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Figurines and Complex Identities in Late Bronze Age Cyprus

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Figurines provide enticing images through which to imagine otherwise remote and faceless prehistoric communities. Early examples from Cyprus feature recurrently on the covers of monographs, excavation reports and conference posters (*e.g.* Coleman *et al.* 1996; Tatton-Brown 1997; Knapp 2008); a Chalcolithic figurine was even deemed an apposite image for the one euro coin. Although for modern audiences, figurines have become convenient symbols, embodying and displaying Cyprus's past identities, researchers are well aware that these complex objects encompass far more than simply passive reflections of past realities. Prehistoric figurines were symbolically-charged objects with clear, active roles in shaping the socio-political landscape in which they were made and used. It is my contention, therefore, that for Cyprus's Bronze Age communities too, the use of figurines was intimately connected to the expression of a complex range of identities and group affiliations. This paper will combine detailed contextual and iconographic investigations of anthropomorphic figurines to explore that hypothesis in a Late Cypriot (LC) (1650–1050 BC) context. It will consider not only some of the criteria on which these identities may have been established, but also how they may have been practically and physically embodied by both figurines and LC people themselves.

Anthropomorphic imagery in this period was dominated by two distinct types, referred to here as Earring figurines (Fig. 5.1a) and Flathead figurines (Fig. 5.1b) (cf. Webb 1999, 209–10). It is commonly held that Earring figurines were introduced during the 15th century and flatheads during the 13th century BC with the types overlapping only briefly in LC IIC (1340/1315–1200 BC) (Courtois 1984, 78–80; Webb 1999, 209–10; Karageorghis 2006). However, thorough investigation of all examples originating in dateable contexts establishes that Earring and Flathead figurines were most probably completely contemporary. The earliest examples of both come from LC IIA (1450–1375 BC) contexts at Katydhata, Tomb 100 (Åström 1989, 56), for example, and Cypriot Tomb 19 and Area III, Level IIB at Enkomi (Dikaios 1969–71, 253, 411). Both types continue in use until at least the end of LC IIIA (1200–1100 BC) and were therefore used together for about 400 years. Recognising this contemporaneity raises important questions about the functional and symbolic relationship between these two similar yet distinct figurine types.

Flathead and Earring figurines survive in strikingly similar numbers with 111 and 112 known examples respectively. Both are similar in size, appearing in a hollow version of approximately 20 cm in length and a smaller, solid version, an average of 14 cm long. Both represent naked females with relief cone breasts and decorated pubic triangles, yet each type emphasises different characteristics. Flatheads display their eponymous feature as well as unusual pinched ears and painted or modelled hair curls. Although some refer to Earring figurines as "bird-faced" (*e.g.* Webb 1999, 209; Knapp 2008, 175–7), their squashed features were probably the result of their exaggerated, pierced ears, rather than any deliberate attempt to appear ornithomorphic. Both figurine types are undecorated at the back and have small, pointed feet which would not have supported them standing upright. This suggests that the figurines themselves were probably intended to lie supine or be carried in the hand, facing outwards. Further, the subject represented by both may well have been conceived as lying down, as befitting a venerated ancestor, floating as a deity or, perhaps, a combination of the two.

Earring and Flathead figurines never appear as massive display pieces or in dedicated ritual space, yet their contexts suggest that they played a visible, active role in the display of individual or group identities. Both types occur in tombs and settlements in roughly equal proportions (37 Flathead

