

PART I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

MINIATURE POSSIBILITIES? AN INTRODUCTION TO THE VARIED DIMENSIONS OF FIGURINE RESEARCH

TIMOTHY INSOLL

1.1 INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCING this Handbook is a daunting task because of, first, the wealth of material it contains and, second, the difficulty in saying anything new due to the comprehensive nature of the chapters herein. Equally, focusing on more general themes in prehistoric archaeological figurine research by way of review, which would be the obvious remit of an introductory chapter, would only be to duplicate the content of the subsequent two chapters (Chapters 2 and 3). Hence the focus will be upon introducing the chapters themselves through drawing out some of the salient research possibilities and ideas they contain.

The Handbook's coverage is comprehensive but not exhaustive. There are some regional omissions: Central Asia, the Arabian Peninsula outside the Near East, and South Asia beyond the context of the Indus civilization. This is because it was not possible to find authors to write chapters on the relevant material, rather than an absence of archaeological figurines. However, the past significance of figurines does also vary regionally. In East Africa and in the Pacific for example, there are very few, and, in prehistoric China, figurines, certainly of anthropomorphic form, were not of great importance (Chapter 21). In Chapter 4, Stevenson also refers to figurines being 'few and far between' in predynastic Egypt. Significant differences can also be evident in figurine frequency across the same time period in adjacent regions. Neolithic contexts in Italy have yielded approximately 235 complete figurines and figurine fragments, whereas from the neighbouring Balkans some 50,000 are currently known (Chapter 34).

1.2 FIGURINE DEFINITION AND ‘MEANING’

The definition of a figurine can be seen to be broad. The initial Handbook guidelines acknowledged that the definition of the category of ‘figurine’ is variable and differs based on regional and chronological context. Hence, certain forms of figurative representation sitting outside the narrower modern definition of ‘figurine’ as ‘a small carved or sculptured figure’ (Friedrichsen 1986: 749) were encouraged to be included where relevant. It was also noted that primacy should be given to ‘statuette’ forms, implying portability (excluding, for example, carved monoliths), and three-dimensionality (excluding, for example, engraved plaques).

Contributors move beyond this with varied definitions used. Sometimes this is on the basis of size, with smaller representations defined as ‘figurines’ and larger, as with half life-sized or bigger representations in prehistoric China, being ‘figures’ (Chapter 21). Sized-based definitional criteria are also discussed by Morris for the Aegean in Chapter 29 where ‘figurines’ are up to 25 cm in height and ‘figures’ up to 70 cm. This also relates to portability, for ‘sculptures’ are described as life size and usually in fixed locations. In Palaeolithic Central and Eastern European contexts ‘figurine’ definition includes both two- and three-dimensional material (Chapter 30).

Figurines can also be of varied forms. Anthropomorphic forms are not privileged herein. Where they may have been the focus of study in the past to the detriment of other figurine forms, as in prehistoric Cyprus (Chapter 33), this is now being redressed. In Chapter 18, Lau makes the cogent point that, even where a human form is depicted, we should not think that the figurine could not have had different and changing ontological status. Zoomorphic forms dominate some assemblages and were particularly pronounced in the Easter Island corpus for example (Chapter 27). Mixed assemblages occur as during the Harappa phase at Indus civilization sites such as Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa where *Bos* zoomorphic figurines dominate along with female anthropomorphic ones (Chapter 22). Other figurines, as with some Neolithic Central European examples, are of indeterminate form, either human or zoomorphic, perhaps a desired characteristic and stressing their dual nature as Bánffy notes in Chapter 31.

The figurine form can also lend itself to the depiction of different elements on the same item, perhaps as viewed from different angles. This is apparent in figurines from contexts as diverse as Anatolia (Chapter 20) and the Amazon (Chapter 19). In Chapter 26, Daems describes a Late Neolithic figurine from Tepe Yahya, Iran, which could be viewed as female from the front but from the top and sides possibly depicts a phallus. In Chapter 6, Barich refers to an anthropomorphic figurine from Farafra in the Sahara that, seen from behind, ‘resembles a bird with plumage’. Figurines can also be parts of other objects, blurring simplistic definitions, as when they are attached to pots for instance (Chapters 4, 8, 14, 19, 25, and 33), bronze vessels (Chapter 21), or other objects (Chapters 16 and 20). Anthropomorphic pots can also blur figurine definition, as with the pots modelled in the shape of the human body from the Neolithic Hungarian Körös culture (Chapter 31).

