



**Human votive offerings to the gods:
from the Aegean island of Keros in 2750 BC to modern
Tinos**

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Abstract: Methodology serves as the foundational framework for the systematic scientific exploration of a problem. Grounded in Aristotelian logic, it often proves effective in elucidating various issues. However, there are instances where Aristotelian logic offers a more comprehensive explanation than methodology, such as in factual deciphering a date in a four yearlong Minoan solar calendar (1550 BC), elucidating the enigma of unmatched human parts in Keros-Dhaskalio (2750 - 2300 BC), unraveling the mysteries of the anchorage of Kouklia-Achni (1600 - 1400 BC), examining hundreds of votives from around 200 Asclepieia (1200 BC – 1st century AD), or delving into the thousands of votives found in Christian churches (1st century AD to the present). This paper suggests that the presence of unmatched

Keywords: The Keros-Dhaskalio problem; The Kouklia-Achni anchorage; The Delos temple; The Epidaurus Asklepiion; The Corinth Asklepiion; The Holy Land churches; The Petounda anchorage; The Byzantine votives; The Balkan and Greek practice of offering under Ottoman/Turkish rule; The Assumption of Virgin Mary church in Tinos.

Human parts at Keros-Dhaskalio and the anchorage at Kouklia-Achni can be traced back to a longstanding tradition. From prehistoric times to the present day, people have practiced offering votive gifts to deities as tokens of gratitude. These offerings often correspond to healed body parts or the successful completion of seafaring ventures, symbolized by the deliberate offering of ship anchors. These votives are presented following the successful fulfillment of vows made by individuals, whether related to matters of health or wealth.

This enduring tradition, dating back to the practices of Keros-Dhaskalio, situated in the Aegean Sea, between 2750 - 2300 BC, and is unabated to our contemporary era. A notable contemporary example is the Assumption of Megalochari in Tinos, Cyclades, situated in the Aegean Sea. Remarkably, this tradition has persisted for an impressive 4500 years.

Introduction

The current issues surrounding the unmatched parts on Keros-Dhaskalio island trace back to the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1960s, a question arose: "Why were more than 500 marble body parts and complete bodies unearthed on Keros-Dhaskalio island, and why do they remain unmatched?" This inquiry was first examined by Dumas¹ in 1968 and later discussed by Lord Renfrew² in 1991. In the 1970s, attention shifted to "Some Cypriot Stone Anchors from Land Sites and from the Sea," a topic explored extensively by Frost^{10c} in 1979.

From prehistoric times to the present day, a range of iconic or three-dimensional offerings has been dedicated to both known and unknown deities. These votives have been documented in various contexts:

- (i) Unmatched body parts and whole figurines, potentially votives, found in Keros-Dhaskalio from 2750 to 2300 BC.
- (ii) One hundred twenty stone anchors, possibly votives, discovered on the seabed at the Kouklia-Achni anchorage, spanning the periods of 1600-1400 BC and 1200-500 BC, in the sanctuary of the Paphian Aphrodite, near Paphos, Cyprus.
- (iii) Votives offered before the Trojan War, around 1230 BC, in the sanctuary of Apollo and others on the island of Delos in the Aegean Sea.

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- (iv) Votives dedicated to the temples of Apollo and Asclepius. Asclepieia were established in approximately 200 locations around the Mediterranean, including (a) Epidaurus from around 700 BC to early Christianity and (b) Corinth from around 600 BC to early Christianity.
- (v) Votives in proto-Christian churches in the Holy Land from the 1st century AD onwards.
- (vi) The 45 stone anchors - votives (?) - at the seabed at cape Petounda, Larnaca, Cyprus, anchorage dating from the 3rd to 5th ce AD. At the promontory are the remains of an early Christian baptistery.
- (vii) The tradition of offering votives to numerous saints was a common practice in Christian churches after Emperor Constantine the Great (306 to 337 AD) until the Ottoman conquest of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 AD.
- (viii) This votive offering tradition persisted modestly during the Ottoman occupation of Orthodox Greek territory from 1453 to 1821 AD.
- (ix) Following the Greek revolution of 1821 AD, the practice of pilgrims offering votives to Greek Orthodox saints intensified, and over the last two centuries, it has become widespread in Greek Orthodox Churches throughout Greece. Special mention will be given to the Church of the Annunciation of Virgin Mary on the Cycladic island of Tinos in the Aegean Sea.

1 The Mystery of the Unmatched Parts and Whole Figurines at Keros-Dhaskalio (2750 – 2300 BC)

1.1 The Puzzle of the Keros-Dhaskalio Figurines and the Unmatched (500+) Body Parts

The island of Keros, situated in the Cyclades near Naxos in the Aegean Sea, Greece, is presently uninhabited due to legal restrictions. It was once linked to an islet to the west named Dhaskalio by an 80-meter-long promontory (see Fig. 1). Archaeologists widely acknowledge that during the Early Bronze Age (2750-2300 BC), this site served as the world's earliest maritime sanctuary.

A prominent maritime archaeologist, Professor Whitewright³ (2019) from the University of Southampton, shared with 'The Independent' newspaper: "The Keros-Dhaskalio sanctuary thrived as a significant center for metal production and featured monumental architecture. Notably, there is substantial evidence indicating crucial developments in architecture, particularly the pyramid-shaped

hill at Dhaskalio (see Fig. 2), adorned with white marble sourced from Naxos”.

Professor Whitewright³ calculated that completing the monumental task of covering the hillside of Dhaskalio required approximately 3,500 maritime transfer trips using small wooden ships. These trips were necessary to transport around 10,000 tons of white marble from Naxos, a distance of about six-and-a-half miles. To achieve this, a crew of 24 individuals would have needed to row continuously for 5 hours, covering a total distance of 45,000 miles. Professor Whitewright³ concluded that this constituted the most significant prehistoric maritime expedition.



