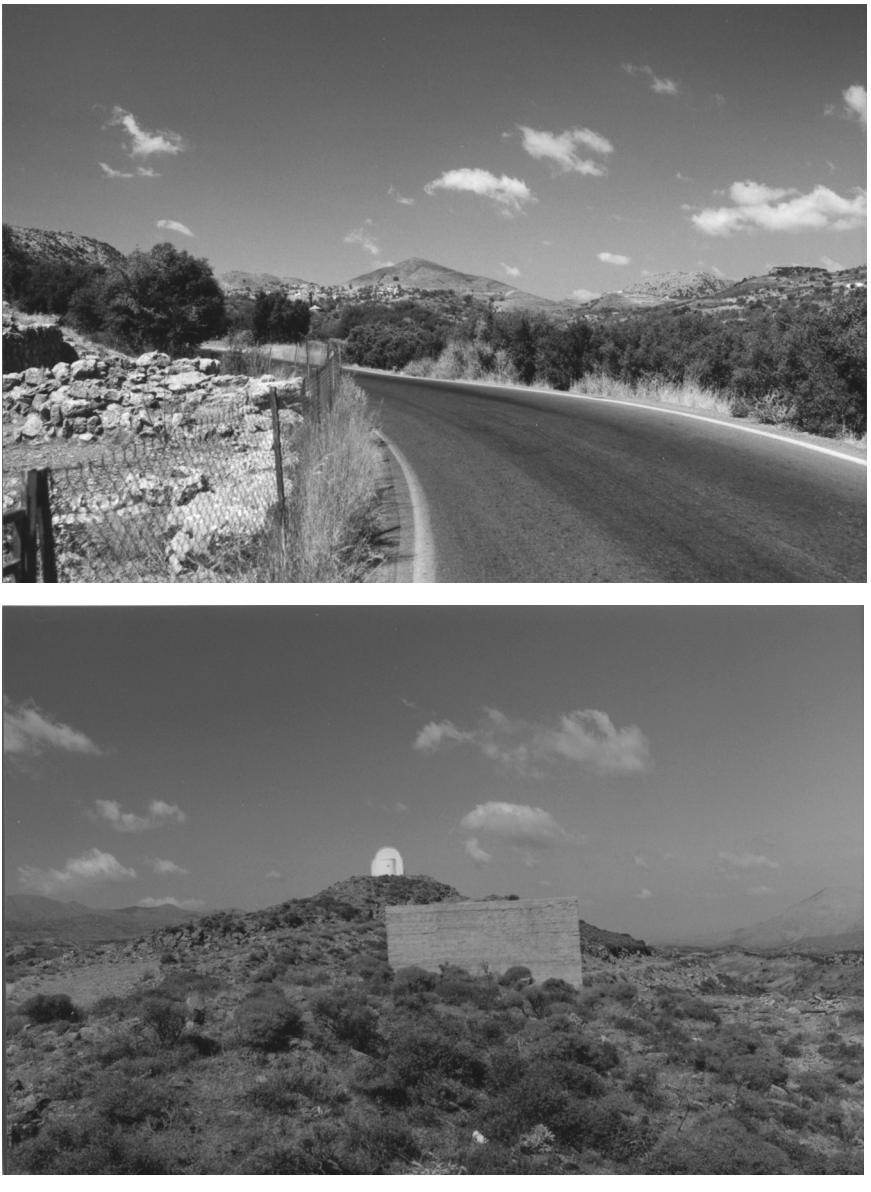

FIGURE 2.1. A Minoan peak sanctuary: (*top*) the peak sanctuary of Philioremos from the nearby Sklavokampos Minoan villa; (*bottom*) a close-up view, 2000.

(figure 2.2). One of the first challenges was to evaluate finds that might suggest ritual activity comparable with that of other sites. For instance, the evidence of ritual drinking and feasting in the peak sanctuaries (Kyriakidis

FIGURE 2.2. Human figurine fragments from the peak sanctuary of Philioremos. (Photo by Kai Scharmer 2006)

2005) is comparable with that found at the contemporaneous Mesara tholos tombs, such as at Moni Odegetria (cf. Vasilakis 1989; Michelaki et al. forthcoming; Vasilakis forthcoming). Animal and human figurines bearing many similarities to those found in the peak sanctuaries are also found at ritual caves, at Piskokephalo (a rather different open-air ritual site), and at Syme (the largest open-air ritual site in Minoan Crete). An instinctive response is to assume that the similar material points to the same rituals being performed in all locations. Observation of modern-day rituals, however, tends to undermine this assumption.

