



Unusual head of a figurine

Not on display

Title/Description: Unusual head of a figurine

Born: 3000 c. BC - 2800 c. BC

Object Type: Figure, Head

Materials: Marble

Technique: Carving

Measurements: h. 25 x w. 18 x d. 20 mm

Accession Number: 355

Historic Period: Early Cycladic I (3000-2800 BC), 3rd millennium BC

Production Place: Cyclades, Europe, Greece

Cultural Group: Early Cycladic I or II

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This small and rather featureless object once belonged to a marble figurine, but the original form is something of a mystery. While it is sometimes easy to apprehend the original form of a Cycladic figurine from just a small part, such as the head, when the figurine belonged to one of the stereotypical forms that were regularly produced, this head must have belonged to an unusual or even unique sculpture.

Two of the most famous of Cycladic sculptures are the harp player and pipe player found in a grave on Keros (south of Naxos) in the nineteenth century. These are now on display in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. Our head has some quite interesting resemblances with the head of the pipe player. The latter is dominated by the pipes but leaving those aside, the head is thrown back strongly, like our example, with the nose high in the air. The overall shape of the head is quite similar, and indeed it appears this head is similar to other musician figures, such as an unprovenanced example now in the museum in Karlsruhe. So it is just possible that this head once belonged to a small male figure depicted playing a musical instrument, or even similar to the so-called 'cupbearer', another unprovenanced example now in the Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens.

Figures such as these come relatively early in the development of Cycladic figurines, potentially placing this example within the first half of the third millennium BCE.

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 1956. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