Figure 1: Keros and Dhaskalio are located at the center of the map. Dhaskalio, a small islet, is situated 80 meters west of Keros. Sketch by Kassidakis.

The pyramid-shaped structure at Dhaskalio, buried for millennia, has been dated back at least 4,600 years, pre-dating the Minoan period. Whitewright³ remarked, "It demonstrates quite clearly just how important, and integral to their culture, seafaring was to these early Bronze Age Aegean people."



Figure 2. The pyramid-shaped islet of Dhaskalio west of Keros

(Source: <https://www.bsa.ac.uk/2019/05/06/evidence-for-advanced-architectural-planning-at-the-early-prehistoric-site-of-dhaskalio-in-the-aegean/>)

Unusual rituals unfolded within the maritime sanctuary of Keros-Dhaskalio. An article titled 'Keros: island of broken figurines' featured in the journal 'Current World Archaeology.' Lord Renfrew⁴ (2011), one of the most renowned excavators of the island, conducted excavations

at the site in 1963, 1987, 2005-2008, and 2015-2018, sheds new light on the mysterious rituals of the Aegean Bronze Age (2750 - 2300 BC). The editor notes that the puzzle he and his colleagues have sought to unravel goes beyond why the island served as a burial site for hundreds of fragments (approximately 500+) of shattered, yet unmatched, marble figurines. The central mystery revolves around why only one piece from each figurine was subsequently taken to Keros for burial, leaving the whereabouts of the remaining parts of the shattered statuettes unknown.

Detailed references for the numerous fragments can be found in the three volumes of the McDonald Institute Monographs⁵ (Mc D.I.M.), spanning from 2016 to 2020. These volumes were authored by 30 leading archaeologists and excavators who conducted extensive research at the site.



Figure 3: According to the author, the unmatched body parts correspond to the healed body parts of pilgrims who sought cures beforehand. The prevalent ailments for women were often related to the areas around the vagina and breasts, while for men, issues centered around the testicles, and for both genders, concerns were frequently related to their feet. Prehistoric individuals sought remedies for various purposes, including the well-being of their vineyards, olive trees, and other cultivations. Additionally, requests were made for the recovery of lost precious jewelry or for protection during perilous seafaring endeavors. A portion of the photograph is taken from the exhibition "See Across," organized by the Ephorate of Antiquities of Cyclades, as depicted in the above

Figure 3.

1.2 The enigma of the Keros-Dhaskalio whole figurines

The discovery includes not only individual human parts but also complete statuettes/figurines within the intricate Keros-Dhaskalio islands. This is substantiated by the notable financial contrast between a costly votive featuring an entire statuette/figurine and a more affordable unmatched offering, such as a 'two feet' marble votive. It becomes evident that individuals of higher wealth place a greater value on their lives compared to those who are less affluent.

Prehistoric Archaeology, Lord C. Renfrew² (1991), pondered the purpose of these splendid products of Cycladic craftsmanship. He mused, "Today we may admire the splendid products of the Cycladic craftsmanship: the fine pots, the metal weapons, the marble vessel (he refers to the Dove Vase), the human figures. But what were they used for?" Renfrew further noted that these questions are ones modern archaeology should be able to answer in terms of function, if not in meaning.

The author posits that the function and meaning of the Keros-Dhaskalio artifacts are as follows: (a) the 'Dove Vase' has been deciphered as an 8-year lunisolar calendar by Pliakos⁶ (2022), and (b) the unmatched body parts and whole statuettes/figurines are offerings to the temple of an unknown/known deity after the successful curing of diseases. This tradition has persisted for eastern Mediterranean peoples from 2750 BC to the present day.

1.3 The Exhibition on Keros Body Parts and Statuettes/Figurines

Numerous unmatched marble figurines were featured in the exhibition "Look Across: A Settlement on Keros 4,500 Years Ago" at the Athens Municipal Gallery in Athens, Greece, which took place on June 1, 2021.

Stefanos Keramidas⁷ (2021), an archaeologist-museologist from the Ephorate of Antiquities of Cyclades, shared insights with the media stating, "Cycladic islanders traveled to Keros to deposit pieces of these fragmented artifacts for rituals. What remains a mystery is the parts of artifacts that did not reach Keros. Did they take them back with them, or did they remain on the traveler's island?" He continued, "Metallurgic equipment, artifacts, ceramics discovered there appear to have come from other Cycladic islands. Also, the food traces indicate that inhabitants had seeds of grapes, olives, figs, cereals, and jewels that came from other places."

The archaeologist is correct in stating that these fragmented artifacts were transported to Keros for rituals, implying that pilgrims fulfilled vows made for their cured ailments. In gratitude, they offered corresponding votives to the healed parts of their bodies: a) women typically presented parts related to the vagina or breast; b) men offered parts around their testicles, and c) both genders presented parts of the foot. The exhibition at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, featuring whole figurines representing women (no. 3078), suggests that these were votive offerings from affluent individuals in the Aegean region. Wealthier individuals could afford to commission more intricate votive offerings and pay sculptors higher fees compared to their less affluent counterparts.

The author's proposed solution to the enigma of the fragmented yet unmatched parts and the whole-body statuettes is that they served as votive offerings from pilgrims to a deity or deities

associated with Keros-Dhaskalio. The religious tradition of presenting votives to a deity is a widespread practice, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean region, as evidenced by eight other documented practices that follow similar traditions.

An excellent reference for findings related to Keros and Dhaskalio Kavos can be found in the book⁸ published in 1987-88.

1.4 A Tentative Solution to the Enigma of the Dhaskalio Unmatched Body Parts and Whole Figurines

The field of new archaeology operates as an interdisciplinary science. Therefore, the author of this article, being a mathematician-statistician, feels a sense of responsibility to provide a tentative solution to the previously mentioned unresolved enigma.