There is a tendency in rituals, especially if well established, to borrow items or behaviors from one another. Moreover, rituals that belong to the same belief or ritual system[2] (for ritual systems, see this volume, Kyriakidis, chapter 13; Bell, chapter 12) will often employ the same paraphernalia, such as symbols or icons, songs or dances, which may identify them as belonging to a certain ritual system and distinct from rituals of different groups.[3] Also, through the two-way process of replication (Vogt 1965:342–353; Marcus, this volume, chapter 4), a group may copy elements of one of their rituals into another of its culturally encoded activities; and conversely, non-ritual cultural elements may be replicated into

the rituals and become ritual elements. As a result, rituals of the same system or group will most often look like one another, sharing a common denominator of elements.

For instance, the religious ritual of blessing the sea, river, or lake waters for the Christian Epiphany, which takes place across Greece on January 6, is in many ways similar to that of the Christian Church's Sunday service, not only in the material culture used, but also in its structure, chants, garments, symbolism, participants, and so on (figure 2.3). Even in less institutionalized ritual systems, there is a centripetal tendency for emulation (Barth 1987:24–37). This cross-fertilization can be a challenge to archaeology since it renders previously distinct rituals almost indistinguishable archaeologically. As far as archaeology is concerned, most material culture related to the Epiphany ritual will be virtually identical to that of the Church's Sunday service.

One other force that enhances ritual homogenization in a ritual system is what McCauley and Lawson call ritual "depth" (this volume, chapter 10). That is to say, some rituals are necessary preconditions for other, "deeper" rituals to take place. Divorce presupposes marriage. Baptism is a

FIGURE 2.3. The Epiphany ceremony in Crete. (Copyright © *Explorecrete.com*. Reprinted with permission, courtesy of Yiannis Samatas)

prerequisite for marriage in the Christian Church. The priest must be initiated for baptism to take place. Rituals of greater ritual "depth" (e.g., divorce) recall and refer to rituals of lesser ritual depth (e.g., initiation of a priest), as they are heavily dependent on them.

Circumcision for the Cameroon Dowayos, to offer a second example taken from Barley (1983), is a ritual of small depth, much evoked in all rituals that depend on it, which have, therefore, a greater ritual depth. Indeed, Barley reckons that most of their rituals seem to "have been 'quotes' from circumcision, reproducing exactly what happened on that occasion" (1983:171).

Thus, archaeologists may be able to distinguish between ritual and non-ritual activity (Kyriakidis 2005:28–40); but they will not be able to differentiate among specific rituals uncovered. Returning to the peak sanctuaries, although the rituals that took place there certainly seem to bear similarities to the contemporary funerary rituals at Mesara or those of Piskokephalo and Syme, in light of the above factors, there is little reason to assume that they were of the same nature. Indeed, the Mesara tholos tomb rituals were clearly funerary, whereas there is no hint of ancestor worship in the peak sanctuaries or in Piskokephalo or Syme (or indeed in other Minoan open-air sanctuaries). It is highly probable that rituals in all these sites borrowed elements from one another, being part of the same ritual system. It is always worth bearing in mind these possible other explanations in accounting for the similarity in material culture among contemporary ritual sites in the same area.

ONE PLACE, MANY RITUALS

One of the elements that may be borrowed from one ritual to another is the location of the performance itself. The more established the ritual system becomes, the more crystallized the ritual locations. This often results in the performance of multiple rituals in specific sites. And this observation challenges another early assumption made when studying the peak sanctuaries—namely, that they played host to one specific and recurring ritual.