Recurrent in this Handbook, following the exhortations of Bailey (2005, 2013) is the recognition that figurines are not images alone, but objects that matter and which can have agency (Chapter 2). To quote Bailey (2013: 245; emphasis in original), 'by seeing that figurines are representations *for*, one recognizes that they have agency'. Equally, figurines are the outcome of conscious processes of material, technical, and aesthetic selection, that is, 'figurines as process' (Chapter 2). Figurines are, as Kuijt aptly puts it in Chapter 24, the materialization of 'clay ideas'.

A general consensus is apparent that prehistoric figurines should be approached as objects with complex meanings that require interpretation and not just description. Seminal in this realization, as cited in various chapters (e.g. Chapters 6, 20, 26, 33, 2, 29, 37, and 4) was Ucko's (1968) study, described by Morris in Chapter 29 as 'a cornerstone of modern figurine studies'. Ucko's contribution to figurine studies is positively acknowledged, as are recurrently, those of, notably, Bailey (2005), Meskell (2007), Lesure (2011), Nanoglou (2008), and Joyce (2003). Less positively accepted are the generalizing approaches of, for example, Gimbutas (1982, 1989) (see Chapters 36, 3, and 2). Overall, healthy debate is evident in figurine studies as is evident in this Handbook (e.g. Chapters 36, 24, 3, and 2).

Precisely defining figurine meaning is difficult, for multiple meanings were probably ascribed to many prehistoric figurines and these meanings could change over time (Chapters 5, 24, 33, and 36). They were subject to what Stevenson describes, in Chapter 4, as the 'condensation' of diverse actions, relationships, and concepts. Contributors also challenge the notion that all figurines were somehow linked with 'ritual'. In many contexts they had a ritual role (Chapters 13 and 21); in others, figurine function varied (Chapter 6) and could change over time. Some figurines were also toys. In Chapter 9, de Maret illustrates this for Central Africa, and, in Chapter 14, Overholtzer interprets the overrepresentation of cruder figurines in certain Aztec domestic floor contexts as suggesting they were toys. Many of the cattle figurines in Neolithic contexts in the Sudan may also have been toys, an interpretation suggested by their being found in settlements (Chapter 5). Some Indus figurines seem also to have become toys after their primary use, and existed alongside other figurines that were produced only as toys (Chapter 22).

Defining figurines as 'art' is rare in the Handbook outside Palaeolithic contexts (Chapters 30 and 37), reflecting shifts in ways of viewing this material. However, avoiding the concept of 'art' is not to deny that some figurines might have been valued as aesthetic creations, produced as objects of beauty and wonder. The visual qualities of colour and luminosity of the Minoan Snake Goddess figurines would have been readily apparent to those viewing them (Chapter 29). Figurines chart changing tastes and aesthetic patterns, and can provide an insight into past aesthetic thinking (Chapter 3) as manifest by the disappearance of ceramic figurines amongst Amazonian Indian groups, reflecting, as Barreto notes in Chapter 19, changes in representational language to a less figurative one in the post-Columbian period. Figurine aesthetics could also be defined through representational emphasis, as with 'cropping' in prehistoric China, utilized to emphasize phalluses or heads for example (Chapter 21).

The scale of analysis to apply to the study of prehistoric figurines is an issue that is also considered. The question of how far comparative analysis should be extended is one of relevance (Chapter 3), with a shift evident from the meta-narrative to specific figurine forms, assemblages, and questions (Chapter 7).

