



Exceptionally large schematic figurine

Not on display

Title/Description: Exceptionally large schematic figurine

Born: 3200 c. BC - 2800 c. BC

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Marble

Technique: Carving, Incising

Measurements: h. 250 x w. 77 x d. 10 mm

Accession Number: 350

Historic Period: Early Bronze Age, 3rd millennium BC, 4th millenium BC

Production Place: Cyclades, Europe, Greece

Cultural Group: Early Cycladic I

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Figurines in this schematic form are quite well known from cemeteries in the Cyclades. This one is unusual in being so large, and in the amount of decoration incised on its body, though neither feature is unknown. It is also very carefully executed, being very thin for its size.

Schematic figurines such as these are reminiscent of aspects of the human form, rather than directly representing them. The head is subsumed within the long neck, and is not specifically represented. The torso, waist and pelvis are each represented (the surface decoration helping us to understand which body parts are represented); the arms are understood, but not depicted, based on the shoulders, and the legs are not shown at all.

The torso bears a V-shaped incision which indicates the join between the neck and the body. Shoulders and elbows are both represented, and are evocative of the folded-arm pose seen on many more naturalistic figurines, but the arms are not in fact represented directly. The waist, below the arms, has horizontal lines incised, four at the upper waist and three at the lower waist. Lines like these on later figurines have been interpreted as wrinkles indicating a state of recent childbirth. The pelvis, below the waist, is dominated by an oversized incised pubic triangle and vulva. The rear of the figurine is covered in encrustation and thus it is not clear if any further incisions were present there.

Although more naturalistic figurines, such as the 'folded-arm' type, more easily capture the imagination, this example shows that even schematic figurines can sometimes reflect considerable care and skill. Moreover some at least of these schematic figurines were painted. These figurines must have played a very similar role in Early Cycladic life to the more naturalistic types, and they continued to be made throughout the period of the use of naturalistic figurines, and perhaps beyond.

Michael Boyd, April 2022

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 1958. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
