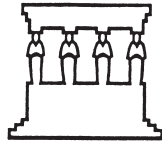


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# Adoring the past: Anthropomorphic art and body language in the Iron Age Mediterranean

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The current article examines the role anthropomorphic representations in the Iron Age Mediterranean. Using two case studies, one from Cyprus and one from Sicily, it is noted that similar body gestures – the uplifted arms - on corplastic figurines was distributed over a vast areas of time and space. Originating in Cretan Bronze Age, the gesture regained its popularity several hundred years later in the Iron Age. The posture was eventually integrated in a multitude of ways in many local communities in the Cyprus, in the Aegean and in Italy and Sicily. While the local significance of the gesture no doubt was of commanding importance it is also argued that it also became popular because it was part of a Mediterranean body language with deep roots and a distant mythical past. The conclusion is therefore that the gesture with the uplifted arms was part of a well-known body language which was part of a cohesive force to bind different parts of the Mediterranean closer together.

## *Introduction*

Gestures and body language, along with speech, are our most fundamental vehicles to communicate with each other. Bodily expressions, or body techniques – a term for nonverbal communication coined by Marcel Mauss –, are fundamental in expressing identity and cultural belonging.<sup>1</sup> In his frequently quoted text, Mauss offers multiple examples of how body techniques are both inherited in what he refers to as *Habitus* and also adopted by individuals who mimic body languages in order to associate themselves with a certain group.<sup>2</sup> This is for instance highlighted in Mauss' own experiences from World War I when he was hospitalised in New York and with a keen eye observed that the nurses there had an unusual way to walk. He then came to the conclusion that they did so inspired by female actors from Hollywood movies. Later, when he observed the same phenomenon

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1. Mauss 1973 [1935].

2. Mauss 1973 [1935].

among females in Paris he realised that the American cinema was responsible there too.<sup>3</sup> In a similar fashion he recognised that the French and English armies mastered different body techniques when digging trenches during World War I; hence, when the English were presented with tools from the French arsenal they were unable to utilise them properly and vice versa. Therefore, all spades had to be changed whenever one group relived the other.<sup>4</sup> It follows that carefully observing present as well as historical bodily practices carries the potential to not only demonstrate how body techniques are exchanged between individuals, but also how body techniques can be culturally restricted, thus signalling belonging and exclusion. We can therefore expect that body language is closely related to human identity, not only on a national and cultural level, but also on an everyday basis between people from different classes and different genders.<sup>5</sup>

When studying humans from prehistory or historical societies without written records, we are often able to study snapshots of human movements which are presented and encoded by artists from the past on wall paintings, on pottery or in the shape of figurines. Since we, most of the time, lack textual descriptions, we are often left in the dark about what these human representations actually mean. Simply speaking, we are trying to interpret an interpretation.<sup>6</sup> A common method to overcome this difficulty in past studies has been to seek more all-encompassing solutions that try to designate specific representations to single categories. Often inspired by psychoanalysis and structuralism, researchers have tried to find underlying and inherited subconscious body techniques which are common to all humans.<sup>7</sup>

The most famous or perhaps infamous example of this last sort is trying to designate all pre-historic female figurative representations to one single “mother goddess” whose bodily traits stands for reproduction and re-birth.<sup>8</sup> Although these essentialist attempts promptly were heavily criticised and generally rejected,<sup>9</sup> the “mother goddess theory” has been surprisingly long lived.<sup>10</sup> As Morris has observed these theories are problematic because they essentially make variety insignificant since they privilege group uniformity.<sup>11</sup>

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3. Mauss 1973 [1935], 72.

4. Mauss 1973 [1935], 71.

5. Bremmer 1991; Thomas 1991.

6. Joyce 1993, 255-257.

7. Goodison and Morris 1998.

8. Meskell 1995; Goodison and Morris 1998 for overviews of this.

9. Fleming 1969; Ucko 1968.

10. Morris 2009, 180.

11. Morris 2009, 181.

*The contextual perspective*

During the past 30 years more and more researchers have acknowledged that variety matters and that contextual analysis is of outmost importance if we are to make sense of past human representations.<sup>12</sup> Joyce notes that although figurative representations from around the globe appear to be similar, these representations often mask carefully selected and crafted attributes that are very important in the dialectic process of creating identities. Therefore, she comes to the conclusion that it is imperative to recognise what appears to be even to most insignificant detail when studying figurines from the past.<sup>13</sup>

Tringham and Conkey have emphasised the need to examine the nature of the archaeological context where the figurative representations were found.<sup>14</sup> They argue that when trying to make sense of a figurative representation it is of major importance if the object was found in a house or in a rubbish pit, for example. Furthermore, we have to investigate what other objects were associated with the object we are interested in. Hence, with more precise recognition of the uniqueness of the object of study, combined with its contextual relationships, we will be able to better understand its social and cultural dimensions.<sup>15</sup>

*The Mediterranean perspective*

However, emphasising local contexts and restricted social and symbolic meaning in figurative studies do not exclude the possibility that we simultaneously find shared, or at least similar, meanings among dispersed contexts located in wide geographical areas. The “mother goddess” theory discussed above is indeed an extreme example but during periods of intense economic and social contact between regions, like for instance during the European Bronze Age, we also know that material expressions as well as ideas spread over vast geographical areas.<sup>16</sup>

After the collapse of the interregional exchange networks around the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC, the period after 900 BC witnessed a renewed contact between particularly the coastal regions in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>17</sup> The contact zone were subsequently expanded, and in the wake of Phonician and Greek colonial endeavours the interior regions of the colonised areas were eventually more

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12. E.g. Hodder 1982; Shanks and Tilley 1987.

