

Carving Out Gender in the Prehistoric Aegean: Anthropomorphic Figurines of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age

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Abstract

Neolithic and Early Bronze Age anthropomorphic figurines from the Aegean have hitherto constituted separate fields of study. The present article proposes a uniform methodological strategy and theoretical perspective, aimed at uniting both sets of figurines to explore social dynamics through the study of gender. The main ideas discussed focus on the complex ways in which gender identities were constructed, the mechanisms of power negotiation, and the ways in which the physical and cultural body constituted an axis on which prehistoric societies organised themselves at a socio-economic and ideological level. The analysis exposes some of the biases that have coloured previous unilinear interpretations, and calls for a critical review of traditional social models, according to which the 'egalitarian' Neolithic was followed by the rise of patriarchy in the EBA.

Keywords: *anthropomorphic figurines, gender, Aegean, Neolithic, Early Bronze Age, body, decoration*

Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore gender construction and gender dynamics in the prehistoric Aegean by applying a uniform approach and methodology to the study of anthropomorphic figurines in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (EBA) periods. The ultimate objective is to review the way early prehistoric Aegean societies have been interpreted and to explore the implications that the study of gender generates for the understanding of Aegean prehistory. Specifically, through the prism of gender, it re-examines current social models explaining the transition from the Neolithic to the EBA and the trajectories and rhythms of social development in the early prehistoric Aegean.

The analysis is confined to the geographical area that coincides with the modern state of Greece, including mainland and insular regions. I am aware that a comparison with the rest of the Balkans and Anatolia would offer a broader picture of the associated prehistoric cultures, and I hope that future research will further elucidate this area of interest. I have not assumed cultural homogeneity for the whole Aegean, and the regions under study, therefore, have not been treated as a uniform cultural unit. In terms of chronology, the study focuses on the Neolithic, which in the Aegean spans from the Aceramic (c. 6800 Cal BC) to the Final Neolithic (c. 3200 Cal BC) phases, and the three EBA periods covering a time from 3100/3000 to 2050/2000 Cal BC (Manning 1995). The continuous development of

the EN (Early Neolithic) and MN (Middle Neolithic) phases (Demoule and Perlès 1993: 368), as well as trends from the LN (Late Neolithic) for changes at a socio-economic level point to a departure from the earlier Neolithic phases (Tomkins 2004: 57). Patterns also concerning the use and context of figurines have led me to present the discussion in terms of an earlier (Aceramic to MN) and later Neolithic (LN to FN [Final Neolithic]), with the two phases corresponding roughly to the periods c. 6800–5300 Cal BC and c. 5300–3200 Cal BC. The analysed corpus comprises 1,094 Neolithic and 567 EBA published anthropomorphic figurines.

Figurine Studies and Gender in Aegean Prehistory: Past and Present

A comparison between the development of Neolithic and EBA Aegean figurine studies reveals a lack of uniform approaches, which have resulted in two separate epistemological fields (Marangou 1992 is an exception). The divergent routes that the study of Neolithic and EBA figurines have followed can be condensed into the following points. The study of Neolithic Aegean figurines, forsaking the Mother-Goddess theory, has entered a new era of analysis and interpretation, following the latest debates in social and gender archaeology, cultural anthropology and material culture studies (most recent examples by Bailey 2005; Nanoglou 2005; Talalay 2005). In contrast, research on EBA figurines is characterised by a bias for Cycladic or Cycladic-style pieces, studied under the influence of art historical approaches emphasising typology, manufacturing processes and aestheticism. Although typological studies and art historical approaches prove a useful tool in the analysis of material culture, a direct result of the ‘tyranny’ of aesthetics has been the reluctance by scholars to address questions relating to the social and

symbolic dimensions of EBA figurines. Recent research, however, has generated optimism for the future of Aegean EBA figurine studies (Broodbank 2000: 58–65, 247–75; Hoffman 2002; Papadatos 2003; Talalay 2005). However, there is still a pressing need to bridge the divide that disconnects figurine studies of the earlier prehistoric Aegean. The unifying methodology and theoretical approach to Neolithic and EBA figurines advocated here allows us to build an unbroken narrative of gender and social organisation at times of stasis and change.

This article also seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on gender in Aegean prehistory, by encompassing the EBA period. The relatively limited number of studies on gender in comparison to archaeologies of other parts of the world is one of the issues that this paper seeks to remedy. Furthermore, because of the untheorised way in which anthropomorphic figurines have been approached in the EBA, modern assumptions and androcentric models have tainted some previously proposed interpretations. Consequently, this study aims to review the explicit and implicit androcentric biases and evolutionary models used to explain EBA society. Applying a gender approach to both periods in question will help to rectify the previous imbalance in the early prehistory of the Aegean.

Proposed Theoretical Approaches

Figurines as Material Culture

A concentration on the purely aesthetic characteristics of figurines severely restricts our understanding of the intention behind their manufacture and the ways in which they operated dynamically at a socio-cultural level. It is for that reason that a material culture perspective that takes into consideration the symbolic dimension of figurines proves to be more productive and insightful. The mate-

riality of figurines as products of prehistoric Aegean culture and their active involvement in everyday life is obvious. Moreover, though figurines may have constituted iconic representations of actual people, ancestors or gods, they were primarily intended to express ideas surrounding central concerns of humans, such as natural cycles and the phenomena of life and death that were ideologically interwoven with social order and gender identity (Haaland and Haaland 1996). Indeed, in simpler societies a clear distinction between the sacred and the profane would not have been maintained, with rituals informing aspects of social and economic life (Insoll 2004: 152-53).

Material culture serves as a medium through which social identities are constructed and has the ability to store and communicate social information (Beaudry *et al.* 1991; DeMarrais *et al.* 1996; Hodder 1987: 7; Tilley 1989: 189). Consequently, through the interactive relationship between the manufacturer and the raw material, figurines are filled with mindful intentions, and as such can offer valuable reflective insights into the cognitive aspects of prehistoric people and the social order of the communities that produced them (Knappett 2006: 240). Material culture also engages with humans in a dynamic way at different levels, thus forming a mutually shaping dependency between things and social conditions (Beaudry *et al.* 1991; Knappett 2002: 98-9; Lele 2006: 54-5; Tilley 1989: 189, 198; 1999: 76). As a result, material forms act as structuring agents with the ability to maintain or challenge a social system (Tilley 1989: 189). Moreover, material forms play an active part in the negotiation of power relationships that are under construction on a daily basis through the most mundane of tasks (Paynter and McGuire 1991). Realising the two-way relationship between figurines and human agents permits us to detect ways in which figurines may have shaped social identities and relationships.

Embodied, Performed and Represented Gender
Applying a gender perspective, with its anthropocentric focus, aids us in unveiling ideas related to social and gender identities, roles and status, but also uncovers how gender informed social, economic, and ideological aspects of prehistoric life.

The body has played a fundamental role in the classification of gender identities cross-culturally, as suggested by the strong tendency for a close association between biological reproduction and gender (Herdt 1994: 80). Caution needs to be exercised, however, not to assume a universal correspondence between sex and gender, two terms that have been shown to be deeply political and culturally arbitrary (Moore 1994; Nordbladh and Yates 1990). Assuming, therefore, a western bi-polar model for the understanding of prehistoric gender is problematic at many levels, and best avoided. In any given context, the body plays an instrumental role in the internalisation and prescription of gender identity through its movements and performances on a daily basis and through the perception of others (Aalten 1997; Lindemann 1997).

Returning to the issue of material culture, inanimate objects play a central role in the embodiment, performance and communication of gender and social identity through processes such as layering, the creation of a second 'skin' through the manipulation of physical appearance, or the use of media that constitute an extension of one's self (Knappett 2006). The role of the body in the construction and performance of gender and cultural identity has been discussed in a number of anthropological and archaeological works and has proven its relevance for the understanding of past social processes (e.g. Joyce 2002; Sørensen 1997; Treherne 1995). For figurine studies, a focus on the represented body with its added insignia offers insights into aspects of gender embodiment, such as posture and manipulation of physical

appearance, and allows us to deconstruct not only the cognitive elements and agency entailed in figurine production, but also the agency of figurines themselves (see Knappett 2002: 98-99; Lele 2006: 54-55).

