

Clay Female Figure, Mycenaean



Copy of Clay Terracotta figurine, Mycenaean, Greece, 13th century BCE, c 5cm high

This is a copy of a Mycenaean clay female figurine, which we purchased on a recent trip to Greece. It is certified by the Greek Ministry of Culture as a true replica of the original figurine.

It is a representation of a standing figure with raised arms. The head or headdress is flattened on top and the head is very narrow, pinched out of the clay. The feature of the nose is painted on the front edge of the face and an eye and eyebrow are painted on either side. The painted nose widens slightly as the base to give the impression of a mouth.

The arms are raised, the torso is flattened but with slightly raised breasts to suggest that the figure is female.

The lower half of the body is circular and spreads out of the base.

This gives the figurine three distinct shapes:

- The pinched features of the head flattened from side to side
- The upper body and arms flattened front and back
- The cylindrical form of the lower body spreading out at the base.

The overall effect is of a female figure in a long flowing gown. Different patterns are painted on the figure. The top of the head/headdress is cross-hatched, the upper part of the clothing is painted with diagonal stripes, while the lower part has three vertical bands. One is painted on either side of the figure with the third band being painted at the back. A horizontal band is painted around the waist and a single, short horizontal line is painted between the rear and right vertical band. The paint is a reddish-brown colour.

There are several of these figurines in the British Museum and according to its website¹ the flattened headdress “suggests they may be goddesses”. It goes on to explain that “as so often with prehistoric figurines, it is hard to distinguish between representations of deities and of worshippers”.

Part 1: Images of works before 1000BCE

According to the British Museum “Female figures like these are found throughout the Mycenaean world of the Greek mainland and islands. The three elegantly schematised types are named phi, tau and psi figurines, after the letters of the Greek alphabet they resemble”.



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¹ http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/gr/t/three_terracotta_figurines.aspx