The proposed answer is rooted in the tradition observed by the people residing in the broader Greek and East Mediterranean regions. It was customary for individuals to offer votive artifacts as an expression of gratitude for the fulfillment of a vow, particularly when their illness or misfortune had been cured. These artifacts typically depict either the ailing body parts or the entire cured body, as illustrated in Fig. 3. Additionally, in Volume III of the McDonald Institute Monograph⁵ (2016-2020), various votive artifacts are featured, such as four pieces of heads (Vol. II, p. 610), sixteen pieces of pelvis from folded-arm figurines (Vol. III, p. 119), fourteen legs from folded-arm figurines (Vol. III, p. 135), and numerous other parts. The Keros-Dhaskalio case marks the inaugural instance among the nine dated practices within the votive tradition of the eastern Mediterranean area.

In the subsequent paragraphs, votives from eight various regions of the eastern Mediterranean will be showcased chronologically.

2 The Anchorage at Kouklia-Achni near Paphos, 1600-1400 & 1500-1200 BC

The etymological interpretation of the goddess Aphrodite, who emerged from the sea's foam, is reflected in the Greek name ΑΦΡΟΔΙΤΗ (APHRODITE). In Greek, ΑΦΡΟΣ (APHROS) means foam, and ΔΙΤΗ (< ΔΥΟΜΑΙ) means to emerge from the foam (of the sea), as noted by Plato⁹ (Crat. 406d). A parallel analogy is identified in the name of the continent AFRICA=ΑΦΡΙΚΗ, where ΑΦΡΟΣ means foam, and ΙΚΩ (< ΕΧΩ ΕΛΘΕΙ, I have come up, I emerge) suggests the continent emerged from the sea. Indeed, when something rocky or with a complex surface emerges from the sea, it tends to produce numerous bubbles akin to foam."

While mythology, including Plato's reference in Crat. 406d, and geology acknowledge the emergence of Aphrodite and Africa from the sea, linguistic interpretations without empirical understanding often

dismiss these explanations as para-etymologies. However, empirical observations suggest that if something, like a piece of rock, emerges from the sea, it will generate thousands of small bubbles, resembling foam.

At the seashore of the village Koukليا-Achni near Paphos, Cyprus, a concentration of anchors was initially observed at the seabed, first by local divers and later confirmed by scientists specializing in underwater archaeology. Through extensive diving efforts, archaeologists identified a total of 120 anchors, varying in size from 30 cm to over a meter in length.

The pioneering work on stone anchors in the Eastern Mediterranean was conducted primarily by Honor Frost^{10a-10e}, who published thirteen papers on the subject from 1963a to 1995. Additionally, Dan McCaslin^{11a,11b} contributed to this field with two papers in 1977 and 1980. Frost and McCaslin classified the anchors into two types: three-holed and one-holed anchors. It is well-established through iconography and shipwreck archaeology that ancient vessels typically carried multiple anchors of each type. For example, the Uluburun shipwreck, which sank in the 14th century BC, was found to have 24 stone anchors of both types, as documented by Steffy¹² in 1994.

2.1 The Significance of the Accumulation of 120 Stone Anchors

Archaeologists have engaged in numerous discussions on this matter. Despite the challenging location of Koukليا-Achni concerning prevailing winds and currents, some archaeologists, including Honor Frost¹³ (1995), have suggested that "seamanship and local knowledge compensate for navigational difficulties." Frost further notes that "the conspicuous absence of harbor facilities therefore does not necessarily preclude Koukليا-Achni as an important maritime terminus in the Bronze Age."

However, the second thesis contradicts the first. The author of this article disagrees, asserting that no captain likely used the Koukليا-Achni location as a safe harbor, at least from the Late Bronze Age through the Early Iron Age.

The paper titled "The Anchorage Site at Koukليا-Achni, Southwest Cyprus: Problems and Perspectives" by Howitt-Marshall^{14a} (2020,2012) thoroughly explores the subject. In summary, he states, "As problematic as stone anchors are to date and provenance, there are a number of examples found on the seabed that are consistent with shapes, sizes, and types located in abundance elsewhere in Cyprus and the eastern Mediterranean. Several anchors are

identical to types located in temple complexes at Byblos and Ugarit from the 14th and 13th centuries BC (McCaslin^{11b} 1980). Other examples are consistent with Cypriot anchors recorded in the 1960s and 1970s by Honor Frost and Dan McCaslin from Capes Kiti, Pyla, and Greco, as well as Enkomi, Kition, and Hala Sultan Tekke (Frost^{10a} 1963a, ^{10b} 1963b, ^{10c} 1970, ^{10d} 1973; ^{10e} 1985), and (McCaslin^{11a} 1977; ^{11b} 1980). Perhaps most importantly, the anchors span a time period from at least the Late Bronze Age through the Early Iron Age."

Howitt-Marshall^{14b} (2012) proposes two scenarios in his article "The Anchorage Site at Kouklia-Achni, Southwest Cyprus: Problems and Perspectives." He rejects the idea of accidental deposition of anchors and instead supports the notion of a ritual or deliberate deposition of the 120 anchors. He suggests, "Ships' crews, grateful for safe passage from their point of origin, may have deliberately cut the hawser line to deposit an anchor - a tribute to the Goddess Aphrodite -, her birthplace and the Sanctuary nearby." The author contends that such actions were likely carried out at the conclusion of successful voyages of a ship as a result of a prior vow.

The concentration of anchors offshore prevents the establishment of a secure harbor due to constant westerly and north-westerly winds throughout the year. Another plausible explanation for the presence of 120 anchors off Kouklia-Achni is their intentional deposition. This deliberate act is associated with specific rituals related to the worship of Goddess Aphrodite/Venus, who was the guardian of love, beauty, desire, sex, fertility, prosperity, victory, and the sailors as the result of safe navigation of ships.

