Gesturing Age, Posturing Gender. The Neolithic Antecedents of Bodily Comportment in the Aegean

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Abstract   *The research presented in this paper examines the postures and gestures of anthropomorphic figurines from Neolithic Crete and a selection of sites from Thessaly. Postures and gestures are classified by type and then analysed statistically in comparison with the sex of figurines. The aim is to distinguish whether or not bodily comportment is related to sex and possibly gender and age. Conversely, the differences in postures and gestures may be the result of the materials employed to make the figurines or a chronological development. The preliminary conclusions suggest that different factors determine the modelling of bodily comportment in Neolithic bodies: the chronology and materials used for the manufacture of the figurines are related to specific postures and arm-positions, gestures and postures that conceal or emphasise sexual attributes are possibly associated with different age-stages; and shared gestures and postures in figurines of different sexual categories may represent similar gender identities.*

Introduction

The Neolithic Aegean represents the starting point of the diversification in bodily comportments in three-dimensional form. For instance, the 'Folded Arms' gesture, typical of Cycladic figurines from the Early Bronze Age, appears for the first time in the Neolithic. The study of anthropomorphic figurines may shed light on the symbolic construction of social identities in which gender and age are significant factors. The conventions employed by Neolithic sculptors in the representation of gestures and postures on figurines may help us understand the division in age-stages and the variety and ambiguity of gender in the Neolithic Aegean.

The diversity of bodily postures and gestures on Neolithic Aegean figurines in clay and hard materials implies the existence of an elaborated language, perhaps concerning ritual expressions. Gesture is also a way of communicating cultural bodily comportments that have different meanings in different societies. Postures and gestures represented on figurines convey messages that express different body languages that may be related to sex, gender and age. Biological sex is not the only structuring principle for identifying sex and gender, but it tends to play a significant categorising role in any given society (Herdt 1994, 80). Thus, the presence or absence of sexual attributes is one of the main ways to categorise Neolithic figurines by sex in our assemblage (see section B, methodology). In this analysis, gender is understood as the social construction of sex. Even though the biological sex of a figurine might not be represented through the depiction of sexual attributes, it could still represent gender through clothing, ornamentation, gestures or postures that are conventionally associated with a particular sex. However, sex and gender change through the life course of an individual. Therefore, an intersectional view is also needed to go beyond the binary assumptions of sex in past scholarship and consider other options for the variations in sex, perhaps indicating age or other non-binary genders.

Previous literature has analysed postures and gestures on figurines from the Neolithic Aegean. For instance, Peter Ucko (1968, 324), who previously analysed gestures and postures on figurines from Neolithic Crete related to sex, considered that no correlations existed between arm-positions, postures and sex. However, he associated a higher number of figurines in the squatting position with females and 'no-sex' figurines, and standing with males and 'no-sex' cate-
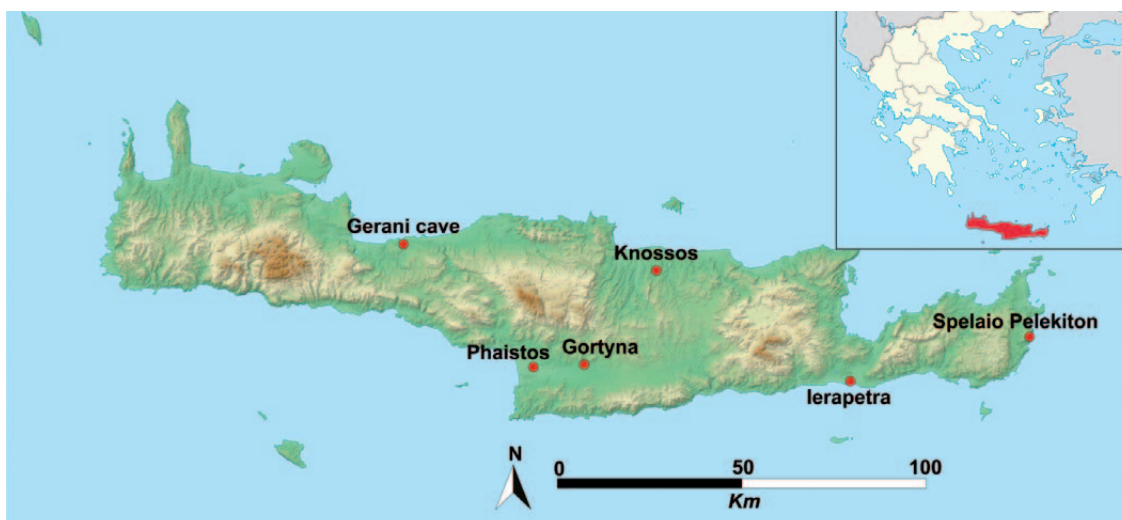
Fig. 1: Map of Crete and sites with Neolithic figurines.

Fig. 2: Map of Thessaly with the selected sites with Neolithic figurines.

gories (Ucko 1968, 323). Also, Ucko (1968, 323) showed that the number of figurines with gestures like arm-stumps is higher in 'no-sex' figurines, while females are mainly represented with 'arms-to-chest'. Maria Mina (2008) also analysed postures and gestures in her corpus of figurines from the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Aegean. She associated gestures with the hands on or near the breasts related to female figurines (Mina 2008, 39). Furthermore, Mina related this association with "expressing a pre-occupation with reproduction as a central part of women's lives" (Mina 2008, 39). An assertion that still reflects the influence of the 'Mother Goddess' theories (*e.g.* Gimbutas 1982) that put reproduction as an essential part to understand the importance of women in the Neolithic, particularly as related to the high number of female figurines in areas such as Greece or the Balkans. Instead, Stratos Nanoglou (2005, 146), in his analysis of figurines from Thessaly, considers that gender is not associated with gesture as, for instance, he considers that breasts are not related to particular gestures or postures. However, he differentiates between earlier Neolithic figurines (Early and Middle Neolithic) with gestures and postures that suggest an emphasis on motion and action, and the later Neolithic ones (Late and Final Neolithic) when almost none of the bodies have articulated legs and the arms are represented as stubs, indicating static bodies (Nanoglou 2005, 150; 2010, 221).

For the purposes of the present discussion, aspects of analysis that play a central part in the understanding of gestures and postures represented on figurines are their associations with sex, gender and age, as well as their possible use as indicators of gender and age in figurines, and their significance in Neolithic iconography.

