



Female figurine with folded arms

Not on display

Title/Description: Female figurine with folded arms

Born: 2700 c. BC - 2400 c. BC

Object Type: Figure, Fragment

Materials: Marble

Technique: Carving, Incising

Measurements: h. 71 x w. 21 x d. 14 mm

Accession Number: 349

Historic Period: Early Bronze Age, 3rd millennium BC

Production Place: Cyclades, Europe, Greece

Cultural Group: Keros-Syros culture

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This is a very small female figurine made closely to resemble the many larger such figurines produced at the same time. Because it is so small, it has some strange features, such as the outsize feet, and an asymmetry in the placement of grooves or incisions. Its head is missing, but by comparing with complete examples we can estimate the height at about 85 mm.

Figurines in this style were quite common in the mid-third millennium BCE in the Cyclades. The very small size of this one makes it rather unusual. The size ranges calculated for the figurines recently published from the site of Keros (the Special Deposit South) show that less than 1 per cent of them were under 100mm in height [1]. That means a figurine of this size is even more unusual than the very large figurines, which formed just over 1 per cent of the Keros examples.

The variation in size affects our speculation about what such objects were for. Small objects like this were made relatively easily and could be picked up, carried or transported without effort. However the larger examples were more difficult to make and less easy to move around. Were similar objects of radically different size used and understood in similar ways? If, as has been speculated, they were sometimes carried in processions, the largest could only be picked up by a group of people. Small ones like this one would however have been much less visible to those watching such a procession. The process of painting (for such figurines were often painted, and repainted) would also differ: our example would be painted by a single person in a solitary act, whereas the larger ones could have been painted by small groups of people. Hence although this small example clearly fits within a particular group, its mode of use must have varied from many of the other members of this group.

Michael Boyd, April 2022

[1] Renfrew, C., 'The sculptures from the Special Deposit South: the finds', in *The sanctuary on Keros and the origins of Aegean ritual practice: the excavations of 2006-2008*, Vol. III: *The Marble Finds from Kavos and the Archaeology of Ritual*, eds. C. Renfrew, O. Philaniotou, N. Brodie, G. Gavalas & M.J. Boyd (McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2018), 19-42.

Further Reading

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

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

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1952. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East

Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