Methodological Strategy

A uniform methodological strategy was applied to both Neolithic and EBA figurines. Starting with the recording of figurines and associated contexts, the same categories of information were compiled for both Neolithic and EBA figurines. Whereas no limitations were applied for the recording of Neolithic figurines, the EBA sample was restricted only to excavated figurines, or figurines that surfaced no later than the year 1900, as a precautionary measure to guard against forged pieces (Broodbank 1992; Gill and Chippindale 1993: 132).

Given the centrality of the modelled physical body and its implications, the recording of the anatomical attributes of figurines was essential. The presence or omission of prominent features related to reproduction (e.g. genitalia and breasts) and secondary ones (accentuated hips and buttocks, or prominent swollen abdomen indicating pregnancy) was recorded. As a result, the following categorising labels were devised: *Female* (female genitalia and/or breasts and secondary attributes), *Female form* (secondary features only associated with the female body), *Asexual* (absence of prominent or secondary anatomical features), *Male* (male genitalia and absence of prominent breasts), *Ambiguous* (prominent breasts and male genitalia or modelling of hermaphrodite genitalia), and *Probably Female/Female form/Male/Asexual*. The probable categories lack definite evidence due to their fragmented state or unclear form, though certain features hint more to one category than to another.

Additionally, a detailed and comprehensive database of individual motifs (as opposed to whole syntheses) was compiled, each marked with a unique code which was applied to both

sets of data. The recorded motifs were then divided into three main classes: those denoting body decoration (body painting, tattooing or scarring), attire (garments and associated fittings) and jewellery. The detailed recording of decoration permitted the deconstruction of the ways in which gender identity was embodied and associated symbolisms. Aspects of gender performance are also revealed through the careful recording of the modelled postures of figurines and the thematic representation (e.g. *kourotrophoi*, *hunter-warriors*) associated with them.

As a final point of clarification, the devised figurine categories have been recognised on the basis of the represented anatomical body and serve as heuristic tools. The reader, therefore, should not expect the figurine categories to be interpreted in the same light in all chronological periods. The secondary reading of figurines in relation to posture and decoration, as well as associated contextual evidence, is what guides the proposed interpretations regarding their possible meaning and use.

Use and Contextual Associations

Neolithic Figurines

Neolithic anthropomorphic figurines have been recovered from open-air settlements, caves, and burial sites. The vast majority of figurines, however, for all four Neolithic phases have been unearthed from open-air settlements, and specifically from domestic and habitation strata. Some of the findspots of Neolithic figurines include general activity areas, houses and courtyards, pits and fills, and were occasionally associated with hearths, ovens and platforms.

Regarding funerary contexts, the association with figurines is mainly a later Neolithic phenomenon, marking a trend that strongly characterised the following EBA period. Finally, two EN figurines from an unusually large structure in Nea Nikomedeia have been inter-

preted as indicating use in a ritual context (Pyke 1996: 48-49; Rodden 1964: 114). It is also possible to argue that figurines may have been used to mark collective events organised by the whole community, if the large structure served as a public gathering space, and as suggested by their inclusion in the collective event of burial.

Finally, analysis indicates that there was no association between sex categories of figurines and their context of recovery. As one would expect, because *Female* figurines dominate the sample, they are also connected to a wider variety of contexts. The presence of *Male* and *Asexual* figurines, however, in domestic and funerary contexts suffices to indicate that female symbolism was not exclusively associated with domestic space or the realm of the dead. Moreover, the presence of clay phalloi further attests to the inclusion of male elements in the domestic sphere. Regarding the circulation of figurines in a possible ritual context, the limited evidence does not allow us to argue for an exclusive link with *Female* figurines.

EBA Figurines

EBA figurines have been found at open-air settlements and burial sites in almost equal numbers, thus indicating that the pattern that was developing from LN became common practice in the EBA. Areas of the mainland and islands of the north Aegean, however, continued to follow the Neolithic tradition of circulating figurines in living areas. Regions such as the Cyclades, Crete, central mainland and Euboea predominantly yielded figurines from funerary sites, although evidence of weathered appearance and signs of repair indicate that figurines were used in settlements prior to their deposition inside burials (Doumas 1977: 63). A smaller number of figurines have been recovered from caves of funerary or habitation use. Finally, a few figurines have been found in ritual contexts, where associated evidence sug-

gests cult practices connected with their use. This shift in depositional patterns indicates a departure from Neolithic traditions in terms of practices, though not necessarily in use or meaning.

Associated finds in funerary contexts indicate that marble figurines constituted prized possessions that most likely were enveloped in processes conferring social status to community members. Evidence for mending and patterns of heavy wear suggest repeated handling, but also an intention to preserve them through time. Association between the represented sex of the figurine and the context of circulation and recovery has not generated any exclusive patterns. In addition, analysis in relation to grave good assemblages, the represented sex of the figurines and the limited number of sexed skeletons cannot support any concrete conclusions connecting gender and the use of figurines. Finally, the rare inclusion of figurines as grave goods, as well as the specialised skills required for their manufacture (Oustinoff 1984), implies that the circulation and production of at least marble figurines came under tighter control.

Formal Attributes

Neolithic Figurines

The predominant material used for the manufacture of Neolithic figurines was clay (84%), followed by marble (9.6%), other stone (6%), and finally bone and shell (less than 1%). The use of marble and other stone increases mainly in the LN and FN. Analysis has revealed that there was no correlation between the use of material and the modelling of any of the detected sex categories. The fact, therefore, that clay was a malleable material suggests that the abstract and asexual form evident from the LN onwards was a deliberate shift in form, and not an effect of technical choices.

Regarding the moulding of the anatomical body, figurines are almost equally divided

between those of a proportionate and corpulent shape. Other classes of figurines include steatopygous (distinctly accentuated from the corpulent type), schematic, and amorphous body representations. Anatomical body parts were modelled in a range of typological forms and with a varying degree of emphasis paid to their representation. Although a broad stylistic tradition is evident for figurines produced in different regions of the Aegean during the same time periods, the formal diversity of figurines suggests a relative degree of autonomy on the part of the producer.

EBA Figurines

The EBA sees a shift from clay to marble and stone in figurine production. Nevertheless, the regions which preserved Neolithic use and circulation practices (Thessaly, the Peloponnese and Macedonia) are also the ones that continued to produce clay figurines, thus implying the perpetuation of Neolithic traditions, although this might be masking ideological changes (Blake 2005: 103). The shift to marble and other stone was not a result of availability, since the switch took place even in areas where marble sources were scarce, as on Crete (Warren 1969: 134-35). We are detecting, therefore, a genuine break in tradition, a trend that was already emerging in the FN. The implication of this technological shift is that more production stages mediated between the procurement of the raw material and the completion of at least some of the figurines. Figurines, therefore, appear to have followed a more rigid process of production in the EBA. Similar production processes parallel other marble objects, such as stone vessels, which also conferred status to their owners (Broodbank 2000: 262-63). A point of caution, however, is that figurines made of perishable materials may also have existed that did not conform to the same rules of production/circulation, though they are likely to have emulated marble forms.

EBA figurines also displayed a narrower range of forms, implying a closer conformity to possible stylistic conventions. The physical body is rendered as proportionate and often schematic and sexless, as opposed to the corpulent, naturalistic and varied Neolithic representations. These stylistic differences reflect real cultural choices and are not a result of the shift to harder materials, since in both periods clay and marble or stone were shaped according to the predominant form. In terms of the anatomical body, as in the Neolithic, there is interplay between the modelling and omission of anatomical details. When anatomical details are rendered, however, the moulding of features is less pronounced, thus playing down the corporeal aspects of the body. This trait appears to be widespread across the Aegean, implying the adoption of similar stylistic conventions and attitudes. The restricted individuality in the representation of figurines is also attested by the limited variation and higher standardisation of postures.