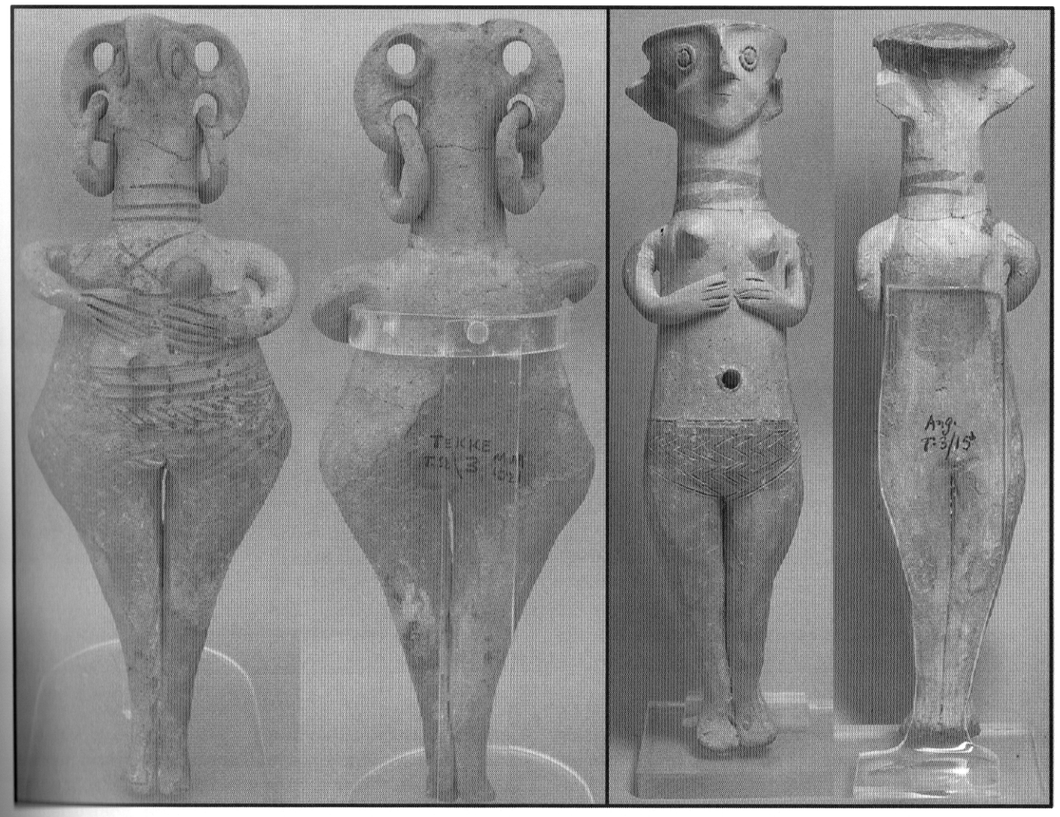


Figure 5.1: a) Earring Figurine, Hala Sultan Tekke, Tomb 2.3 (Larnaca Museum, photograph by author; courtesy of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus); b) Flathead Figurine, Angastina-Vounos, Tomb 3.15 (Cyprus Museum, photograph by author; courtesy of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus).

figurines were found in tombs, 32 in settlements and 7 in uncertain contexts; 24 Earring figurines were found in tombs, 18 in settlements and 17 in uncertain contexts). Within settlements, both types are most commonly found between floors in layers of fill. Just 14 come from primary contexts, nine of which, including Room 77 in Enkomi's Area III (Dikaios 1969–71, 240, 636) or Room 8, House A, Apliki-*Karamallos* (Kling and Muhly 2007, 210), were identified by their excavators as areas of small-scale industrial activity, including copper processing. Such contexts are often open-air, on the edges of buildings and are likely to have been public or semi-public space. Both figurine types, therefore, may have been used in these areas by those involved in manufacturing activities.

Furthermore, the presence of Earring and Flathead figurines in burials indicates a visible role in this important public ritual (Keswani 2004, 33–35, 140–45). Crucially, Earring and Flathead figurines, and indeed other contemporary figurine forms, are almost never found together in the same tomb. Of the 96 LC tombs in which figurines have been discovered (out of a total of 187 contemporary tombs known: Keswani 2004, tables 5.8, 5.9a–d, 5.11, 5.13), 70 contained only one distinct type. This follows an established Bronze Age Cypriot tradition of using figurines in tombs, not as part of a standard burial complement, but as a deliberate choice through which to demonstrate publically the identities or allegiances of the deceased (cf. Knox 2013, 53–5).