In close proximity to Kouklia-Achni, there existed a sanctuary dedicated to the goddess. The author suggests that when captains or ship proprietors from the nearby region launched a ship, they would make a vow to the local goddess Aphrodite. This vow entailed dedicating one or more of the ship's anchors to the goddess upon the successful completion of its maritime endeavors, symbolizing a gesture of gratitude and fulfillment of their commitment.

In Greek mythology, Aphrodite is revered as the goddess of love, desire, beauty, sexuality, pleasure, and procreation. Furthermore, Pausanias¹⁶ 9.16.3 notes: "In Thebes, there exist three ancient wooden images of Aphrodite, believed to be votive offerings from Harmonia. According to the tale, these statues were crafted from the wooden figureheads of Kadmos' ships." This passage implies that Aphrodite was also regarded as a protector of maritime endeavors.

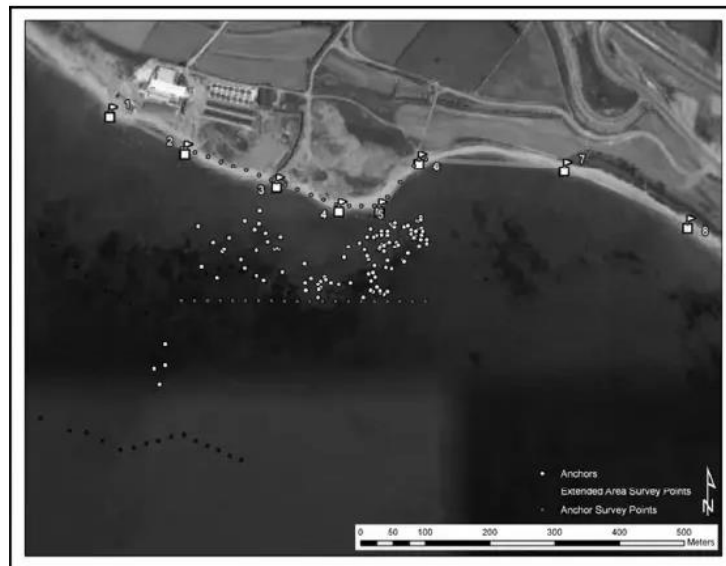


Figure 4. It displays a satellite image capturing the anchorage site at Kouklia-Achni, showcasing the distinct individual stone anchors. The image is credited to J. Leidwanger and D. Howitt-Marshall.

The papers by a) Hohlfelder^{15a} (1992), Hohlfelder^{15b} (1995), Hohlfelder^{15c}, and Leonard (1993), b) Leonard¹⁶, and Hohlfelder (1993), and c) Sawicky¹⁷ (2007), provide extensive documented arguments on the subject.

The chronology (1600 - 1400 BC) represents the second among the nine dated devotional practices within the tradition of the eastern Mediterranean region.

3 Votive offerings unearthed in Delos trace their origins to the pre-Trojan War era, dating back to approximately 1230 BC

The name "Delos" has a fascinating etymological origin. In Greek, the verb is ΔΗ-ΛΟ-Ω (DE-LO-O), meaning "to make manifest, to be clear or plain." The island of Delos was originally submerged under the Aegean Sea. According to mythology, Poseidon brought the island to the surface to conceal a scandal involving his brother Zeus and Niobe, who was pregnant with Artemis and Apollo. Upon learning of the scandal, Hera, Zeus' wife, directed a watchdog to prevent Niobe from giving birth on any established land. Consequently, Poseidon, aware of the prohibition, raised Delos from the sea. This miraculous act allowed Niobe to give birth to the twins, the goddess Artemis, and the god Apollo, in a previously nonexistent territory.

Due to this extraordinary genesis, Delos was designated as a sacred island. It is located 80 kilometers N. NW of Keros, as mentioned in works by Homer^{18a} (Hymn to Apollo),

Hyginus¹⁹ (Myth 140), and Thucydides²⁰ (Γ 104). The worship of Artemis, Apollo, Niobe, Hera, and Asclepius is dated to the pre-Trojan War era, as indicated by Homer²¹ in the *Odyssey*, Delos (6.162-165).

The French School at Athens has conducted excavations on Delos since 1873, and their findings reveal intriguing details about the island's history. During the Mycenaean period (approximately 1750-1100 BC), the presence of humans on Delos is evidenced by Mycenaean pottery discovered in various locations within the sanctuary. While indications suggest a substantial community with cult sites during this time, much remains uncertain about them, as noted by the French School at Athens.

In the Delos Museum, there is an exhibition featuring a fully equipped Mycenaean soldier dated to 1400-1200 BC, Homer^{18c}, Il. K 260-265, providing additional insights into the island's early history. Moving forward to the protogeometric and geometric periods (10th-8th century BC), Delos experienced depopulation and significant impoverishment, aligning with general trends across Greece during the Dark Ages.

However, a positive shift occurred during the Geometric era, particularly in the Late Geometric period, where Delos witnessed a remarkable increase in population. This growth is notably evident south of the sanctuary of Apollo, marked by the abundance of Late Geometric pottery. Additionally, in the latter half of the eighth century, a notable surge is observed with the appearance of costly bronze offerings.



Figure 5: The small island of Delos, situated southwest of Mykonos, is renowned as the birthplace of the twin deities Artemis and Apollo. A sanctuary was established on the island prior to the Trojan War (circa 1230 BC). Notably, temples dedicated to Niobe, Hera, and Asclepius were discovered, beneath which lay inscribed votive vases dating from the 7th to 5th centuries BCE.

In Book 6 of the *Odyssey*²¹ (lines 162-165), Delos is mentioned by Odysseus as he compares Nausicaa's slender figure to a palm tree he observed there, as per information provided by the *Ecole Francaise d' Athenes*.

