



Unlocking
Sacred
Landscapes



Trinity
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MNES

MEDITERRANEAN
& NEAR EASTERN
STUDIES



IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn



THE A.G. LEVENTIS
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SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF HELLIC STUDIES

SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF RITUAL AND CULT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

A Workshop in the Framework
of the Research Network
Unlocking Sacred Landscapes

15-17 May 2015
Trinity College Dublin

PROGRAMME & ABSTRACTS

Convenors:

Giorgos Papantoniou & Christine Morris

<http://www.ucy.ac.cy/unsala/workshops/dublin-2015>



Programme

Unlocking Sacred Landscapes: Spatial Analysis of Ritual and Cult in the Mediterranean

Friday, May 15

8.45-9.15: Registration and Coffee

9.15-9.30: Welcoming addresses

Giorgos **Papantoniou** and Christine **Morris**

Session 1: Inter-site Approaches to Ritual and Cult

Chairperson and Discussant: Maria Iacovou

9.30-10.15: Unlocking Sacred Landscapes: the Territoriality of Cypriot Iron Age Sanctuaries and the Applicability of Geographic Information Systems

Giorgos **Papantoniou**

10.15-10.45: The Sacred Landscape of Samnium (Central-Southern Italy) and the Socio-political Organisation of the Samnites in the Hellenistic Period

Tesse **Stek**

10.45-11.15: The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse: Spatial Analysis of Figurine Assemblages of the Persian and Early Hellenistic Period from Idumaea

Adi **Erlich**

11.15-11.45: Coffee Break

11.45-12.15: Maritime Aphrodite Sanctuaries from Cyprus to *Magna Graecia*

Amelia **Brown**

12.15-12.45: Ritual Dynamics, Material Culture, and Religious Experience in Context through Place-making of Isis Sanctuaries in the Roman World

Eva **Mol**

12.45-13.45: Discussion

13.45-15.30: Lunch Break (and optional visit to The Book of Kells, Trinity College Dublin)

Session 2: Intra-Site Approaches to Ritual and Cult

Chairperson and Discussant: John Bennet

15.30-16.00: Space, Place and Performance on the Minoan Peak Sanctuary of Atsipadhes

Christine **Morris** and Alan **Peatfield**

16.00-16.30: Late Cypriot Female Figurines: from Intra- to Inter-site Investigation of their Function and Life-cycle

Constantina **Alexandrou**

16.30-17.00: Sacred Spaces from Sanctuaries to Settlements in Early Iron Age Crete: the Case of Syme Viannou in Crete

George **Papasavvas**

17.00-17.30: Coffee Break

17.30-18.00: Entering to Dream: the Role of Landscape in Incubation in the Cult of Asklepios

Liz **Bourke**

18.00-19.00: Discussion

Reception (courtesy of Odaios Foods)

With a recital of Irish traditional music by Caolán Mac An Aircinn and the launch of a digital photographic exhibition, *Lapithos: Landscapes and People of a Lost Past*, curated by Stella Diakou

Saturday, May 16

Session 3: Mortuary and Spiritual Landscapes

Chairperson and Discussant: Michael Given

09.00-09.30: Journeys with Death: Spatial Analysis of the Mesara-type Tombs of Prehistoric Crete

Lucy **Goodison**

09.30-10.00: Socio-spatial Discontinuities in Burial Ritual in Prehistoric Bronze Age Cyprus

Jennifer **Webb**

10.00-10.30: 'Family and Friends': Spatial Analysis of Funerary Ritual in Iron Age Italy

Jacopo **Tabolli**

10.30-11.00: **Coffee Break**

11.00-11.30: Phoenician and Punic Funerary Landscapes: a Phenomenological Approach

Mireia **López-Bertran**

11.30-12.30: **Discussion**

12.30-14.30: **Lunch Break (and optional visit to the National Museum of Ireland – Archaeology)**

Session 4: Christian Sacred Landscapes

Chairperson and Discussant: Jim Crow

14.30-15.00: Island Topography: the Late Antique Christianisation of Crete and Cyprus

Rebecca **Sweetman**

15.00-15.30: Unlocking Sacred Space on Early Medieval Naxos: Digital Approaches

Sam **Turner**

15.30-16.00: Medieval Communities between Rural and Sacred Spaces: the Spatial Dimension of Sacred Monuments in Middle and Late Byzantine Naxos