Earring and Flathead figurines are relatively evenly distributed across the island and most of the larger, better known sites have examples of both (Fig. 5.2). This geographical homogeneity is a significant departure from earlier periods when regional clustering of local figurine styles is manifest (Knox 2012, 159; 2013 50–2). On the



Figure 5.2: Map showing the distribution of Earring and Flathead figurines across Cyprus (drawn by author).

surface it suggests that the separate groups who used Earring and Flathead figurines were not defined by any connection to a particular site or area of the island. The mechanisms behind this distribution, however, suggest a more complex picture, emblematic of the LC socio-political environment in which they were made.

Although each type has a canon style, considerable variation exists in the rendering and presence of minor details, such as arms or navel, and decorative elements on the pubic triangle, chest and neck. Coupled with the relatively small surviving numbers, this suggests that Earring and Flathead figurines were neither standardised nor mass-produced (*contra* Karageorghis 1993, 1–2, 21). Significantly, within this variation, several pairs and small groups of almost identical examples can be distinguished (Table 5.1). Their similarity is significant enough to suggest that they were made, if not by the same hand, at least in the same workshop, but they were discovered at geographically disparate sites. Whereas earlier figurine types seem to have been made individually by households as the need arose, Earring and Flathead figurines were probably manufactured in small batches, designed by their makers to match a similar mental template of the required form. These objects travelled away from their site of manufacture, peddled by journeyman craftsmen perhaps, or as possessions of itinerant workers. The LC period is characterised by the appearance of large, often coastal, industrial or commercial settlements, many of which were new foundations at the beginning of LC IIA. Although the idea of a politically unified island at this time is hotly debated (*e.g.* Peltenburg 1996, 27–37; Keswani 2004, 154–7; Knapp 2008, 384–5), there is little doubt that Cyprus's culture and population had become more integrated. In this context, the geographical intermingling of contemporary figurine types is unsurprising, but nevertheless significant in terms of their use as markers of identities.

Within the bustling new LC settlements, distinct groups of people with differing local, kinship, social or other allegiances, may have lived side by side, an environment in which the need to establish identities and group allegiances in a visible manner would doubtless have been heightened. The use of distinctive figurines, displayed or used in semi-public settlements and public burial rituals, was one means by which this could be achieved. It is no accident that LC IIA–IIIA witnessed the most prolific figurine use ever seen in Cyprus with more than half of all figurative objects known from the Cypriot Bronze Age attributed to this period (940 of the 1790 clay objects in human and animal form). At least 12 distinct indigenous figurine types and three imported and copied Mycenaean forms can be identified, most of which are distributed evenly across Cyprus and all

Table 5.1: Significant groups of stylistically similar Earring and Flathead figurines

		Group Features	*Known Examples*	*Locations of Discovery*
Flathead figurines	1	hollow, straight arms, modelled curls	1897.04-01, 1322 (British Museum); 74.51.1543 (Metropolitan Museum, New York); E.003:184 (Medelhavsmuseet); A52 and A45 (Cyprus Museum)	Enkomi (British Tomb, Swedish Tomb 3.184), Nicosia-*Agia Paraskevi*
	2	hollow, angular face, exaggerated, vertical fingers	MLA 1009 (Larnaca Museum); A43 (Cyprus Museum)	Dromolaxia-*Trypes* (Tomb 1.1); Ayios Theodoros Soleas *Alonia*
	3	hollow, round navel, long body, small hands high up, small pubic triangle	A44 and E.T19.11 (Cyprus Museum)	Maroni-*Tsaroukkas* (Tomb 25.201); Enkomi (Swedish Tomb 19.11)
	4	hollow, round navel, both hands curving up, left to touch breasts in centre	A.T.3.15 (Cyprus Museum); (Kouklia Museum)	Kouklia *Palaeopaphos*; Angastina (Tomb 3.15)
Earring figurines	1	solid, upright infant, one hand above the other	NM 47.347 (Nicholson Museum, Sydney); 1964/IX-8/8 and 1937/VI-8/4 (Cyprus Museum)	Nicosia-*Agia Paraskevi*; Skouriotissa, Yialousa
	2	hollow, upright infant, three piercings	1897.04-10.1086 (British Museum); AO2407 (Louvre)	Enkomi (British Tomb 67), Tyre
	3	hollow, upright infant, crossed diagonals with double underline on chest	49-12-305 (Pennsylvania Museum); A55 (Cyprus Museum); 22.654 (Athens Archaeological Museum)	Kourion-*Bamboula* (B1563); Enkomi
	4	solid, incised horizontals on stomach, arms folding back horizontally to cover breasts	370312 (Smithsonian Museum); 1898.12-01/134 (British Museum); 19.29 (Cyprus Museum)	Enkomi (Cyprus Tomb 19.29); Maroni-*Tsaroukkas* (T14.103)

