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Kavos and the Special Deposits

Edited by Colin Renfrew, Olga Philaniotou, Neil Brodie,
Giorgos Gavalas & Michael J. Boyd



The sanctuary on Keros and the origins
of Aegean ritual practice VOLUME II

Kavos and the Special Deposits

To the memory of

Dora Kemp
(1966–2014)

in gratitude for all her generous support for our work





McDONALD INSTITUTE MONOGRAPHS

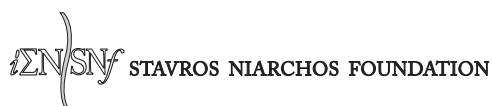
Kavos and the Special Deposits

Edited by Colin Renfrew, Olga Philaniotou, Neil Brodie,
Giorgos Gavalas & Michael J. Boyd

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practice: the excavations of 2006–2008
VOLUME II



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Cover image: *Kavos seen from Dhaskalio*. Inset: *The Special Deposit South from the southeast during excavation*.
Frontispiece image: *Figurine fragments from layer 4 of Trench D2 in the course of excavation*.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Colin Renfrew

This volume, as noted in the Preface, describes the excavations and investigations undertaken on the Cycladic island of Keros at Kavos by the Cambridge Keros Project over the years 2006 to 2008. In particular it details the researches undertaken at what is here

identified as a hitherto unrecognized component of the major early bronze age sanctuary on Keros. The Kavos area is located at the western end of Keros Island, facing the islet of Dhaskalio. It extends some 330 m southwards from the Kavos Promontory at the