All the features of an established ritual locale, be they man-made or natural, inevitably become associated with the rituals. Moreover, ritual paraphernalia are commonly stored there (in the case of buildings) and used in several of the respective rituals. Thus, to give an example, in a Christian church, many different rituals take place—including baptisms, marriages, funerals, communions, vespers, and confessions—which are considered different by the emic participants. However, shared elements, including the location, garments worn, paraphernalia, group of

participants, and organizers, constitute a common denominator among the rituals.

A notable exception is the interfaith sanctuary in "globalized" locations, such as the Internet,[4] airports, or great natural landscapes such as the Grand Canyon. Such sanctuaries usually require little in the way of modification for ritual use, being virtually a blank space or an inspiring natural landscape in which rituals can be performed. Notwithstanding such exceptions, the majority of established ritual locations host a variety of rituals of the same system that usually have a great deal in common.

Consequently, archaeologists are often faced with identifying multiple rituals, the remains of which are mixed. In the case of the Minoan peak sanctuaries, the primarily open-air ritual sites have yielded masses of human and animal figurines, architectural models, and drinking and eating vessels found on and around flat, man-made areas. It is very possible that this material represents a number of rituals. Their common elements and location make it almost impossible to distinguish one ritual from another, as far as the material culture is concerned. Instead, the archaeological record represents a ritual pattern.

We should thus bear in mind that the evidence at an excavated ritual site will in all likelihood reflect many rather than one ritual. Archaeologists will generally have to content themselves with identifying ritual patterns of common denominators.

Occasionally, however, there are some elements that are restricted to a certain ritual, not repeated in any other. These may be rare, even unique, and sometimes immaterial (e.g., things spoken), but if traced could offer the possibility of differentiating one ritual from another. This very role of differentiation would indicate their significance from the performers' standpoint and as such places them in a central position in the ritual itself. They will thus be called *ritual cores* (Kyriakidis 2005:43). For example, the font is used only for baptisms in many Christian churches, where it is a central element. Unfortunately, at this stage of peak sanctuary research, where there is no comprehensive peak sanctuary publication, it is impossible to trace candidates for ritual cores, and therefore, at least as far as my research is concerned, these remain a theoretical concept.

CONTINUITY OF PRACTICE, CONTINUITY OF BELIEF

The peak sanctuaries were used for ritual for hundreds of years, some for almost a millennium. Initially, the constancy of the ritual deposits suggested to this author a relative constancy of ritual, which in turn suggested constancy of associated belief. Indeed, the more established the rituals

of a system, the more likely they are to be attached to specific beliefs—about how the rituals are to be correctly performed, their significance, their properties, and their purpose. As mentioned earlier, ritual is a set practice, and that implies a relative constancy through time. Moreover, rituals tend to be associated with a certain tradition, thus implying a constancy across long periods of time. Although such implications have been challenged (Cannadine 1983:101–164), it is true that as crystallized action many rituals are less variable in their performance than many other types of action.

But, that is not to say that the relationship between ritual (a certain type of action) and belief is singular; the association of identical rituals with identical beliefs should not be taken for granted. The continuity of religious ritual practice may be indicative of, but does not in itself prove, the continuity of religious belief. For example, in the first centuries of the spread of Islam, the gestures and movements of prayer were (and still remain today) identical with the contemporaneous Eastern Christian way of praying (which has since altered). This may have resulted from the close historical relationship between the two religions, the fact that many of the early Muslims were previously Christians, but it may also be due to the geographical link of the two religions once Islam expanded into previously Christian-dominated areas in Egypt, Syria, and the Levant.[5] The beliefs behind these two prayers, however, were and remain, at least partly, different. Thus, in this case, ritual practice stayed the same while associated belief altered. Conversely, a change in ritual practice does not necessarily imply a change in belief. In Queen Victoria's funeral, horses accidentally bolted in the midst of the ritual; this action was then quickly incorporated into the tradition. Yet in this change of ritual, there was no significant change in the associated beliefs (Cannadine 1983:134; Ponsonby 1951:32–33, 83–94).

Thus, in the case of the peak sanctuaries and other ancient ritual sites, it cannot be assumed that the constancy of the material evidence for the ritual practices necessarily reflects a continuity of the associated beliefs. Neither is change in the ritual material culture necessarily sufficient to argue for a change in the related beliefs.