of which are spatially segregated within the burial record. Each type, including the Earring and Flathead figurines under discussion here, likely represented its own separate, but dispersed, group using different criteria on which to establish independent identities.

These groups were most likely defined by a complex collection of interrelated factors such as age, ethnic origin, social status, political or even religious affiliation. Contextual and osteological evidence for these criteria is regrettably scant. Multiple burial tombs, frequently disturbed by natural and manmade activities, for example, preclude the possibility of reconstructing individual burial assemblages which might have offered clues on the status or role of those buried with particular figurines. Similarly, lack of interest in skeletal remains at the time of excavation has obscured any insight into their age, gender or physical condition. Whilst figurines should never be treated as an uncomplicated window onto the past, in this instance such objects present an alternative and essential source of evidence. Earring and Flathead figurines played a demonstrable and active role in the display of identities, particularly within burial but probably also in settlement contexts. These similar yet distinct representative tropes remained in use side by side as a tangible embodiment of these divergent identities. As such, exploring their contrasting physical characteristics can begin to unravel some of the criteria or symbolism on which these identities might have been established.

Both Earring and Flathead figurines developed through a disparate group of Middle–Late Cypriot anthropomorphs (*e.g.* Morris 1985, fig. 231; Karageorghis 1991, WhP.Bh.1, WhP.D.1 Ea.11) and ultimately derive from the Plank tradition of the Early–Middle Cypriot period in which the flattened head is an obvious characteristic, and 85% of examples included pierced ears (*cf.* Karageorghis 1993, 21). The divergence between the two LC forms, which accentuate different, latent iconographical features, may be partly explained by differing influences from outside the island. Earring figurines have some resonance with earlier Levantine imagery, particularly the Syrian Orontes MAI "type classique" which were used predominantly *c.* 2300–2000 BC (Badre 1980, 45–51; cf. Karageorghis 1993, 21; Webb 1999, 211; Budin 2003, 143–4). Both are naked females with breasts and incised pubic area, squashed faces, pierced ears and necklaces. Significant differences, however, confirm that Earring figurines were certainly not a wholesale copy of Syrian types. The latter always wear a pierced headdress which is not seen on Cyprus, but never appear either hollow or holding an infant, as many Earring figurines do. Given that several centuries elapsed between the last use of the Syrian examples and the development

of Earring figurines on Cyprus, any stylistic influence must have derived from a complex, early and ongoing process of interaction between Cyprus and the Levant (*contra* Budin 2003, 199–241) which resonated with the importance of pierced ears within the indigenous Cypriot tradition.