Athanasios **Vionis**

16.00-16.30: **Coffee Break**

16.30-17.00: Sensing Heaven on Earth: Landscape, Religious Movement and Sacred Identity
Vicky **Manolopoulou**

17.00-18.00: Discussion

18.00-18.15: Short Break

18.15-19.00: Unlocking Sacred Landscapes: the Irish Dimension (response presentation)
Gabriel **Cooney**

19.00-19.30: Future Directions of the Network
Giorgos **Papantoniou** and Christine **Morris**

Sunday, May 17

All Day Excursion to Irish Sacred Landscapes: Glendalough and Kilkenny

Abstracts

Late Cypriot Female Figurines: from Intra- to Inter-site Investigation of their Function and Life-cycle

Constantina ALEXANDROU

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Base-Ring or Late Cypriot female figurines, produced approximately during the 15th-12th centuries BC in Cyprus (Late Cypriot II-III A) have been traditionally interpreted according to their typological similarities with the figurines of the adjacent areas of the Mediterranean, attaching to them a divine character. Although a few scholars have tried to record or take into consideration their archaeological context in order to proceed to observations regarding their use, none of these attempts have been systematic or focused specifically on this group of terracottas.

These figurines have been found in domestic, burial and ritual contexts. They seem to have been mainly used in domestic structures while they were sometimes deposited in tombs and more rarely in ritual contexts. This paper presents the results from the intra-site investigation of the archaeological contexts of the Base-Ring female figurines, aiming to proceed to observations regarding their function(s), life-cycle and role. The limited amount of figurines recovered from well excavated and recorded contexts necessitates the use of a methodology employing different approaches in order to gather the maximum of evidence from the available sources. This methodology results in the recording of patterns related to their places of discovery, associated assemblages, modes of discard/deposition and fragmentation. Patterns regarding the frequency of appearance of certain types in particular contexts are also recorded. From the observations of this intra-site contextual analysis regarding the use-life of these figurines, one can move to an inter-site analysis to reconstruct the general attitudes of the society towards this category of artefacts.

Entering to Dream: the Role of Landscape in Incubation in the Cult of Asklepios

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Incubation – sleeping within the temenos area in order to receive a sacred dream – plays a vital role in the healing aspects of the cult of Asklepios. Incubation is a liminal activity, occupying as it does a conceptual space between conscious and unconscious, and representing a locus of communication between human and divine. It is also, in the cult of Asklepios, most undertaken by persons who occupy a liminal status: individuals who are ill or injured, and who seek healing through incubation.

It is often assumed that incubation took place exclusively within the building known to modern scholars as the *abaton*, a word which is derived from ἄβατος, untrodden. There is, however, evidence to suggest that incubation did not necessarily require a specific building. This paper examines the relationship between incubation and the landscape of the Asklepieian sanctuary, with particular reference to the sanctuaries of Asklepios at Pergamon and at Athens.

Maritime Aphrodite Sanctuaries from Cyprus to *Magna Graecia*

Amelia BROWN

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Aphrodite was one of the most widely-worshiped ancient Greek goddesses, with shrines all around the Mediterranean Sea. Yet modern scholarship focuses mostly on her origins and nude representations as a goddess of sexuality, not on her cultic significance as a patron of ancient sailors, colonists and cities. However, her widespread network of sanctuaries on harbours and heights and her controversial connection with prostitution may be best understood in relation to Mediterranean maritime connectivity. The development of her cults from Cyprus to Corinth, Eryx to Paestum, depended on a sacred network over the sea. Greek and Phoenician interaction, colonisation and common use of some sanctuaries is clear from archaeology, and material evidence can with some caution be matched up with ancient comments by Herodotus, Strabo, Pausanias and others. Offerings made by hopeful or grateful seafarers, colonists and travellers of multiple ethnicities occur at all of these shrines, and there is a paucity of traditional Greek temples as well. Maritime Aphrodite's cult was practiced both at the port and atop sites with a view of the sea, with a focus on enclosures, statues and dedications rather than on monumental buildings. A better understanding of Aphrodite's network of maritime sanctuaries casts light on otherwise immaterial rituals of travel, and the interlocking networks of colonisation, trade and religious practices which linked *Magna Graecia* with Greece, Cyprus and the eastern Mediterranean.