The Physical Body and the Modelling of Figurines

Neolithic Figurines

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the Neolithic corpus according to the representation of the anatomical body, which has also been confirmed through statistical analysis (Mina 2005: appendix E, fig. 2). It is evident that *Female* figurines represent the highest proportion and, with the addition of *Female*-related categories, they predominate overall, constituting nearly 70% of the corpus. *Asexual* and *Probably Asexual* figurines account for a considerable proportion, while the very low percentage of *Male* figurines is striking. *Ambiguous* figurines are by far the least common category. This pattern is replicated both in terms of provenance and chronology, even in the FN when evidence indicates a shift in the deposition of figurines. Finally, analysis has indicated that the repre-

sented sex of the figurines did not correlate with the type of site or their context of use (Mina 2005).

<i>Figurine Categories</i>	<i>Neolithic</i>	<i>EBA</i>
Female	48.2	35.0
Probable female	12.5	2.7
Female form	6.2	13.7
Probably female form	0.6	0.8
Male	2.1	1.0
Probably male	0.7	0.6
Asexual	18.2	38.8
Probably asexual	10.7	6.2
Ambiguous	0.8	1.2

Table 1. Percentage of figurine categories according to chronology.

EBA Figurines

For the EBA, Table 1 demonstrates a shift in preference (supported statistically [Mina 2005: appendix G, fig. 3]) from *Female* to *Asexual* figurines, though *Female form* figurines represent a sizeable proportion. *Male* and *Ambiguous* figurines account for only 1% of the assemblage, a proportion similar to that in the Neolithic. The geographical distribution of figurine categories suggests that the preferred represented type was closely associated with regional traditions, as opposed to the Neolithic period when a similar ratio of the represented categories of figurines was evident cross-regionally. It is possible that regions that differed in terms of the preferred category of figurines may also have been organised along different social axes, a distinction that would not apply to the Neolithic period.

Modelled Postures: Repertoire and Implications for Gender

The points that are highlighted here (for detailed analysis see Mina 2005) are (a) the relative degree of individualism on the part of the figurine-maker in terms of the postural modelling, with implications for gender

embodiment, and (b) the correlation between postures and the represented sex of the figurines.

Neolithic Figurines

Neolithic figurines demonstrate a relatively extensive range of postures. Individualistic elements were articulated through stylistic variations, even in the rendering of the same postural theme, or through the combination of different upper and lower body postures. The most common postures represent figurines in the standing position, sitting on the ground, squatting and kneeling, and less frequently seated on stools or chairs. Hands are often employed and tend to rest on the torso, specifically on the chest and breast area, abdomen and waist. Rare postures worth mentioning represent figurines in the birth-giving position with the legs drawn up and the genitals exposed, while five specimens of *kourotrophoi* are also included.

Although a number of postures were shared between *Female*, *Male* and *Asexual* figurines, some of them appear to have a strong association with specific figurine categories. Postures, exclusively associated with *Female* figurines, were modelled with hands resting on the breasts and breast area or with the hands below the breasts. The postures drawing attention mainly to the breast area were shared with the *Female*-related categories which, as we shall see, has implications for the complex ways that gender identity was constructed. It is interesting to note a postural overlap between *Female* and *Asexual* figurines (Figure 1), as illustrated by figurines modelled with the hands resting on the abdomen or in the kneeling, squatting and reclining position. Similarly, though most *kourotrophoi* represent *Female*-related categories, one *Asexual* example is also known. A posture exclusively associated with male representations draws attention to the genital area. One shared posture is particularly important for drawing

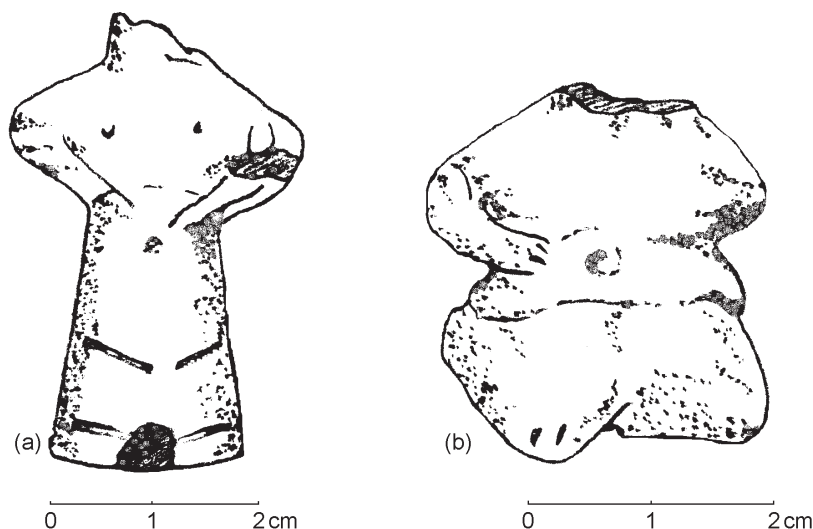


Figure 1. Example of postural overlap between (a) *Female* and (b) *Asexual* figurines. (a) Achilleion (after Gimbutas *et al.* 1989: fig. 7.11:1); (b) Achilleion (after Renfrew and Gimbutas 1986: fig. 7.34:2).

inferences regarding social status and gender: *Male*, *Female*, *Asexual* and *Ambiguous* figurines were modelled as seated on chairs/stools, a posture associated ethnographically with distinct social standing (Wason 1994: 105).

EBA Figurines

EBA figurines display a more restricted range of postures, one which nevertheless covers wider geographical areas, mainly as a result of the movement of figurines between regions and of attempts to emulate Cycladic figurines in areas outside the Cyclades. In general, the EBA postural repertoire is repetitive and is characterised by a low degree of variation and individualism. Some thematic postures (e.g. *hunter-warrior*, *musician*) are new additions, while others (e.g. kneeling, squatting) are discontinued.

Regarding the represented sex of the figurines and postures, the standing pose is the most common one among all categories of figurines. Seated postures on chairs and stools also occur among *Male*, *Female* and *Asexual* figurines. A posture strongly associated with *Female* figurines, however, represents the arms in a folded arrangement resting below the

breasts or on the abdomen. The same posture occurs among *Asexual* and *Ambiguous* figurines, and in the lack of any such *Male* models, we can consider this overlap as a strong indication of shared gender symbolism expressed through embodiment. This association can further be noted for the posture of figurines with their hands meeting on the chest or abdomen, which is again shared between *Female*, *Female*-related categories, *Asexual* and *Ambiguous* figurines (Figure 2). Regarding thematic representations, figurines associated with a musical instrument belong equally to the *Male* and *Asexual* figurines, while the hunter-warrior theme occurs among *Female* (Figure 3) and *Asexual* figurines.

Decoration, Symbolism and Inferences for Gender

Neolithic Figurines

Analysis has revealed that the majority of figurines were undecorated in the Neolithic, though 43% did bear decoration in the form of applied paint or slip and motifs. Figure 4 suggests a steady increase in the application of decoration from the EN, reaching its peak

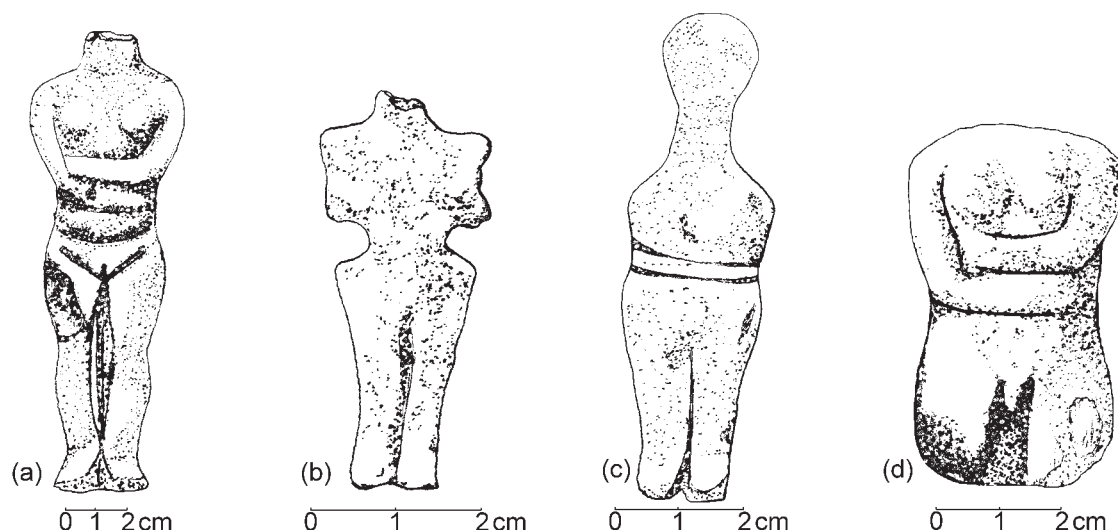


Figure 2. Example of postural overlap between (a) *Female*, (b) *Female form*, (c) *Asexual* and (d) *Ambiguous* figurines: (a) Euboia (after Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1991: pl. 5); (b) Thermi (after Lamb 1936: pl. XXI); (c) Euboia (after Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1991: pl. 3); (d) Amorgos (after Marangou 1990: pl. 173).

in the LN, after which a dramatic decrease is noted. Further analysis has also revealed that the frequency and degree of decoration in relation to the figurine forms is closely associated with the represented sex (Mina 2005: appendix E, fig. 61).