13. Joyce 1993, 256.

14. Tringham and Conkey 1998, 27-29.

15. Morris and Peatfield 2002; Morris 2009, 180; Stig Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury 2012.

16. Sherratt and Sherratt 1991; Sherratt and Sherratt 1993; Kristansen and Larsson 2005.

17. Sherratt and Sherratt 1993, 364-365.

firmly integrated into a wider network of exchange.<sup>18</sup> What emerged during the following centuries, contradictory to the heavily centralised economy of the previous Bronze Age, was a network of numerous independent, political and economic entities which were more or less active in the Mediterranean arena.<sup>19</sup> It is true that some regions still were dominant in production and trade but the capacity of independent city-states and independent tradesmen created a process which some scholars have compared to modern globalization.<sup>20</sup> The more arbitrary and random modes of interaction, similar to what we find in the modern world of today, resulted in two major trajectories in how new products and new ideas and institutions were appropriated by local communities. On the one hand we find the creation of a similar Mediterranean culture, what Ian Morris refers to as Mediteranisation. This process resulted in a more coherent line of desires among different Mediterranean communities.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, the lack of centralized authority also led to a more local translation of the shared cultural elements, which, at least during the 7th and 6th centuries BC resulted in a more irregular and transformative appropriation of goods and ideas.<sup>22</sup>

*Goddess figurines, anthropomorphic cups and artistic traditions*

In this paper, and in consideration of the above previous studies, I will deal with four three-dimensional figurative representations from Cyprus and Sicily (two from each island). The most obvious trait shared by these four examples is that they all hold their arms beside their heads in an upright position. The gesture is otherwise, at least in Mediterranean research, perhaps most well-known from final and post-palatial (1450-1200 BC) Crete where it is associated with so-called “goddess” figurines.<sup>23</sup> These coroplastic figurines have mostly been found in association with sanctuary buildings where they typically hold prominent positions of worship.<sup>24</sup> In this text however, I will engage with similar representations of much later date. The aim here is trying to understand how and why the gesture with uplifted arms observed in Bronze Age Crete was revitalised during the archaic period, and also why the gesture with it gained in popularity among the population in new Mediterranean territories.

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18. Sherratt and Sherratt 1993, 367-369.

19. Malkin 2011, 22.

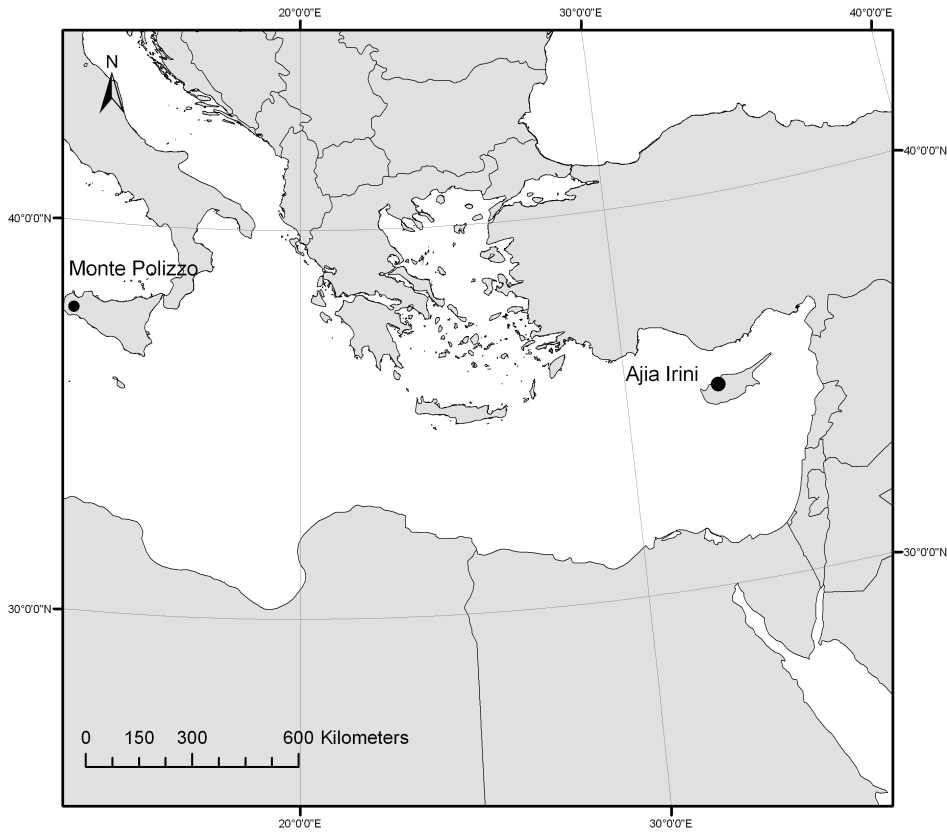
20. Morris 2003; Sherratt 2003; Hodos, 2006, 2010; Malkin 2011.

21. Morris 2003; Hodos 2010.

22. E.g. Sherratt 2012.

23. Gesell 2004.

24. Gesell 2004.



**Fig. 1:** Map over the Eastern and the central Mediterranean with the two main sites mentioned in the text (Ajia Irini, Cyprus and Monte Polizzo, Sicily) highlighted. Scale 1:1300000.

Although Sicily and Cyprus are ecologically similar, their historical development has been quite different. Much of the difference is probably related to geography and geology; while Cyprus is located close to the easternmost shores of the Mediterranean, Sicily enjoys a strategic position in its very centre (Fig. 1). The differences in history, political, economic and social relationships are reflected in the artistic influences and developments in two islands over time.