Methodology

The figurine sample analysis is taken from the corpus of figurines from Neolithic Crete, which includes a total of 127 figurines from the sites of Knossos, the Gerani Cave, Phaistos, Pelekita Cave, Ierapetra, Gortyna (Fig. 1), and figurines from unknown sites in the Mesara plain or in central Crete. The other corpus analysed for this study is a selection of case studies from Thessaly, considering the high number of Neolithic sites with figurines in this region. The sample includes sites of all the different Neolithic phases from Early to Final Neolithic (Table 1): Sesklo, Tsangli, Tsani Magoula, Platia Magoula Zarkou, Dimini, Rachmani, Zappeio 2 (or Magoula Kouskouro), Chara 1 (Magoula Panagou), Sitochoro 1 and Nees Karyes (Sarliki) (Fig. 2). The total number of figurines included in the sample from Thessaly is 208. Both assemblages of figurines from Crete and Thessaly include figurines made mainly of clay, but also of marble, steatite, shell, slate, breccia, bone and stone.

Initial Neolithic / Aceramic (IN):	*c.* 7000–6600/6500 *cal.* BC
Early Neolithic (EN):	'Early Ceramic' (Frühkeramikum), Proto-Sesklo, Pre-Sesklo c. 6500–6000/5900 *cal.* BC
Middle Neolithic	(MN): Sesklo I, II, III *c.* 6000/5900–5600/5500 *cal.* BC
Late Neolithic (LN):	Tsangli-Larisa, Arapi (LN I); Otzaki, Classic Dimini (LN II); *c.* 5600/5500–4500 *cal.* BC
Final Neolithic (FN):	Rachmani *c.* 4500–3500 *cal.* BC

Table 1. Chronology of Neolithic Greece with the Thessalian phases combining radiocarbon calibrated dates and relative chronology terms (modified from Perlès and Johnson 2004, 66; Reingruber et al. 2017).

The methodology used to analyse sex categories on the figurines is mainly based on their sexual attributes. The sexual features examined are the presence or absence of breasts, genitalia, an exaggerated protruding belly, a pubic triangle and exaggerated buttocks. The categories are as follows:

Female: presence of breasts or female genitalia, exaggerated buttocks or exaggerated protruding belly. Possible presence of secondary traits such as wide hips and buttocks, decorative motifs, painting, anatomical details and incisions, postures or gestures associated with Female sex.

Probably Female: unclear presence of breasts or female genitalia. Secondary attributes that may indicate a female gender such as the presence of wide hips and buttocks, decoration and painting, anatomical details and incisions, postures and gestures, must be analysed compared to their presence or absence in definite Female figurines.

Male: presence of male genitalia and absence or small rendering of breasts. Secondary patterns that may indicate male gender include the body shape, decoration, postures and gestures associated with Male sex.

Probably Male: unclear or absence of representation of male genitalia. Other features such as body shape, posture, arm-position, or decoration can suggest male bodies and must be analysed compared to definite Male figurines.

Asexual: absence of sexual attributes, including male and female genitalia, breasts, and the lack of any pattern of secondary traits associated with figurines categorised as probably sexed.

Double-sex: presence of male and female sexual attributes on the same figurine, generally consisting of breasts and male genitalia.

Non-Identifiable: fragmented figurines that cannot be assigned to any category due to their state of preservation.

The gestures and postures on the figurines are divided into types using descriptive categories that are developed taking as reference previous works (*e.g.* Ucko 1968). The different categories are then analysed statistically and compared with sex and age classifications. The three-dimensional representations of postures and gestures show distinctive patterns which probably had an associated meaning and significance that is, at times, difficult to interpret, considering the schematism of some representations. The materials used to make the figurines may also influence the

representations of particular gestural representations and, therefore, this aspect will also be explored in the analysis.

The methodology to classify the figurines by age looks at the differences in size, sex (or absence of), gestures and postures that may be gendered, anatomical details, especially differences in the development of sexual traits or body hair growth, and decoration. The appearance in the same archaeological context of figurines with sexual traits (Female/Male) with those showing an ambiguous depiction of sex (Probably Female/Male) or absence of sexual traits (Asexual) that also show differences in size, such as larger sexed figurines and smaller Asexual are important to identify possible age-stages in the assemblage. Those Asexual and of small size compared to other larger Male or Female figurines representing adults may be interpreted as children, juveniles, prepubescent or younger individuals. Other ageing traits as signs of old age are also considered which include paunches, wrinkles, sagging breasts and a sagging chest. Neolithic images without firm bodies and faces marked by signs that may indicate advanced age have been interpreted in this way (Hitchcock and Nikolaidou 2013, 505; Gallou 2018, 63).

Gestures on Neolithic Figurines from the Aegean

The examination of gestures represented on Neolithic figurines from Crete and Thessaly reveals an array of different arm position types, the most numerous being the arms depicted as stumps, 'arms to the chest' in different variations, and no arms.

The analysis of gestures depicted on figurines compared to their sex shows that the arm-positions are definitely gendered. Statistically, the most frequent way of depicting the arm-position in the Neolithic of Crete and Thessaly is through arm-stumps. Arm-stumps are probably a schematic depiction of the 'arms to the chest' gesture. This is exemplified by the figurine AMH.2716 (Ucko 1968, fig. 120) from Late Neolithic Knossos, which has arm-stumps modelled in a triangular shape, but the arms are bent to the chest in low relief. The use of arm-stumps might also be a way of avoiding the breakage of the arms, especially for clay figurines. Ucko (1962, 45) suggested this idea using an ethnographic parallel with the dolls of the Ashanti tribes, who employed this method for figurines that children carried around. Arm-stumps are displayed in most categories of sex: in Female, Probably Female, Probably Male and Asexual, except for Male figurines in Crete and Thessaly, and for Double-sex figurines, which are only found in Thessaly. This gesture is mainly used for Asexual figurines in both Crete and Thessaly (Tables 2–3) and, less frequently, in Females. Most arm-stumps appear on Late and Final Neolithic figurines made of hard materials. However, stumps are also numerous in clay, especially in those figurines with more schematic traits where the anthropomorphic shape of the figurine is merely outlined. Perhaps the selection of the material conditioned the details depicted on the figurines, particularly the representation of arm-stumps. There is also a slight difference in shape in the classification of arm-stumps in Crete. Female and Probably Female figurines are mostly depicted with rounded arm-stumps, while Asexual figurines and Probably Males are mostly associated with triangular arm-stumps (Table 2). While this difference could pertain to a gender differentiation and perhaps rounded and triangular stumps represented two diverse schematic gestures of the 'arms to the chest', it rather seems to be related to the material from which figurines were made. Precisely, triangular stumps on Asexual figurines from Crete are mostly associated with hard materials (in seven figurines out of nine total), which could relate to the different tools and carving methods used for these materials. In Crete, seventeen figurines with arm-stumps are Asexual (Table 2). In Thessaly, twenty-eight Asexual figurines depict the arms as stumps (Table 3). This is the sex category with the highest number of arm-stumps. However, Female figurines have arm-stumps in thirteen examples from Crete and eight from Thessaly.