Colour is known ethnographically to be symbolically loaded with notions that signal and bond material and ideological categories together (Jones 1999). The use of pigment on figurines, therefore, may have served to mark and communicate such concepts. Regarding

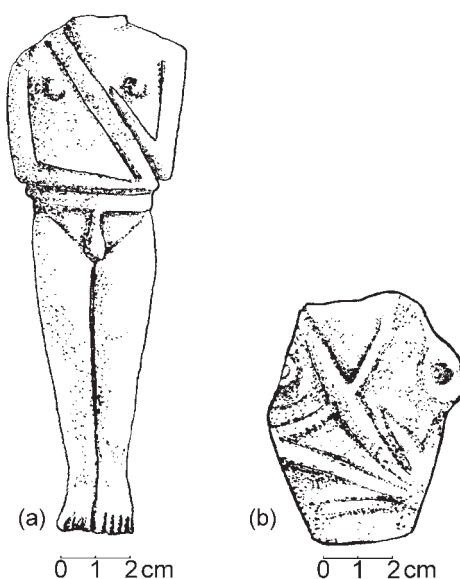


Figure 3. Two EBA *Female hunter/warriors*. (a) said to be from Syros (after Zervos 1957: pl. 253); (b) Ayia Irini, Kea (after Caskey 1974: pl. 11)

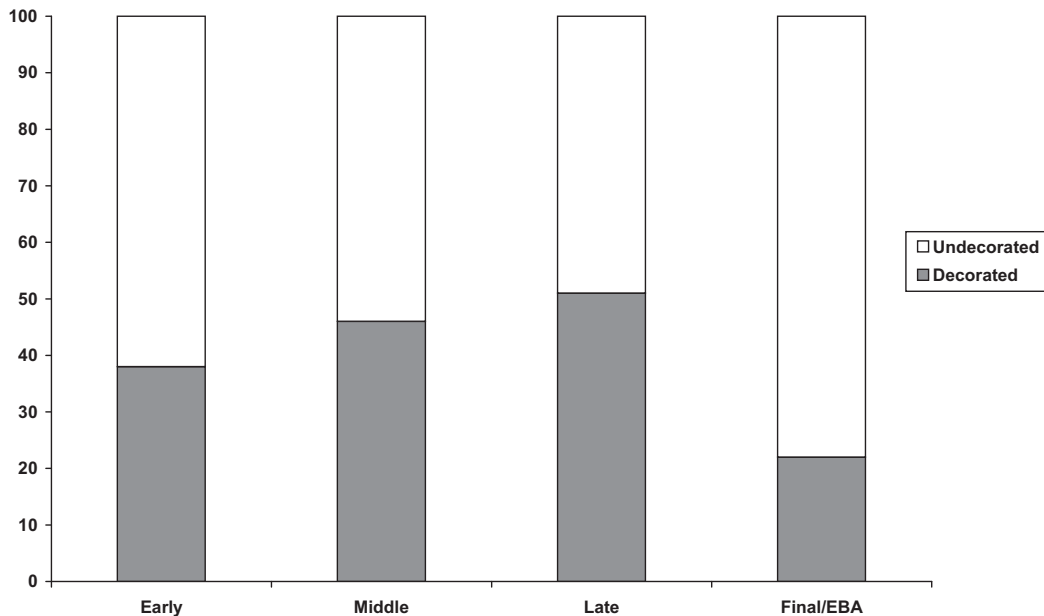


Figure 4. Percentage of Neolithic decorated figurines in relation to chronological phases.

the earlier Neolithic figurines, we know that the main colours applied were red, black and white with some variations. It also becomes apparent that the same colours were used to denote motifs on *Female*, *Female-related* and *Asexual* categories, which has implications for the use of colour as a way of expressing overlapping gender identities. Paint in the EN and MN was commonly used to emphasise anatomical parts related to reproduction or sexuality on both *Female* and associated varieties. Red was applied on the breasts and pubic area, while black demarcated the abdomen and pubic area, with white being restricted to the pubic area. No *Male* figurines in the sample exhibit the same focus on reproduction through the use of pigment.

In the LN and FN, a new and composite colour scheme emerged. The complexity of the colour scheme takes two forms: (a) a wider variety of combinations of colours used, and (b) the introduction of new colours. The fact that the same pattern is shared among *Female*, *Female-related*, and to a lesser degree *Asexual* figurines, again implies an intersection

of the associated symbolisms. If we assume that colour is a symbolic category by which humans categorise themselves and the world around them, then the new colour scheme may be implying new and more intricate symbolic messages associated with social identity (Chapman 2002: 52-53, 67).

In the FN, there was a diminution in the emphasis of anatomical parts through the employment of colour, though we need to bear in mind that the increase of hard materials, such as marble and stone, is likely to have affected the preservation of pigments. Along with the three basic colours of black, red and white, the new colours green and blue appear. Coupled with the use of metals, such as copper and gold, it appears that the palette of the material culture expanded towards the end of the Neolithic, perhaps mirroring a complexity in the notions that served to explain and order Neolithic society and ideology (cf. Chapman 1991).

Decoration was also commonly expressed through the representation of incised, painted, carved, or pinched motifs and applied details.

A number of those motifs denoted body decoration in the form of tattooing, body painting or scarring. Detailed analysis has shown that the majority of body decoration motifs were exclusively associated with *Female* figurines with the intention of highlighting anatomical parts related to fertility and reproduction. One such example is the spiral-like motif, possibly representing snakes, drawing thus a link between female symbolism and nature in accordance with the principles that governed Neolithic ideology.

Another range of motifs expressed attire and was again mainly associated with *Female* figurines. They denoted gear, such as forms of headdress, belts, strips of fabric and woven textiles as garments covering the upper and/or lower body in an array of styles. Other motifs mainly associated with *Female* figurines denoted jewellery, with amulets or necklaces commonly represented. Finally, female appearance was also associated with the modelling

of a range of hairstyles, such as long or shorter locks of hair, or buns at the base of the neck.

As mentioned earlier, the majority of the three categories of motifs discussed above adorned mainly *Female* figurines. Analysis, however, has revealed an overlap between *Female* and other *Female*-related categories in motifs representing body decoration, attire and jewellery, which again confirms the varied way in which female gender could be rendered, possibly in relation to age (Figure 5). A similar decoration overlap between *Female* and *Asexual* figurines in motifs expressing attire and jewellery warns against dismissals of *Asexual* figurines as 'neutral', but also portrays a more complex picture regarding gender construction (Mina 2007). Moreover, the fact that no *Male* figurines bear similar types of garments further illustrates that the manipulation of external appearance played a central role in the dialectic performance of gender identity.