In the votive offerings at the sanctuary of Apollo in Delos, artifacts dedicated to Artemis, Hera, and later to Asclepius have been unearthed. Among them is a notable votive dedicated to Asclepius, represented by a marble block. On its right side, a woman's left foot is delicately curved, and on the left side, an inscription reads: “ΑΣΚΛΗΠΙΩ ΚΑΙ ΥΓΕΙΑ ΤΥΧΗ ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ” - translated as “A woman named TYCHE (Luck) expressing gratitude to Asclepius and his daughter Health (presumably because they healed her left foot).” This votive is housed in the British Museum."

Nicandra, a prominent figure from the Naxian family, gained distinction in the mid-7th century BCE. She dedicated a statue of Artemis in the sanctuary that honored Artemis, Apollo, Hera, and Asclepius. The statue, identified as number 1 and currently on display in Room 7, along with potentially related votive offerings such as those of a harpist (number 3908) and a flutist (number 3910), are exhibited at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens.

In a succinct observation by Cl. Prêtre²² (2011), she notes, "The inventories of Delos serve as an ideal foundation for the study of votive offerings. Each year, worshippers from the Greek world and beyond visited Delos to present gifts to the numerous deities revered on the island. Apart from the local residents of Delos, the majority of contributors hailed from the nearby Cyclades islands, including Naxos and Paros.

Nearly one-third of the individuals from Paros mentioned were donors who visited the sacred island to pray or make offerings. The majority of Parian contributors presented a vase, specifically a *ποτήριον*, with their name engraved on it. This type of vessel, much like the phial, emerged as the most prevalent form of offering.

Donors visiting Delos didn't limit themselves to offering solely dedicated or extravagant items. The act of devotion extended to objects that had been previously used or even damaged, imbuing them with a certain sentimental value. Consequently, it was not uncommon to find entries in the catalogs detailing items such as a meat hook (possibly donated by a butcher), a cattail (indicating a possible cat-lover), or a chisel (suggesting a donor with a

background in sculpture). Noteworthy is the depiction in vol. I, p. 649, Fig. 31.8, Mc Donald Institute Monographs⁵, featuring a clay impression of a vine leaf (DV1, DV4). This may signify a farmer dedicating the vine leaf to the deities in gratitude for a cure, as his vineyard faced a threat from a plant disease. This emphasizes that votive offerings were not solely connected to health concerns but also extended to matters related to wealth and the safety of voyages, as evidenced by the discovery of anchors in the Kouklia-Achni seabed site."

Antigonus Gonatas, born 320 BC and son of Demetrius Poliorcetes (337–283 BC), made several dedications on Delos between 260 and 250 BC.

Delos' chronology, spanning from around 1400 BC to the 1st century BC, ranks as the third among the nine dated devotional practices in the eastern Mediterranean region.

4 Instances of Asclepieia: (a) Epidaurus and (b) Corinth

Mythologically, Asclepius was the son of the god Apollo, who served as the overseer of the Gods. Interestingly, a para-etymological interpretation of the name APOLLO (ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝ in Greek), according to author, suggests someone who eradicates (from the verb ΑΠΟΛΛΥΜΙ) every disease, ΑΠΟΛΛΥΕΙ, implying that Apollo possesses the ability to cure all ailments.

There is a suggestion that the cult of Apollo persisted into the fifth century AD, and even into the fourth, indicated by figurines depicting nude standing males and females, as well as a male figure holding a lyre and patera. The fragmentary votive foot and knee could potentially be seen as evidence for the existence of a cult of Asclepius in the early fifth century BC, given the popularity of such offerings to him at a later date. However, they could just as well have been offered to Apollo in his role as a healing deity.

The renowned Asklepiion of Epidaurus stood out as the most famous among its counterparts. Its reputation reached across the Mediterranean, leading to the establishment of over 200 Asclepieia. These centers aimed to foster the worship of the healing god and the advancement of medical science. They were located in various regions, including Attica, Peloponnesus, western Greece, the Aegean islands, Crete, Minor Asia up to Cilicia, Rome, and even Cyrene in Africa.

Within Asclepieia, worship was dedicated not only to Apollo Asclepius but also to Asclepius and his mythological offspring, including Hygeia, Panacea, Telesforos, Iaso, as well as his physical children Maxaon and Podaleirios, both of whom participated in the Trojan War (as

referenced in Homer's Iliad²³, B 731, D 200, L 505, and others). It's interesting to note those details are supported by research conducted by Papamarinopoulos^{24a} et als, (2012) and Papamarinopoulos^{24b} et als, (2014), which places the Trojan War in the timeframe between 1227-1218 BC, aligning with archaeological estimations -last third of the 13th ce. BC. This provides additional scholarly backing to the historical and chronological context of the votives, anchorages, and traditions discussed in the eastern Mediterranean region.

The worship of Asclepius, focused on curing diseases and mishaps, began around 600 BC, and spread to over 200 sites across the ancient world. The establishment of Asclepieia played a pivotal role in human history, as these temples marked the first instances where the divine (ΘΕΟΥΡΓΙΚΕΣ) insights into diseases guided the human mind towards scientific diagnosis and treatment.

Archaeologists, exploring ancient Greek healing shrines, have unearthed numerous anatomical votive reliefs crafted from materials such as marble, wood, stone, or terracotta. These votives, dedicated by thankful patients, typically depicted the healed body part, as documented by Oberhelman²⁵ (2019).

