



Broken feet of a marble female figurine

Goulandris Master

Not on display

Title/Description: Broken feet of a marble female figurine

Artist/Maker: Goulandris Master

Born: 2700 c. BC - 2400 c. BC

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Marble

Technique: Carving, Incising

Measurements: h. 115 x w. 75 x d. 50 mm

Accession Number: 410

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, 1973

This is a fragment from a larger object representing a female form. We see the stylised feet and ankles broken off a sculpture originally about 523 mm in height. Cycladic islanders of the third millennium BCE made such sculptures in great numbers, and often following a well-defined stylistic 'code'. Elements of that code which we can decipher here include its stark simplicity and clean lines, as well as the 'stance' of the object: with the feet pointing markedly downwards, the woman is not depicted in a standing position. This is one of the repeated features of such sculptures, along with the folded-arms which can be seen in other examples in the collection.

One might wonder how such a wonderful object came to be broken. Most artefacts from archaeological contexts are broken, of course, but sometimes if an object such as this is placed somewhere deliberately, like a grave, it might on excavation be found in good condition. There is now, however, quite a lot of evidence that many of these marble sculptures were in fact broken deliberately, and might even have been made with the expectation in mind that they would eventually be broken. You can see at the main break on this object that the break is indeed ancient, as the surface of the break is patinated in the same way as the rest of the carved surface of the object (and a more recent chip at the break on the left leg is much cleaner, revealing the true colour of the marble).

Recent excavations on the island of Keros in the middle of the Cyclades have uncovered evidence for a 'maritime sanctuary', an open-air area of ritual practice close to the sea [1]. Here many hundreds of similar broken marble figurine fragments have been found, alongside other specially selected material, also broken. After much scientific work it now seems that these broken objects were brought to Keros from other islands deliberately for deposition in a broken state [2]. Although we don't know where these feet were found, they may well have been broken deliberately in such ritual actions. Perhaps they were intended also for deposition on Keros, or perhaps this piece was not taken to Keros, but instead retained in the local community in an act of 'enchainment' [3], linking people and places through special materials such as this.

Michael Boyd, March 2022

[1] Colin Renfrew, Michael J. Boyd & Christopher Bronk Ramsey, 'The oldest maritime sanctuary? Dating the sanctuary at Keros and the Cycladic Early Bronze Age'. *Antiquity* 86 (2012), 144-60.

[2] Colin Renfrew, 'The sanctuary at Keros: questions of materiality and monumentality'. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 1 (2013), 187 - 212.

[3] John Chapman, *Fragmentation in Archaeology: people, places and broken objects in the prehistory of South Eastern Europe* (Routledge 2000).

Further Reading

C. Broodbank, *An Island Archaeology of the Early Cyclades* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

M. Marthari, C. Renfrew & M.J. Boyd, *Early Cycladic Sculpture in Context* (Oxbow Books, 2017).

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1970. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