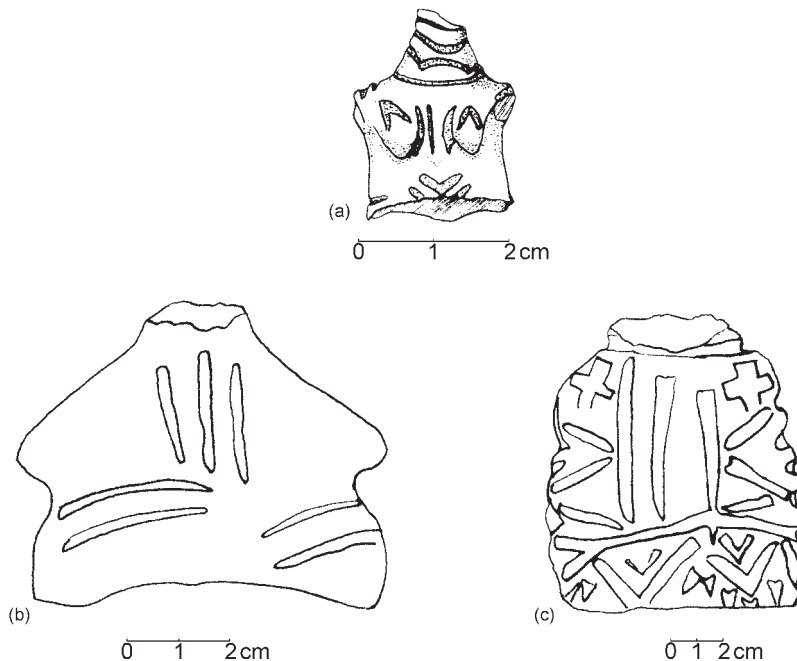


Figure 5. Example of decorative overlap (vertical lines on chest) between Neolithic (a) *Female*, (b) *Female form* and (c) *Asexual* figurines. (a) Sitagroi (after Renfrew and Gimbutas 1986: fig. 9.35); (b) Sitagroi (after Renfrew and Gimbutas 1986: fig. 9.32); (c) Sitagroi (after Renfrew and Gimbutas 1986: fig. 9.09).

For the earlier part of the Neolithic, analysis of decoration has suggested a close association between *Female* figurines and body decoration, the modelling of headdresses, jewellery and clothing, as opposed to *Male* ones that are devoid of such insignia. In the later Neolithic, the lack of decoration on *Male* figurines suggests that male bodies continued not to be subjected to manipulation. In contrast, an increasing emphasis on modification of the female body is evident in the LN, a trend that becomes evident in the MN. Body decoration, attire and jewellery motifs largely adorned *Female* figurines, reaching their peak in the LN. The fact that such motifs concentrated on *Female*, *Female*-related and *Asexual* figurines may indicate an elaboration in the way female gender was constructed. In the FN, there is a drop in the use of decoration, perhaps as gender identity was more socially bound and less prone to open challenges possibly as a result of gender identities becoming consolidated, or of communal identity gaining supremacy over idiosyncratic gender experiences.

EBA Figurines

The proportion of decorated figurines is much lower than in the Neolithic, a pattern that applies to most regions. This decrease can be partly explained as a consequence of the shift from the use of clay to marble and stone. It is worth bearing in mind that the proportion of decorated to undecorated clay figurines in the Neolithic is 47%, as opposed to 31.5% in the EBA, while the same proportion for marble figurines results in 19% in the Neolithic and 19.2% in the EBA. The drop in decoration levels, therefore, was probably the result of changes related to the preferred material. Due to the lack of surviving evidence, however, we are restricted to a few general comments.

The same coded system of decorative motifs used for the Neolithic was applied for the analysis of decoration of EBA figurines. The

comparison revealed a much narrower range of motifs for the EBA. Moreover, analysis of painted and incised motifs showed that differences in the EBA are related to biases in the sample and do not therefore indicate differential treatment according to the represented sex. Regarding the use of pigment to denote motifs, colour has survived on *Female*, *Female*-related and *Asexual* figurines, with a range of colours similar to the Neolithic, red, black and white being the main pigments employed. The sharing of colour symbolism between *Female* and *Asexual* figurines may also imply an overlap of gender identity. Colour emphasised certain parts of the body, such as the eyes or locks of hair, while traces of pigment suggest that paint also denoted body decoration, attire or jewellery. In contrast to the Neolithic period, emphasis on anatomical parts using pigment would appear not to be a common practice. It is also worth mentioning that unusual motifs which have been detected on unprovenanced Cycladic figurines (e.g. the 'eye motif') (Hendrix 1998: fig. 16) suggest a possible use of body decoration to communicate ideological symbolism.

The Wider Picture: Gender and Society in the Neolithic and EBA Aegean

Numerous interpretations have been offered in relation to figurines, their meaning and use in the Neolithic and EBA, ranging from portraits of individuals (Gallis 2001) to divinities (Gesell 1985). Whether figurines represented existing individuals or abstract divinities, it is my contention that they were loaded with ideas surrounding gender and social identity in general. As a result, intentionally or not, figurines served as a medium of acculturation whereby ideology became interwoven with social norms. Examining figurines in relation to other types of evidence, therefore, allows us to draw a broader picture of gender in the two periods.

Gender in the Neolithic

Gender in the Neolithic Aegean appears to have been constructed on a corporeal basis, though not necessarily on a one-to-one correlation with the anatomical sex. Analysis of figurines suggests that the physical body held a central place in the internalisation and communication of gender identity. The modelling itself, as well as postures drawing emphasis to primary or secondary anatomical features, indicate that reproductive aspects or the sexual/sensual body were central in the construction of the embodied gender. Moreover, that gender was constructed through the manipulation of physical appearance is further demonstrated by the numerous and often elaborately decorated figurines. Furthermore, the close association between postures and the anatomical body indicates that gender roles were internalised and communicated through prescribed ways of performance. Additionally, the postural and decorative overlap between *Female*, *Female-related* and *Asexual* figurines could portray different life-stages, so age may have also played a structuring role in the categorisation and performance of gender. In fact, the differential treatment of infants at a number of sites is evident across the Aegean throughout the Neolithic (Papathanassopoulos 1996: 173, 176). Such distinct attitudes towards one segment of the population indicates that age determined the extent to which an individual could reach full adulthood and gender status among community members (Lucy 2005: 63).

The central role of the physical body in the construction of gender is further attested by the extensive repertoire of motifs that represented jewellery, body decoration or attire. Support for such practices survives in the archaeological record from the EN onwards. Evidence indicating the production and decoration of textiles, objects possibly used as ear ornaments or as cloth fasteners, as well as pendants and spondylus beads,

offer additional support for practices involving the manipulation of the physical body (Karali 1996: 165; Perlès 2001: 246-54, 287-89). The high proportion of female figurine representations from the earlier Neolithic points to women as the main bearers of such traditions.

In the later Neolithic, figurine evidence indicates a continuation of body manipulation practices that highlight women as the main social category that was distinctly and elaborately marked. The repertoire of personal material culture expanded (parallel to decoration evidence) to include new forms of jewellery made of an array of materials, including metal plaques, possibly affixed to garments, as well as metal daggers (Karali 1996: 338; Zachos 1996a: 142; 1996b). Although we do not have evidence for exclusive associations between genders and specific categories of personal material culture, the under-representation of *Male* decorated examples may imply a differentiation in the way men and women constructed their embodied identity in the LN.

Overall, the predominance of *Female* figurines implies the strong preoccupation of Neolithic people with women's bodies and, no doubt, physical aspects related to them, such as pregnancy, birth, and menstrual cycle. The close parallelism of the female body and the phenomena of nature cannot have escaped Neolithic people, the physical body acting as a common metaphor to explain the natural and social world (Haaland and Haaland 1996; Tilley 1999). It is in this milieu that we should consider the zoomorphic versions of anthropomorphic figurines, as well as motifs on female representations alluding to animals, such as snakes or toads. It is important to bear in mind, however, that gender was constructed on a dialectic basis whereby gender identities were defined in relation and in contrast to others. Female gender and surrounding notions, therefore, were internalised and played out against the parallel circulation

of counter gender symbolism, such as clay phalloi, or vessels with bearded faces from Nikomedeia (Perlès 2001: 264).

A number of implications result from decorative evidence regarding the embodiment of gender and the social role played by women in Aegean Neolithic communities. Ethnographic evidence implies that the use of head-dresses, clothing and jewellery were used as markers of high social status (Wason 1994: 105). The increasing evidence for motifs denoting clothing from the MN suggests an emphasis on the elaboration of female appearance, which has implications regarding distinct social status. Body decoration also associated with *Female* figurines implies that women were likely to have been involved in ritual practices that underlined the communication of social and cultural identity (David *et al.* 1988: 378; Hodder 1982; Turner 1995: 146), lineage history (Rainbird 2002: 237) or even sexual attractiveness and the coming of mating age (Joyce 2002: 15-25). Thus it appears that the special status of men inferred from the seated male specimens of the same period is counterbalanced by the evidence for female status insignia and involvement in ritual practices.