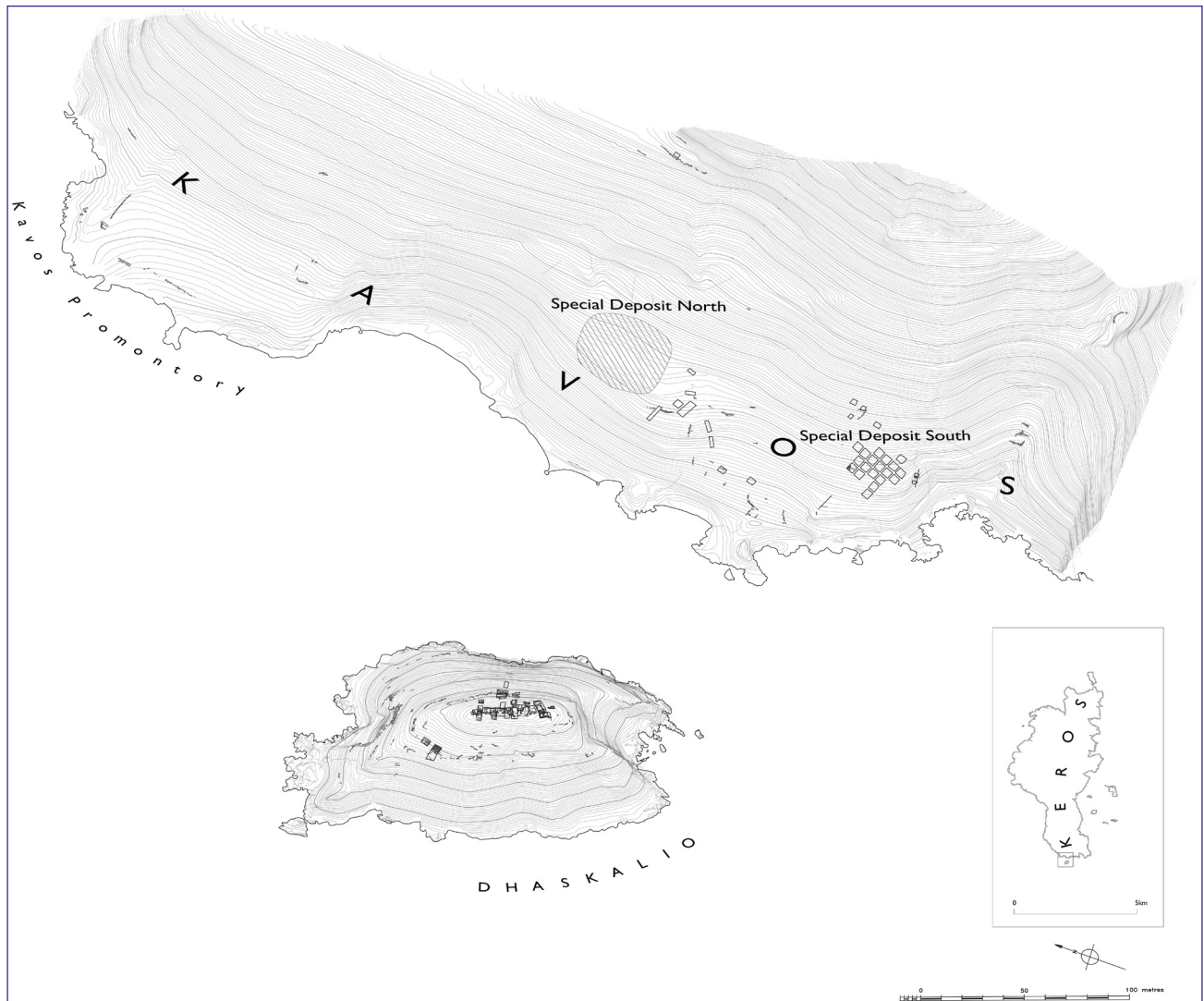


Figure 1.1. *Perspective view of Dhaskalio and Kavos from the west. Contours at 0.5 m and 5 m intervals.*



Figure 1.2. Plan of Dhaskalio and Kavos, showing the location of excavation trenches.



Figure 1.3. *Some of the figurines recovered from the Special Deposit South (Spedos variety) laid out for study in the Naxos Museum.*

north (Plate 1a). Further to the south again (Plate 4b) the coastline becomes rockier. To the east of Kavos, some 100 m from the sea, the ground rises more steeply and the slope sometimes becomes precipitous (Plate 2a). The low-lying slopes of Kavos form a natural amphitheatre facing Dhaskalio. It was here that the sanctuary was situated.

The discovery of the area now termed the Special Deposit South was the key event of the 2006 excavation season. The surface survey of the Kavos area undertaken in 1987, which had accompanied the re-examination of the looted area lying some 110 m to the north (Fig. 1.1 and Plate 1a), had yielded a couple of fragmentary marble finds (Whitelaw 2007). These indicated the possibility that this might be another area where special finds of the kind unearthed in that ‘special deposit’ might be found. So excavation was initiated in 2006 with a 4×4 m trench at the location where those fragmentary marble finds had been collected. At once marble bowl fragments, broken marble figurines and potsherds were discovered in quantity. Nearby 4×4 m trenches yielded more, and soon an area comprising a grid of 4×4 m trenches was under excavation (Plate 5b). These soon produced an abundance of similar material, yielding more figurines and marble vessels, all in fragmentary condition, than has ever been recovered in the Cyclades in an archaeological excavation (frontispiece and Fig. 1.3). This area was at once termed the ‘Special Deposit South’ (Fig. 1.2) to distinguish it from that other special deposit, now termed the ‘Special Deposit North’, lying just 110 m to

the north. The Special Deposit South, before and after excavation, is seen in Plates 3a and 4a.

It soon became apparent that there were no signs here of subsequent disturbance: no indications of looting. This was of crucial importance, since the disturbance to the Special Deposit North had led to serious difficulties in interpretation. Here the finds lay where they had been deposited 4500 years ago (frontispiece). Some of them had been subjected to weathering (Plate 13b), and the possibility that the deposit had moved downslope was subsequently investigated geomorphologically (chapter 3), and in consequence largely discounted. There were frequent groups of broken figurines and marble bowls (Plate 11a). It at once became clear that these had not been broken at the location where they were found, or it would in many cases have been possible to find joins allowing their reconstruction. The subsequent careful search for joins, undertaken in the laboratory, made clear that these could not be found. It led to the inference that the systematic breakage process did not occur at this location. These artefacts, it seems, were broken elsewhere, probably on other islands where they had originally been in use, whence they were brought to Keros at the end of their use life. This pattern of repeated deposition at Kavos seems indicative of ritual practice, apparently undertaken on a regional basis.

This fortunate discovery of the Special Deposit South and its subsequent systematic exploration is the principal theme for the present volume. It seems to offer the key to the understanding of the entire

Table 1.1. *Early Cycladic culture names and phases with particular reference to the settlement at Dhaskalio. For radiocarbon dates, see Volume I, Chapter 33.*

Dhaskalio phase	Markiani phase	Culture name	Numerical phase	Calibrated radiocarbon dates	Cycladic comparanda
C	–	Later Kastri Group	ECIII	2400–2300 BC	Phylakopi I (Melos) Arkesine (Amorgos)
B	IV	Earlier Kastri group	ECII/III	2550–2400 BC	Kastri (Syros) Ayia Irini III (Kea) Panormos (Naxos)
A	III	Keros-Syros culture	ECII	2750–2550 BC	Skarkos (Ios) Phylakopi A2 (Melos) Ayia Irini II (Kea)
–	II	Kampos group	ECI/II		Kampos cemetery (Paros) Simigdalas cemetery (Ano Kouphonisi)
–	I	Grotta-Pelos culture	ECI		Phylakopi A1 (Melos) Grotta (Naxos) Lakkoudes cemetery (Naxos)

complex on Keros which first came to the attention of archaeologists in 1963. And it has opened the way to the interpretation of that complex as a regional sanctuary, the earliest such regional centre of congregation yet discovered in the Aegean.

