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Plank-shaped Idol

Cypriot, Middle Cypriot I, ca. 1900-1800 B.C.

Terracotta

Height: 27 cm; 10 5/8 in.

Provenance:

Private collection, Geneva, prior to 1984;
Ars Antiqua, Geneva, 1984/85;
Private collection, Switzerland;
Private collection, Belgium.

Exhibited:

Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, 2005-2019.
TEFAF Maastricht, March 2020.
Antike in Basel, 5-8 November 2020.

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The present figurine is a very fine example of a plank-shaped figurine from Early Bronze Age Cyprus. The figurine has a rectangular head and body, the head featuring a raised nose and two round impressions indicating eyes. Both the head and body are lavishly decorated with geometric incised patterns on both sides: above the eyes perhaps indicating a headdress, along the neck, and down the body, likely indicating a woven garment overlaid with jewelry. The reverse of the head is decorated with cascading rows of incised lines, perhaps indicating long hair.

Anatomical representations of humans and animals first appear in the Neolithic period on Cyprus, at the end of the ninth millennium B.C. Not until the third-millennium B.C., however, did stone and terracotta figurines come into use in large quantities in religious rituals. Although the sex of the present figurine is not clear from its iconography, Bronze Age Cypriot human figures were dominated by representations of women, which are supposed to have represented fertility and rebirth in the afterlife.

The present figurine is exceptional in its large size, as well as its impeccable state of preservation. The figure is entirely original and unrepaired, as attested by a scientific report conducted by the Qed Laboratoire (Marseille).

References:

Karageorghis, Vassos. 1991. *The Coroplastic Art of Ancient Cyprus*, Vol. 1. no. Ba.7, pp. 55–56, pl. XXI.1, Nicosia: Foundation Anastasios G. Leventis.

Barnes, Lorna and Ellen Salzman. 1998. "Preliminary Investigations of Surface Decoration on a Group of Ancient Terracottas from Cyprus." *Glass, Ceramics and Related Materials : ICOM Committee for Conservation Glass, Ceramics, and Related Materials Working Group, & Institute of Arts and Design Department of Conservation Studies*, Alice B. Paterakis, ed. p. 83, Vantaa, Finland: EVTEK Institute of Art and Design, Dept. of Conservation Studies.

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Karageorghis, Vassos, Joan Mertens, and Marice E. Rose. 2000. *Ancient Art from Cyprus: The Cesnola Collection in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. no. 2, pp. 20–21, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Karageorghis, Vassos, Gloria Merker, and Joan R. Mertens. 2016. *The Cesnola Collection of Cypriot Art : Terracottas*. no. 1, pp. 16, 252, Online Publication, [CD-Rom 2004], New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Comparanda:



Paris, Musée du Louvre, AM 822.



New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 74.51.1534.