Further insights into the possible symbolisms associated with the female body can be gained through the study of surviving pigment on figurines. The restricted evidence for pigment use on mainly *Female* figurines does not allow an explicit discussion on other gender categories. Though Layton (1991: 118) has commented that colours can be culturally arbitrary, ethnographic evidence indicates a tendency to link the colour red with ideas related to blood, menstruation, birth and death (Walisewska 1991: 39), or minerals and fire (Chapman 2002: 51). It is possible, for instance, that the emphatic use of red on anatomical parts of *Female* and associated figurines was intended to express an allegorical play on the life-giving properties of women and the cycles of human and natural life. The use of red on *Female* figu-

rines may also be indicative of women's ritual associations with the 'birth' of ceramic vessels and the processing and use of iron minerals (Maniates and Tsirtsoni 2002) 'delivered' from the earthly body, possibly implying a shamanistic status held by women.

In the later part of the Neolithic, apart from new colour combinations, new pigments appear to have been used. Blue has been detected on the shoulder of a *Female* figurine and green marked the pubic area of another. Green may again have expressed notions of women's and nature's fertility through insinuations of agricultural lushness (Chapman 2002: 51; Walisewska 1991: 39-40), but also a link with metals (green copper). As for the colour blue, its associations with water or the sky (Chapman 2002: 51; Walisewska 1991: 39) could possibly be linked with mystical symbolisms of water as a source of fertility, celestial bodies or minerals (blue azurite being a copper mineral). Blue azurite points to an association not only between figurines and metals, but also between female gender and the nascent copper metallurgy at a technological and/or ritual level.

Turning to the mechanisms of which figurines were part of, at the level of gender and social relations, an interesting case emerges from figurines modelled as sitting on stool-like furniture in the earlier Neolithic. Although the number of early seated specimens is limited, the majority represented *Male* figurines and there is only one such securely provenanced *Female* specimen. Additionally, there are curious examples of two Thessalian seated *Ambiguous* figurines (Figure 6, a) from the earlier Neolithic. While we cannot be sure about the full proportion of seated *Male* figurines, their intentional modelling on stool-like furniture (Figure 6, b) nevertheless becomes evident if we consider that, out of the very small proportion they represent (seven in total), three of them represented such seated specimens. In contrast, a posture common among

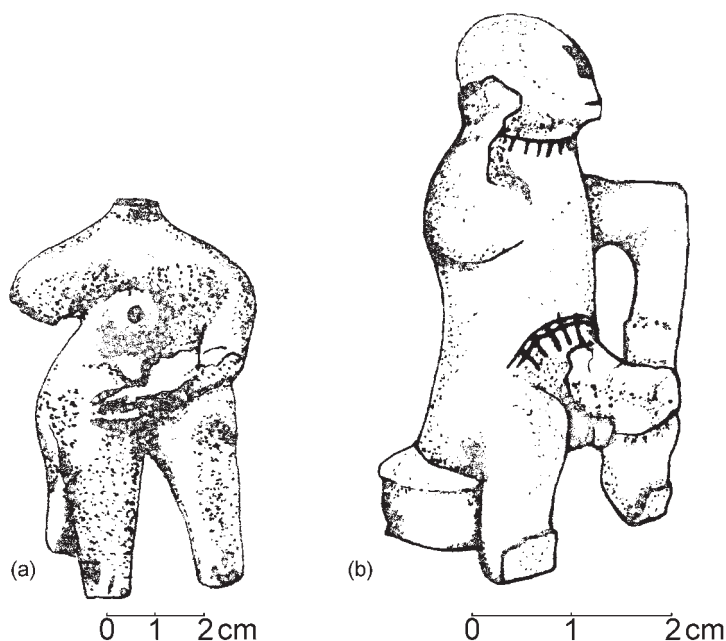


Figure 6. Neolithic seated figurines. (a) *Ambiguous* from Tsani Magoula (after Hourmouziades 1973: pl. 9); (b) *Male* from Larisa (after Orphanidi 1998: fig. 53).

Female figurines represented them in the reclining or sitting on the ground position. Note that none of the *Male* figurines was modelled in such postures.

It is known that postures related to furniture, which create a distance between the ground and the individual, as in the case of stools or chairs, are likely to have expressed a marked social status (Wason 1994: 105). Thus, the postural repertoire of the earlier Neolithic points not only to the existence of special status individuals, but also to social differentiations among gender groups. Nevertheless, although the proportion of *Male* seated figurines implies that men may have had more opportunities to increase their social status, the existence of one *Female* seated figurine suggests that women were not excluded from such processes. That burial evidence does not indicate any form of differentiation between genders supports the suggestion that early Neolithic communities promoted an idealised vision of social equality (Tomkins 2004: 49).

In the later Neolithic, emphasis on physical aspects of women's bodies continued to be expressed. The theme of pregnancy proliferated, but also the modelling of LN *kourotrophoi* indicates an increasing concern with the role of women in relation to motherhood and child-rearing. At the same time, evidence for *Female* seated figurines implies that social status was also accessible to women. Indeed, one of them is represented as a *kourotrophos*, which dispels the commonly held notion that childrearing should be equated with a loss of social status for women. This pattern contrasts with some *Male* figurines placing postural emphasis on the genital area (Figure 6, b), which signals an emphasis on their physicality. Such evidence challenges the idea that women's universal subordination results from their association with nature, as opposed to men's supremacy enabled through their connection with culture (Ortner 1974). In the light of evidence as discussed above, it is important to be conscious of how western concepts regarding gender and

social dichotomies can colour our reading of past societies.

Other types of archaeological data also indicate increasing social complexity in the later phases of the Neolithic, as suggested by the decorative and postural modelling of figurines. Evidence from LN settlements points to greater social competition among households (Halstead 1995; Kotsakis 1999; Tomkins 2004) and stricter delineation of settlement space (Halstead 1995: 14; Kotsakis 1999: 71). The same restriction may also have applied on the construction and enactment of prescribed gender roles. The domain of pottery production also suggests a break from earlier cultural practices, which has been interpreted as an indication of the deterioration of social homogeneity (Vitelli 1999: 102). In the context of social competition and increasing heterogeneity, nascent metallurgy provided an added arena in which status could be negotiated through access to knowledge (Nakou 1995: 21). Knowing where metal sources were located, as well as how to work metals, was one way status was attributed to community members. Moreover, exhibiting these new material forms, most of which constituted the media of personal material culture, would have added another level of status negotiation, with implications for gender.

It would be useful at this point to distinguish between the LN and FN phases, in order to pinpoint a certain shift regarding gender as a structuring agent of social relationships. In the LN, figurine modelling and personal material culture suggest that gender construction became a dialectic and multifaceted process. As LN society more forcefully imposed a set of prescribed social norms in the context of increasing social competition, gender and social status became closely entangled. This emphasis on gender may imply that gender acted as the vehicle through which social norms could be successfully enforced and maintained, possibly along

a patrilineal or matrilineal system of descent and/or succession.

Within this context of social realignment, we can note an oxymoron between individual and group values that pertained to personal and social identity. The LN emphasis on individualism and personal identity is evident in the modelling of figurines and personal material culture. At the same time we need to realise that the distinct and dialectic performance of gender that emerged in the LN was the result of prescribed social norms. A similar interplay between individual and group identity is also apparent in relation to social status. Figurines representing individuals of a special position, as well as funerary evidence for individual interments (Coleman 1977) and unusual adult and infant furnished burials (Papathanassopoulos 1996), suggest that individuals were in a position to attain or even inherit positions of special status. At the same time, there is evidence for the performance of communal funerary rites at Makrygialos (Triantaphyllou 1999), communal ossuaries (Papathanassopoulos 1996) and clearly delineated cemeteries that attest to collective group identity. The interplay between individual and social identity characterised social relationships at the level of gender and social status, as individuals became increasingly enmeshed in the politics of social competition.