1.3 FIGURINE CONTEXT AND USE

All the chapters indicate the importance of figurine context. Without adequate attention to context, the danger exists that the beguiling artefact that can be the figurine itself becomes the focus and the investigator slips into the default position of being ‘figurine centric’ (Chapter 2). In some regions, for example in predynastic Egypt (Chapter 4) or West Africa (Chapter 8), the previous absence of adequate consideration of context is being redressed. Figurine context is extremely varied, as the chapters indicate, and patterns of figurine disposal and deposition versus that of other categories of material can allow significant inferences on past figurine use, as Priewe discusses in Chapter 21 with reference to figurines and red pottery cup deposition in the Middle Yangtze region of China. Similarly, a special curation rationale appears to have been applied to Neolithic Eastern and Central European figurines when other categories of material culture would be routinely discarded (Chapter 31).

Figurines are particularly well contextualized in certain regions. In the Temple period on Malta, for example, figurines are largely retrieved from megalithic temple structures and tombs (Chapter 32); in Sardinia bronze figurines (*bronzetti*) were frequently placed in locations such as temples and central meeting places (Chapter 35). Yet even where contextual information is present, reconstructing from this how figurines were used can be difficult (Chapter 36). Figurines often come from disposal contexts that might not relate to original use. Some West African figurines were disposed of in shrine deposits apparently unconnected with primary usage (Chapter 8). Similarly, in Chapter 28, Renfrew describes how the primary use context for many of the large marble Cycladic figurines is not known. In the Indus region, figurines have been recovered from waste middens, house floors, and domestic rubbish pits, but again there is a lack of primary figurine use contexts such as burials or shrines (Chapter 22).

Figurines could also be indiscriminately deposited, as seemingly was Olmec practice (Chapter 12). Interpretation is generally enhanced, though not always unproblematically, where ethnography is available (Chapter 24), as is evident in discussion of figurine use on Easter Island (Chapter 27) or in the Arctic or northwest coast of North America (Chapters 16 and 17), but for the majority of prehistoric contexts in this Handbook relevant ethnography is lacking. However, more generally, ethnographic sources can be seen to be effective in encouraging thinking in new or more complex ways, as in relation to how figurines in the past might have been perceived as having agency or being imbued with personhood.

1.4 FIGURINE MATERIALITY

The extent of archaeological figurine materiality discussed in the following chapters is wide. In Chapter 36, Bailey refers to ‘figurines as the body made material’. Materials used for figurine manufacture range from goat and antelope metapodia in Central Africa (Chapter 9), wood on Easter Island (Chapter 27), cave stalactite in Italian Palaeolithic contexts (Chapter 34), steatite and mammoth tusk in the Upper Palaeolithic of Western and North Central Europe (Chapter 37), chalk in the Western European Neolithic (Chapter 38), driftwood and walrus ivory in the North American Arctic (Chapter 17), marble in the Cyclades (Chapter 28), sandstone in Neolithic Sudan (Chapter 5), mud in southwestern North America (Chapter 15), bronze in China (Chapter 21), bone in the Upper Palaeolithic (Chapter 30), copal for the figurines representative of Aztec imperial ritual (Chapter 14), and faience and ivory in Minoan and Mycenaean contexts (Chapter 29), to, above all, fired and, to a lesser extent, unfired clay. Understanding of figurine materiality is skewed in favour, generally, of archaeologically durable materials. Figurines could be made from less permanent materials such as wood, as already mentioned, textiles, or dough (Chapter 26). Multiple materials were used in the Manchay figurine from Mina Perdida in the Central Andes that had a bottle gourd frame, clay/plaster surface, and human hair and cotton thread cording (Chapter 18).

Figurines could also be adorned, decorated, filled, connected to, or treated with other substances and materials, becoming accretive objects, as Meskell describes in Chapter 2. In Chapter 15, Schaafsma, for example, relates how clay heads were attached to fibre bodies to make figurines in the Sacaton phase, and how feathers were attached to figurines in a Salado cave cache in southwestern North America. Perishable materials such as feathers, wood, and plants were also seemingly used with some prehistoric Anatolian figurines (Chapter 20). Paint was applied as red wash and dots to some ceramic Neolithic Mesopotamian figurines (Chapter 25). Repeated painting was also a feature of some Cycladic figurines (Chapter 28). The nostrils of some Easter Island wooden statuettes were filled with red or orange pigment to represent the breath of life (Chapter 27). Red ochre was coated on to some predynastic Egyptian fired clay figurines (Chapter 4).

