REPORT ON STONE TOOLS AT KOMMOS 1991

Helène Whittaker, August, 1991

All the stone objects collected in the course of the 1991 excavations at Kommos have been looked at and either catalogued, kept but not catalogued, or discarded. Two catalogued items have been left on site (S2131 Spout, S2136 Stamnostatis). The remainder have been stored in Apothiki 4. All the catalogued objects have been photographed.

Thirty-three objects have been catalogued as stone tools (S2127, S2129-S2136, S2140-S2142, S2146, S2147; S2151-S2157, S2160, S2163-S2167, S2169, S2174). Most of the catalogued objects have come from Trench 73A; Trench 74A also produced a certain number of stone tools. The stone tools recovered have been related to Harriet Blitzer's typology based on the stone tools found in previous years of excavation at Kommos. The stone implements found this season include tools used in domestic industry such as mortars, querns, grinding-stones, whetstones, as well as weights, possibly used for fishing.

Of particular interest is a (LMIIBA2) floor deposit from X4 consisting of several grinding stones, a weight, and a whetstone (S2151, S2152, S2153, S2154, S2155, S2156, S2157 73A/8:63A, 7:62). From a higher floor (LMIIBA2) of the same room were found a quern with a grinding stone (S2146, S2147 73A/7:60). A LMIIBA1 floor deposit from X5 consisted of a particularly fine mortar made of green and red sandstone, a grinding stone, and a weight.
(S3167, S2169, S2170 73B/8:106, 108).

Also worth noting is a tripod mortar of grey volcanic stone, trachyte, (S2127 73A/5:45); this is a type of mortar found elsewhere on Crete as well as on Thera, Cyprus, and in Syria/Palestine, and it has been suggested that the Cretan examples were imported from the Levant (MSV, 115-117: Thera II, 48). Since nearly all of these mortars are made of trachyte, a central place of manufacture for these seems logical. Two examples found at Hagia Triada and Palaikastro made of serpentine and limestone respectively could be local imitations of an imported type.

Of great interest is the find of a drill wedge made of serpentine (S2173 74B/10:74A), a tool used in the production of stone vases (MSV, 159, fig. 5). A similar stone has been found in the earlier excavations (S1695 59A/2:16). There is therefore some indication that stone vases were manufactured at Kommos. A further indication that this may have been the case, is provided by the fact that a certain number of stone tools at Kommos are made of serpentine. Since there does not seem to be any deposits of serpentine within reasonable vicinity of the site (according to MSV, 139, fig. 3, and John Gifford's manuscript, the closest source of serpentine is in the mountains to the North and South of the Mesara), the use of serpentine for common types of stone tools is unexpected; it could however be explained as residue material left over from stone vase production being taken into use for tools. Although toolmarks are visible on some
examples, no unfinished stone vessels have been recovered at Kommos. Unfinished vessels are, however, on the whole rare, also of sites where the manufacture of stone vases has been certainly established.

The material which has been discarded consists of objects which either have been rejected as tools, or although tools conform to a particular type in Harriet Blitzen's typology, exhibit no peculiarities, and do not come from contexts which suggest they might have a wider significance. In each case, the location has been recorded along with a short description.

In some cases, objects have been kept but not catalogued. All obsidian, chert, and pumice has been kept (this last, unless worked and therefore classified as a tool, will not be dealt with by me). Other objects have been kept because their identification as a tool is uncertain and they need to be looked at again.

The stone tools from the Southern area which were accessioned but not catalogued in 1987 have been dealt with as far as possible; that is to say, they have been catalogued and the information has been entered into the Kommos Database. A large number of these tools, however, were not located, a situation which continues to mystify.
APOTHEKE REPORT, 1991
Niki Holmes
The summer of 1991 marked resumption of active excavation at K鳳mos after a hiatus set aside for study and the preparation of publications. From the cataloguers' perspective the season's activity was divided into an attempt to close the gap on unfinished business of the past, and the processing of artifacts from this year's trenches. While considerable progress was made towards accomplishing the former objective (the success of which is dramatized by a comparative glance at the reports of former years), it was not possible completely to reintegrate, for example, the special collections set aside by the pottery and stone tool specialists of the past or to complete cataloguing of all the items accessioned in former years and not processed further. The attached charts will make clear the status of this catch-up effort. On the other hand, all objects accessioned from the present summer's excavations were catalogued and sent as far along the complete recording process as possible, before the end of the season forced them to a halt. This was true despite a record number of finds (437 objects catalogued from this year alone), and it convinces me that a backlog of "not yet catalogued" items is wholly unnecessary. We were fortunate to have a congenial and cooperative group of people working at the apotheke this summer, and I daresay our relative efficiency is a function of that fact.

