

## **Worshipping and Stones on the Cycladic Islands**

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Until recent times, studies of Greek art and archaeology were dominated by an evolutionary approach that considered aniconic worship and, in particular, the worship of stones, as a primitive manifestation of the early stages of Greek culture. New studies, however, have changed our perception of stones in Greek religion and art by showing that rocks were the focus of attention in cult practice in all periods of Greek history, and that their veneration occurred side by side with the worship of the gods represented in traditional, including classical, works of art. This paper examines the importance of rocks to Greek cults by looking at two important examples from the Cyclades: the sanctuary of Phrerio, and the cult of Zeus. I first examine the sanctuary of Phrerio on Naxos, which was active from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC until late antiquity. I show that several of the buildings erected at the sanctuary in various periods had the huge stone at the site incorporated into their architecture. The rough surface of the stone was not altered or reworked at any time, which offers clear indication of its sacred significance. In the second part of my paper I deal with the cult of Zeus, which was practiced on several Cycladic islands between the Archaic and Roman era. Here I demonstrate that the god rarely received a temple or a cult statue. The worship of Zeus took place either in caves or by inscribing his name on rocks, which became places for veneration and the practice of other rituals. The rocks themselves seem to have been the elements that established contact between Zeus and his worshippers. These two examples of rocks incorporated into Cycladic cults reveal the importance of rocks in Greek cult practices.