Significant stylistic and chronological factors undermine the common suggestion that Cypriot Flatheads were influenced by the form of Mycenaean Psi figurines (*contra* Karageorghis and Karageorghis 2002, 272; Bolger 2003, 91–2). Flathead figurines are naked, with round anatomical faces and cannot stand alone, whereas Mycenaean examples have narrow, squashed faces, are clothed from head to toe and stand upright on a conical base. Moreover, since Mycenaean anthropomorphs do not appear on the mainland prior to Late Helladic IIIA, around 1390 BC (French 1971, 103), Flathead figurines pre-date them by almost a century. Instead of Aegean resonance, therefore, two unusual characteristics of Flathead figurines hint at another possibility. Firstly their small, pinched ears are unique amongst Bronze Age anthropomorphic representation, yet identical ears do appear on every contemporary Cypriot bovine representation – a collection of figurines and vessels known as Base Ring Bulls (Fig. 5.3). Since this feature is omnipresent in the Base Ring Bull repertoire and otherwise utterly absent from the anthropomorphic corpus, it is plausible that the ears of Flathead figurines were deliberately intended to resemble those of bulls. Secondly, painted or modelled hair curls, another feature unique to this type, appear on 43 of the 49 Flathead figurines whose heads survive in good condition. Taken together, these characteristics are unmistakeably reminiscent of pictorial representations of Egyptian goddess, Hathor.

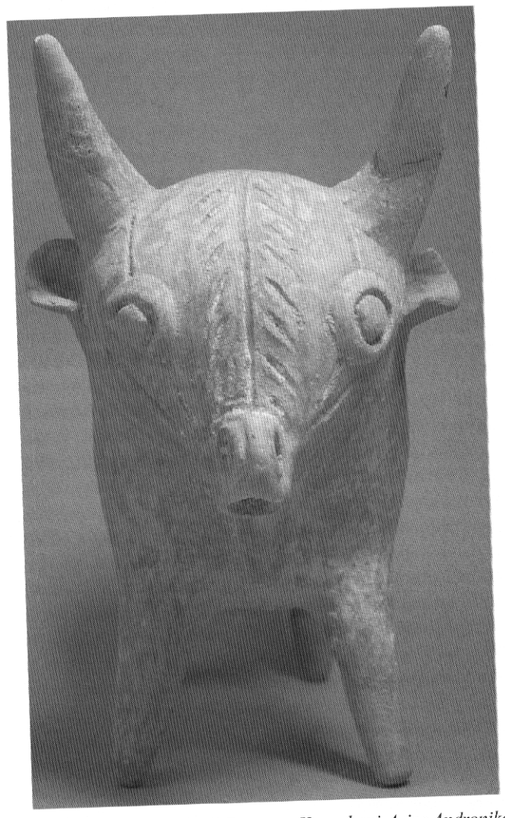


Figure 5.3: Base Ring Bull Figurine, Kazaphani-Ayios Andronikos Tomb 2B.198 (Cyprus Museum, photograph by author; courtesy of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus).

Egyptian cultural and trading contact with Cyprus is well-known during the Late Bronze Age. A significant amount of Aegyptiaca has been discovered in LC contexts and vice versa (Jacobsson 1994; Eriksson 1995). Significantly, Peltenburg (2007) argues that in LC II the island consumed an unusually high concentration of Egyptian Common Faience bowls, whose imagery and use within Egypt at least, is primarily associated with Hathor. While Flathead Figurines are evidently not direct copies of Egyptian representations, known characteristics of that deity may have been transmitted not by visual examples, but through oral communication, as has been argued elsewhere for the proliferation of Centaur imagery throughout the Near East (Shear 2002). Flathead figurines, then, would be local, Cypriot versions with bovine ears and hair curls rendered in distinctly Cypriot ways, but with the intention to represent something akin to Egyptian Hathor. This resonance with Hathor has important implications for our understanding of the function of Flathead figurines, their use in ritual practices and their possible relationship with the copper industry on Cyprus. What is relevant here, however, is that Flathead figurines call to some extent on the imagery of Egypt.

Although Earring and Flathead figurines grew from indigenous Cypriot forms, therefore, it seems likely that different external influences, from the Levant and Egypt respectively, helped to shape them into distinct types. Part of the ideological distinction between these types, then, might be explained by these different evolutionary paths as those who used Earring and Flathead figurines may have consciously or unconsciously allied themselves to Levantine or Egyptian cultures. This, however, is likely to have been just one facet of a complex array of identities symbolised within these figurines.