The 'arms to the chest' gesture is statistically the second category in number in the series of gestures present on Neolithic figurines from Crete and Thessaly. Similarly to arm-stumps, the 'arms to the chest' gesture appears in most sex categories except for Probably Males in Crete and Male and Probably Males in Thessaly. In contrast with Minoan figurines, where this gesture ap-

pears on male figurines from peak sanctuaries and Neopalatial bronze figurines (Morris 2001, 249), in general, the variants of 'arms to the chest' appear more commonly on Female and Probably Female figurines in Neolithic Thessaly and Crete. However, the only exception of a Male figurine with 'arms to the chest' is the marble L2623 (Papathanassopoulos 1996, fig. 247) found in Pit A, from Middle Neolithic Knossos.

The 'arms to the chest' gesture can be further subdivided into subtypes. One is the 'arms to the chest below the breasts'. This is the most widely used gesture for Female figurines in Crete and Thessaly. In Thessaly, 'arms to the chest below the breasts' is found in nine Female figurines (Table 3). For instance, at Platia Magoula Zarkou, the two larger Female figurines found on the house model ML.PMZ.619 are represented with 'arms to the chest below the breasts', while the smaller Female has the arms missing (Fig. 3). The clay house model without a roof had nine figurines in its interior, and it was found in a pit dug into the destruction level of a house at the end of the Middle Neolithic in Platia Magoula Zarkou (Gallis 1985). Therefore, the house model dates either to the end of the Middle Neolithic period or the beginning of the Late Neolithic (Nanoglou 2005, 149). The group of nine anthropomorphic figurines display different sizes, shapes, decorations, gestures, postures, and sex. The largest figurine is a Female and measures 7 cm high, represented with the 'arms to the chest below the breasts' gesture. Next to this figurine lay a Probably Male figurine depicted with four legs, which can be referred to as the 'four-legged' or 'seated on a stool' type characteristic of the Early-Middle Neolithic, which tends to be Male (Gallis 1985, 21). The two figurines possibly represent a couple and are the largest compared to the other groups. In the opposite corner and next to the entrance opening, another Female and a Probably Male couple were rendered in a slightly smaller size. Both the Female and the Probably Male figurines were depicted in the same way as the first couple: with the same gesture, posture, and decorations. These four figurines probably represent the oldest couple and the younger couple of adults. Adjacent to this pair, and next to the Female figurine's head, lay two smaller and schematic figurines, which lack any indication of sex, arms and leg differentiation. These figurines measure only 2.5 cm and could represent children or infants. In the corner side, close to the oven, lay three small figurines (smaller in size than the two couples) but each of a different size. The largest of those is a Female figurine modelled with breasts and incised decoration, possibly representing a young girl or adolescent. The slightly smaller figurine to the right corner shows a similar posture to the other adult Probably Males and is perhaps an adolescent or pre-

Fig. 3: Platia Magoula Zarkou house model ML. PMZ.619 with its contents and the arrangement in which the figurines were found (Alram-Stern et al. 2022, 524, fig. VI.27–37b).

Fig. 4: Clay Female figurine M41 with 'arms to the chest below the breasts', from Middle Neolithic Tsangli (after Papathanassopoulos 1996, fig. 211).

pubescent individual. The middle figurine of the three was even smaller, measuring 2.6 cm in height (Gallis 1985, 22), possibly representing a child or infant without arms and leg differentiation. This example shows how different gestures, postures and size may indicate differences in both sex and ages of the figurines that, in this case, Kostas Gallis (1985, 22) interpreted as the members of a family.

Other possible relationships between sex, age and gesture, particularly in Female figurines, may be found, for instance, on M41 from Middle Neolithic Tsangli (Fig. 4). This figurine has a wide body with protruding belly and two incised lines indicating fat folds and similarly protruding buttocks, perhaps showing signs of a woman of old age. Other figurines which share the same gesture, round flat bases and paunches are No. 10.673 from Middle Neolithic Tsangli (Ucko 1968, pl. LXVII) and ML. THE.642 from Zappeio 2 (Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, fig. 226). Therefore, Female figurines with hands under the breasts may represent adult or older women, especially those of a larger size, broader torsos and bodies that include fat folds or paunches. Thus, the difference in representing gestures may indicate both gender and age.

However, there might also be a difference in gesture depiction between sites. For instance, six Female figurines with 'arms to the chest covering or touching the breasts' were found in Early or Middle Neolithic Sesklo. Three further examples of the same gesture on Probably Females come from Chara 1 ML. THE.1128 and ML. THE.1788 (Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, figs. 276, 689) and Early Neolithic Sesklo (unknown inv.no.; Tsountas 1908, fig. 33, 3). In contrast, 'arms to chest below the breasts' appear on five figurines from Tsangli, two from Platia Magoula Zarkou, two from Zappeio and two from Chara 1. Interestingly, two Female figurines from Chara 1 (ML. THE.1203; Orphanidis and Gallis 2011, fig. 701) and Tsangli (unknown inv.no.; Wace and Thompson, fig. 75b) depict the left hand resting below the breasts or on the abdomen, while the right arm raises upwards but in both examples is broken. This gesture perhaps represented a different symbolic expression or action.

The Double-sex figurine ML. THE.1070 from Chara 1, Thessaly (Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, fig. 132) has the right hand touching the right breast; the left hand is broken, although it probably rested on the sternum area. Therefore, this figurine shows a gesture only associated with Females and Probably Females in Thessaly. Gallis and Orphanidis (1996, fig. 132) suggest that the gesture recalls homosexuality. Instead, this figurine should be viewed as an amalgamation of Male and Female sexes given the depiction of breasts and a phallus, and the combination of a Female gesture and a Male posture ('sitting on a stool') that will be analysed below.

