

Abstract

Anthropomorphic figurines constitute one of the most interesting and equally enigmatic objects of the prehistoric era. These miniature statues of the human form are often perceived as representations of gods or goddesses, and treated as static images of worship. More recent approaches investigating their context and materiality, however, have begun to highlight these objects' active agency in the construction of personhood and the creation of a sense of place in prehistoric societies, with references to a variety of issues such as gender, identity, regeneration, and ancestry. In tandem with these developments in the theory and method of prehistoric figurine studies, this book aims to explore the figurines recovered from the site of Uğurlu Höyük, located on the island of Gökçeada (Imbros) in the northeastern Aegean. Occupied in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, this mound yielded close to a hundred figurines which were in use between approximately 6800 to 4300 BC. The function and meaning of these objects are investigated through an assessment of their thematic variation, standardisation and abstraction, selection of raw materials, manufacture processes, and surface treatment, as well as temporal and spatial analyses of their breakage patterns, find contexts, and intra-assemblage relations. A comparative analysis with other figurines from the wider region is also undertaken to examine the relations between these communities and their utilisation of similar objects.

The figurines in Uğurlu Höyük were particularly accumulated at a specific part of the settlement where intensive pit-digging and mortuary activity took place, where they were systematically broken and distributed. Thematically, it is hard to impose a simple male-female dichotomy on the Uğurlu Höyük figurines, which retained an intentional ambiguity. Different raw materials were consistently manipulated to offer alternative narratives about identity and affiliation. The figurines provided this prehistoric island society with a means of connecting with other people, groups, and ancestors through their fragmentation and circulation. On a regional scale, Uğurlu Höyük figurines indicate links with Anatolia in the late 7th millennium BC, when the figurine assemblage shows strong parallels with contemporary sites in the Lakes Region. In contrast, representational preferences in Uğurlu Höyük aligned with the Aegean Sea during the 6th millennium BC. At this period, they were used to relate to other communities in the northern Aegean through the execution of incised decorative motifs, and with the southern Aegean through their shared forms. Far from being passive objects relegated to isolation, figurines actively contributed to how the people of Uğurlu Höyük understood themselves and how they could relate to the world around them.