Unlocking Sacred Landscapes: the Irish Dimension

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A notable feature of the Irish prehistory is the recurrence of activity over long periods of time in specific areas. These persistent places or landscapes are also a feature of the wider world of prehistoric Atlantic Europe. This pattern of human activity has been long debated. Depending on the point of view of the researcher it can be explained for example as indicating foci of long-term settlement, as the repeated but unrelated use of areas improved by human modification in the context of technological constraints on land use or as special places, sacred landscapes. Not only does the understanding of such landscapes require explanation in terms of how they articulated with everyday life in the past, but they also pose problems of recognition and sustainability in today's world. The particular focus on the paper will be on monumental landscapes and the changing treatment of the dead over the course of Irish prehistory.

The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse: Spatial Analysis of Figurine Assemblages of the Persian and Early Hellenistic Period from Idumaea

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The foothills of Judaea in the fifth-fourth century BCE have witnessed the formation of Idumaea, a region with a distinct ethnos, religion and material culture. Maresha, the main town of the region, flourished during the late Persian and Hellenistic period. Figurines and statues have been found both in Maresha and in sites in the Idumaeian countryside. The figurines found in the countryside were retrieved from repository pits which might have served as favissae of nearby shrines. These pits contained terracottas and stone statues of mixed iconography with local, Phoenician, Cypriote and Greek influences. At Maresha, however, terracottas were found in fills of caves, and for the most part they seem to have functioned in the domestic sphere. The Maresha repertoire is limited and consists mostly of two types of local nature, unlike the heterogenic and more cosmopolitan character of the figurines in the countryside. Furthermore, males prevail over females, unlike the more balanced gender of the countryside figurines.

Investigation of the distribution of the figurines through a spatial approach in the region of Idumaea, while comparing the town to the countryside and cultic pits to urban and domestic use, will be used to offer insights into social, cultic, and ideological transformations within the region in the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods.

Journeys with Death: Spatial Analysis of the Mesara-type Tombs of Prehistoric Crete

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The Mesara-type tombs of Early to Middle Bronze Age Crete were almost exclusively built with their main entrance aligned to receive the first light of dawn at specific times of year. Around the central circular tomb building, a variety of antechambers, passages, ossuaries and courtyards were constructed, following recurring patterns concerning the use of space in relation to the cardinal points and the movements of the sun. These spaces were used for rituals involving manipulation of bones, secondary burials, libations, activities at altars and possibly dancing. There are no translated texts to elucidate the beliefs and concepts behind such funerary rituals, but this paper investigates how the architecture itself, in conjunction with the material finds, may reflect ideas about the transformative journey of the dead, communal identity, regeneration and interaction of the living with the deceased.

Phoenician and Punic Funerary Landscapes: a Phenomenological Approach

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This paper analyses and compares some Phoenician and Punic cemeteries of the Western Mediterranean from an intra-spatial perspective. Specific ritual activities were performed in these places and they remained key sites for forging Phoenician and Punic identities. Specifically, the following issues will be taken into consideration:

- a. Funerary rituals. As some cemeteries share both inhumation and cremation rituals simultaneously, it is my intention to discern if the selection of a specific ritual entailed differences in terms of the treatment and understanding of death bodies.
- b. Spatial organisation: How was the space in each cemetery arranged? Was the internal space of chambers and tombs organised in a meaningful way?
- c. In what ways did the cemeteries materialised the religious experience of coping with death? How did the funerary landscape express otherworldly cosmologies?

I will adopt a phenomenological approach and stress the array of sensitive and corporeal dimensions that people experienced when dealing with death.

Sensing Heaven on Earth: Landscape, Religious Movement and Sacred Identity

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The main aim of this paper is to examine the spatial dimension of religious movement and to understand its role in creating a sacred landscape. This paper takes an inter-disciplinary approach toward the archaeology of religion and practice in the Byzantine capital that suggests that sacred landscapes are not static amalgams but that they exist and transform through experience.

In medieval minds Constantinople was the queen of cities, a world-famous jewel under the protection of God and His mother the *Theotokos*. The city's sacred landscape hosted the relics of saints and was perceived as being like a church; it was a landscape characterised as a leader of faith and a guide of Orthodoxy. The city was the *lieu* of religious processions, historic and commemorative, that found their referential traces in various primary sources. These processions are recorded as having salvific and protective properties and as a link to the divine. Churches, but also civic sites, like the Forum or even open spaces outside the city walls, are during these processions within a sacred sphere. Time, landscape and text are active agents that shape but also are shaped by religious practice.

A spatial analysis of the processions but also the troparia — short prayers that were sung and heard during the processions — will entail a discussion on the affect of space and material culture, on liturgical experience, and the effect of text, in experiencing landscape and material culture, creating meaningful places. Spatial analysis within a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) environment is used in order to show the relationship of text, material culture, religious practice and sacred landscapes.

