



Cycladic figurines

Feeling the Art

2024-2025



About us

I am a Cycladic figurine coming from an ancient and old civilization. We are all members of a big ancient family.

Would you like to learn more about me and my relatives?

Let's get to know each other!



Some history

- **Cycladic culture** (also known as **Cycladic civilization**) was a Bronze Age culture (c. 3100–c. 1000 BC) found throughout the islands of the Cyclades in the Aegean Sea.
- Cyclades is an island group in the Aegean sea in Greece, as shown in the map.
- One of the first great European civilizations that flourished during the early and middle bronze age.



What is a figurine?

A figurine is a sculpture that represents a human, deity or animal or a small group of them.

Figurines are usually small in size; however, some of the figures found are large, almost life sized.

Cycladic figurines depict human forms and are made of white marble. A majority of the figurines found are female.



Where were they found?

- They have all been found in graves. However, not all graves had figurines in them.
- This has led many scholars to associate them with the funerary rituals of the Cycladic civilization, although the theories proposed vary considerably
- On the other hand, the diversity we observe in figurines' features like size, decoration and usage may relate both to ritual and social factors - as the status of the owner.



How were they made?

- They were carved out of the islands' pure white marble. Because marble is a hard material it was carved with metal tools, mainly made of copper (chisels, knives, needles, saws, etc.)
- Traces of colour have been found on figurines. Cycladic artists used mineral colors, i.e. natural colors that they mined from the earth (red and blue), and painted eyes, mouths, hair and other details that were lost over time.



What are they showing us?

- We observe that wind and stringed musical instruments (diaulos, harp or lyre) were in use for the entertainment of the Prehistoric Cycladic people.
- We gather information about social perceptions regarding the position of women in their society, the honor they attributed to a pregnant woman, about the furnishing of their home (with thrones and ornate chairs) and more.
- We gather information about their work/occupation. They depict men hunting, which was the basic source of food, and men as soldiers.



Harpist

"I am one of the first musicians of the Greek world. It is certain that the artist who made me loved life. I sit comfortably in a wonderful chair, which resembles a throne. With my head slightly tilted back, I exude joy and happiness. My mouth has been erased by time, and yet I still sing. I sing the sound of the waves breaking on the shores of my island. I sing the simple life of the Cycladic people. Imagine how much effort it would have taken the artist to create me, my triangular harp and my throne with such craftsmanship and sensitivity! "

- This figurine depicts a seated harpist playing. He sits on a particularly elaborate throne. He rests on his right thigh a triangular musical instrument, interpreted as a harp or lyre. The face is turned to the sky.





Harpist (Activity)

Listen to the music and describe what you are feeling

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le2EtPn6a1s>

Or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLAF0k2ks50>



Female figure pregnant

"Oh, hello there!
I have been studied and admired for a long time!
Some say I am a deity, other claim I represent the
Mother Goddess herself, can you believe that?
The thing I know for certain is motherhood to be the
most sacred of all things – it is the gift of life.
And I shall protect it through the centuries."

► We can observe the triangular head and the long
aquiline nose. The shoulders are curved slightly
downwards. The hands are folded under the chest
and probably symbolized a state of pregnancy. This
figurine consists of one of the most elegant and
flowing forms of Early Cycladic sculpture.

► In their majority the figurines represent women
naked with their arms folded on their chests. We do
not know for sure, whether they were intended to
depict mortals or goddesses, nor whether the
Cycladic people worshipped one or more deities, or
simply believed in an all-powerful "Mother Goddess"



Female figure pregnant (Activities)

Do the relaxation exercises:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X655B4ISakg>

and

Play the relaxation game below:

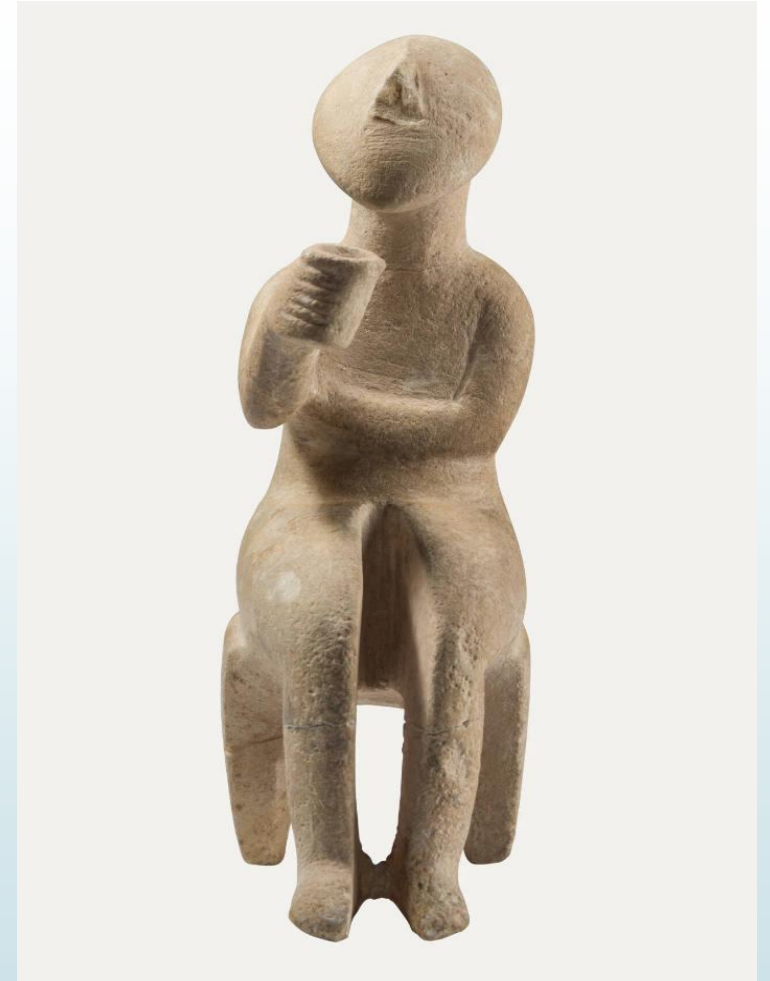
1. Lie down comfortably. Close your eyes and take deep breaths. While listening to the coordinator giving the instructions, tighten your body as hard as you can; our legs, arms, hips, face and hold tightly for a while. Then relax completely and breathe deeply. We repeat again for a while.
2. Then, in the same relaxed way, while listening to the music, we mentally transport ourselves to places that relax us. We hear familiar sounds and smell known scents.
3. Stand upright in space and close your eyes. We breathe deeply 2-3 times and then start to stretch as if you are waking up from a deep sleep, allowing the body to relax and unwind.



The reveler

"Hi there,
I am the reveler, and this is my belly!
Sitting on a stool - I became a little dizzy!
I have lived a life full of honors.
Many archeologists have bent over to study me.
I can't remember how many times they have measured me!
I am called by many names, other call me drunk but I prefer the name reveler!"

- This is most known as "The Cup-bearer". It is a rare type of a seated figurine and holds a cup in its right hand, as if ready to propose a toast. It is considered to represent a male figure because it is shown "in action".





The reveler (Activities)

The Reveler invites you to a Greek feast to dance together.

Listen and dance to the music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpXwDQ97dbg>

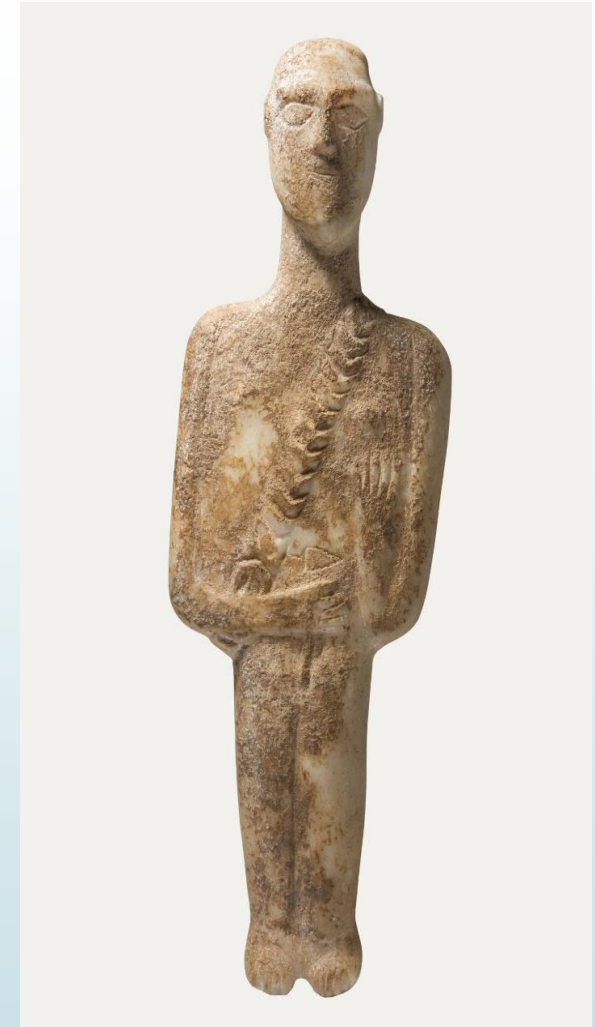
After the intense dancing, sit down and relax. Describe your feelings and compare how you feel now that you are relaxed in contrast to the intensity before.