Cypriot prehistory is replete with anthropomorphic representations from earliest human occupation of the island until the present. Among the earliest Cypriot figures the ones from Khirokitia (7000-5500 BC) are mostly phallic shaped but two examples also depict sexually ambiguous figures.<sup>25</sup> Also from

25. Christou 2006, 98.

one of the earliest Neolithic sites in Cyprus, Petra tou Limniti, comes two oval shaped stone idols which clearly, in a very simplistic way, combine both male and female genitalia.<sup>26</sup> Sicily was inhabited much earlier than Cyprus and here the earliest traces depicting humans are rock paintings dating to around 10000 BC.<sup>27</sup> Figurines, on the other hand exist from around 5000 BC onwards and the first anthropomorphic representations are limited to human heads, making gender determination difficult.<sup>28</sup> From the Early Chalcolithic (3500-3000 BC) tombs of Piano Vento, we do find anthropomorphic figures in Sicily representing a male and a more sexually ambiguous figure depicting a mixed human/animal representation nick-named the “centaur”.<sup>29</sup> Roughly from the same time, from Cozzo Busoné, not very far from Agrigento, come two pebble figurines of phallic shape with pecked female attributes filled with red ochre.<sup>30</sup>

The most well-known figurines from Cypriot Chalcolithic (4000/3500-2500/2200 BC) are the cross-shaped stone idols in various sizes, representing what is assumed to be seated females. Although their meaning is disputed, their physical shape, in their most stylized form; represent complete human bodies.<sup>31</sup> Normally they have outstretched arms, legs in a squatting position, a head and sometimes additional details such as breasts and feet.<sup>32</sup> From the Bronze Age (2500/2300-1050 BC) and at least into the Iron Age, terracotta became the favourite material for Cypriote figurine craftsmen. The earliest Bronze Age examples are the early plank figurines which were produced from the final phase of Early Cypriote Bronze Age to sometime in the Middle Cypriote Bronze Age (c. 2000-1800 BC). Their typical characteristics are the rectangular plank shape fashioned out of a relatively thin piece of terracotta. The rectangular head and face, with a moulded nose and incised eyes and sometimes incised mouth, is attached to a long neck joining a rectangular body which is often is adorned with incised lines in various decorative patterns.<sup>33</sup> Some plank figurines can be multi-faced and others carry a baby.<sup>34</sup> Traditionally the plank figures have mostly been interpreted as feminine.<sup>35</sup> But there is an ever increasing awareness that

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26. Åström 2003, 32.

27. Leighton 1999, 38.

28. Leighton 1999, 67.

29. Leighton 1999, 96.

30. Leighton 1999, 97.

31. Åström 2003, 31.

32. a Campo 1994, 80-82.

33. a Campo 1994, 100-104.

34. a Campo 1994, 100.

35. a Campo 1994, 100; Karageorghis 2003, 60.



the plank figurines can benefit from not solely be interpreted in binary terms as either male or female. Rather, as Knapp and Meskell suggests; a more nuanced analysis might uncover a manifold or even ambiguous gender representations.<sup>36</sup> The typical Late Bronze Age Cypriote (1450-1200 BC) type A and B figurines representing nude female figurines with either human or animal face can also benefit from a similar approach.

While the evidences suggests that the Cypriotes, during the Bronze Age, had a desire for more complex and wide reaching representations of anthropomorphic representations the Sicilian anthropomorphic material from the Bronze Age, is much more scarce. Figurines exist, but they appear in a much more random fashion. One of the more complex and intriguing finds stem from castelluciano da San Giuliano, Caltanissetta, from the Sicilian Early Bronze Age (2500-1500 BC). Here the excavators found the remains of more than 40 figurines; some were almost complete while others were very fragmented. A few of the figurines have what appear to be male genitalia while others have breasts.<sup>37</sup> The size difference between the figurines is also notable with the largest figurine being almost 40 cm while the smallest figurine is no more than 6 cm. This has led the excavators to presume that the find represents a family with adults and children possibly related to local religion and local ritual.<sup>38</sup>

This brief and perhaps slightly random comparison of anthropomorphic art between Cyprus and Sicily demonstrate two important points. The first one is that figurative representations were much more common in Cyprus than in Sicily; at least from 4000 BC and onwards. Secondly, from the Early Bronze Age, the Cypriote figurine production was far more standardised (in the sense that similar types were found in numerous contexts all over the island) than it was in Sicily where we generally find unique anthropomorphic figurines in very few places.

#### *Cypriot "Goddess" figurines with uplifted arms – previous interpretations*

A relatively advanced and long lived tradition of terracotta figurine production was already in place when the earliest known small terracotta figurines uplifted arms were discovered at the coastal site of Enkomi in Cyprus. These figurines (more than 250), predominantly depicting females, were the first of their kind excavated in a secure archaeological context in Cyprus. There is some disagreement on their precise date, but Webb has convincingly argued that they

36. Knapp and Meskell 1997; Knapp 2008, 142.

37. Orlandini 1968.

38. Orlandini 1968, 58.

were introduced to Cyprus around the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>39</sup> After the initial introduction the “goddess” figurines with uplifted arms remained popular in Cyprus for an extended period of time. The presence of these figurines is attested throughout the intervening centuries and became popular again during the Late Cypro-Archaic II (600-470 BC) and disappears entirely during the later Cypro-Classical period.<sup>40</sup> During this time span, of more than 500 years, much of the original characteristics were lost although the key emblematic feature with the uplifted arms was kept intact.<sup>41</sup>

Traditionally, these figurines have been labelled “goddesses with uplifted arms” and most scholars agree that the source of inspiration was Cretan figurines which typically have the same posture and share a number of other characteristics such as the uplifted arms, almond shaped eyes, marked eyelashes, spots on their cheeks and a high tiara.<sup>42</sup> The appellation, “goddess” is probably also borrowed from the term most often used for the Cretan figurines. In the Cypriot context, however, this label is unfortunate, biased and has been justly criticised for being murky due to the lack of definition of what the term really means.<sup>43</sup> Another flaw with the “goddess” terminology is that it tends to collapse the boundary between description and interpretation.<sup>44</sup> The terminology itself: “goddess”, can easily obscure alternative interpretations.