Ritual Dynamics, Material Culture, and Religious Experience in Context through Place-making of Isis Sanctuaries in the Roman World

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Within religious studies a focus on material agency is becoming increasingly important, especially with regard to religious experience and ritual dynamics, for which it is now acknowledged that material culture plays a key role. Archaeology (as the study whose primary focus lies on the role of material culture) and the field of cognitive religious research can be considered interconnected vessels in this respect and can benefit significantly from each other. This paper attempts to combine the two fields by analysing and comparing the material and architectural remains of Isis' sanctuaries in the Roman world through a focus on religious experience. How did the cult space and its material enable religious experience? How did the space and the objects of the sanctuary structure ritual dynamics? How did Isiac cults deal with material and materiality, and how did they differ from other Roman (mystery) cults? Could the cult's 'inherent pluralism', as argued by some scholars, be sustained through the perspectives offered by the cognitive science of religion?

Answers to these questions will be attempted through the application of place-making, a methodology which aims to combine material and cognitive approaches in order to reconstruct the experience of a place. By bringing together the mental and the physical within the use of a place, uniting the analysis of objects, architectural design, ritual and social performance, and psychology, it is possible to get a better grip on how Isis cults once functioned.

The paper will focus especially on the relation between material culture (cult objects, space and architecture) and cognition, and the role of material culture in ritual practice. It thereby wishes to take a comparative approach in order to see how different parts of the Roman Empire dealt with cult objects, architecture and space and what this can tell us about religious experience in general, and the Isis cults in particular.

Unlocking Sacred Landscapes: the Territoriality of Cypriot Iron Age Sanctuaries and the Applicability of Geographic Information Systems

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The present paper derives from a broader project entitled *Unlocking Sacred Landscapes: A Holistic Approach to Cypriot Sanctuaries and Religion*, funded by the Irish Research Council and the Marie Curie Actions of the European Commission. This project aims to contextualise the development of sacred space and cult in Cyprus from the Late Bronze Age to the Roman period, using a range of interdisciplinary approaches. Perceiving sacred space as instrumental in forming power relations and the worldview of the ancient Cypriots, it elucidates how meanings and identities were diachronically expressed in, or created by, the topographical setting of religion and its material depositions and dedications. Particular emphasis is given to the interaction between political and religious structures.

The multiplication of the extra-urban sanctuaries in the early Cypro-Archaic period (circa seventh century BC) represents the climax of the consolidation of the political power of the mini-states of Cyprus in the Iron Age, also known in the archaeological literature as the Cypriot city-kingdoms. In this paper I experiment with various Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analyses in a preliminary attempt to reveal possible relations among extra-urban sanctuaries, socio-political boundaries and networks, as well as communication- and trade-routes between the various Iron Age Cypriot polities, or among urban centres, second-rank towns and rural settlements. The GIS analyses complement other archaeological evidence and suggest that the Cypriot sanctuary sites played a significant role in the political formation of the Iron Age city-kingdoms. This approach demonstrates that the GIS is a tool that can make significant contributions when addressing issues related to the territorial formation of the Cypriot Iron Age polities; it also shows that there are technical difficulties and theoretical weaknesses when one attempts to employ these methodologies diachronically and across the totality of the Cypriot sacred landscapes. I conclude that the method can provide better results when employed at a regional level.

Sacred Spaces from Sanctuaries to Settlements in Early Iron Age Crete: the Case of Syme Viannou in Crete

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Cretan sanctuaries bear witness to profound changes in cult practices and dedication patterns during the course of the Early Iron Age. Cult activities (rituals, types of votives, spatial organisation of cult sites) appear to have been closely interrelated with the evolution of settlement patterns on the island, and were thus subject to socio-political changes. Of particular importance for these discussions are the issues of the emergence of the polis on the island, and of those sanctuaries that were not connected to any single urban centre, but instead functioned at an interstate level, and served as fora for individual display among the elites. An eminent example among them is the sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite at Syme, Crete. In this sanctuary, a clear tendency for the monumentalisation of the sacred space, associated with the accommodation of large crowds, manifests itself from the late 8th-early 7th century BC. A further shift in cult practices on the island which affects both the urban centres and the cult sites becomes obvious in the latter part of the 7th century BC, when the settlement pattern throughout the island shows a clear tendency to nucleation. By this time, buildings with a distinct sacred character were erected within several urban centres (e.g. Dreros, Prinias, Gortyn). From this period onwards, following the developments that had begun more than a century earlier, if not before, urban centres started to invest their resources in monumental display within their limits. This clear tendency for the centralisation of cult within the urban centres eventually weakened the popularity of the extra-urban sanctuaries, and from the late 7th century BC important cult activities were primarily celebrated in civic contexts.