In the FN the archaeological record indicates that social differentiation continued among communities (Kotsakis 1999: 71; Halstead 1989: 76). The rich repertoire of personal material culture, as well as evidence for individual interments from different parts of the Aegean (Davis 1992: 96; Vagnetti and Belli 1978), suggest that Neolithic society continued to acknowledge individuality, which was, however, played out against the overriding communal identity. Figurine evidence breaks from the earlier tradition with elements of abstraction and schematisation. It is possible that the underplayed anatomical and cultural

bodies of the figurines were symptomatic of an ever increasing consensus within Neolithic society regarding gender roles. If we also take into account ceramic evidence that indicates homogenisation and regional alliance (Vitelli 1999: 103), then we may envisage that gender played a secondary role in relation to the overarching intercommunity coalitions. Population movement into new areas (Broodbank 2000: 144) and the parallel movement of goods (Halstead 1994: 207; Nakou 1995) may have placed more emphasis on group identity as opposed to gender. Though gender undoubtedly continued to play a structuring role in FN society, the focus shifted to social, community or cultural identity.

Gender in the EBA

The modelling of *Female* figurines, especially for a wide stylistic zone, indicates the continuing preoccupation of society with aspects related to the female body and its relevance for the organisation of society. The associated symbolism may have been linked again to a parallelism between the cycles of the female body and the natural world, which in turn may have been transported to the social and economic world, as has been attested ethnographically (Gosselain 1999).

Turning to *Asexual* figurines, the underplayed anatomical features and increased preference for such forms may be indicative of the emergence of a socially constructed status which overrode gender-bound identity. Elements, such as the standardisation of form, imply the emergence of more socially prescribed gender identities. The very small proportion of *Male* figurines indicates a continuation of the peripheral role played by male symbolisms (at least in figurine form) in the formation of ideological and social constructs, though *Asexual* figurines may have accounted for some of the male representations. The limited representation of male figurines needs to be acknowledged, since a number of interpre-

tations of EBA Aegean society as patriarchal are based on the presumed emphasis of male imagery. As far as *Ambiguous* figurines are concerned (Figure 7), as in the Neolithic, they may be indicative of a distinct gender identity, thus implying a complex organisation on the basis of gender which differs from the bi-polar model operating today.

As in the Neolithic, the physical body was employed for the construction and communication of gender. This is again confirmed through the analysis of modelling conventions and postures, which reveals that *Female* and *Male* figurines exhibit a correspondingly different repertoire of gender embodiment and performance. A comparison with the Neolithic, however, shows that the increased standardisation of postures implies, on one hand a tighter control over the manufacture of gender informing symbolisms, and on the other more rigid rules regarding the performance of gender. The limited ways in which especially the female body was represented, and the preference for static *Asexual* models also imply less individuality in the enactment of gender behaviour. The socially bound construction of gender identities is further indicated by the emergence of categories that suggest a distinct social role in society, as demonstrated by figurines representing *musicians* and *hunter-warriors*.

Restrictions on the production and circulation, especially of Cycladic figurines, can be inferred by the standardisation of their form, the manipulation of their value (Broodbank 2000: 262) and the shift to different materials in the EBA. The requirement of specialised technical skills for the production of marble objects (Oustinoff 1984), therefore, implies restriction over the manufacture of figurines. Portrayals displaying a more 'intimate' knowledge of the female body in the Neolithic, for instance, are not evident for their EBA counterparts, which followed a far more standardised representation of the female anatomy. It could be proposed that socially dictated gender

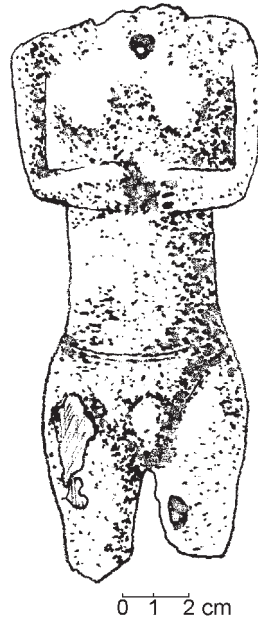


Figure 7. EBA *Ambiguous* figurine from Akrotiri, Thera (after Sotirakopoulou 1998: pl. 10).

identity perhaps overrode a more idiosyncratic internalisation of gender. Finally, the wide circulation of Cycladic figurines and attempts to emulate them indicate a wide appeal and consent regarding socially prescribed gender performance and associated symbolisms.

Other types of evidence indicate an increased social complexity and a more centrally organised society than in the Neolithic, which would have affected gender. Evidence from the Cyclades suggests that longboat activities would not have been possible unless some form of central authority could mobilise people and materials (Broodbank 2000: 256). The existence of centralised management and control over natural, material and human resources is apparent in other regions of the Aegean, such as Crete (Haggis 1999), the central and southern mainland (Halstead 1994; Pullen 1994), and the North Aegean (Marthari 1997). Differentiations between the accumulation of resources, access to wealth and its redistribution, as well as displays and manipulations of regimes of value imply the existence of an

elite or socially differentiated groups (Broodbank 2000: 264; Haggis 1999; Halstead 1994). Evidence coming from different regions of the Aegean, therefore, indicates the exercise of a form of central authority over human and material resources. The control over people may not have been restricted only to the mobilisation of labour, but may also have monitored performance according to prescribed gender and social identity in general.

Other evidence also suggests that gender identities in the EBA became more constrained (though not unequal) by social norms. More emphasis appears to have been paid to personal identity as a socially bounded category, evident in single, rich burials that attest to achieved social status (Broodbank 2000: 247). The same emphasis on socially bound identities is also indicated by communal burials that above all communicated group identity (Branigan 1988). Moreover, the production and use of new prestige objects, such as daggers, spearheads or diadems became closely interwoven with the construction and

performance of gender and social identity. The social restriction over gender roles is also evident in funerary assemblages. Although there appears to be an overlap regarding grave good assemblages (Mina 2005), a limited number of grave good categories were strongly associated with men and women respectively (Maggidis 1998: fig. 6.5; Sampson 1988).

Although I have argued the case for relative social rigidity in the way gender roles were performed, this does not necessarily indicate the rise of a patriarchal social system in the EBA. The limited research on gender in the EBA Aegean has been coupled with an unspoken consensus which characterised earlier narratives in which society was portrayed as patriarchal. As a result, figurines have been interpreted, implicitly or explicitly, as evidence that testifies to male dominance at the expense of women (Fitton 1989; Marinatos 1933; Sherratt 2000: 135-36). In this milieu,

there is a generalised assumption that the seated figurines represented men. Analysis, however, has shown that the two securely provenanced figurines seated on chairs represented *Male* and *Female* specimens. Moreover, of the securely provenanced figurines seated on stools, four are *Female* (Figure 8), four are *Asexual*, only two are *Male*, and one of the *Probably Male* variety. We have already seen how the modelling of figurines sitting on furniture (chair or stool) was linked with a marked social status. Social status, therefore, was not only restricted to men, and appears to have been closely associated with female representations. The funerary record also does not imply social inequality between men and women, as indicated by the rich female burials on Crete and Euboia (Maggidis 1998: 91-92; Sampson 1988: 41).