The understanding of the gesture itself relies heavily on previous interpretations of Cretan figurines. In Cypriote contexts the gesture with the uplifted arms has been interpreted as signs of mourning (by individuals), praying and as a manifestation of divine presence,<sup>45</sup> but here there is no consensus. Rather, it appears as if there are as many interpretations as there are scholars.

Bolger has noted that the interpretations of the Cypriot figurine studies (including the “goddess with uplifted arms”) to a large extent rely on traditional archaeological methods such as typology rather than on contextual considerations.<sup>46</sup> The result is that chronological and evolutionary studies have been at the forefront in the interpretation of these figurines preventing a proper understanding of their meaning. In Cypriot research there is a gap between more traditionalist interpretations of the figurative material based mostly on stylistic

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39. Webb 1999, 215.

40. Karageorghis 1977; Nicolaou 1979, 252.

41. Nicolaou 1979, 252.

42. Karageorghis 2001, 325.

43. Smith 2010, 134.

44. Peatfield 2001, 52.

45. Webb 1999, 215.

46. Bolger 2003, 84.

attributes and the more recent trend where social and gender aspects play a more prominent role in determining the meaning of these figures.<sup>47</sup>

What is lacking from Cyprus, therefore, is a more contextual interpretation similar to Peatfield and Morris' investigation of Cretan terracotta figurines from the peak sanctuary of Atsiphades. Here, mostly based on a careful excavation methodology with detailed recordings of the figurine finds, they argue that the postures envisaged by the many figurines, including the uplifted arms posture, probably reflect the dynamic body language of the worshipers who possibly were engaged in performances and ritual action.<sup>48</sup> Hence, Peatfield and Morris effectively move away from the notion that the figurines represents passive body language of adoration or supplication arguing that instead they actually could represent spiritual experiences such as divination, trance or altered states of consciousness.<sup>49</sup> In their opinion, the figurines are direct reflections of individual bodily action and performance.

*Sicilian anthropomorphic cups with uplifted arms*

While the Cypriot "goddess with uplifted arms" is well-established in Cypriot research, Sicilian anthropomorphic "cups with uplifted arms" is a relatively new and not so well articulated phenomenon in Sicilian research. Anthropomorphic/zoomorphic cups are relatively well known and previously discussed in various publications, but except for one example known from the 7<sup>th</sup> century Segesta,<sup>50</sup> most representations with uplifted arms have been discovered since 1999 as a result of excavations in the indigenous Iron Age site of Monte Polizzo.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, no research, as yet, is particularly concerned with this relatively limited occurrence.

If the gesture with uplifted arms is rare in Sicily it more frequently occurs in mainland Italy.<sup>52</sup> There, the gesture has generally been associated with a phenomenon inspired by Greek and Mediterranean prehistoric and historic art based on the fact that the gesture was introduced around the 8<sup>th</sup> BC.<sup>53</sup> Similar to Cyprus, the interpretation of the gesture is often related to praying, lamentation or religious ecstasy.<sup>54</sup>

47. Zeman-Wisniewska 2012, 153.

48. Peatfield 2001, 55; Peatfield and Morris 2012.

49. Peatfield 2001, 55; Peatfield and Morris 2012, 235-237.

50. La Rosa 1989, tav. 2, fig. 66.

51. Mühlenbock 2008.

52. Leighton 1999, 266.

53. Orlandini 1971, 282.

54. Orlandini 1971, 282.

Due to similarities between west Sicilian figurative art and the art of mainland Italy Sebastiano Tusa has suggested that the figurative art of the *capeduncola* (a cup with an anthropomorphic/zoomorphic handle) was brought to Sicily by Italian immigrants.<sup>55</sup> Here, particularly Francesca Spatafora has been a critical voice pointing to the importance of local agents in the creation and adoption of figurative elements among the inhabitants of Sicily.<sup>56</sup> Following this path contextual considerations have been acknowledged as fundamental in order to understand the meaning of anthropomorphic representations in Sicily.<sup>57</sup>

### *Objects and contexts*

Thus, in order to remedy the lack of contextualisation in earlier work, both in Cyprus and Sicily, this study will venture into more limited, confined and well documented territories when trying to make sense of the wide distribution of figurative representations with uplifted arms.

### *Sicily*

Monte Polizzo is located in western Sicily and is a proto urban settlement in the hinterland of one of the island's most remote parts. Here, on an altitude of more than 700 meters we excavated five 6<sup>th</sup> century BC domestic buildings. Three houses contained, among many other things, vessels with anthropomorphic handles. Two of these have previously been published; those will be described further in this text. Both *capeduncole* from Monte Polizzo were discovered among ordinary household objects inside two dwellings simultaneously destroyed around the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The houses were multifunctional and self-sufficient production units with ample evidence of textile production, food processing, food preparation, storage, and food consumption.

### ***The capeduncola from House 1***

*ID. 13970. Monte Polizzo. House 1. Room VI. Height: 17.6 cm. Date: 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Fig. 2.*

The handle of the vessel is moulded to represent an anthropomorphic figure with a triangular head extending from a human torso. The face has two incised circular

55. Tusa 1990: 44.

56. Spatafora 1996a.

57. Mühlénbock 2008, 2013; Delgado-Ferrer 2011.



**Fig. 2:** *Id.13920. Anthropomorphic cup from Monte Polizzo dated to the middle of the 6th century BC.*

eyes with pronounced irises. The large round nose is moulded in relief. The neck of the figure is ornamented with two horizontal incised triangles in an hour-glass pattern. A similar, but larger pattern is placed on the torso below the arms. It is tempting to interpret the first decoration as a necklace based on its position. The larger decoration is possibly two breasts. The figure has one raised arm in an upright adorning gesture while the other arm, which originally was held in the same position, has been broken off. The arm is well proportioned in relation to the head. Below the torso, where we on an anthropomorphic figurine could have expected abdomen and legs, the body is transformed to become a rounded cup. The rim of the cup is perforated with three holes on each side of the handle. It is possible that decorative elements were attached to these holes on occasions. At the backside where the handle meets the rim, the two sides of the cup have loops with perforated holes; the loops have wear marks indicating that the vessel could be suspended, potentially in the building where it was found. One additional knob is placed on the front of the cup; it is not perforated and probably placed there to enhance the symmetry of the vessel.