The cataloguing and storage system inherited by the 1991 cataloguing team was not perfect; and I think that, while it is still far from that ideal state, some practical improvements have been made, based on the suggestions of both pottery experts and cataloguers:

1. Regarding storage of torpedo bags and even of catalogued objects, there has been dangerous negligence in past years (not, I understand, as the result of any defect on the part of the cataloguers). Unlabelled sherds have been overstuffed into a single plastic bag prone to split with age; the bag has been left wholly open or sometimes secured only with a rusting paper clip. Often the only identification of objects has been illegible scribbled or dissolving flow-pen letters on the bag itself. Since an artifact whose context is unknown is virtually useless as data, it seems the proper storage and labelling of objects is one of the top priorities of the cataloguing department. Towards this end the following improvements were implemented: A heavier gauge of plastic bag was used for storage, with all sherds from catalogued items labelled, and the sherds of a multiple-findspot object additionally were separately bagged by pail, so that most objects of any size were double bagged. All bags, interior and exterior, were closed with soft coated telephone wire to avoid ripping the plastic. Each bag was given an internal cardstock tag, identifying it thoroughly for easy recognition. (It will be important for the future, however, that all pottery specialists understand the importance of labelling in a readable hand.) For better legibility without obtrusiveness in photography, a finer rapidograph point and more
discreet location were employed in shard labelling.

2. In order to keep track of the location of objects and their cards during the cataloguing process, which began automatically as soon as an artifact was accessioned, a series of "whereabouts" boxes were set up in a prominent place. Here the catalogue card of a given object would pass through boxes labelled "photography," "drawing," "copy for Toronto," etc., enabling anyone to know immediately where an item was until it reached its final trench box. It must be admitted that to some extent this system was vitiated by human carelessness when cards were not moved from box to box or when whole stacks were unthinkingly put in the wrong place. While this system may eventually show itself to be an unnecessary complication, we cannot say we have given the idea a fair try until it becomes more familiar and such errors become less chronic.

3. The last of the cardboard trench boxes were replaced by sturdy wooden ones, reducing the danger of spillage and loss.

4. The plastic boxes used for storing bronze objects were labelled with the catalogue numbers of all pieces stored in each of them respectively, and the silica gel packets were refurbished. The same identification of contents, long employed on ceramics trench boxes, should be extended to other types of objects such as vats/slabs and stone tools, which are presently very time-consuming to locate.

5. The "lost objects/lost cards" list was reduced. It seems unnecessary that there should be such a chronic list. A great deal of the present problem stems from the parallel storage/cataloguing system inherited from previous years, which makes it all but impossible to find an object without being party to the private code of persons no longer part of the excavation.

6. One of the biggest helps in double-checking catalogued items and pulling lists of various sets of objects has been the advent of a computer. I believe much more intensive use could be made of this tool in the future with a few adaptations of the present system, but will confine myself to a specific recommendation or two under "suggestions."

7. Trench boxes and Dexion shelves were labelled to indicate where objects relegated to auxiliary storage were actually to be found. Formerly there was no written clue to their whereabouts except the badly outdated tags on the auxiliary shelves themselves. The contents of these shelves were totally unorganized, including even some uncatalogued items. Unfortunately there was no time really to restructure their arbitrary arrangement, but it needs to be done. The storage system should be as free of arcana and idiosyncrasies as possible, so that anyone can make use of it.