Although the excavations on the settlement on the islet of Dhaskalio, lying 90 m to the west (Plate 1b), did not begin in earnest until 2007, they have already been described in detail in Volume I of the present series. This priority accorded to Dhaskalio was felt appropriate in view of the secure stratigraphic succession established there, which allowed the recognition of three constructional phases (designated Dhaskalio A, B and C). The accompanying ceramic sequence was summarized in Chapter 6 of Volume I. Radiocarbon samples from the successive strata there yielded a secure absolute chronology, set out in Chapter 33 of Volume I. They are summarized in Table 1.1. The Dhaskalio sequence and chronology offers the best guide to the culture sequence at Kavos itself. At Kavos, as discussed here in Chapter 2, the deposition processes by which the site was formed involved the digging of successive pits resulting in some loss of stratigraphic definition. While the general sequence of events is clear, including the effective abandonment of the site at the end of the early bronze age, it is often difficult, as will be discussed below, to assign even well-stratified finds from the Special Deposit South to a specific sub-phase by virtue of their context. The more detailed assignment of such finds to Phases A, B or C of the Dhaskalio sequence has to be undertaken largely on the grounds of the ceramic chronology established for Dhaskalio. This is securely based upon the stratigraphic excavations there, as fully discussed in Volume I.

The geology and geography of the island of Keros was discussed in detail in the earlier chapters

of Volume I, and the present volume should be read with reference to these. In particular the conclusion of Chapter 4 of Volume I should be noted, that during the early bronze age Dhaskalio and Kavos were united by a natural causeway. The discussion there by Dixon and Kinnaird (in Volume I, Chapter 3) of the geology of the Kavos area is particularly useful as an introduction to the investigation of the Special Deposit South, as set out in Chapter 2 of the present volume.

The discussion (Chapters 2–4) here begins with a detailed description of the excavations undertaken in the Special Deposit South, accompanied by a detailed tabulation of the special finds in their stratigraphic contexts. There follows a discussion of the finds from the Special Deposit South themselves, beginning with a consideration (Chapter 6) by Jill Hilditch of the ceramic petrology of the pottery recovered. The various special finds are then discussed in turn in their respective categories, although the detailed typological consideration of the marble finds (sculptures and vessels) and of their likely provenance is deferred to Volume III. This review then permits a full consideration in Chapter 13 of the activities undertaken at the Special Deposit South.

The second part of the volume considers the areas of Kavos lying beyond the Special Deposit South itself. The published evidence from the Special Deposit North is briefly reviewed in Chapter 14. The excavation in the Middle Area, lying between the Special Deposits North and South, is then described in Chapter 15. The excavation trenches peripheral to the Special Deposit South are then considered (in Chapter 16) along with a discussion of the burials found to the south in Area A (in Chapters 17 and 18). The evidence recovered from Kavos Promontory, with its abundant indications of copper smelting, is then presented in

Chapter 19, and the evidence for metallurgical practice discussed in some detail. The caves and fissures produced by faulting in the higher land immediately to the east of Kavos are then briefly considered in Chapter 20. All of this gives a solid factual basis for the concluding discussion in Chapter 23 of the activities undertaken at Kavos during the early bronze age and of the nature and role of the Early Cycladic sanctuary discovered there.

On the grounds of length the detailed presentation of the marble finds (sculpture and bowls) is deferred to Volume III. There the finds from the sanctuary at Kavos and the settlement at Dhaskalio

will be compared and contrasted, leading the way to a concluding discussion of the two sites and the relationship between them.

The photographs of excavation trenches and of finds, as published in the present volume, are also available on the accompanying disc (located in the rear cover of the binding), where they are seen in colour and in higher definition. They are accompanied by the archive of further photographs taken in the trenches, and by further images of the artefacts recovered. The detailed illustration of the marble finds (including figurines) is, however, deferred to Volume III, and of the pottery to Volume V.

Kavos and the Special Deposits

Volume II describes the excavation and finds from the Special Deposits at Kavos at the sanctuary on Keros lying opposite the settlement on the islet of Dhaskalio (described in Volume I). The finds of marble from the Special Deposit South are described in Volume III, and the pottery in Volume V.

The sanctuary at Kavos, dating from c. 2700 BC to 2400 BC has yielded the richest ritual deposits of the early bronze age Cyclades.

The finds are presented here in their excavation contexts, and the significance of the Special Deposit South as a ritual deposit is examined in the context of Aegean prehistory.



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