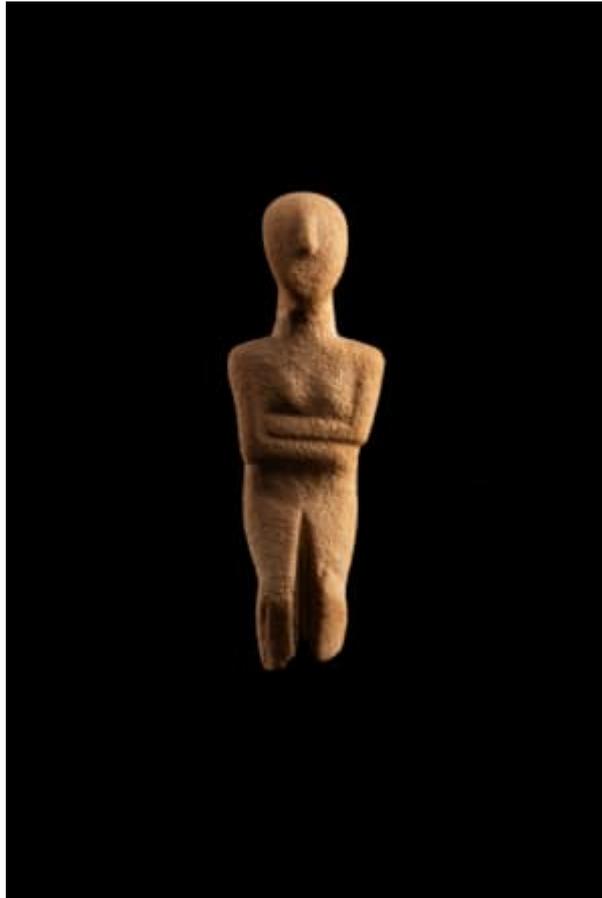


DAVID AARON



Cycladic Idol

Cycladic Idol

2500-2000 B.C., Greece

Marble

Height: 13 cm

A marble figure of the early Spedos type of sculpture produced during the Early Cycladic II Period. The simplified figure is depicted in the canonical posture, with incised arms folded across the stomach, true right arm below the left. The rounded legs are flexed at the knees and are divided by a deep groove, which only fully cuts through to the other side of the figure at one between the calves. The legs are broken below the knees. As is typical of such figures, the prominent nose is the only facial feature indicated on the head. The head tilts slightly backwards and is gently flattened at the top. The flat chest and straight hips marks this figure as one of the rarer, more androgynous sculptures from the period – the vast majority of Cycladic figures are distinctively female.

Much of the evidence we have for the Early Cycladic period comes from goods and objects that were found in tombs on the islands. Tombs contain a range of objects in different materials: tools and weapons of Melian obsidian and bronze; shell, stone, bone, bronze and silver jewellery; elaborately carved soapstone boxes. However, marble was clearly the preferred material for sculpting. The marble came mainly from the islands of Naxos and Keros, and some from Paros and Ios. Marble objects were made only during the first two phases of Early Cycladic culture, with the folded-arm figures appearing

only in the second stage.

The meaning and use of such figures remains uncertain, and may have changed across the five centuries in which they were produced. Some archaeologists have suggested that they were produced solely for funerary use, and may have fulfilled the same role as ushabtis in Egyptian graves (to perform work for the owner in the afterlife), as substitutes for human sacrifice, or as guides for the soul of the deceased. Others have suggested that they had apotropaic qualities.

Another theory is that they represent figures from Cycladic mythology, and even could have been images of the 'Great Mother' goddess. There is little evidence for this deity in Cycladic culture, however, and androgynous figures such as this, as well as examples with male genitalia have also been excavated. Some figures were found broken and repaired prior to their placement in the tomb – this suggests that they were used prior to their burial, perhaps within a domestic shrine.