



Figure with folded arms

Not on display

Title/Description: Figure with folded arms

Born: 2400 c. BC - 2000 c. BC

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Marble

Technique: Carving, Incising

Measurements: h. 120 x w. 46 x d. 14 mm

Accession Number: 358

Historic Period: Early Cycladic II-III (c. 2400-2000 BC), 3rd millennium BC

Production Place: Crete, Cyclades, Europe, Greece

Cultural Group: Cycladic

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This is a very small and thin figurine made of marble. The red colouring over most of the front is a result of the object's long burial over approximately the past 4,500 years, and not any kind of deliberate colouring.

The profile of the piece is so thin that the head stands out as the only truly three-dimensional aspect of the object: it is thrown back, looking upwards, and the prominent nose is the only use of relief on the object. Most of the other features of the figurine are shown by light incision. These include three horizontal incisions forming the arms, incisions at the side of the neck, a deeper incision for the legs at both front and rear, and (as is common) the depiction of the pubic triangle and vulva. The legs are very slightly flexed at the knees, and the feet project only slightly from the profile of the body. There is a possibility that a lighter-coloured area on the right side of the face is caused by the paint for an eye, now lost, having protected the surface from the encrustation around it.

Figurines like these are usually referred to as 'Cycladic figurines', since most of them were made in the Cyclades, in the centre of the Aegean. But a small number were made on the southern Aegean island of Crete, and this is one of that group. These so-called 'Koumasa' figurines are very recognisable as they have similar characteristics that make them stand out, not least the very thin bodies, and the proportionally 'compressed' central part from shoulders to pelvis, giving them a very characteristic look. Imported versions of figurines made in the Cyclades are also occasionally found on Crete, but this local style suggests that the Early Bronze Age inhabitants wanted to express a local identity through the lens of a widely distributed style. Interestingly, Koumasa figurines seem not to have been exported from Crete: their meanings were for negotiation within the island of Crete, which is however a large landmass itself.

Michael Boyd, March 2022

Further Reading

Stampolidis, N. C. and P. Sotirakopoulou (eds.), *Cycladica in Crete: Cycladic and Cycladicizing figurines within their archaeological context* (University of Crete & Museum of Cycladic Art, 2017).

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1955. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.