The gesture 'arms to the chest covering or touching the breasts' is an ambiguous representation, as the breasts are not clearly indicated on many occasions, and in others, they are covered by the hands. In Neolithic Knossos, in Crete, this gesture is mainly attested on three Probably Females: AMH.2715 (Ucko 1968, fig. 121), AE.731 (Fig. 5) and AN.1927–3260 (Fig. 6); and on two Female figurines (1938.662 and unknown inv.no.; Ucko 1968, fig. 58; Mina 2008, fig. 7). In Thessaly, it appears on seven Female figurines and, less frequently, on two Probably Females. Probably Female figurines covering their breasts appear on some figurines of small size at Knossos. For these three figurines, it is unclear where the hands and the breasts end; the stumps are modelled, but the arms are shown in relief probably on the breasts. The sexual attributes are also ambiguously rendered and, therefore, are classified as Probably Females. Similarly, the other two figurines with a similar gesture from Crete that are Female (1938.662 and unknown inv.no., Ucko 1968, fig. 58; Mina 2008, fig. 7) have the breasts explicitly shown. Is this vague rendering of the gesture a possible representation of age? It is unclear whether age is a factor in depicting distinct gestures since we do not know if showing breasts was only allowed for adult women. In Minoan Crete, adult women wear costumes that leave part of the breasts exposed. A similar attire could apply to Neolithic Knossos.

The 'arms to the chest touching/covering breasts' gesture also appears on three Probably Female figurines from Thessaly, ML. THE.1128 (Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, fig. 276) and ML. THE.1788 from Chara 1 (Orphanidis and Gallis 2011, fig. 689) and a torso fragment from Sesk-

Fig. 5: Probably Female figurine AE.731 with arms over the breasts, from Neolithic Knossos (Photograph by the author, © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford).


Fig. 6: Figurine 1927–3260 with arms covering the breasts, Neolithic Knossos (Photograph by the author, © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford).

lo (unknown inv.no.; Tsountas 1908, fig. 33, 3). The breasts seem to be slightly outlined on these figurines but are unclear due to the hands covering them. Similar to the examples from Crete, the presence of breasts is ambiguous and not clearly outlined, which might be a way to depict a young girl without developed breasts or the intention to cover them. Figurine ML. THE.1215 from Chara 1 (Orphanidis and Gallis 2011, fig. 178) has the same gesture as the 'arms to the chest' but has no distinct breasts, thus perhaps also indicating an individual of Probably Female gender but of a young age. The ambiguity in the depiction of sexual attributes may indicate the representation of younger girls, perhaps prepubescents or adolescents. A small marble Asexual figurine from Late Neolithic Dimini also seems to schematically represent the 'hands to the chest' arm position (Tsountas 1908, fig. 37, 8).

These figurines covering their breasts might show a meaningful division, perhaps of age-stages, or perhaps a taboo of nudity that could be related to age. For instance, Egyptian children, boys and girls, were often represented naked until they reached puberty. Similarly, in Minoan Crete, images of children appear naked, but young men on stone vases and frescoes wear loin-cloths (Pomadère 2012, 434). Thus, Maia Pomadère suggests that nudity in the Minoan imagery from Crete was reserved for young children but not for the young in general. This may suggest that the figurines with arms covering their breasts perhaps depict young females who have reached pre-pubescent or pubescent ages but not children. In her study of Minoan Bronze Age figurines' gestures, Louise Hitchcock (1997) considers that this arm position appears in females lacking clear details like facial features and other traits, including sex, perhaps suggesting a similar link between the gesture and younger age representation in Minoan iconography.

Other less frequent subtypes of the 'arms to the chest' gesture are the 'arms resting on the sides' at the waist or hip level (*e.g.* AMH.249 from Neolithic Ierapetra, Crete; Ucko 1968, fig. 169) and 'arms to the abdomen' (*e.g.* AMH.G184 of unknown provenance in Crete; Kanta and Kokkosali 2017, fig. 13) which are mainly associated with Female figurines. The 'arms to the abdomen' gesture is more frequent in Thessaly, where it appears on six Female and one Asexual figurine. Therefore, the 'arms to the chest' gesture and its variations, including the 'arms to the chest covering or touching the breasts', are gendered body expressions in the figurines from Crete and Thessaly. Unfortunately, many of these figurines lack information regarding their archaeological context and the associated objects they were deposited with. However, a possible explanation for the representation of age-stages on figurines is their possible use in transitions,
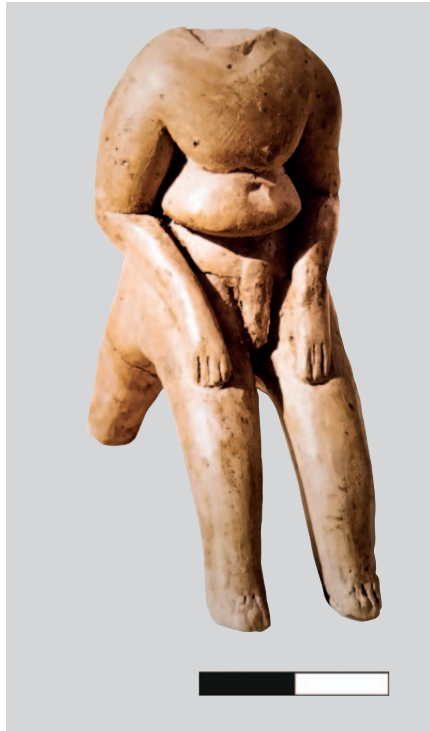
Fig. 7: Male figurine MB-M.5109 with the 'hands to thighs' gesture and 'sitting on a stool' posture, from Middle Neolithic Sesklo (after Theocharis 1973, fig. 37).
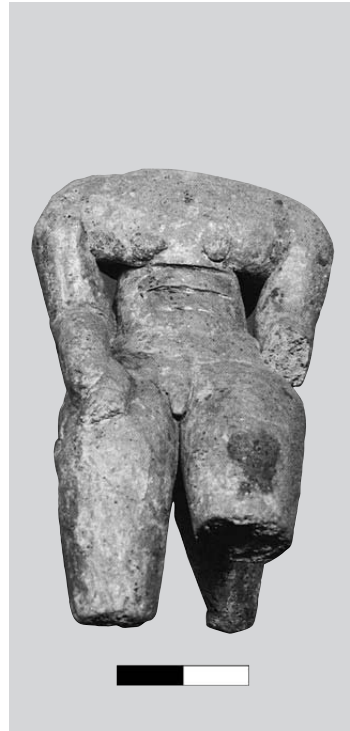
Fig. 8: Double-sex figurine ML. THE.644 from Zappeio 2 with the 'hands to thighs' gesture and 'sitting on a stool' posture, probably Early or Middle Neolithic date (after Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, fig. 125).

initiations or coming-of-age rituals. This possibility was already suggested by Ucko (1968, 434–437) and Lauren Talalay (1993, 41–42) using anthropological and historical parallels of other figurines uses, although they did not recognise different age-stages represented in Neolithic figurines from Greece. Figurines found in groups in the same archaeological context and showing different age-stages may be interpreted as such.