Space, Place and Performance on the Minoan Peak Sanctuary of Atsipadhes

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This paper explores ideas of space, place and performance on Cretan peak sanctuaries, taking the site of Atsipadhes Korakias as the key case study. A small, rural peak sanctuary in western Crete (in the Ayios Vasilios valley, south of Rethymnon), Atsipadhes was fully excavated by us in 1989. The location of the artefacts, which included over 5000 anthropomorphic and animal figurine fragments, together with pottery and water worn pebbles, was recorded in detail within their setting of two terraces separated by a drop with many natural rocky clefts. This unusually rich dataset provides the basis for an intra-site analysis, or, in other words, an opportunity to think about the spatial organisation on the site and its implications for creating a place for participation and performance. In addition, we investigate Atsipadhes as a space within its wider landscape, paying attention to varying levels of perspective and experience. These include lines or zones of visibility with the secular landscape of the local settlements, the intervisibility with other sacred sites and peak sanctuaries, and the extended cosmology of landscape and celestial phenomena.

The Sacred Landscape of Samnium (Central-Southern Italy) and the Socio-political Organisation of the Samnites in the Hellenistic Period

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The socio-political organisation of the Italic peoples known as the *Samnites*, who in antiquity inhabited large portions of the Apennine areas of Central and Southern Italy, is a conundrum in modern scholarship. Recent, and indeed vigorous, deconstructivist studies have undermined previously held views and have further aggravated the aporia. An important key to understanding the particular workings and articulation of power and organisational structures in Samnite society has long since been recognised in the highly monumental rural cult places dotted all over the Samnite mountains. The incompleteness of the archaeological dataset, as well as both ideological and methodological biases pose, however, formidable challenges to a comprehensive reading of the sacred landscape as a reliable indicator for social organisation.

Detailed research on a selection of these cult sites and their environment by excavation and field surveys is now starting to reveal an ever more dense sacred network, which operates on an entirely different scale than allowed for in previous analyses. In this paper, an attempt will be made to link these recent findings to the wider debate on Samnite society and its supposed distinctiveness vis-à-vis 'Classical' Graeco-Roman civilisation.

Island Topography: the Late Antique Christianisation of Crete and Cyprus

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The results of a 2012 topographic analysis of the Late Antique churches of the Peloponnese showed how the Christianisation here was carried out through three different processes of change: complexity, social movement and tipping point. These stages were not period-specific and diverse locations could experience different processes of Christianisation simultaneously. The analysis of the survey results makes clear the importance of location-choice in order for the church to publicise itself by taking positions in places of high visibility and in some cases creating a sense of endeavour from the visit. Furthermore, it is likely that the setting of a church in the landscape allowed it to draw on memory in order to consolidate the place of the church within the existing society. In the Late Antique period, however, Achaëa is considered to have been on the margins of communication links and some argue that this is reflected in the relatively late Christianisation of the province. Although a tradition of contact does not necessarily mean shared architectural forms, the surprising general uniformity of the Peloponnesian churches perhaps supports this assertion of a comparatively insular region, in spite of the diversity of local religious and political arrangements. By comparing a number of other provinces using the same criteria of analysis, topography and architecture, it will be possible to evaluate the theories for the role of the location of the church in conversion practises. To this end, this paper will focus on two centrally located islands in the Eastern Mediterranean: Crete and Cyprus. Both islands belong to different provinces, and for reasons of trade and pilgrimage they had key roles in Roman and Late Antique networks. The paper will first examine the topographic distribution of the churches in the Peloponnese to lay the foundation for application of the theories of Christianisation here. The focus will then turn to the location of the Late Antique churches in Crete and Cyprus to assess whether evidence for the same processes of conversion can be seen on the islands, whether the islands themselves differ and what this tells us about the impact of networks on Christianisation processes.