Another category of figurines that has spurred androcentric interpretations is that of

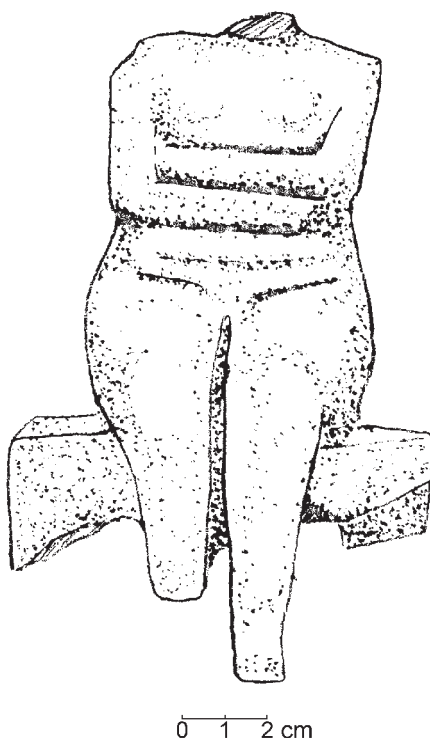


Figure 8. EBA seated *Female* figurine from Naxos (after Kontoleon 1976: pl. 137).

the *hunter-warrior*. The existence of two figurines, both of which bear anatomical female traits, exposes the androcentric biases of earlier interpretations. In fact, the modelling of what is conventionally interpreted as the 'baldric' (see Fitton 1989: 65, 88; Getz-Preziosi 1987: 20) does not occur on any of the provenanced *Male* figurines. The baldric motif instead marks two *Female* figurines, as well as one *Female form* and *Asexual* figurine. A sketch of a male *hunter-warrior* from the British Museum (Fitton 1984) should not be dismissed, but the secure representations of female hunter-warriors calls for a review of long-held stereotypes about EBA society. Though the EBA is characterised by stronger social norms over gender construction, we should not assume contentious gender relations. On the contrary, we may be able to detect complementary gender roles. For instance, a bone tube, which in the cemetery of Manika on Euboia is associated with female burials (Sampson 1987: 23), in the Cyclades furnished a burial also containing a sword (Doumas 1977: Grave 468 on Syros). Spinning implements often assumed to be associated with women, have been found in both female and male burials in Manika, Euboia (see Sampson 1988: fig. 35). 'Frying-pans', which in Cycladic culture indicate an association with male burials, are often decorated with female genitalia (Broodbank 2000: 251).

Traces of pigments on figurines and evidence indicating the practice of body decoration allow us to explore some of the symbolisms associated with gender. We have already explored possible symbolisms associated with the use of red, black and white colours. The use of blue pigment, however, in the form of azurite requires further discussion. Admittedly, blue has survived on the faces and pubic area of two unprovenanced Cycladic figurines (see Hoffmann 2002: 531), but blue pigment contained in bone tubes also appears to have been deposited as female grave goods (Sampson 1987: 23). Azurite is a copper mineral,

thus pointing to a direct link with metallurgy. The possible use of azurite to demarcate parts of the female anatomy (pubic area), and the association between bone tubes and female burials in Euboia (Sampson 1988), allude to a link between women and metals at a symbolic and/or tangible level. Equally, blue may have also alluded to celestial and water elements that would correspond with metallurgy and seafaring at a time when the Cyclades held a cardinal place in the movement of metal goods (Broodbank 2000: 292-97). Moreover, the use of exotic cinnabar may be implying a link between women and far-off places, if women moved geographically in the context of exogamous relationships. Finally, the association between women and the use of pigments, as well as between pigments, metallurgy and special social status (Broodbank 2000: 249), implies that women were able to tap into all the material and symbolic vocabulary that articulated social status. Such evidence reinforces the view that the EBA was not characterised by unequal gender relations.

Turning our attention to the possible ways that gender was embodied, decoration can offer us some insights. Motifs adorning figurines from regions of the northern Aegean and Thessaly imply that body decoration was still practiced in the EBA period. Evidence of tattooing and body painting implements from the Cyclades (Broodbank 2000: 249) and Euboia (Sampson 1987) confirm the manipulation of the body as a surface on which gender could be written and communicated. Furthermore, the association of such objects with female burials in Euboia (Sampson 1987: 23) suggests that women's identity was also expressed through the manipulation of their physical bodies. Women's association with body decoration, often constituting a ritual practice, may have given them a central part in processes of social cohesion and continuation of cultural traditions. Moreover, the inclusion of tattooing and body-painting implements in

rich burials on Euboia and the Cyclades suggest that body manipulation was a common practice among people of special social status, including women.

More insights into embodied gender come from motifs that represented jewellery, mainly denoting necklaces or amulets worn around the neck. Such motifs commonly adorned Cycladic figurines and some from regions of the north and east Aegean, all areas that played an instrumental role in the movement and processing of metals in the EBA. Such motifs adorned almost all categories of figurines, suggesting thus that there was no exclusive association with any one type, despite a tendency towards female representations. Jewellery as grave goods has been associated with women and was contained in rich burials (Maggidis 1998: 91-92; Sampson 1988: 41). Finally, the association on Crete between jewellery and *Asexual* figurines, the majority of which are represented clothed, implies that the embodiment and communication of social identity and rank were bound together with the use of costume and jewellery.

Conclusion

Applying uniform methodological and theoretical strategies for the study of Neolithic and EBA figurines has bridged a long-held division between a category of artefacts that in the prehistoric Aegean continued unbroken. If we dismiss changes in the representations of anthropomorphic figurines as purely stylistic, we risk oversimplifying the complex nexus that holds ideology and society together in an interlaced web of social actions. The employment of figurines in the ideology of prehistoric people has allowed us to gain an insight into past societies. The line between the sacred and the profane would have been blurred in simpler societies, therefore authorising a system of beliefs to structure social life, relationships and gender (Insoll 2004: 152-53), although I would

add that such a connection would have operated both ways. Moreover, drawing upon other evidence from the two periods has provided additional support for patterns that this study of figurines has detected.

Aside from the implications resulting from this analysis for the field of figurine studies, the study also offers new insights into aspects of prehistoric social organisation. In particular, it has discussed issues surrounding gender, social identity and the complex social dynamics between people that constituted what it meant to be a person in the prehistoric Aegean. In the Neolithic, the formal features of figurines, as well as contextual associations, have revealed a relative individualism and autonomy in the way gender was internalised. That should not be taken to mean that Neolithic society was not categorised according to gender groupings, as it apparently was on a strong corporeal basis. Also, contrary to modern-day preconceptions, indications that Neolithic society was not organised along a bi-polar axis suggest the manifold ways in which gender was constructed and further subdivided, implying multiple-gendered persons (Fowler 2004: 25).

While evidence points to increasing complexity in the later part of the Neolithic, there is no support for theories of gender inequality. That is not to assume that the dialectics of heterarchy did not affect gender. Indeed, negotiations between gender groupings are evident, also bringing to the forefront the active role of men in the social-ideological arena, which obliges us to revoke matrifocal interpretations of the Neolithic. In addition, it highlights the construction of female gender at a level beyond the purely biological role. The interpretation suggested here, therefore, contributes through a gender approach to recent studies that stress the complex nature of Neolithic social organisation in the Aegean.

In the EBA, evidence indicating a shift from domestic to communal rites suggests changes from an autonomous performance of rites to

increased external control over the exercise of ritual traditions and a more collective construction of social identities (Blake 2005: 110). Moreover, the repetition of form, but also of practices surrounding the use of figurines, which characterised the EBA, served to emboss the commonly held values of society into the minds and bodies of community members (Blake 2005: 104). In the case of regions that preserved Neolithic traditions of figurine use, we may be detecting an intention on their part to disguise changes that were taking place at an ideological (Blake 2005: 103), but also social level. Such seeming conservatism could be interpreted as an attempt of the EBA community to cultivate a link with the ancestral past, former ideals and values that further emphasised collective identity.

The formal and contextual evidence of figurines, as well as other types of evidence, point to a decreased freedom of individual internalisation of gender and to a tighter social control over the performance of social and gender roles. Though the physical body continued to play a central role in the construction and expression of gender identity, we may be detecting a move away from an emphasis on the corporeality of gender. Evidence indicates a coalescing of gender and social status, as community rules prescribed accepted social roles in a stricter way. Nevertheless, EBA society was not organised according to bipolar gender parameters. Furthermore, the EBA displays complementary gender roles evident in funerary assemblages and in the form of *hunter-warrior* female representations. Finally, despite the dominant model of a patriarchal Aegean society, the evidence in fact indicates that the avenues for the attainment of social status were open to both men and women.

The interpretation proposed has wider implications for the study and understanding of Aegean prehistory. Misplaced notions about a matrifocal Neolithic and a patriarchal EBA, as well as modern-day preconceptions

that have coloured interpretations of the prehistoric Aegean, have come under critical examination. Moreover, this study has demonstrated how a gender approach enhances our understanding of the social, economic and ideological organisation of Aegean prehistoric societies.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to Ruth Whitehouse, Cyprian Broodbank, John Chapman and Leslie Fitton whose comments on my doctoral thesis in turn benefited this article. I also thank *JMA*'s anonymous referees whose suggestions improved the article, as well as S. Phillips for proofreading the text.

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