THE INSEPARABILITY OF THE RITUAL AND MUNDANE SPHERES

Another issue to consider when identifying and interpreting ritual in archaeology is the common inseparability of ritual and the mundane. The overlap between these two activity spheres raises many questions: Is all of the material excavated in the peak sanctuaries, for example, exclusively rit-

ual in nature? Should storage jars really be considered cult items? Are the remnants of workshop activities, such as potters' wheels, likely to be votives? Evidence found across cultures demonstrating the inseparability and overlap of the ritual and the mundane worlds argues against such assumptions.

Since there is no temporal or other limit as to what constitutes a practice or action, the term "ritual" can apply to both a "package" (a number, a group) of events and to an "element" (a single event). For instance, the classical Greek funerary festivals can be considered ritual as a package, though many of their elements may be non-ritual. For example, the Patroclus funeral (*Iliad* 23) included sport contests that Achilles organized to honor his companion. In the same way, during a Christian mass in Greece (and elsewhere), a basket is circulated in order to collect donations, a relatively unritualized event. In this volume (chapter 11), Humphrey and Laidlaw describe how the ritual ceremony of the *taxilag* sacrifice (a ritual package) has an unritualized event as its main element: the mundane slaughter of an animal. Conversely, mundane packages such as elections or university studies include a host of ritual elements, from oath taking and prayers to matriculation or degree ceremonies. This means that the two types of action, ritual and mundane, cannot usually be cleanly separated from each other, as they may form part of the same "package" or group of activities.

The same is true for institutions. Ritual institutions such as Christian churches and monasteries have a number of non-ritual rooms: offices, storerooms, activity rooms, bedrooms, even cafeterias and museums. Conversely, many civic (i.e., mundane) institutions, such as government buildings, art galleries, or port installations, also host ritual performances: inaugurations, blessings, personal prayers, and award ceremonies. Often these institutions have rooms especially reserved for rituals, such as chapels, prayer rooms, special ceremony rooms (e.g., banquet halls), or ritual assembly rooms. Thus, there are very few, if any, locations that categorically exclude either ritual or mundane activities. Location, then, does not directly dictate the type of action taking place there, though it may be indicative of that action.

In some of the peak sanctuaries, buildings were erected toward the end of the Old Palace period. These buildings bear no trace of ritual but seem to have housed storage facilities and workshop activities. Storage and workshops were in all likelihood ultimately associated with ritual practices; the buildings themselves, however, despite apparently forming part of the ritual institutions, were primarily mundane in nature

(Kyriakidis 2005:99–109). This is also very likely to have been the case in other established ritual sites.

The storage of ritual and non-ritual objects together can also contribute to the inseparability of the two spheres (figure 2.4). A great number of rituals are performed in places not exclusively used for rituals, such as the aforementioned mundane institutions or even private homes. Special items used in the performance of these rituals are often stored together with non-ritual items. An example from modern Greece illustrates this phenomenon. It is not unusual for a household to be ritually fumigated every day. This is usually carried out by the older women of the house who have a special incense burner. In the 1980s, I observed the ritual being carried out by Sophia Zographaki, an immigrant from Smyrna (today Izmir) to Athens; but variations of this practice are still taking place today in various parts of Greece. The event used to commence in a specially designated part of the house with religious icons and a candle. The practitioner would first light the candle and the incense, and then she would say (or rather mumble) prayers in each room, moving the incense burner in the air in the form of a notional cross or in a straight up-and-down movement. The incense burner was stored together with the dining plates; the incense and the candle-wicks (whether plant or artificial) together with the spices; the candle oil used was household olive oil. In other words, there was no special ritual storage space, and it would have been difficult to discern the ritual from the non-ritual objects without special, insider knowledge. In the same way, non-ritual items may be stored in primarily ritual sites such as churches. Telephones, stationery, spectacles, and other personal items belonging to the priests may be found in the sanctified areas of Christian churches, which are primarily designated (and often built) for objects used in rituals. Thus, as far as storage of ritual items is concerned, context is rarely indicative.