Hunter / Warrior

"Some say I'm a hunter, others a warrior.
I would like to be called a king like in fairy tales.
My hands, if you noticed, are not folded.
I have eyes and eyebrows and a nose and a mouth
and ears. If you see me from behind, you will
admire my hair, which forms a braid.
Did you notice the turban hanging from my left
shoulder, diagonally across my chest?
What about my knife?!"

- Figurine of a hunter or warrior. He wears a baldric (belt) and carries a dagger. Usually, the male figures are depicted in specific activities (musicians) or representatives of a specific social group, as warriors or hunters.





Hunter / Warrior (Activity)

Draw while listening the sounds of forest birds

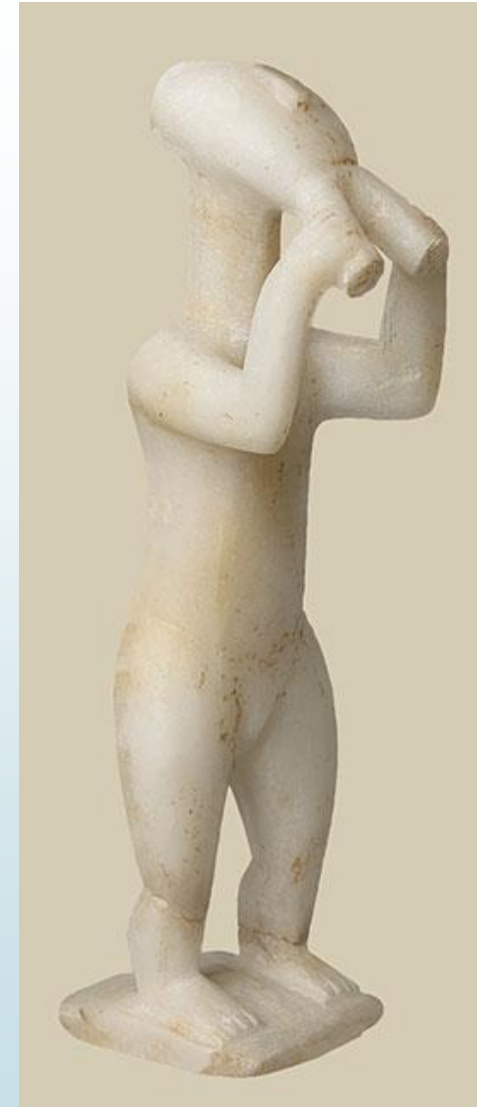
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKPG7tqXGOU>



The piper

"Happy piper they call me.
Because I smile all the time – can't you tell?
Together with my friend harpist we make the
perfect band. Or is it duet?
I stand firmly on my feet, holding my beloved flute
and gaze the sky.
You can close your eyes and hear me play!"

► This figurine depicts a standing flute player playing a flute. He leans on the lips of the flute, which he holds with both hands. The face is turned towards the sky. Both feet are on the ground.





The piper (Activity)

Move your body around while listening to the music below

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBpmDG7wkxU>



From Cycladic culture to modern art

- Here is a Sculpture by Italian artist Amedeo Modigliani.
- Seems familiar? Cycladic figurines have influenced early 20th century sculpture.



From Cycladic culture to modern art

► Sculpture by English artist Henry Moore.



Picasso and Cycladic art

► Picasso, Woman with the blue dress, Vallauris



The Cycladic figurines inspired modern sculpture and art

“The smooth, white surfaces of the marble, the abstract and reduced formal language and the calm power of the sculptures captured the attention and interest of these artists”

Source:
<https://www.aesence.com/cycladic-art-the-origin-of-minimalist-aesthetics/>



Cycladic art in the museum

- Most of the Cycladic figurines can be found at the Museum of Cycladic art in Athens, Greece

<https://cycladic.gr/en/ebeiries/kykladiko-eidolio/>