Different types of gestures are the 'hands to the thighs' and 'hands to the knees'. These gestures are mostly associated with Male figurines from Early and Middle Neolithic Thessaly. The 'hands to the thighs' gesture appears on the Male figurines MB-M.5109 (Fig. 7) and MB-M.4340 from Middle Neolithic Sesklo (Hourmouziadis 1973, fig. 7b), MB M.2430 from Middle Neolithic Tsangli (Wace and Thompson 1912, fig. 75e), and a Probably Male figurine from Rachmani (unknown inv.no.; Wace and Thompson 1912, fig. 26m). The gesture 'hands to the knees' appears on another Male figurine from Middle Neolithic Tsani Magoula (MB-M.5108; Hourmouziadis 1973, fig. 9). The gesture 'hands to thighs' is shared by two Double-sex figurines: ML. THE.644 from Zappeio 2 (Fig. 8) and ML. THE.68 from Nees Karyes (Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, fig. 131). Both are probably of Early or Middle Neolithic dates, although they have no contextual data. Thus, this gesture may represent a close gender relationship between Male and Double-sex figurines in the way both genders are conventionally portrayed. As mentioned before, the other Double-sex figurine analysed in this study from Chara 1 is represented with an arm to the chest and the other to the sternum area, which is a gesture mostly associated with Female figurines. Therefore, two Double-sex figurines share a gesture with Males and the other with a Female. As such, there is a clear difference in how bodies occupy space in relation to the representation of gestures in Females and Males in Neolithic Thessaly, perhaps as a way of representing gender-distinct activities, ritual motions or even gender roles.

Fig. 9: Neolithic marble Asexual figurine 1941.200 without arms and standing with differentiated legs, Neolithic Knossos (Photograph by the author, © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford).

In Neolithic Crete, Male figurines are represented with different gestures. For instance, Male figurine 18717 (Papathanassopoulos 1996, fig. 252) from Late Neolithic Knossos displays a gesture with the arms open, protruding outwards of the body. However, the arms are broken at the midpoint. Two other figurines – the Asexual L276 (Gavrilaki 2017, fig. 7) from Middle Neolithic Gerani Cave and the Probably Female 1389 (Kanta and Kokosali 2017, fig. 16) – both in hard materials – are depicted with extended horizontal arms, which may be a similar depiction to that of the Male gesture at Knossos.

Probably Male figurines in Thessaly are represented without arms, one being a phallic-shaped figurine from Tsangli (Wace and Thompson 1912, fig. 77c) and the other two from the house model from Platia Magoula Zarkou (ML. PMZ.619; Fig. 3). Conversely, Probably Male figurines at Knossos in Crete have triangular arm-stumps. However, the number of Probably Male figurines in the sample from Crete and Thessaly is relatively small overall (5 % of the total, see Ramirez-Valiente 2023, 12, fig. 2) to draw meaningful statistical conclusions.

At least five figurines from Crete are armless (59/9, L62/L722, G104, No. 7730, 1941.200; Ucko 1968, fig. 36; Gavrilaki 2017, fig. 8; Kanta and Kokkosali 2017, fig. 11; Davaras 1979, fig. 215c; Fig. 9). Four armless figurines are Asexual and almost all of marble, except for figurine 59/9 in clay and the phallic-shaped stone No.7730. These armless figurines are very schematic. They represent a basic body contour shape that divides the head or waist from the rest of the body and, in a few instances, with leg differentiation (*e.g.* in figurines G104 and 1941.200). Similarly, in Thessaly, thirteen Asexual figurines also appear without arms. Figurines without arms are associated with Asexual schematic representations. In particular, armless figurines also appear in possible depictions of children. For instance, the four small Asexual figurines from the Platia Magoula Zarkou house model (ML. PMZ.619; Fig. 3) and one Female figurine from Thessaly is depicted without arms (Wijnen 1981, figs. 14–15), but none from Crete. The absence of arms suggests that in these contexts, gesture representation was unimportant, a fact that in some examples also extends to other details, like facial features or sex categorisation.

An unusual gesture appears on Asexual figurine EAM.5945 from Middle Neolithic Sesklo (Fig. 10) with the 'arms to the groin' gesture, perhaps representing an individual covering its genitals but these are not clearly represented and therefore, its sex is unknown. Furthermore, at Knossos appears a very schematic early depiction of the 'Folded Arms' gesture (also known as 'FAF') with three grooved incisions on the marble Probably Female figurine AMH.G99 (Kanta and Kokkosali 2017, fig. 3). This figurine was found in the same area as the marble legs of a figurine of Cycladic type, and it may be of a Final Neolithic date, an antecedent to the later typology of Cycladic figurines with 'Folded Arms'. Also unusual is the 'kouro-
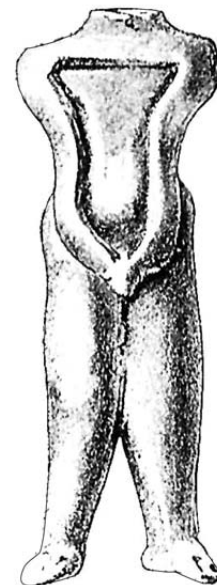

Fig. 10. Asexual figurine EAM.5945 with the 'arms to the groin' gesture and 'standing with differentiated legs' posture, Middle Neolithic Sesklo (after Tsountas 1908, fig. 33, 2).

trophos' figurine from Late Neolithic Sesklo (EAM.P5937; Tsountas 1908, fig. 31, 2) with the 'hands holding a child'. This is the only example of a Neolithic 'kourotrophos' figurine from the assemblages of Crete and Thessaly that can be securely identified as such (for other possible 'kourotrophos' figurines in Thessaly see Skafida and Toufexis 1994, 18, fig. I/8, and for Macedonia Koukouli-Chrysanthaki et al. 2007). Also, in Thessaly, two Asexual figurines from a group found in House T at MN Tsangli were represented with the hands holding a rounded object. One of the figurines has the arms remaining while the other has the rounded object attached to their body but no arms remaining. This group was interpreted by Giorgos Hourmouziadis (1973) as representing the action of kneading the dough in a bread-making scene. However, it probably represents both figurines carrying an offering, considering the context in which they were found was a pit with a structured deposit that included several well-preserved objects (Wace and Thompson 1912, fig. 69 h–j).