4.1 The diverse offerings found at the Temple of Asclepius in Epidaurus

It's noteworthy that the term "Epidaurus" in Greek is a compound noun formed by "epid-" (derived from the Greek verb ΕΠΙΔΡΩ= to ACT) and "-aurus" (derived from the Greek word ΑΥΡΑ=referring to the luminous body that surrounds a physical body). Consequently, Epidaurus is a place where Apollo or Asclepius heal a diseased part of a body for which vows were made. For example, Fig. 6 depicts a cured blind child, Fig. 7 showcases a collection of statuettes from the Hellenistic and Roman periods discovered during excavations at the



Figure 6 depicts a votive offering representing a cured blind girl from the 4th century BC. The photographs (6, 7, 8, 9a, 9b, 10, and 12) were captured by the author in 2023.

Sanctuary of Asclepios, and Fig. 8 displays a group of unspecified votive offerings, illustrating the diverse sculptures that once adorned the Sanctuary. Discoveries at the site, such as double-axes, swords, stone rhyta, seal stones, statuettes (see Fig. 6, 7, 8, 9a, 9b), indicate the significance of the Epidaurus sanctuary, which extended beyond local boundaries.

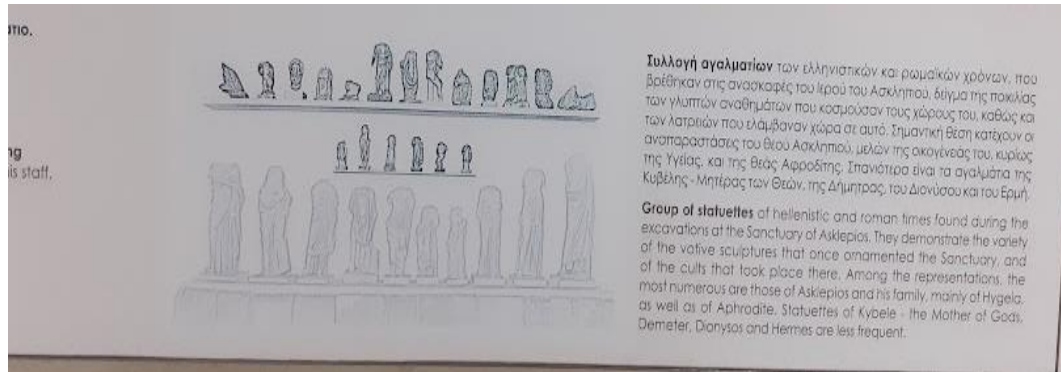


Figure 7 showcases a group of statuettes from the Hellenistic and Roman periods discovered during excavations at the Sanctuary of Asclepios. These statuettes exemplify the diverse range of votive sculptures that once adorned the Sanctuary. The most prevalent among them are representations of Asclepios and his daughter Hygeia.



Figure 8 features a collection of unspecified votive offerings located at the entrance of the Epidaurus Museum.



9a



9b

Figure 9a depicts an individual with hearing difficulties who has been cured.

Figure 9b illustrates a documented cure.

Many votive offerings to Asclepios of Epidaurus, including bas-reliefs and statues, are

displayed in Room 22 of the National Archaeological Museum of Athens. Among them is a depiction of a votive dedicated by a Cutius from Gaul, expressing gratitude for the restoration of his hearing, as shown in Figure 9a. The early votive offerings from Epidaurus were both pictorial, as seen in Figure 9a, and presented through written stories depicted in stone, as shown in Figure 9b. These narratives were expressed in various materials such as terracotta and wood, as elaborated by Dillon²⁶ in 1994. The accompanying photographs were captured by the author in 2023.

The interactions of supplicants with Asclepius at the Epidaurian sanctuary are documented in existing inscriptions. Four stelae, dating back to the fourth century CE, preserve 70 stories of individuals who experienced healing or assistance at the sanctuary, as detailed by Oberhelman²⁵ in 2019.

4.2 The numerous offerings discovered at the Temple of Asclepius in Corinth, dating back to the 6th century BC

A krater dedicated to Apollo, along with the accompanying pottery found, provided reassurance that the earliest(?) known use of the sanctuary was around the middle of the 6th century BC, specifically around 550 BC. Numerous votive offerings were made to Asclepius, as indicated by inscriptions on the vases. Additionally, some of these objects predate the middle of the 6th century BC.

At the sanctuary of Asclepius in the city of Corinth, a multitude of votive offerings depict various appendages and limbs, including hands, feet, arms, and legs. For instance, there are 145 depictions of hands alone (Figure 10). Given that many supplicants visiting the Corinth sanctuary likely had an agricultural and rural lifestyle involving extensive walking, fieldwork, and the use of equipment and farming tools, these votives may elucidate the prevalence of offerings related to feet (such as ankle sprains and foot injuries) and hands (including injuries, wounds, and bites).

Moreover, the abundance of votives representing male genitalia at the Corinth sanctuary might be associated with the city's extensive sex trade, as discussed by Oberhelman²⁵ in 2019. The chronology of dedicatory offerings at the Asclepieia spans from the 6th century BC to the times of Emperor Theodosian, specifically between 379 and 395 AD.



Figure 10. . It shows offerings from the sanctuary of Asclepius in Corinth, which largely correspond to those found in Keros. The items include a) small and large items; b) a complete female body; c) a left foot, corresponding to the one from Delos (held at the British Museum); d) two feet; e) a right hand; f) a horse, symbolizing a votive related to the animal stock. The photographs were taken by the author in 2022.

This represents the fourth among the nine dated dedicatory practices observed in the eastern Mediterranean region.

5 The tradition of offering votives in proto-Christian churches began in the 1st century AD and continued onward.

The practice of making a vow for a cure and subsequently offering a votive to Christ, the Virgin Mary, or another saint persisted in the proto-Christian era from the 1st to the 4th century AD. Numerous examples of such offerings, often in the form of metallic representations or icons of saints, have been documented in churches across the Holy Land. Simple candles, serving as symbols of Christ who proclaimed, "I am the true light," were commonly used in these votive practices.

