



Female marble sculpture with folded arms

Goulandris Master

Not on display

Title/Description: Female marble sculpture with folded arms

Artist/Maker: Goulandris Master

Born: 2700 c. BC - 2400 c. BC

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Marble

Technique: Carving, Incising

Measurements: h. 276 x w. 86 x d. 40 mm

Accession Number: 342

Historic Period: Early Cycladic II (c. 2700-2400 BC), 3rd millennium BC

Production Place: Cyclades, Europe, Greece

Cultural Group: Keros-Syros

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This stylised female figurine is a product of the Cycladic islands in Greece. Made around four and a half thousand years ago, it has suffered some damage: it is broken at the neck, the arms, and the knees. The lower legs are still missing; the other parts have been put back together using modern conservation techniques. Interestingly, the surface patina on the body above and below the break at the arms is the same, whereas on the head it is different: this indicates that the head was in a slightly different environment (buried in the ground before discovery) than the body: perhaps the body was broken in recent times, an accident during the looting by which this object came to light.

Like many Cycladic figurines, this one has a very characteristic form: the head has a distinctive 'lyre-shape', meaning that it is elongated, with a rounded chin, and with a distinctive flare at the top. The nose is indicated in relief, but other features, such as arms and legs, are shown by incision or grooves. Such figurines are characteristically female (male counterparts are rare): here the breasts are barely shown, but the pubic triangle is an indication of sex.

Some features on such figurines were shown using paint rather than sculpture, and in this case there may be traces of paint preserved, very faintly, at the forehead and on the back of the head, probably representing hair. There may even be an eye on the right side of the face.

Scholars have in the past tried to discern the 'hand', ie distinctive stylistic traits, of individual craftspersons or, perhaps, workshops [1]. This object is actually a classic example of one of the best defined of these groups (the so-called 'Goulandris Master', now better, and slightly more technically, the Kavos sub-variety) although, rather strikingly, one made up almost entirely of objects without a good archaeological context (ie, looted objects). Recent scholarship has moved away somewhat from attributing individual pieces to specific persons or 'masters' [2]: the reproduction of style in the past need not involve the mind of a single individual (pottery styles were replicated for centuries) and the level of skill or artistry in creating Cycladic figurines may have been over-emphasised [3]. The traits present in this figure that allow us to attribute it to the Kavos sub-variety are the shape of the head, the steeply sloping shoulders, thin arms, the proportions of the body, and the lack of spine at the rear.

Michael Boyd, March 2022

[1] Pat Getz-Gentle, *Personal Styles in Early Cycladic Sculpture* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).

[2] Colin Renfrew, 'Early Cycladic sculpture: issues of provenance, terminology and classification', in *Early Cycladic Sculpture in Context*, eds. M. Marthari, C. Renfrew & M.J. Boyd (Oxbow Books, 2017), 1-12.

[3] Yiannis Papadatos and Epaminondas Venieris, 'An experimental approach to the manufacture of Cycladic-type figurines with folded arms: preliminary observations', in *Early Cycladic Sculpture in Context*, eds. M. Marthari, C. Renfrew & M.J. Boyd (Oxbow Books, 2017), 483-90.

Further Reading

C. Broodbank, *An Island Archaeology of the Early Cyclades* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

M. Marthari, C. Renfrew & M.J. Boyd, *Early Cycladic Sculpture in Context* (Oxbow Books, 2017).

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1961. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