Multiple ear piercing and flattened heads, the eponymous features of Earring and Flathead figurines, are known to have been practiced by the wider LC population and their appearance on the figurines may suggest a further component of the complex identities embodied by their use. Pierced ears are well attested in Bronze Age Cyprus, not least by the recovery of vast numbers of metal earrings,

many of which weighed upwards of 8 g. There is no doubt that multiple, possibly large gauge ear piercing was practiced with frequency in the Late Bronze Age. Piercing could have occurred at any point during the life of the woman and been augmented, highlighted or ignored at will (although see Sørensen 1997, 101 on what might have been considered permanent or transient modifications). Furthermore, the heavy earring sets discovered in Kalavasos-*Ayios Dhimitrios* Tomb 11 (Goring 1989, 103–4) present the possibility that wearing earrings may have been an overt yet coded marker of specific wealth. In this tomb, two sets were discovered, apparently *in situ*, each comprising six plain gold hoop earrings. Both sets conformed to a known weight standard of 10.8 g, where one set added up to a total weight of six units and the other four units. Evidently, these earring sets would have been very heavy to wear and possibly have led to permanent stretching of the ear with prolonged use. Crucially, however, their conformity to this weight standard suggests that they may have been used as a sort of visible currency, signalling the wealth of the wearer with mathematical precision. Earring figurines, then, may well be connected to this practice of wearing multiple earrings as a marker of wealth and status, an obvious, physical signal of identity.

The rounded, flattened head of Flathead figurines, however, tell another story. These were formed with care from a separate piece of clay and have a distinctive ridge along the front edge. This ridge, as well as the unusual head shape, is characteristic of a skull deliberately shaped by post-bregmatic flattening. Cradleboarding in prehistoric Cyprus and the accidental plagiocephaly which this encouraged are well attested throughout the Bronze Age, both osteologically and iconographically. Infants depicted on Plank imagery and as Cradleboard figurines corroborate the practice in the Early–Middle Bronze Age. The rare LC Cradleboard figurines demonstrate its continuation into the Late Bronze Age (Karageorghis 1993, D.2–3). Several osteological studies have shown that post-bregmatic flattening, a deliberate modification achieved in infancy by cradleboarding with a flat object strapped to the head, was a practice specific to Late Bronze Age Cyprus (Bolger 2003, 141–4; Lorentz 2005, 46–7; 2009, 93–4). Attested with varying frequency at different sites across the island, this practice would have left a permanent indication of the infant life of the person, an inescapable marker of identity.

If Flathead figurines reference those whose heads were deliberately shaped in infancy, this implies an identity defined at birth, by kinship or heredity which could neither be acquired nor surrendered in adulthood. If Earring figurines, on the other hand, are connected to the practice of piercing ears and wearing heavy earrings of plausibly calculable wealth, they might suggest something more transitory. Piercings can be added and earrings added or removed at any time during a person's life. This wealth and this particular manner of expressing it may be acquired, augmented or lost at any given point. If Flathead figurines stood for inherited status, perhaps Earring figurines represented the "nouveaux riches". Whatever the distinction, it is clear that Earring and Flathead figurines were part of an integrated package of visible identity markers which made use not only of the represented, but also the living body.

Whilst Earring and Flathead figurines share many analogous characteristics and functioned in similar ways for similar purposes, their contextual distinctions reveal that each was relevant to a separate group of people, scattered across the island. These groups called on subtly opposing symbolic roots to display their differing identities. One referenced Levantine imagery, the other possibly Egyptian; one privileged pierced ears and wearing multiple earrings, the other a deliberately flattened head. Undoubtedly further distinctions existed as part of these complex identities which cannot easily be uncovered from surviving evidence. It cannot be insignificant, however, that both of these groups called on female imagery. Indeed, Earring and Flathead figurines represent the earliest Cypriot anthropomorphs to demonstrate categorical, anatomical gender, female or otherwise. It has been argued that the use of gendered imagery in prehistoric communities may have been part of a strategy to negotiate power and identity for previously disenfranchised groups (*e.g.* Bailey 1994). Similarly, the use of physical modification, jewellery and dress as visible symbols of identity has also been specifically associated with power relationships between groups particularly of women (Sørensen 1997, 98–105). Although there is no osteological or contextual information which might support their gender-specific use, it is nevertheless tempting to suggest that Earring and Flathead figurines were specifically associated with female identities. It is plausible that two separate groups of people, possibly women, who were involved in small-scale industrial activities including the processing of copper, were able to take advantage of the blossoming economic environment of Late Bronze Age Cyprus to establish an improved social status. To do so, it was necessary for them to use persistent, visible means in order to promote and advertise their desire for change. The use of Earring and Flathead figurines in public and semi-public spaces played a significant part in this crucial system of identity display and negotiation.