The chronological period of devotional offerings in early Christianity, spanning from the 1st to the 4th century AD, constitutes the fifth among the nine dated devotional practices observed in the region around the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

6 The anchorage at Petounda, near Larnaca, Cyprus, dates back to the 3rd to 5th centuries AD.

The site of Petounda is located in the district of Mazotos, Larnaca. Cape Petounda has been converted into a small harbor, formed by an 80-meter promontory. At the edge of the promontory, the remains of an early Christian Baptistery* can be found. This site is remarkable as it is the only one of its kind in the area with official archaeological activity, as documented by Georgiou²⁷ in 2013. In addition, an underwater survey conducted outside the small harbor revealed the presence of 45 anchors.

The proximity of an early Christian Baptistery* (3rd - 5th century AD) to the discovery of 45 anchors hidden on the seabed led the author to propose a hypothesis. He suggests that these anchors may have been offerings to the baptistery by captains or ship owners, considering anchors as among the most valuable possessions related to their ships. Archaeologists have identified 22 small harbors in Cyprus associated with offering practices. These findings support the author's theory that anchors deposited in the seabed near a holy place might result from vows made by entrepreneurs for the successful retirement of their ships. In total, approximately 396 stone anchors have been documented around Cyprus, according to Papakosta²⁸ in 2017. This suggests that the ancient tradition, observed in places like Koukليا-Achni, of offering the anchor of a retired ship as a fulfilled vow to a sacred institution, may have endured through the ages in Cyprus.

*The baptistery is the section of a church or a separate, protected space where baptisms were conducted.

The chronological period of devotional offerings, such as anchors at Petounda, to a sacred institution, the Baptistery, endured in Cyprus during Roman times from the 3rd to the 5th century AD. This marks the sixth among the nine dated devotional practices identified in the eastern Mediterranean area.

7 The tradition of votive offerings (TAMATA) continued throughout the Byzantine times, spanning from the 4th to the 15th century AD

During the 4th to the 15th century AD, pagan temples and healing centers underwent a transformation into Christian churches and sanctuaries. An illustrative example is the Church of the Saints Cosmas and Damian, dating back to the 3rd century AD. These saints, originally qualified doctors in Syria, performed miraculous cures in the name of Jesus Christ without charge. Their icon in Constantinople attracted numerous offerings. The Emperor Justinian the Great (482-565) experienced healing in this church through a dream, reminiscent of the curative practices associated with Asclepius, referred to as 'THEOURGIA', 'ΘΕΟΥΡΓΙΑ' in Greek.

Saints Cyrus and John, both qualified doctors, carried out their healing practices in the name of Jesus Christ. Initially practicing medicine in Egypt and later in Constantinople (Istanbul). They exemplify a broader trend where numerous Christian saints, regardless of medical qualifications, performed healings in the name of Jesus Christ. This phenomenon extended to various regions, including western Turkey, Syria, and numerous holy Byzantine churches, as noted by Talbot²⁹ in 2002.

During Byzantine times, votive offerings took various forms, representing different parts of the body such as heads, eyes, legs, and entire bodies. Additionally, hanging candles were common, and offerings extended to include devotees' precious objects like small silver or golden ships, vineyard leaves, jewelry, and more.

The chronological period of devotional offerings, spanning from the 4th to the 15th century AD, constitutes the seventh in a sequence of nine dated devotional practices identified in the eastern Mediterranean area.

8. The Fourth Crusade spanned from 1204 to 1268, and it involved the crusaders who participated in this particular campaign.

The crusaders of the Fourth Crusade in 1204 invaded and looted Constantinople, pillaging numerous precious votive offerings from Byzantine holy places, including churches, monasteries, and shrines. These items were taken to Western European countries by the Crusaders. The decline of the Byzantine Empire continued, culminating in its conquest by the Ottomans in 1453 AD. The Glorious Greek Orthodox churches suffered setbacks as they endured Ottoman rule. Consequently, from 1453 through the mid - 1830s, the votive offerings in Greek Orthodox churches were limited to a few candles and waxes due to the challenging circumstances imposed by Ottoman slavery.

The period from the 15th to the 19th century AD is often referred to as the "Dark Ages of Balkan Christianity." The tradition of offering humble and limited gifts persisted during the Ottoman occupation. This marks the eighth consecutive practice among the nine dated devotional practices in the eastern Mediterranean area.

9 The Greek revolution against Ottoman rule commenced in 1821 and continued until 1830, culminating in the Treaty of London in that year.

The Greek revolution against Ottoman occupation and slavery began in 1821 and extended until 1923, concluding with the Treaty of Lausanne in that year. Remarkably, around the same time as the start of the Greek revolution in 1821, the icon of Panagia Megalochari (Virgin Mary) was discovered in 1823 on the Cycladic island of Tinos, approximately 20 km north-northwest of Keros. The simultaneous occurrence of these two significant events was considered akin to a miracle.

Following the initial establishment of the Church of Annunciation in Tinos, numerous offerings depicting parts of a body corresponding to "the unmatched parts of the Keros-Dhaskalio artifacts" were gradually devoted to the Virgin Mary. These parts and precious objects were crafted from silver or gold, often in the form of small 2D icons (Fig. 12).

The church was built over an early Byzantine basilica dedicated to John the Baptist, which had been destroyed by fire in 1200. In 1823, during the construction of the Church of Panagia



Figure 11 depicts the Holy Icon of Virgin Mary surrounded by numerous votive offerings. This image is sourced from the complimentary booklet "Panagia Megalochari," published in 1985.

Megalochari, numerous precious objects were unearthed, including marble stelae, sacred items, votives, and more. Parts of the ruins used in the construction originated from a pagan shrine dedicated to the deities Apollo, Artemis, Niobe, Hera, and Asclepios, sourced from the island of Delos, as documented by Dubisch³⁰ and Dubisch³¹.