One experiment I am not sure was particularly useful was the prior assignment of ceramic catalogue numbers to the trenchmasters. I cannot say what its advantage to the trenchmasters may have been, but from the cataloguers' perspective it provided an unnecessary complication with no
advantages. Certainly the pottery experts are likely to catch any vessel so significant as to deserve cataloguing in the field. Only two of the five trenchmasters made use of the allotted numbers, and those two required far more than the initial issue of twenty. This resulted in gaps in the numbering sequence on the one hand and confusing reappropriation of numbers on the other. Some items catalogued by trenchmasters had to be deaccessioned by the pottery specialists: there were accidental overlaps of allotments by the cataloguers; and the trenchmasters themselves, in the flurry of excavation, sometimes used the same numbers twice. Such human errors are inevitable, but ordinarily they are caught immediately and dealt with "in house" before being written down in anyone's pail log and trench notebook. In other words, under this system errors were much more serious and time-consuming to correct. I suggest that all catalogue numbers should be assigned from the same central source — for ceramic vessels this should be the pottery specialists. In fact ideally the already-narrow gap between pottery experts and cataloguing department should be completely closed. I agree with Maria that the specialists should enter their accessioned pieces immediately into the central register, at least in abbreviated form, and not wait for what can be weeks while they collect joining sherds and pass the object in to the cataloguers for its full processing. This is the only way to eliminate the possibility of overlapping.

In fact synthesis — unification — seems to me to be the key to an efficient cataloguing system on every front. Our objective as cataloguers is to make objects and data as easily accessible as possible to those who wish to study them, and that leads me to a second suggestion: namely, the reintegration of all sorts of special deposits and arcane classifications into the general system of cataloguing and storage. The specialists agreed with me wholeheartedly on this proposal: there should be no PPR or LVW or ESB or HBW hoards. Those objects presently cached away should be stored in their respective trench boxes like the other items from the same findspots, where the aforementioned experts, should they wish to reexamine them, could find them as easily as anyone else. The standard "location" information on an artifact's card consists of catalogue number and trench number; it is these by which a person knows where to find a piece, and these (alone, as far as possible) should be what determine where an item is actually to be found. The same is true for any "strange and wonderful" objects which are sufficiently identifiable to deserve a regular storage space. A large percent of that box's contents, for example, are so designated simply because they are pottery of a foreign fabric. Many other such foreign objects are stored in the regular trench boxes; it apparently depended on the taste of the expert studying them. Especially now, with the computer able to provide an instantaneous list of all foreign objects, there seems to be no practical reason to retain these pieces in a separate category. Both ceramic specialists agreed with this.
As regards storage generally, the changes implemented for this year's objects should be applied retroactively, before disintegrating bags or spillage from unsealed ones robs the academic community of the value of Kommos' material record. That is, all objects worth cataloguing should be relabelled, rebagged and sealed. This is also true in due measure of torpedo bags, and next year, when sherds are to be culled for throwing, would be a very appropriate time for this preservative measure.

Another suggestion I would like to repeat in writing is the implementation of a more standardized approach to cataloguing itself. The amount and quality of the information given about an object varies enormously with the array of cataloguers through the years. Overly subjective descriptions may mean different things to different readers. Less well-trained individuals may neglect to describe traits important for future study. I think a range of standardized vocabulary could be provided for the persons doing the cataloguing, as well as a more detailed check-list than that constituted by the catalogue cards themselves -- for eg., what dimensions ought to be taken. This should be developed jointly by the cataloguing department and the specialists in the major fields. Such a standardization seems especially important now with the use of computerized cards, since the computer can only pull up lists which are meaningfully complete if all objects with the same traits are described in the same words.

The computer could be of further help if photography and profiling were given D-base fields, so that it would be possible to tell not only whether or not an object has been photographed, for instance, but also to identify all shots, including group photos, in which it may have been featured.