### ***The capeduncola from House 3***

*ID. 44429, Monte Polizzo, House 3. Room III. ID. Height: 15 cm. Date: 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Fig. 3.*

The second *capeduncola* is crafted differently. Most of the handle is moulded in one piece. The head is cast as an undefined extension of the body. Two slightly curved and substantial horns, possibly inspired by bovine animal, extend from the head. The eyes consist of three circles with the inner circle defining the iris. The nose is pointed and long, possibly resembling a beak rather than a human nose. The two upraised arms are well defined but they appear tiny in comparison to the rest of the figure. The arms are the only figurative elements which are distinctively anthropomorphic. The upper part of the body is extensively decorated and divided into three fields. The middle field consists of five incised concentric circles. The two flanking fields are filled with small waves. Below the handle the vessel becomes a carinated cup of the local tradition, adorned with *denta di lupo* triangles along the rim.<sup>58</sup> The outer part of the body is encircled by the same wavy lines that we find on the handle. A vertical ridge on the back of the handle probably acted as structural support and could have been used if a person, for some reason wanted to raise the vessel holding it from behind.

### *Interpretation*

The two anthropomorphic cups from Monte Polizzo are excellent examples of the indigenous Iron Age iconography in western Sicily which, with few exceptions, was highly individualized and somewhat enigmatic to the modern observer.<sup>59</sup> The type of media displayed here (applying zoomorphic/anthropomorphic handle attachments on ceramic vessels) had a long history in Sicily deriving at least from the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>60</sup> Apart from the strong emphasis on the uplifted arms it is not easy to find a characteristic which supports cohesion between the representations. Within the artistic framework (the handle attachment) the artists clearly took great pride in experimenting with the various elements in the different representations, both concerning style and ornamentation.

The gender characteristics are obscure and so it is difficult to assess whether the representations fit into any traditional gender category although the decoration on the upper part of the body of the first anthropomorphic cup indicates that this indeed could be a female representation. The second

58. Spatafora 1996, 98; Mühlenbock 2008, 110.

59. Leighton 1999, 261-268; Trombi 2003.

60. E.g. Malone *et al.* 1994; Mühlenbock 2013.



**Fig. 3:** ID. 44429. Anthropomorphic cup from Monte Polizzo dated to the middle of the 6th century BC.

anthropomorphic cup, however, is even more obscure. The two horns possibly allude to a male characteristics but its main message is a fusion of human and animal. This general obscurity was most probably intentional showing that displaying gender was not of prime importance. It also appears as if the decoration, or lack thereof, is primarily related to age. In an earlier article I have argued that, based on stylistic evidences, the *capeduncola* from house 3 is older than the *capeduncola* from house 1.<sup>61</sup>

The finds of anthropomorphic cups in three out of five completely excavated households at Monte Polizzo could indicate that most houses possessed an anthropomorphic piece. Since, no anthropomorphic cup, at the moment, have

61. Mühlenbock 2013.

been discovered in other excavated contexts (graves and a sanctuary) at the site, it appears that they were possibly restricted to domestic contexts. From this we can deduce that the prime function of the individual *capeduncola* was tied to the singular house and the family living in it rather than to the community. Therefore, I would suggest that anthropomorphic cups probably did not depict one and the same character; rather we are dealing with objects that were produced to serve and possibly protect households. Because we still have a very limited dataset it is difficult to draw more far reaching conclusions but based on the current evidence it appears as if it is justified to talk about the individual pieces as potent protectors for the individual households. While the raised arms, as a coherent trait, stand out as a strong symbol for cohesion and meaning among the inhabitants on Monte Polizzo.

If we are right, assuming that the *capeduncola* signified the household we can expect that they were utilised in various ceremonies related to the domestic sphere. The *capeduncola* from House 1 was designed to be suspended from the roof, from a wall or something similar inside the area of the house which was designated for storage.<sup>62</sup> The other *capeduncola* was probably displayed in a similar fashion standing on a raised platform inside house 3, in a room which possibly was intended as a small shrine.<sup>63</sup> Both *capeduncole* were possibly responsible for the well-being of the family members, possibly as mediator between gods/goddesses and humans. In this role, particularly considering the proximity to storage vessels, it is possible that the anthropomorphic cups were intended to enhance and promote the production of food and textiles.

Assuming that these human representations partially reflected social aspects of Sicilian society it is interesting to note how these anthropomorphic/zoomorphic representations downplay the role of gender. Gendered aspects were most probably important, but in this case the household members, the family was promoted. The fact that the household was such an important entity to render a specific representation is indicative of a society which holds the family and the household in high regard.

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62. Mühlenbock 2008, 133-135.

63. Mühlenbock 2008, 156-157.



### *Cyprus*

The Cypriot site, Ajia Irini, is located not very far from the island's northern coast. Ajia Irini was a sanctuary with evidence of cultic buildings and activities dating back to at least the Late Bronze Age.<sup>64</sup> Swedish archaeologists excavated the site in 1929, here they discovered more than two thousand figurines which were extensively published in the Swedish Cyprus Expedition (SCE) series. Most of the figurines were deposited around the time of a reorganisation of the sanctuary during the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. But it is worth observing that there is an abundance of ceramic material that dates to the earliest phases of occupation.<sup>65</sup> The excavators dated some of the bull figurines to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. Most of the Ajia Irini figurines are male warriors, but there are also musicians, charioteers, horsemen, figurines bearing offerings, priests, mythological creatures such as sphinxes and centaurs.<sup>66</sup> What is significant with this collection of images is first of all the strong individuality expressed among many of the larger figurines. Secondly we can discern a number of traits that can be attributed to different areas of the Mediterranean. Warriors wearing Egyptian headdresses can be found alongside stern looking men with beards typical for the Assyrian kingdom in the east.<sup>67</sup> The figurines selected for this study are among the very few female or hermaphroditic representations that we find from the sanctuary.

