



Ring with spouted and lugged bowl

Not on display

Title/Description: Ring with spouted and lugged bowl

Born: 2700 c. BC - 2400 c. BC

Object Type: Ornament, Ring

Materials: Marble

Measurements: h. 54 x w. 35 x d. 42 mm

Accession Number: 357

Historic Period: Early Cycladic II (c. 2700-2400 BC), 3rd millennium BC

Production Place: Cyclades, Europe, Greece

Cultural Group: Cycladic

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This is a very unusual object, and not one that can easily be paralleled from known archaeological contexts. It is a marble ring with a model spouted and lugged bowl on top. While at first one might assume this is a finger ring, the hole is quite large (inner diameter around 23mm) and the inner part of the circle is not flattened at all. If not worn, the object would not stand on its own; if worn as a pendant, the bowl would be upside down; so it is perhaps better to assume it was intended to be worn on the hand.

The spouted and lugged bowl depicted on the ring is a well-known form of marble vessel from the Cyclades at the time. Although the Early Bronze Age Cyclades are well-known for their marble figurines, in fact marble vessels were more common, and the marble bowl the commonest form of all [1, 2]. Marble bowls between about 100mm and 300mm in diameter were fairly standard, though examples with both lugs and spouts are somewhat rarer. Marble bowls have been associated with the use of pigment and perhaps tattooing, and examples with surviving traces of colour (usually red, in the form of cinnabar, though sometimes blue), are quite well known [3]. This brings together an association between marble vessels, pigment and body modification, and also offers an association with the act of painting marble figurines [4, 5]. It seems figurines were often painted, sometimes on multiple occasions. The markings seen on the figurines perhaps depict tattoos, and the occasional find of bronze pins in association with marble bowls with traces of pigment suggest tattooing, perhaps of the living or even the dead on the occasion of funerals [6].

Given all that, it is remarkable, then, that this depiction of a spouted and lugged bowl in miniature, on a ring perhaps meant to be worn, has traces of red pigment on the rim of the bowl. This implies that the miniature vessel was indeed used, at least once, to mix pigment, although the purpose may simply have been to leave a red colour on the interior to indicate to the viewer the normal use of the vessel. Alternatively, it may have been used regularly to produce small amounts of pigment, perhaps to indicate details such as dots on figurines, in the same way that larger bowls were sometimes used to produce pigment to render colour on humans.

Michael Boyd, March 2022

[1] Pat Getz-Gentle, *Stone Vessels of the Cyclades in the Early Bronze Age* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

[2] Georgios Gavalas, 'The stone vessels', 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), 259-354.

[3] Kiki Birtacha, 'Examining the paint on Cycladic figurines', in *Early Cycladic Sculpture in Context*, eds. M. Marthari, C. Renfrew and M.J. Boyd (Oxbow, 2017), 491-502.

[4] Elizabeth A. Hendrix, 'Painted Early Cycladic figures: an exploration of context and meaning', *Hesperia* 72 (2003), 405-46.

[5] Gail L. Hoffman, 'Painted ladies: Early Cycladic II mourning figures?' *American Journal of Archaeology* 106 (2002), 525-50.

[6] Tristan Carter, 'Cinnabar and the Cyclades: Body Modification and Political Structure in the Late EB I Southern Aegean', in *The Aegean in the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and the Early Bronze Age*, eds. H. Erkanal, H. Hauptmann, V. Şahoğlu & R. Tuncel (Ankara University Press, 2008), 119-29.

Further Reading

Pat Getz-Gentle, *Stone Vessels of the Cyclades in the Early Bronze Age* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

Kiki Birtacha, 'Examining the paint on Cycladic figurines', in *Early Cycladic Sculpture in Context*, eds. M. Marthari, C. Renfrew and M.J. Boyd (Oxbow, 2017), 491-502.

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.