The storage of ritual items in mundane contexts and of mundane items in ritual ones is also evident in the study of the peak sanctuaries. As noted earlier, buildings in the peak sanctuary premises were used to store foodstuffs, tools, and possibly items for ritual use; however, few rituals, if any, occurred there. Thus, given that the ritual and the mundane spheres are often linked so closely as to be inseparable, the attribution of ritual value to an item on the basis of its context alone is difficult for archaeology.

FINDS IN SECONDARY CONTEXTS

The excavation contexts of ritual sites can be misleading in one other way: residues from ritual performances are scarcely traceable in situ. Indeed,

FIGURE 2.4. Mundane storage at a ritual site: two storage jars from the peak sanctuary of Philioremos. The site included fragments of many such storage jars. (Photos by Kai Scharmer and Yiannis Papadakis 2006)

established ritual locales that host one or more rituals are usually cleared before and after a ritual performance. So material residues of the ritual activities are recycled, pushed aside, littered in wells or pits, purposefully destroyed, or dutifully cleared away, often in a fashion not respectful to the objects. The peak sanctuary figurines and other material were mostly found in secondary contexts, thrown or cleared away. Many flat areas or platforms in these sites were even constructed with fills of figurines and broken pottery. In Aghios Georgios at Kythera, Sakellarakis found heaps of figurines thrown off the cliff (Sakellarakis 1996:81–99), while in many Cretan peak sanctuaries, figurines and other ritual residues were found mainly in rock clefts and chasms. Initially, researchers surmised that the Minoans venerated the earth and tried to push votives inside rock-clefts. However, there is not enough evidence to support such a reconstruction, and the fragments of figurines found rather favor the scenario that the material was simply cleared or swept away into any space available. Rock crevices and chasms were better protected from the rake, the broom, the wind, and the rain and thus retained more material.

And finally, excavators studying rituals can be fooled by find context in still another way. Consider the kind of ritual that begins in one place and ends in another, such as a procession. In such a ritual, items originating in one place may be found in another, as residues from the ritual may be deposited anywhere along the route. In several Minoan peak sanctuaries, for example, river or sea pebbles were found in large numbers. Because it is obvious that the pebbles did not originate at the find spot, we can notionally connect their place of origin and the peaks. We know that people came from other places to visit the peak sanctuaries, and it is possible that many of them brought along such pebbles (Kyriakidis 2005: 143–144). This connection of rivers or the sea with the peak is interesting in many ways, but the point here is that, like the pebbles, many (if not most) of the other items found at the peak sanctuaries may well have been in secondary deposits. The identification of a ritual in the archaeological record, therefore, is complicated by the fact that the items found are most commonly not in a primary deposit.

To sum up, rituals may be easier overall to trace than many other types of action, due to the fact that they are crystallized, often repeated, and can form patterns in the archaeological record. Nevertheless, archaeologists should be aware of the various limitations and the challenges posed by a ritual's material remains. Such an understanding will help "calibrate" the evidence and steer research to more fruitful directions, away from potential dark alleys and red herrings.

NOTES

1. That is, technologically governed activity, trade, and exchange, or simply culturally encoded action; see chapters 10 and 13.
2. If "societies" can be groupings of interacting individuals of any kind, and multiple societies can exist within a population of individuals (e.g., for a population in the United States, you might have the society of U.S. citizens, the society of computer engineers, the society of academics, the society of Catholic Christians, the society of those who are of Italian decent, and so on, and one person can be a member of all of them at once), then ritual systems are groups of related rituals, and multiple ritual systems may be present within a population (e.g., British military rituals, Protestant Christian religious rituals, personal rituals, family rituals, state rituals). Often the various societies within a certain population have their own ritual system.
3. Sometimes, even rituals of different belief and ritual systems will copy and imitate each other due to a general trend of cultural assimilation or imitation. A good example is the Eastern Christian Church's wide influence on the Ottoman Islamic "institutions" in areas such as architecture and music.
4. For example, *www.paganinstitute.org*.
5. Tertullian and Origen describe kneeling and prostration for Early Christian prayer, much like in the current Islamic prayer (Burghardt 1954:226, n. 466). For more on the various positions assumed by Early Christians in prayer, see Leclercq 1913.

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