*Ajia Irini ID: 2804. Height: 10,5 cm. Cypro-Geometric III to early Cypro-Archie I. c. 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC. Fig. 4.*

This piece is a very typical example of the traditional “goddess with uplifted arms”.<sup>68</sup> She is recognised primarily by her gesture, with two raised arms in an adorning position. Furthermore, her head is often embellished with what has been interpreted as a *polos* or a *high tiara*: head-gear typically worn by most of the early types of the “goddess with uplifted arms”. She is constructed in the so called snow-ball technique where individual features were crafted separately and added in the final stage of manufacture. Her facial expression is unusual with its two attached bulging pellet eyes and pellet eyebrows. Her large nose (now chipped) was moulded and her mouth is marked by an incised

64. Gjerstad: 1935, 820.

65. For a detailed discussion see Gjerstad 1935, 815-820.

66. Winbladh 2003, 151-203.

67. Törnkvist 1970.

68. See Karageorghis 1977.



**Fig. 4:** Front and back of A.I. 2804. The “goddess with uplifted arms” figure from the Ajia Irini sanctuary in Cyprus dated on stylistic grounds to the 8th-7th century BC but in use until the site was abandoned in the middle of the 6th century BC.

line. Her trumpet shaped, hollow body is partially restored. Two pellet breasts are attached to the upper part of the torso. The figure has traces of black paint with groups of encircling lines along the body and vertical lines along the back of the *polos*. Vertical, black lines marks coiffure on back of her head.

*Ajia Irini ID: A.I. 2316. Height: 36.2 cm. . Cypro-Geometric III to early Cypro-Archie I. c. 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC. Fig. 5.*

The second figurine is much more ambiguous but still has the typical posture with the uplifted arms. The figure most probably represents a hermaphrodite with a woman’s body and male characteristics such as the moulded and black painted beard. The wheel made, hollow trumpet-shaped body is decorated with two modest pellet breasts. The concave neck carries a square head with a broad chin and large convex nose. The mouth, the eyes, the ridged eyebrows and the large ears are carefully moulded. The eyes, the mouth and particularly the beard are highlighted by black paint. The arms are uplifted in an adorning gesture with the open hands facing the observer. The fingers are marked with faint black paint. A snake curls along the back of the figurine projecting above its left shoulder. Painted black lines on the back of the figure probably depict that the figurine was clad in a girdle and a *chiton*.



**Fig. 5:** *Front and back of A.I. 2316. A hermaphroditic figure with uplifted arms from the Ajia Irini sanctuary in Cyprus tentatively dated to the 8th-7th century BC but in use until the sanctuary was abandoned in the middle of the 6th century BC.*

(A.I 2316) can, due to the precise measurements taken by members of SCE, be contextually pinpointed on the site. Hence, we know that the hermaphrodite was found a few meters behind the majority of figurines from Ajia Irini. They were standing in a semi-circle in front of the sanctuary's main altar. Together with the hermaphrodite there were a number of other figurines that were distinctly recognisable among the pre-dominantly warrior figurines. For instance we find a small number of animal (bull) statuettes, part of a throne with a sphinx, one lyre playing musician and most importantly three hermaphroditic minotaurs; one with braids and a raised goblet in its right hand. Additionally, the excavators found two, smaller but otherwise similar, hermaphroditic figures with uplifted arms.<sup>69</sup> It therefore appears as if the distance between this group and the majority of statues was deliberate. According to the excavators this group was part of a waste heap.<sup>70</sup> The members of the SCE dated the

69. Winbladh 2003, 168.

70. Gjerstad 1935, 808-809.

hermaphrodite, mainly on stylistic observations, to the 8<sup>th</sup> or the 7<sup>th</sup> -century BC.<sup>71</sup>

Unfortunately, we are less lucky with the second figurine (A.I 2804) which was published almost twenty years after most of the other figurines from Ajia Irini.<sup>72</sup> In this process the geographical and contextual relationship got lost.

### *Interpretation*

The artistic variability is accentuated in these two figurines. The smaller statute is clearly more in accordance with the older and more traditional “goddess with uplifted arms” figurines, both concerning size and style. The second figure on the other hand, is more elaborate and naturalistic, more synchronous with many of the other figures and figurines from Ajia Irini.

The smaller figurine is clearly a female and perfectly in accordance with the large corpus of “goddesses with uplifted arms” found in Cyprus. Most of them, with only three important exceptions, derive from sanctuaries.<sup>73</sup> At Ajia Irini, however, the figurine is an anomaly because it so clearly represents a figurative tradition of several hundred years with deep historical roots in Cyprus. In this respect and because we lack an exact find spot it is even possible that she perhaps belonged to the earlier phases of the sanctuary and possibly was re-used, like the Bronze Age bulls, in later Iron-Age ceremonies. Gjerstad believed that she was a product of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, being made simultaneously with most of the other figures from the site. In this case it is probable that “the goddess with uplifted arms” signified a link to the past for the worshipers at Ajia Irini. Possibly, comparable to the situation of the Iron Age sanctuary which purposefully was constructed on top of - and in relation to - the much older Bronze Age sanctuary.