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6

Handlers and Viewers: Some Remarks on the Process of Perception of Terracotta Figurines on the Example of Cypriot "Goddesses with Upraised Arms"

Katarzyna Zeman-Wiśniewska

Coroplastic studies concerning figures and figurines have developed as a distinct, very vibrant and dynamic field of archaeological research.[1] Terracotta figures and figurines, especially anthropomorphic ones, are fascinating in the way they bring us *face to face* with the past, and have provoked numerous discussions concerning social structures, ancient religions, and even prehistoric models of beauty. Scholars have suggested that artefacts, including figures and figurines, should not be studied, as they are still often presented in museums, standing alone, extracted from their environment, visible only en-face and untouchable (Brumfiel 1996; Hamilton *et al.* 1996; Bailey 2005; Zonou-Herbst 2009). We can overcome these limitations by placing these kinds of objects within the social and spatial contexts they derive their meaning from, and not vice versa as used to be believed (French 1981, 173). The application of this dynamic approach, which underlines the three-dimensionality and performative aspects of terracottas, is of special importance. I hope to add an example of how these methodologies can help to *figure out* figurines, by asking a new type of questions.

The dimensions of the object play an important role in the process of perception and can have psychological effects on viewers and handlers, and this is the main subject of this paper. Bigger or smaller size imposes specific limitations and possibilities, *i.e.* a figure is more visible for a larger group of people, and a figurine is more palpable and easier to handle. Particularly miniaturisation combined with three-dimensionality forces a closer proximity between the object and the viewer or handler (allowing proper view of the object), which introduces a sense of intimacy and empowerment (Bailey 2005). In this paper, I focus on performative and experiential aspects of the figurines. Taking into account their find spots, dimensions, and portability, I discuss how they might be handled and displayed. This approach helps to reconstruct the perspective of those who created and used figures and figurines. I will discuss these issues by referring to a case study of groups of Cypriot terracottas, conventionally termed "Goddesses with Upraised Arms" (GWUA).

GWUAs are anthropomorphic figurines and figures, representing a standing person, most commonly gendered female, wearing a long garment (a skirt, often wheel-made), with arms stretched upwards and often bent, sometimes wearing a tiara or a *polos* (a type of head-dress, a high cylindrical crown). Figurines classified as GWUA are well attested in Cyprus from Late Cypriot (LC) III (1200–1050 BC) and were especially common during Cypro-Geometric (CG) I–II (1050–900 BC) (Karageorghis 1978). However, they are still present in the assemblages of Archaic and even Cypro-Classical anthropomorphic terracottas in a more standardised form.

Cypriot GWUAs differ noticeably from their Bronze Age (BA) predecessors in the manner of representation, illustrated by the new characteristic gesture which replaced arms folded under the breasts or alongside the body, and introduced the long garment in place of nudity. These new terracottas were also made to stand independently and were therefore probably handled differently than the Late Bronze Age (LBA) ones. Furthermore, LC figurines were mostly found in mortuary contexts, while GWUAs were found within sanctuaries, thus suggesting that the meaning and function of figurines changed during the LBA/Early Iron Age (EIA) transition period. Nevertheless, some signs of continuity in Cypriot coroplastics are also noticeable; GWUA facial characteristics and painted