'Family and Friends': Spatial Analysis of Funerary Ritual in Iron Age Italy

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Along with the growing number of publications of complex Iron Age necropoleis in Italy, the theme of 'ritual space' within the funerary landscape has been increasingly addressed in the Italian scholarship. Spatial analysis of funerary ritual has been therefore variously applied, often influenced by the different schools interested in the Iron Age (such as Prehistory and Protohistory, Etruscan and pre-Roman studies, Classical Greek and Roman archaeology) revealing a multitude of different approaches, ranging from an unconditional adoption to a denial of any possible 'model'. This paper aims to present a critical synthesis of both the potential and the problems embedded in the spatial analysis of funerary ritual in Iron Age Italy, comparing different case studies as well as different methodologies recently applied. Through the lens of funerary ideology, this paper focuses specifically on the spatial relations between the ritual expressed by the composition of different tomb-groups and the identity of the family or other social groups. Therefore, tracing '*family and friends*' on the basis of spatial analysis of funerary ritual constitutes a powerful approach for exploring the communities of pre-Roman Italy. This paper also offers an innovative way of analysing and modelling funerary ritual when dealing with past excavations, particularly those of the late nineteenth century.

Unlocking Sacred Space on Early Medieval Naxos: Digital Approaches

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The early medieval rural landscapes of much of the eastern Mediterranean remain poorly understood. Scholars' understanding of the structure and experience of sacred space after Late Antiquity is limited by relatively poor knowledge of settlements, land-use patterns and the location of churches. In this context, the island of Naxos provides unparalleled opportunities to explore a rural sacred landscape thanks to the excellent survival of small early medieval churches as standing buildings and a rich historic landscape. Recent collaborative fieldwork and Geographic Information Systems (GIS)-based research has begun to unravel the complexities of this landscape through a case-study in the region of Apalirou, a major early medieval centre where the development of medieval urban space from the seventh century AD onwards can also be addressed.

Medieval Communities between Rural and Sacred Spaces: the Spatial Dimension of Sacred Monuments in Middle and Late Byzantine Naxos

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After the re-establishment of imperial control in the Aegean in the late tenth century AD, the Byzantine central administration invested in the construction of monumental defence outposts, monasteries and churches on several islands, in the framework of a revived imperial propaganda for the resurgence of political, economic, ecclesiastical and cultural links with the periphery.

Thirty six new churches were constructed between the late tenth and twelfth centuries, while another seventy were erected throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries on the Cycladic island of Naxos. This unusually large concentration of religious monuments in the island's rural landscape does not only signify extensive settlement and agricultural intensification during the Middle and Late Byzantine/Frankish eras, but also offers a fascinating opportunity for reading the sacred landscape of Naxos and its relation to the symbolic presence of imperial structures and community identities in the Aegean.

Drawing on the concentration of churches in two neighbouring and particularly fertile inland valleys of the island, this presentation proposes to initiate an inter-site analysis of sacred spaces employing a range of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) techniques in order to explore the relationship between religious monuments (as symbolic expressions of piety and wishes for protection and prosperity) and rural settlements, in terms of settlement hierarchy and community 'territorial' and 'sacred' zones. This preliminary study is based on the examination of sacred topography, on the reading of visual imagery as a means for identifying the character of religious monuments, and on the evaluation of archaeological evidence for settlement activity.

Socio-spatial Discontinuities in Burial Ritual in Prehistoric Bronze Age Cyprus

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Cemeteries provide a spatially extensive backdrop for individual funerals which may enhance or conceal the differential performance of mortuary rituals. While some have proposed that Early Bronze Age cemeteries in Cyprus were marked by standardisation and uniformity – suggesting that social and economic inequalities were minimal or that burial programs intentionally masked inequalities in order to foster social cohesion and community identity – this was clearly not everywhere the case. The degree to which cemeteries and burials were arenas of social power varied significantly between sites and regions with far greater levels of social capital invested in the mortuary domain on the north coast. There is, moreover, a clear correlation between the extent to which cemeteries were socially contested landscapes and the intensity of mortuary ritual. While tombs generally served as settings for funerary ceremonies, at some sites burial involved highly visible forms of ritual and symbolic activity and gave rise to a material culture with considerable spiritual power.

The spatial discontinuities in burial ritual and ancestralising practices in prehistoric Bronze Age Cyprus reflect significant social and ritual boundaries and have produced a set of archaeological data marked by a site-specific material culture and iconography. This paper explores several key sites, objects and iconographic concepts in an attempt to elucidate both intra-site and inter-site aspects of ritual variability and to trace the spatial and chronological evolution of key symbolic elements from the pre-state agricultural communities of the Early and Middle Bronze Age to the complex polities of the Late Bronze Age.