Based on its posture Vassos Karageorghis attributes the second figurine to the same category as the aforementioned “goddess with uplifted arms”.<sup>74</sup> Yet its appearance and size is strikingly different. Marie Louise Winbladh refers to this figure as the bearded goddess.<sup>75</sup> This is indeed an apt description but in a similar fashion as the former it is questionable if we *a priori* can assume that she was a goddess. Examples of the “goddess with uplifted arms” used until the Archaic II period often had clearly recognisable attributes such as breasts, uplifted arms, a

71. Winbladh 2003, 167.

72. Gjerstad 1963, 24-25.

73. Karageorghis 1977; 1993.

74. Karageorghis 1977, 21.

75. Winbladh 2007, 49-54.

headdress (polos), a slightly tilted head and painted decoration on the head, face and body. The facial expressions such as eyes, eyebrows, typical spots on the cheeks and mouth are often highlighted with paint. Furthermore, many figurines have either a painted or moulded pendant around their neck, our figure is without headgear. But already from the Cypro-Geometric II there are exceptions, such as the figurine found in a tomb at Lapithos. This figurine has most of the attributes of earlier “goddesses with uplifted arms” but it has a ram’s head instead of the face of a female. It is interesting to note that the figurine with the ram’s head was found in a tomb, not in a sanctuary.<sup>76</sup>

As we move later into the century the insignia for the “goddess with uplifted arms” became even more schematic.<sup>77</sup> Now it is often the upraised arms which are the most important attribute in identifying the figure as the “goddess”. Hence, the later representations became much more individualistic, thus eluding the earlier mould. Such is the case with the second figurine from Ajia Irini which is considerably larger than most figures with uplifted arms from Cyprus. Similar to the Sicilian examples, this figure evades the classical male/female dichotomy combining female and male attributes (breast and beard). Additionally, it has a snake coiling up its back. Hence, it is a rare hermaphroditic image with strong animal connotations. Therefore, this figurine, together with similarly hermaphroditic minotaurs forms an interesting group which evades the usual gender stereotypes.<sup>78</sup> It is interesting to note that among the figures with uplifted arms from Ajia Irini (8 in total) all figures are either females or ambiguously gendered. This suggests that the gesture was designated to non-male participants who most probably had a specific role to play.

Katarzyna Zeman-Wiśniewska makes an interesting point claiming that these hermaphroditic figurines reflect a socially accepted negotiation of one’s gender role; something which possibly was an important part of the sacred space of the sanctuary: in dancing and other ritualistic performances.<sup>79</sup> The close relationship between this sexually ambiguous figurine and the snake enhances the impression of the transgression even further. Possibly, the general outline of the figurine from Ajia Irini suggests that it was not only able to transgress gender roles but also to communicate with and possibly transform into animal spirits. If we assume that the figurines, at least partially, reflect social roles in Cyprus we find that we must start thinking about what these transcending human/animal representations

76. Gjerstad 1937, 213, pl. XLIX, 5.

77. Karageorgis 1977, Nicolaou 1979.

78. Christou 2009.

79. Zeman-Wiśniewska 2012, 159.

actually mean. We cannot automatically assume that Cypriot society and cult was only centred on holistic and all-encompassing dualities such as male and female or war and fertility. Rather, these images show that the inhabitants of Iron Age Cyprus endorsed a much more complex worldview.

*Beyond Sicily and Cyprus*

In order to seek answers about why and how the inspiration for the gesture of uplifted arms ended up in Cyprus and Sicily it is inevitable that we turn to Crete. Already in the beginning of this article I mentioned that the “goddess with uplifted arms” probably was introduced to Cyprus from Crete by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. Before that the particular goddess had been a distinctive feature in the cult assemblages of Late Minoan (LM) III C cult buildings in Crete.<sup>80</sup> Here, they were part of distinct community sanctuaries and were often placed on benches accompanied by specifically designated cult paraphernalia.<sup>81</sup> Approximately synchronous with the adoption of “the goddess with uplifted arms” in Cyprus around 1200-1100 BC she was subsequently abandoned in official cult in Crete during Early Iron Age in favour of sanctuaries that were more directed towards male terracotta representations.<sup>82</sup>

However, Mieke Prent has observed that, similar to what we find in Cyprus, the gesture with the raised arms continued to exist in other artistic media during the Early Iron Age and well into the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC; in terracotta- and bronze figurines depicting females.<sup>83</sup> These representations often mimic the gesture of the old form without highlighting or articulating the gesture or the sacred nature of the figure from earlier periods.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, these figurines are often found in non-religious contexts; in settlements and particularly in tombs. Therefore, Prent suggests that this phenomenon indicates a change of meaning, much the same as Karageorghis has observed for Cyprus. She also believes that that the revival of a traditional image occurred at a time of enhanced cultural and social change.<sup>85</sup>

As an interesting parallel to the Cretan goddess figurines we also find terracotta figurines with uplifted arms in Mycenaean contexts. These figurines are generally called PSI figurines alluding to the shape of the Greek letter. They appear in

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80. Prent 2009, 231.

81. Gesell 2004.

82. Prent 2005, 467-469.

83. Prent 2009, 234.

84. Prent 2009, 237.

85. Prent 2009, 237.

Late Helladic (LH) IIIB and remain popular until LH IIIC (1300-1060 BC). The Mycenaean terracotta tradition developed its own characteristic style but it is also probable that the inspiration for its form originally came from Minoan Crete.<sup>86</sup> Similar to the Minoan versions, the Mycenaean Psi figurines often wear a headdress (a *polos* or a high tiara) and have highlighted breasts, the body is often painted in various patterns. The earliest examples are more realistic in nature but the most common type is typically stylistic in its shape with an almost bird shaped face. These figurines were exported, a few have been found in Sicily. French also observes that they also were exported to Cyprus although in comparatively low numbers.<sup>87</sup> But contradictory to what we find in Cyprus and Crete, the figurines with uplifted arms disappeared in the areas previously controlled by the Mycenaean at the end of the Bronze Age.