Vows made to the sanctuary of Panagia Megalochari³² and their subsequent fulfillment led to the dedication of numerous votive offerings, ranging from body parts to precious objects made of zinc, silver, or gold, depending on the donor's wealth. An example is a marble fountain offering from Mustafa Aga, a Turkish official, dated to 1845, which provides insight into the reason for the dedication. Another distinctive silver votive is associated with the miraculous saving of a ship, with the noteworthy detail that its breach on the bottom was sealed with a large fish!

Both photos, as depicted in Figures 11 and 11a, are referenced from the complimentary booklet Panagia Megalochari³² distributed in 1985.



Figure 11a. A snapshot from the Litany of the icon of Panagia Megalochari.



Figure 12. Votives from St. Lucas, the surgeon, 1887-1961, Nauplion, Mycenae, 2023.

Over the past two centuries and continuing into the present day, the tradition of offering votives has endured in Orthodox Churches worldwide, as depicted in Figures 11, 11a, and 12.

This marks the ninth consecutive practice among the nine dated devotional practices in the eastern Mediterranean area.

CONCLUSIONS

In short:

1. The mystery surrounding the unmatched parts or whole artifacts of human bodies has been unraveled, revealing that these were offerings made by a cured person to a deity on the island of Keros-Dhaskalio.
2. The puzzle regarding the use of the Keros Disk has been solved; it served as an eight-year lunisolar calendar, *ELECTRYONE* (2022), Vol. 8, Issue 2,16-31.
3. The enigma of the 396 anchors on the sea beds around the harbors of Cyprus, Byblos, and Ugarit has been addressed; these anchors are likely offerings e.g. to Paphian Aphrodite/Venus, seeking success and protection for the voyages and life of a ship.
4. Pilgrims make vows to heal specific parts of their bodies or seek prosperity, and after a successful recovery, they fulfill their vows by offering an icon representing the healed part or wealth. This tradition has persisted for approximately 4750 years.

In details:

The unmatched parts (2750-2300 BC) of Keros-Dhaskalio in the Cycladic islands were not

components of intact bodies; rather, they were the outcome of vows made by pilgrims seeking healing for specific parts of their bodies. In cases where the ailment affected their entire bodies and their financial means allowed, the healed pilgrims made offerings in the form of figurines. These figurines are displayed in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, numbered 1, 2468, 3908, 3910, 3978, and 6174.

The Kouklia (Palaepaphos) - Achni anchorage, dating back to 1600-1400 BC, with the discovery of 120 anchors on the seabed, is not an unresolved mystery. It is likely associated with a vow made during the launch of a new ship, seeking the successful and enduring navigation of the vessel throughout its long life at sea. This hypothesis gains support from the proximity of the anchorage to the temple of Paphian Aphrodite, the goddess known for her role as a provider of success in sea ventures.

The numerous votive offerings discovered in Delos, alongside Mycenaean pottery dating from 1700 to 1100 BC, provide evidence for the existence of a prehistoric temple dedicated to deities such as Artemis, Apollo, Niobe, Hera, and Asclepius. According to documentation from the French School at Athens, this temple was active from 1400 BC to the 1st century BC.

Certainly, the numerous votive offerings from the Asclepieia of Epidaurus and Corinth are indicative and self-explanatory. These objects and dedications reflect the rich history of devotion and worship associated with these ancient healing sanctuaries, particularly dedicated to Asclepius in Epidaurus and the broader religious practices in Corinth.

Indeed, the tradition of offering votives for cures persisted in proto-Christian churches in the Holy Land from the 1st century AD onwards. This reflects the continuity of devotional practices, where individuals sought healing and expressed gratitude through the dedication of votive offerings within the context of proto-Christian religious settings.

The discovery of 45 stone anchors/votives on the seabed at Cape Petounda in Larnaca, Cyprus, representing an anchorage dating back to the 3rd to 5th centuries AD (the Roman period), suggests a continuation of the prehistoric tradition observed in the Kouklia - Achni anchorage. This maritime tradition is further evidenced by a total of 396 anchorages identified around Cyprus, with notable examples including Agios Philon (31 anchorages), Agios Photios (21), Cape Andreas (43), Cape Kition (26), and Maroni Tsaroukkas (35), as documented by Howitt-Marshall in 2020 (table 1).

The tradition of offering votives for the healed part of a Christian believer to various Christian saints was indeed a common practice in Christian churches from the 4th century, coinciding with the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337), until the Ottoman conquest of the Eastern Roman Empire in 1453. During this period, individuals would express gratitude for healing or seek divine intervention through the dedication of votive offerings in Christian religious settings.

During the Ottoman occupation of the Balkan Orthodox territory from the 15th to the 19th centuries, the tradition of offering votives experienced a decline and was relatively limited. However, it continued to some extent during this period. Votives were scarce in the Orthodox Greek territory from 1453 to the Greek revolution in 1821 and persisted until the liberation outlined in the London Protocol of 1830. The challenging circumstances under Ottoman rule likely contributed to the reduced frequency of votive offerings during this time.

Following their liberation, Greeks had the means to fulfill vows, especially if their prayers were answered in a free country. Consequently, Greek Orthodox Churches across Greece are abundant with votive offerings. This is evident in places such as Panagia Megalochari and Saint Lucas the surgeon, as depicted in Figures 11 and 12. The practice of offering votives continued and flourished in the post-liberation era, reflecting the gratitude and devotion of the faithful.

The conclusion drawn is that the unmatched or whole parts from Keros, the ancient anchorages in Kouklia-Achni (Palaepaphos) and Petounda (Larnaca), as well as the corresponding Christian votives, collectively form a series indicative of a tradition likely initiated around 2750 BC and continuing up to the present day. This practice has persisted across different periods and contexts in the eastern Mediterranean, serving as a testament to the enduring significance of this tradition in the region's rich cultural and religious history for 4,750 years.

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