The realization that figurines were part of much wider material worlds is recurrent in the Handbook. In Neolithic Western Europe, figurines were part of a ‘broader world of representation’ (Chapter 38): at Çatalhöyük, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines were connected with wall paintings, human skull removal and plastering, and other material culture (Chapter 2). Overall, the production and use of figurines could form part of what Antczak and Antczak eloquently define in Chapter 10 as ‘sociomaterial ritual *habitus*’, and as such were entangled within a web of materiality (e.g. Hodder 2012; Meskell 2005; Watts 2013), which could make them efficacious (Chapter 18).

1.5 FIGURINES, GENDER, SEX, AGE, THE BODY, AND PERSONHOOD

A shift beyond defining figurines in simplistic male and female terms is apparent. As Meskell indicates in Chapter 2, figurines can be embodied but not necessarily linked to specific gender or sex. Representing the ‘corporeality of the human body’ (Chapter 10) rather than maleness or femaleness could have been key (Bailey 2013: 248), and sexless figurines are widely found (e.g. Chapters 25, 25, and 36). Equally, supposed sexual characteristics can be misleading (Chapter 36): breasts and pregnant bellies could be indicators of obesity rather than indicators of sexuality (Chapters 12 and 21).

Figurines might also have offered the medium for creating an ideal of gender and/or sex through the elision of male and female via androgynous representation, or via the duality of male and female figures composing the same figurine. Some Marajoaro figurines from the Amazon combined both male and female elements (Chapter 19), as did a figurine found in an A-group site in the Sudan (Chapter 5). In Chapter 36, Bailey refers to Neolithic Southeastern European figurines that have a phallic neck but with breasts and pudendum. Gender might also be blurred, as Knox suggests in Chapter 33, for some prehistoric Cypriot figurines.

Although in many instances the representation of pregnancy and birth (Chapters 8, 13, 17, 23, and 26), singular biological sex, and/or the cultural construction of gender are apparent (Chapters 12, 22, and 25), the factors underlying the use of prehistoric figurines for representing sexed bodies and their function within gender construction and gender relations were complex. Figurines could be used in the formation of gender and the citation of sex perhaps via initiation as in southern Africa (Chapter 7). This might be broadly akin to how some Neolithic Iranian figurines were possibly used for didactic purposes perhaps linked with the female life cycle (Chapter 26). Some figurines in the North American Arctic were similarly used for didactic purposes. These were dolls that could be used for play but also to teach children about adult activities (Chapter 17). In the Caribbean, figurines could be used as substitutes for women in ritual practices (Chapter 10). In the Levant, male and female sexed bodies or portions thereof began to only be represented by figurines during a time of stress (Chapter 24). On Easter Island, women used wooden figurines to make obscene gestures whilst men were painted with images of female genitalia (Chapter 27), the latter impossible to reconstruct archaeologically.

Figurines were certainly ‘somatic’ media (Chapter 4). In human terms they provided a medium for miniature human representation, and the idea of miniaturization is seen as particularly significant in some contexts (e.g. Chapters 4, 6, 18, and 29). Figurines could be ‘mimetic representations of miniature humans’ (Chapter 13). As Bailey (2005: 32–9) has discussed, miniatures serve to distill and compress what is represented, and can promote, through the agency of miniature three-dimensionality, object intimacy and tactility. Miniaturization could also stretch the limits of imagination and challenge

intelligibility (Mack 2007: 11, 75). The ‘tropes’ of material reality could be subverted and played with (Stewart 1993).

Figurines could also represent age from infancy to antiquity (Chapter 12) and be used for the inscription of personhood (Chapters 7 and 15). Prehistoric figurines potentially attest a significant range of understandings of personhood and ontology. For example, in Chapter 19, Barreto indicates how Amazonian perspectivist ontologies were based on beliefs that both humans and non-humans formerly shared humanity, then separation occurred, but non-humans still viewed themselves as human; these ontologies can be reflected in complex ways by stone or clay figurines from the region. Whilst Mizoguchi, in Chapter 23, argues that the varied forms of both fantastic and realistic Jomon figurines and the existence of pots with figurine-shaped motifs suggests, ‘human beings, animals, plants and supernatural beings were perceived to be mutually transformative’.