Considering the chronological phases in Thessaly, the division in gestures is more pronounced and varied in the Early and Middle Neolithic. The contextual evidence from Sesklo, Tsangli and Tsani Magoula suggests that Female gestures such as 'arms to the chest' with variations (with the hands touching or covering the breasts, the hands below the breasts, or the hands to the abdomen) and Male gestures like 'hands to the thighs or knees' are concentrated in the Early and Middle Neolithic phases. The exceptions are the two late Middle or early Late Neolithic larger adult Female figurines from the Platia Magoula Zarkou house model (ML.PMZ.619; Fig. 3). In contrast, in the Late and Final Neolithic phases, arm-stumps and no arms proliferate in both Asexual and Female figurines at sites such as Dimini, Sesklo, or Rachmani. Therefore, it is highly probable that the figurines lacking contextual data from Chara 1, Zappeio 2, Nees Karyes and perhaps Sitochoro 1 belong to the Early and Middle Neolithic periods since both gestures and figurine types are similar to figurines from other sites dating to those phases. However, exceptions are the schematic figurines found in Early Neolithic I levels from Sesklo, which are represented with arm-stumps and no arms. Nanoglou (2012, 283) associates the differences in gesture and posture between the periods with an emphasis on representing motion and actions in the earlier Neolithic, when a wider variety of gestures is present in Thessaly, in contrast with the 'static' gestural depictions of the later Neolithic. However, the representation of figurines in a sitting posture, particularly those 'sitting on a stool' seem to purposefully represent individuals in a non-active posture, which will be discussed in the following section. In Crete, most figurines date to the Late Neolithic and, therefore, we cannot establish a chronological development of the gestures.

Gesture	Female	Probably Female	Male	Probably Male	Asexual	NI
Downward projection	1	0	0	0	0	0
Arms to the chest	1	3	1	0	7	5
Arms to the chest under breasts	5	0	0	0	0	0
Triangular stumps	2	0	0	3	9	4
Rounded stumps	11	2	0	0	3	2
Stumps (other: broken, rectangular)	0	0	0	0	5	1
Arms to the chest touching/covering the breasts	2	3	0	0	0	0
Folded Arms by incision	0	1	0	0	0	0
Protruding outward of the body	0	0	1	0	0	0
Horizontally extended outwards	0	1	0	0	1	0
Arms to the abdomen	1	0	0	0	1	0
Arms to the sides at waist level	1	0	0	0	0	0
No arms	0	0	1	0	4	0
Total	24	10	3	3	30	12

Table 2. Sex and gesture of the figurines from Neolithic Crete.

Gesture	Female	Probably Female	Male	Probably Male	Asexual	Doublesex
Arm-stumps	8	1	0	0	28	0
No arms	1	0	0	3	13	0
Arms to the abdomen	6	0	0	0	1	0
Arms to the chest touching/covering breasts	7	2	0	0	0	1
Arms to groin	0	0	0	0	1	0
Hands to thighs	0	0	3	1	0	2
Arms to the chest below the breasts	9	2	0	0	0	0
Arms to the chest	0	0	0	0	1	0
Hands holding an object	0	0	0	0	1	0
Hands to knees	1	0	1	0	0	0
Hands to sides resting on hips	0	0	1	0	1	0
Hands holding a child	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	33	5	5	4	47	3

Table 3. Gesture and sex of figurines from Neolithic Thessaly.

Postures on Neolithic Aegean Figurines

The main figurine postures in Neolithic Crete and Thessaly are standing and sitting but with different variations (Tables 4 and 5). Standing figurines are divided between those with differentiated and undifferentiated legs. All sex categories are depicted standing with differentiated legs. However, this posture is more numerous among Asexual figurines in Crete, particularly those made of hard materials in a total of twenty-eight examples (for instance, the marble figurine 1941.200, Fig. 9). Also, nine examples of Asexual figurines are possibly depicted in a standing position but without showing leg differentiation (*e.g.* 59/9, and L62/L722; Ucko 1968, fig. 36; Gavrilaki 2017, fig. 8). In Crete, twenty-four figurines of hard materials appear standing, while two made of steatite are squatting (*e.g.* 59/153; Evans 1964, pl. 66, 4), four are sitting (*e.g.* 60/183; Evans 1964, pl. 66, 5), and another of marble is sitting with legs crossed (09.408; Fig. 11). Therefore, the standing posture is prevalent in hard materials in Crete. However, the presence of squatting and 'sitting with legs crossed' postures may indicate that the depiction of other postures was not difficult to achieve in hard materials. Four Female and five Probably Female figurines also display a standing position with leg differentiation.

In Thessaly, Female figurines are mainly depicted as standing. Eight Female and two Probably Female figurines appear standing with leg differentiation. In most examples (13), Female figurines appear 'standing with undifferentiated legs'. The figurines without leg differentiation depict the lower body as a flat rounded or cylindrical base, perhaps designed to stand on a flat surface. In some instances, Female figurines with wide flat bases may depict elements of clothing, particularly skirts or dresses, for instance, the largest Female figurine from Platia Magoula Zarkou (Fig. 3) or figurine ML.THE.726 from Chara 1 (Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, fig. 241). The 'standing with undifferentiated legs' posture appears more frequently in the Late and Final Neolithic phases in figurines with scanty details like arm-stumps. Not surprisingly, this is the main posture modelled on Asexual figurines in 42 examples (Table 5). Late and Final Neolithic acroliths, schematic marble and clay figurines, which tend to be Asexual, display this posture. This engages with the trend seen in the later Neolithic of depicting figurines which display general images of the human body with arm stumps as gesture and undifferentiated legs as posture, without showing specific details on their bodies, 'inviting generality more than particularity' (Nanoglou 2008, 324). Rather than depicting detailed figurine bodies, the emphasis is on the head, especially on acroliths with examples which bear rich painted ornamentation and facial features (*e.g.* acrolith heads ML.KR.10 and MB.2748a from Final Neolithic Rachmani; Papathanassopoulos 1996, figs. 216–217). Asexual figurines are also represented in other postures in Thessaly, such as 'sitting' (2), 'standing with differentiated legs' (2) and with a flat base with no recognisable posture (2) (Table 5). The latter lack the depiction of legs, for instance, Female ML.THE.642 from Zappeio 2 (Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, fig. 226), which depicts only the torso.

Fig. 11: Neolithic marble figurine 09.408 with the 'hands to the chest' gesture and 'sitting with legs crossed' posture from Late Neolithic Knossos (Photograph by the author, © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford).

