



Female figurine with folded arms, missing head

Schuster Master (attr.)

On display

Title/Description: Female figurine with folded arms, missing head

Artist/Maker: Schuster Master (attr.)

Object Type: Figure, Fragment

Materials: Marble

Technique: Carving, Incising

Measurements: h. 330 x w. 156 x d. 55 mm

Accession Number: 668

Historic Period: Early Bronze Age, mid-third millenium BC

Production Place: Cyclades, Europe, Greece

Cultural Group: Keros-Syros culture

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1978

This is a representation, in marble, of a female figure, dating from some 4,500 years ago. It was made in the Cyclades, in the middle of the Aegean, where such figurines are well-known. They follow a somewhat standardised and sparse code of representation, with repeated features like the folded arms and the head looking up (although the head is unfortunately missing from this piece).

While experimental work has shown that the inexperienced can learn to make smaller versions of such figurines (100-200mm in height) quite quickly, this one is quite a bit larger. Although its head is missing, the fact that they are made in a predictable way means that we can estimate its original height to have been as much as 490mm. This is quite large for such a figurine, implying that it was made by a skilled and experienced person.

The body is represented in a way that is more angular than flowing. Overall the body narrows consistently from the shoulders to the ankles. Archaeologists think that more schematised and less modelled figurines such as these come later in the sequence of such figures, perhaps 100 years or more since the first 'folded-arm figurines' had been produced.

The way this particular figurine is produced is in fact so similar to some others that they have been grouped together as the 'Akrotiri sub-variety' [1], so-called after a complete figurine that was found at Akrotiri on Santorini [2]. One characteristic of this group is the very slightly arching (rather than straight) way the lower arms are represented. On other pieces in this group the belly swells to indicate pregnancy, but this feature is not so clearly represented on our example.

Michael Boyd, April 2022

[1] Peggy Sotirakopoulou, Colin Renfrew and Michael J. Boyd, 'Selected sculptural fragments from the Special Deposit North at Kavos on Keros', in *Early Cycladic Sculpture in Context*, eds. M. Marthari, C. Renfrew & M.J. Boyd (Oxbow Books, 2017), 345-68.

[2] Panayiota Sotirakopoulou, 'The EBA stone figurines from Akrotiri on Thera', *Annual of the British School at Athens* 93 (1998), 107-165.

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).