Figurines could also be used to create ideal persons or qualities or essences of persons. Janus heads might reference wisdom, foretelling, fantasy, or even physical abnormality (Chapter 13). The fusing of animal and human forms is a repeat theme (Chapters 8 and 20), perhaps as a reflection on ontology, perhaps to create mythical creatures of imagined forms. Some of this imagery could also reflect masquerade. In Chapter 25, Campbell and Daems refer to ‘reptilian-like’ facial characteristics evident on examples of Late Ubaid figurines from Mesopotamia that might depict masks. More unequivocally, figurines depicted wearing human, animal, or indeterminate masks were found in Linear Pottery culture (‘Linearbandkeramik’ or LBK) contexts in Central Europe (Chapter 31).

Figurines can provide information on dress and accouterments and bodily adornment and modification otherwise lacking in the archaeological record. In prehistoric Malta, several hairstyles as well as dress were modelled on figurines (Chapter 32). Incised lines and zigzags on figurines and a face pot from Neolithic Italy might have related to decorations also applied to the bodies of the living (Chapter 34). Yup’ik dolls from the North American Arctic were often decorated with facial tattoos and labrets (Chapter 17). The incisions made on a figurine from a child’s grave at el-Kadada in the Sudan perhaps represented tattoos or clothes (Chapter 5). Either scarification, tattooing, or wearing armlets is indicated on the arm of the early Upper Palaeolithic ‘lion-man’ from Hohlenstein-Stadel, other figurines depict bracelets, belts, and hats of woven fibres or shells (Chapter 37). Possible tattoos are depicted on the faces of some Neolithic figurines from the Åland Islands in the Baltic (Chapter 38). Possible tattooing or scarification is depicted on a figurine from the predynastic Egyptian site of Mahasna, while other predynastic figurines depict hairstyles and attire (Chapter 4).

1.6 FIGURINES AND POWER

Figurines are powerful objects, as contemporary responses to figurines indicate (e.g. Bailey, Cochrane, and Zambelli 2010), and they were also seemingly considered as powerful in varied prehistoric contexts. Figurines could be literally power objects

(Chapter 9) invested with substances that were perceived as giving them power (see Hersak 2010). Figurines could also be used in the construction and legitimation of power, as in the Mayan context, where elite figurine production in ceremonial centres occurred and figurines were utilized in elite burial contexts and as part of ceremonies associated with political elites (Chapter 11). Figurines in prehistoric Sardinia appear to have played a central role in politics (Chapter 35). Power seems also to have been a major factor structuring the production, curation, and use of figurines on the northwest coast of North America (Chapter 16). The presence or absence of figurines might also attest to changing power structures. In Chapter 5, Haaland and Haaland suggest that the general disappearance of figurines and their replacement by larger figures in the Sudan after the Neolithic was perhaps due to changes in social and political organization, with increasing centralization and specialization evident. In Chapter 4, Stevenson also charts how figurine usage reflects power changes in predynastic Egypt: from 'embodied projections of inward-looking group ritual action' to a possible decline in the relevance of anthropomorphic imagery as state formation processes 'gathered pace'.

The power of figurines is also suggested by the fact that deliberate fragmentation could have been a recurring practice (see Chapman and Gaydarska 2007), perhaps at the end of the 'life' of the figurine (but see Chapter 36). Intentional breakage seems to have been a factor in Hohokam figurine usage in the southwest of North America (Chapter 15). It was also possibly significant in some Mesopotamian contexts (Chapter 25) and in many Central and East European Neolithic ones (Chapter 31). In Bandkeramik Western European Neolithic contexts, intentional fragmentation of figurines appears to have occurred, perhaps paralleling the controlled fragmentation of bodies evident in Bandkeramik cemeteries (Chapter 38). At the Early Bronze Age site of Kavos on Keros in the Aegean, deliberate fragmentation was also evident, and here it seems that figurines were brought to Keros from other Cycladic islands already fragmented (Chapter 28). Items such as a house model and anthropomorphic vessels were also metaphorically 'killed' in Cypriot Chalcolithic contexts by being defaced and broken, and in the Bronze Age many plank figurines were deliberately broken (Chapter 33). Purposeful decapitation was also evident on many of the figurines of Bering Sea cultures in the North American Arctic (Chapter 17). This was not a unique instance, for the decapitation of two figurines at the Highland Formative Mesoamerican site of Gualupita was interpreted as potentially allowing their force or energy to escape (Chapter 13).