Fig. 12: Clay Female figurine AE.729 in kneeling posture, from Neolithic Knossos (Photograph by the author, © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford).

Fig. 13: Clay Asexual figurine 1938.658 in kneeling posture from Neolithic Knossos (Photograph by the author, © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford).

Fig. 14: Female figurine ML. THE.1062 with legs drawn up, from Chara 1 (after Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, fig. 143).

Two Female figurines from Crete show a 'sitting with legs crossed' posture (AMH.249 from Ierapetra and 09.408 from Knossos; Ucko 1968, fig. 169; Fig. 11). This was probably a posture only used for Females. Likewise, in Thessaly, this posture is only associated with Females, although in our assemblage, it only appears on two Probably Female figurines: ML. THE.446 from Chara 1 (Orphanidis and Gallis 2011, fig. 608) and a figurine from Tsangli (unknown inv. no.; Wace and Thompson 1912, fig. 71a). Both have only legs remaining and, therefore, have been classified as Probably Females.

Other postures mostly attested on Female and Probably Female figurines in Crete are squatting and kneeling, although there are examples of Asexual figurines in these postures. The squatting posture appears on two Probably Females (*e.g.* AMH.2715; Ucko 1968, fig. 121), on one Female and another Asexual. The kneeling position appears on two Female figurines, AMH.2718 (Ucko 1968, fig. 68) and AE.729 (Fig. 12) and on two Asexual (AMH.2722 and 1938.658; Ucko 1968, fig. 44; Fig. 13).

The posture 'sitting with the legs to the right side' is also associated with Females and Probably Females in Thessaly. Figurine ML. THE.535 from Rachmani (Orphanidis and Gallis 2011, fig. 575) is represented with the legs to the right side but only preserves the legs and, therefore, has been classified as Probably Female. The Female figurine ML. THE.1062 from Chara 1 (Fig. 14) has an unusual posture with the legs drawn up, exposing the genitalia. It perhaps represents a birth-giving position, as Gallis and Orphanidis suggest (1996, fig. 143), although their claim that the baby's head is visible remains speculative. However, Female figurines in Thessaly are

Fig. 15: Drawing of the front, back and side of Male figurine 1927.3261 in sitting or standing posture, from Neolithic Knossos (after Ucko 1968, fig. 39).
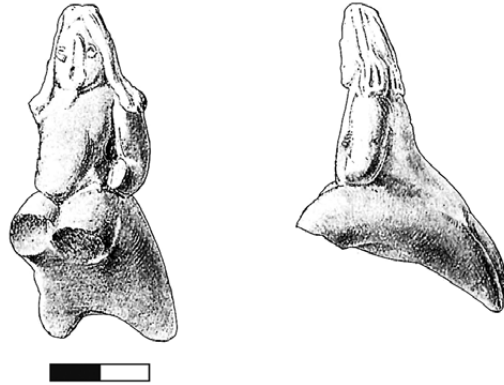
Fig. 16: Probably Male clay figurine EAM.5947 from Early or Middle Neolithic Sesklo 'sitting on a stool' (after Tsountas 1908: fig. 33, 4).

mainly depicted as standing, in most examples with undifferentiated legs, in a total of thirteen figurines (Table 5).

The number of male figurines from Crete and Thessaly is generally low and accounts for only 7 % of the total in the assemblage (see Ramirez-Valiente 2023, 11–13, fig. 2). In Crete, two Male figurines from Neolithic Knossos 60/232 (Ucko 1968, fig. 5) and 1927.3261 (Fig. 15) may either be standing or sitting; their legs are inclined towards the front, which means they are unable to stand and need a miniature stool to sit on or were meant to be put against a wall to stand. Considering that Male figurine 18717 (Papathanassopoulos 1996, fig. 252) is probably sitting on a stool, other Male figurines perhaps had the same posture, although the stool was not attached to their bodies. In Thessaly, Male figurines are mostly depicted in the 'sitting on a stool' posture. This is typically the posture of Male figurines in the Early and Middle Neolithic phases. In our assemblage, the exception is Male figurine ML. THE.689 from Sitochoro 1 which is shown standing with differentiated legs, but of unknown date (Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, fig. 139). The figurines in the 'sitting on a stool' posture represent the lower body as four legs, and the stool is only recognisable by the modelling of the buttocks' end, while the figurines' legs fuse with those of the stool. The legs sometimes show the feet rendered by incisions at the end. Six Male figurines of this type have been found at our selected case study sites: three at Sesklo MB-M.4340 (Hourmouziadis 1973, fig. 7b), BE.4667 (Papathanassopoulos 1996, fig. 203) and MB-M.5109 (Fig. 7), one at Tsangli (M.2430; Wace and Thompson 1912, fig. 75e), at Tsani Magoula (MB-M.5108; Hourmouziadis 1973, pl. 9), and Zappeio 2 (ML. THE.1285; Orphanidis and Gallis 2011, fig. 488). A further figurine sitting on a stool, but without genitalia depicted, was found at Early or Middle Neolithic Sesklo (EAM.5947; Fig. 16). Forty-two figurines from Neolithic Thessaly can be included in this 'sitting on a stool with four legs' category, excluding the fragmentary examples of possible figurines of the same type where the posture is not clearly shown. The majority lacks contextual information, which prevents us from knowing how they were deposited, their use and more precise chronology. However, those with a known archaeological context were deposited in the Early and Middle Neolithic periods. The distribution of this type is wide, ranging from the south-eastern to the north-eastern part of Thessaly (Nanoglou 2010, 218). Regarding their sex, sexual attributes are not always represented. However, phalli or indications of detached phalli occur on twenty-nine figurines, only breasts in two, one figurine may depict a sexual triangle with no further sex indication, another has female genitalia, while four examples depict both phalli and breasts, and a further one may ambiguously portray breasts and a phallus.

The figurines depicting both breasts and phalli have been classified as Double-sex figurines. In our assemblage, there are three examples of Double-sex figurines from Chara 1 (ML.

