EARLY STATUETTES FROM GREECE

By CHRISTINE ALEXANDER

Associate Curator of Greek and Roman Art

The archipelago of the Aegean sea called by Greeks the Cyclades had deposits of a white marble which knew the chisels of the Greek sculptors in turn, from the nameless masters of the kouroi on down to the end. But in the Bronze Age the Aegean peoples were not sculptors par excellence, and Island marble for the most part slept in its quarries until the barges called for it in archaic Greek times. Yet in the third millennium B.C., when copper was newly hardened into bronze, strange and prophetic figures made their appearance, carved from translucent white marble and streaked with paint. The center of their distribution seems to have been the Cyclades. The more primitive of them are shaped as much like violins as like human figures, or else they map the human frame in one plane only, or again do hardly more than that. But the best are fully plastic, like the goddess or woman on page 239. To what pattern was this figure cut? We do not see her like among the narrow-waisted tribes of Cretan art. Some fresh eye and hand saw and recorded this woman in the simplest of terms.

The group of Cycladic marble statuettes in the First Greek Room includes the chief known types, except the fiddle-shaped, thanks to anonymous lenders who have supplemented the Museum collection for the reopening of the Greek wing. Besides those here illustrated, there are a little flat upright statuette; a goddess or woman standing in angular grace; an obese female figure seated in the coil of her limbs; a man playing the harp, the rarest and strangest of all. There is no paint left on these statuettes, though no doubt they had it, like others of their kind. Thus marble sculpture appeared in the Aegean, lingered a little, and vanished without issue, in the Early Cycladic period, about 3000-2200 B.C., when the Old Kingdom sculptors were at work in Egypt.

The male figure that proudly walks through Cretan art is long-haired, erect, with shoulders and hips flaring from a narrow waist. Two bronze statuettes of the Late Minoan period are shown together, one of which is illustrated on page 240.

There have come from the tombs of the late Mycenaean period, about 1400-1100 B.C., numerous little figures of singular grace, terracotta statuettes striped with blackish glaze. They are goddesses or ladies. The face is a pinched-up beak. Some fold their arms. The torso, if the arms hang down, is a disk (see p. 241); if the arms are raised, that makes a crescent of it. Below this the drapery falls bell-shaped, so that the figure stands. Some of the women wear hats. It is hard to define how they give their gracious impression. They were accompanied in the tombs by oxlike quadrupeds like the one at the right on page 241.

The goat on page 241 could have been a puzzle, for it is not striped with glaze but gilded all over. It is credibly said to have been found with some Mycenaean ornaments, also shown in the First Room, and a fragment of a similar animal was discovered during Swedish excavations at Asine. So, not without credentials, this goat joins the company of the Mycenaean statuettes and stands among them as a rarity. The provenance is said to have been Mycenae itself.

These were the creations of artisans who in an age of palaces made them as humble tokens for the living or the dead. When this Age of Bronze was gone, and dark centuries ensued, the Greeks were poor and decentralized, and their art was geometric. The five bronzes, shown here, belong to the last of these centuries during which Greece lay fallow, the eighth B.C. They are not the by-products of a rich community; they are the purposeful beginnings of Greek sculpture and lie fully in its current. The human and animal figures emerged from the linear scheme of geometric
Cycladic marble statuette of a goddess or woman, said to have come from a Greek island. Height 14 1/4 inches. Fletcher Fund, 1934

Decoration; they bore its stamp, and transmitted to the archaic style a respect for pattern as such. But they also show the sculptor's true interest in bone and muscle and articulation. Emboldened by such interest, the artist produced the man and centaur locked in friendly or unfriendly grip, page 242. He stated here the problem which we see solved in the Parthenon metopes. The warrior, page 243, the horse with rod-like barrel and flaring thighs, page 242, the armorer intent on making a helmet and the strutting fowl, page 243, are full of action.

A terracotta goddess seated on a rich throne, page 240, belongs also to the Geometric period. A caryatid figure, sculptured in the round, acts as a stretcher for the back of the throne.

The reinstalled Greek collection, opened to the public on May 23, is the first completed section of the projected rearrangement of the entire Greek and Roman Department. The collection is shown in eight rooms, progressing in chronological order from 3000 B.C. to the Hellenistic period and centering around a sculpture hall containing larger work of all periods.—Editor.
ABOVE: Mycenaean terracotta statuettes of women, height 4 1/8 and 4 1/4 inches; Mycenaean gilt terracotta statuette of a goat, said to have been found in a tomb at Mycenae, height 3 inches; and Mycenaean terracotta statuette of a bovine animal, height 3 1/4 inches. Fletcher Fund, 1935, 1939, 1936

OPPOSITE PAGE: Late Minoan bronze statuette of a youth, height 3 1/4 inches, bequest of Richard B. Seager, 1926, and Geometric Greek statuette of an enthroned goddess, terracotta, height 4 7/8 inches, Fletcher Fund, 1931
Geomnetric Greek bronze statuettes. LEFT: a horse, height 6 15/16 inches, Rogers Fund, 1921. RIGHT: Herakles (or a Lapith) and a centaur, height 4 7/16 inches, gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
Geometric Greek bronze statuettes. **LEFT:** a warrior (the weapons once held in his hands are missing), height 7 13/16 inches. **RIGHT:** an armorer, height 2 1/16 inches, and a cock or peacock, said to have been found in Argolis, probably in the Argive Heraion, height 4 inches. *Fletcher Fund, 1936, 1942, 1935*