I would like to complete my list of suggestions with two strong pleas. The first is, that we have a conservator and profiler on site next season, perhaps rather than a full-time stone tool expert. While I concede in principle that there may be no harm in an amateur sticking a few pieces back onto a conical cup for a photo -- if it is painstakingly and neatly done -- the fact is that once amateurs, especially visitors who are not subject to any kind of jurisdiction by the staff, feel entitled to mend vessels, quality control becomes impossible without seeming rude. To be sure, a badly mended vessel can be broken down and remedied by a professional, but that means paying a conservator for twice her time, quite apart from the wear and tear on fragile and irreplaceable artifacts. This was a real problem during the summer. It should be the cataloguing department, which represents the excavation as a whole, that controls the mending of vessels, and they should not be farmed out to unsupervised menders by pottery people or anyone else. In some cases objects were so poorly stuck together that they were literally unfit to photograph, and there was virtually nothing we could do.

The second plea concerns the allotment of time at the end of the summer. My suggestion is to complete excavation at
whatever point in the season is necessary to allow the
trenchmasters a week to digest their material and produce their
reports, then another week (or whatever time is reasonable) for
the photographer and specialists to finish up their work, then a
final week for the cataloguers to complete the tasks which cannot
be undertaken until everyone else's have been turned in and the
apotheke vacated. While a more equitable distribution of work
among us would be desirable, the three of us in cataloguing
really had no problem keeping up with our task, despite its
unusual volume, until the last week of the season. Indeed a day
rarely passed which saw any uncatalogued items left over. The
problems arose when, trenchmasters, specialists and cataloguers,
al found themselves attempting to do simultaneously tasks which
are necessarily accomplished sequentially, not least of which is
the physical packing up and sealing of the apotheke. As I write,
hours before the apotheke is to be locked for the winter, a
pottery expert is mending vessels outside. This means I will
never have a final look at where things are and in what
condition. Tables that have been cleaned and put away twice
already will have to be cleaned and put away yet again. The
status and whereabouts of objects will have been changed but
that fact will never make it onto the card, the D-base or the
"whereabouts" box list. With even a few more days after the
(enforced) departure of everyone else, our year's work could have
been finished, the location of all items and equipment
double-checked, any cards unaccounted for replaced, and the new
season entered with a clean slate. The answer is not more helpers
but more time. The superfluity of helping hands in the last few
days is one of the major sources of the confusion, since it
became impossible to coordinate and oversee adequately. Now, at
the eleventh hour (last night at one a.m., to be precise) I find
tasks so poorly and incompletely executed that I have to re-do
them, but of course there is no time.

Lest I end, misleadingly, on a sour note, I want to say
that I feel the summer has been fruitfully spent in the
cataloguing department, and I am grateful to have been a part of
the Kommos excavation, its important finds, its wonderful
people. These reflections are meant as a positive critique, not
as criticism, and I am confident that any which you find
genuinely useful will be tried out, in the effort to perfect our
common endeavors. I hope that my own small contribution will help
preserve and make accessible to future generations of scholars
the data of which its cataloguers are custodians.
SUPPLIES NEEDED/RECOMMENDED FOR 1942

Whitewash brush
Heavy torpedo bags -10 K.
At least 2 boxes BME glue, from England
Hydrochloric acid
Cardboard boxes (30x2.5x10 cm.)
Small-sized paper bags for trenchmasters
Adhesive tape
Wooden boxes

Repair or replace the big, heavy-duty stapler.

All other supplies are in readiness for next season.
Work Accomplished

Total number of objects catalogued: 827
  This year's objects: 437
    Ceramic: 363
    Non-ceramic: 74
  Former year's objects: 390

Number of items photographed: 792

Number of objects drawn: 84
  Ceramic: 29
  Non-ceramic: 55

Work Remaining for Next Year

Objects ready to be mended: 113
  This year's objects: 104
  Former years: 9

Requests for profiles: 19 (all AWJ's; JBR has not yet made a list)

Objects to be photographed (in addition to those needing mending): 66

Cards needing sketches on the back: 31

Objects in the process of cataloguing:
  Stone tools accessioned by HDW but not in her MS: 237
  (Nearly 1000 objects appearing in her MS are left accessioned but uncatalogued, and need to be referenced)
  PPB special collection still to be referenced: 63
  LVW special collection to be referenced: 650
  Misc. other objects from former years, accessioned but not catalogued: 63