THE.1070; Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, fig. 132), Zappeio 2 (ML. THE.644; Fig. 8) and Nees Karyes (ML. THE.68; Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, fig. 131), representing only 1% of the total of sex categories from Crete and Thessaly (Ramirez-Valiente 2023, 12, fig. 2). These figurines are represented in the same posture as the Early and Middle Neolithic Males, that is, sitting on a stool. The archaeological contexts of Double-sex figurines are unknown as they are surface and casual finds and, therefore, cannot be dated on the basis of their stratigraphical associations. However, they possibly date to the same periods as the Male figurines sitting on a stool and perhaps embody or symbolise a similar concept. This means that Double-sex figurines and Males share, in two cases, gestures and postures, perhaps representing a close gender relationship. The only other figurine represented sitting on a stool from the assemblage is the 'kourotrophos' figurine from Late Neolithic Sesklo EAM.P-5937 (Tsountas 1908, fig. 31, 2), but with clearer separation between the stool and the female body than the Male figurines in the same posture. Furthermore, this composite figure is richly decorated in brown-on-buff, while the examples of decorated Male figurines are always in red-on-white. In the transition from the late Middle to early Late Neolithic, Probably Male figurines are depicted with four legs but show no sexual traits, which probably is the same depiction of the posture sitting on a stool seen in the Early and Middle Neolithic Male figurines. However, these figurines are depicted more schematically, and the posture shows no differentiation between the legs and the stool (Gallis 1985). Examples of this type are the two Probably Male figurines in the Platia Magoula Zarkou house model (ML. PMZ.619; Fig. 3).

The representation of figurines 'sitting on a stool' indicated individuals emphasising a static posture, perhaps with an inactive role for work, while their associated social role was probably related to a position of status. The Probably Male figurines found in the Platia Magoula Zarkou house model were represented schematically in the same posture with a four-legged body even though they were lying on the ground, which means that the stool had become a symbol or a concept. Likewise, the 'kourotrophos' figurine from Late Neolithic Sesklo was sitting on a stool, which probably signified the high status of this woman and her child given the richly ornate attires. Some Double-sex figurines sitting on a stool may represent women or a third gender with a position of high status or prestige or perhaps associated with a gender role assigned to males like ritual practitioners or head of a household.

Posture	Female	Probably Female	Male	Probably Male	Asexual	NI
Standing with differentiated legs	4	5	1	3	12	3
Sitting	6	4	0	0	4	8
Sitting with legs crossed	2	0	0	0	0	0
Standing with no leg differentiation	2	1	0	0	8	2
Sitting/Standing	0	0	2	0	0	0
Seated (on a stool?)	0	0	1	0	0	0
Kneeling	3	0	0	0	3	2
Squatting	0	2	0	0	1	1
Total	**16**	**8**	**4**	**3**	**31**	**17**

Table 4. Sex and posture of the figurines from Neolithic Crete.

Posture	Female	Probably Female	Male	Probably Male	Asexual	Doublesex
Standing, undifferentiated legs	13	1	0	0	42	0
Standing legs differentiated	8	2	1	0	2	0
Sitting on a stool	1	0	6	4	0	3
Sitting	4	0	0	1	2	0
Sitting legs crossed	0	2	0	0	0	0
Sitting, legs to the right side	0	1	0	0	0	0
Legs drawn up	1	0	0	0	0	0
Flat base	3	0	0	0	2	0
Total	**30**	**6**	**7**	**5**	**48**	**3**

Table 5. Posture and sex of figurines from Neolithic Thessaly.

Conclusions

The study of figurines through an analysis of the gestures and postures has uncovered some insights into the figurines' sex, age, and gender that, in turn, may help us understand the social organisation and the construction of social identities in the societies of Neolithic Crete and Thessaly. The results of examining figurines' gestures and postures in combination with their sex show a correlation indicating gendered bodily expressions. This means that the conventions in bodily comportment in the Neolithic Aegean are differentiated by gender with diverse ways in which bodies occupy space associated to their sex.

Regarding the representation of gestures on figurines from Crete, Females are associated with 'arms to the chest under the breasts', rounded arm-stumps, arms to the sides and on the abdomen. Asexual figurines are mainly represented with arm-stumps, particularly triangular stumps, no arms, and 'arms to the chest'. Probably Females appear mostly with the 'arms to the chest touching or covering the breasts'. In the case of Thessaly, there are some similarities as Female figurines are mostly depicted with 'arms to the abdomen', 'arms to the chest below the breasts' and 'arms to the chest touching or covering the breasts', while Males appear with the 'hands to the thighs or knees' and Probably Males are represented without arms.

Considering the analysis of postures as related to sex, the results show that Female figurines are associated with sitting, kneeling, and sitting with legs crossed postures in Crete. Asexual figurines are mostly represented standing with differentiated and undifferentiated legs and kneeling. Probably Females appear squatting and sitting, while Males are sitting or standing and perhaps, in one example, sitting on a stool. In Thessaly, figurines sitting on a stool are mostly Males and Probably Males. Females appear standing with differentiated and undifferentiated legs, sitting, with a flat base or with the legs drawn up. Probably Females are some figurines sitting with legs crossed and with the legs to the right side. Asexual figurines are mainly depicted standing with undifferentiated legs or with a flat base.

Therefore, the results show avenues to identify the figurine's gender by analysing their specific gestures and postures even when no sexual traits are depicted. The sharing of gestures and postures between sex categories such as Females or Probably Females with Asexual, or between Males and Probably Males with Asexual figurines may indicate that those figurines without sexual traits may represent the same gender, perhaps showing individuals of younger ages to those definitely sexed. However, Asexual figurines need to be analysed on a case-by-case basis to understand if they share other traits with figurines of definite sex that allow for a possible gender classification.

Regarding the incorporation of age as part of the analysis, gestures that conceal or emphasise sexual attributes are possibly associated with different age-stages. For instance, the 'arms to the chest under the breasts' may be associated with adult females considering their larger size and ageing traits such as broad bodies and torsos present in these figurines. Conversely, 'arms to the chest covering or touching the breasts' may be associated with younger girls, particularly in Crete, where those figurines depict sex more ambiguously. This differentiation may reveal a difference in age stages of the figurines with the different sex categories Male/Female, Probably Female/Male and Asexual, sometimes representing adults, young girls or boys and children respectively. In these cases, figurines may have been used in transition or coming-of-age rituals. However, figurines were multifunctional objects and there was not a unique way of using and disposing of figurines.

Shared gestures and postures among figurines of different sex categories may represent similar gender identities or roles. For instance, the 'sitting on a stool' posture may represent an inactive role in society that is particularly associated with elderly or older Males and Double-sex figurines, perhaps indicating that some Double-sex figurines are indeed males, such as the figurine from Zappeio 2, or that they embody a similar concept or gender role that is mostly associated to males.

The chronology and materials used to manufacture the figurines need to be considered as part of the analysis, as these parameters are related to specific postures and arm-positions. Such is the case of the association between hard materials with the depiction of arm-stumps, particularly triangular arm-stumps in Crete, or with the representation of figurines in a standing position.

Acknowledgements

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