From the Iron Age, however, there is a renewed interest in typical figurative representations with uplifted arms deriving from Rhodes, Samos, Lemnos, Boeotia and Attica.<sup>88</sup> During the same period the gesture also appears frequently on depictions from mainland Italy.<sup>89</sup> Here, also a Cretan origin has been suggested.<sup>90</sup> In Calabria we also find figurines with the same gesture dated between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>91</sup> One of the most interesting and intriguing figurines regarding the relationship between Crete, Mainland Greece, Cyprus and Italy were found in a grave in the cemetery of Francavilla Marittima.<sup>92</sup> Here, together with a small child, probably a girl, the excavators found a handmade figurine resembling the “goddess with uplifted arms”.<sup>93</sup> The anthropomorphic figurine wears headgear, possibly a *polos*; its head is slightly tilted backwards and both arms are placed in an upright position. Although the figure lacks specific gender attributes, the excavators believe, based on the shape of the headgear that we are dealing with a female.<sup>94</sup> The figurine was placed just above the little girl’s head and was probably a protector of the deceased. Additionally, the excavators believe that the figurine was inspired by Cypriot “goddess with uplifted arms” figurines.<sup>95</sup> The important conclusion drawn from these examples is that the gesture with uplifted

86. French 1971, 106; Renfrew 1985, 436; Dickinson 1994, 177.

87. French 1971, 131.

88. Krogulska 1968; Nicholls 1970; Karageorghis 1977, 6; Szabó 1995.

89. Leighton 1999, 266.

90. Müller-Karpe 1959.

91. Orlandini 1971, 282-283.

92. Zancani-Montuoro 1977, 51-55.

93. Zancani-Montuoro 1977, 53, tav. XX:A.

94. Zancani-Montuoro 1977, 53.

95. Orlandini 1971, 277; Zancani-Montuoro 1977, 55.

arms during had gained striking popularity not only in Cyprus, Crete and Sicily but also over vast areas of the eastern and central Mediterranean. It therefore appears as if the gesture, during the Iron Age, had ceased to be associated only with one or a few geographical areas; rather it had been appropriated in many places and in many contexts. This is part of the answer to why the gesture also became popular in Western Sicily.

*A Mediterranean body language*

There is convincing evidence to support the notion that the gesture with the uplifted arms in Cyprus was inspired by prototypes from Crete. But how exactly did the same gesture reach Western Sicily and the indigenous groups at Monte Polizzo during the Iron Age? This question is much more difficult to answer because beside the gesture itself, there are few apparent similarities. A direct contact between Cyprus and Sicily during the archaic period is not well attested archaeologically although we know that Boeotian merchants were engaged in both islands from an early stage during the Iron Age. Using the same logic, Phoenician merchants were simultaneously directly engaged both in trading relations but also with permanent settlements in both Sicily and in Cyprus.<sup>96</sup> We may tentatively suggest that both groups could have established an emerging cultural link between the two islands. Another suggestion, which perhaps is even more likely, is that no direct link between Sicily and Cyprus was responsible for the simultaneous appreciation for the uplifted arms. Rather, as I have demonstrated above the uplifted arms was such a widespread phenomenon during the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC that the inspiration to Sicily might have come from Italy, Crete or even from a number of places in the Mediterranean simultaneously.

Considering the many contextual and stylistic differences between the figurative art displayed in this text it would be farfetched to suggest an identical meaning between the figurines from Cyprus and Sicily. On the other hand the three-dimensional representations demonstrate that there were structures in society which were equally important in the two islands, such as the dynamic and fluid nature of gender. Continuity and tradition both obviously played a crucial role in how the figurative elements of the uplifted arms were integrated in societies. In Cyprus, the gesture moved from being an imported phenomenon with strong foreign attachments to a gesture which eventually became integrated and a familiar element in the local cult for hundreds of years. Later the meaning of the gesture was expanded and came to include a more innovative and fluid

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96. Aubet 2001.



approach to the cultic performances visible in the hemaphroditic figures from Ajia Irini. We find a similar process in Sicily. After all – both in Cyprus and Sicily the figurative representations were probably used as vehicles to communicate with the world beyond. Possibly with the past but also with the forces which directed the daily lives of peoples. This transgressing nature of the gesture was probably also one of the reasons why it became so popular. It is of course difficult to know if the inhabitants in Cyprus and Sicily knew about the exact nature of its historical meaning but it appears as if the gesture effectively became part of a religious *lingua franca*, a mediating force between different groups in the Mediterranean. If this is correct this is perfectly in accordance with Irad Malkin's suggestion for the role of religion in the ancient world.<sup>97</sup> He describes religion as the universal language while the distinctive names and religious practices constituted the local dialects.<sup>98</sup>

### *Conclusions*

In this case we might deduce that the wide distribution of the depiction of uplifted arms was a result of a highly interconnected Mediterranean. Local history and local practices were clearly responsible for how the goddess with uplifted arms were integrated in the different societies in Sicily and Cyprus – the *dialects*. The gesture itself on the other hand was part of a Mediterranean body language, shared and partially understood by peoples from various parts of the Mediterranean. Crete and Cyprus were no doubt responsible for guarding and maintaining a long-lived tradition. The power and popularity of the gesture was related to this historical and possibly mythical origin. The figurines from the different regions do not only represent a transmission of art but also a common inspiration for real body language and possible transformative action. In Sicily, the gesture became popular much later and here we can expect that the inhabitants on Monte Polizzo embraced the gesture with the uplifted arms partially as a sign of cohesion but also as a desire to belong to a much wider world outside Sicily. Thus, the gesture with the uplifted arms can be understood in relation to what Mauss described initially in this text when young French women in Paris, inspired by Hollywood actresses, adopted a certain way to walk precisely because they also desired to be associated with a bigger, more international world.

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97. Malkin 2004, 350; Malkin 2011, 8.

98. Malkin 2011, 8.

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