Besides removing them from active use, in some instances fragmentation might also hint at perceptions of past figurine agency. Figurine agency or related concepts is a theme explored by various contributors (e.g. see Chapter 35), and Gell's (1998) ideas of object agency have proven influential here. Andeans believed figurines to be imbued with force or energy and thus a primary role they assumed was as a surrogate (Chapter 18). Figurines might also have functioned as objects used to enchain people with the past and with powerful places, spirits, and people (Chapter 14).

1.7 FIGURINES, SENSES, AND PERFORMANCE

It is also apparent that figurines need not have been static objects but could be subject to manipulation and utilized in performance-related activities (Chapters 4, 13, and 14), including, but not exclusively linked, to ritual. Figurines can appeal to the senses. They can be tactile objects, and were perhaps deliberately exploited as such (Bailey 2013: 252), as with some Early Jomon figurines from Japan (Chapter 23) and carefully fired figurines from the Sahara (Chapter 6). Figurines can also be visually appealing, and this seems to have been the quality drawn upon in later Jomon contexts, with a change in emphasis placed on seeing figurines rather than handling them (Chapter 23).

Figurines could also be made to enhance performance. The inclusion of whistle vents in some Mayan figurines attests an aural dimension perhaps linked to performance (Chapter 11). Sardinian *bronzetti* of musicians provide glimpses into performances involving sound—music—and possibly dance (Chapter 35). Some Amazonian (Chapter 19) and Aztec figurines functioned as rattles, by containing small clay pellets, and other Aztec figurines were puppet-like, with limbs attached with string (Chapter 14). Stone figurines with string holes that allowed their heads to be moved like puppets were also found in several Maltese Neolithic temple sites (Chapter 32). The presence of detachable heads on Anatolian figurines suggested that they too might have been used for performative purposes (Chapter 20).

Initiation potentially provided a context for figurine performance (Chapters 7 and 8). Gesture is a further important component of performance and figurines can ‘fossilize’ gesture and posture (Chapter 29). This might be particularly applicable to ritual gesture and posture (Insoll and Kankpeyeng 2014): gestural differences between Minoan bronze and clay figurines were interpreted as suggestive of ritual variation (Chapter 29).

1.8 FIGURINE MANUFACTURE

Figurines are testimony to human technical ingenuity. This is an issue not lost on the contributors to this Handbook, who indicate the range of mechanisms used to construct figurines: from the wooden sticks or reeds used as a core around which some figurines were formed in predynastic Egypt (Chapter 4), or the wooden dowels used on some figurines at Çatalhöyük (Chapter 2) or in the prehistoric Sahara (Chapter 6), to the ceramic joints and moulds used by Mayan figurine makers (Chapter 11) and the peg holes recorded on Neolithic Italian figurines indicating that they were made in separate pieces and then joined together (Chapter 34). Factors such as the use of moulds relate also to how unique figurines might have been perceived. This raises questions such as to what extent the manufacturing processes reference the emphasis given to creativity and experimentation as opposed to a more homogeneous production (Chapter 30). In

Chapter 22, Clark and Kenoyer suggest the making of Indus figurines was meaningful in perhaps re-enacting birth or creation of deities or human beings from clay or earth as suggested by figurines being hand-modelled rather than moulded.

Technological choice is significant. Additive (ceramic) versus reductive (ivory, stone, bone) figurine manufacturing processes are explored in relation to the Upper Palaeolithic (Chapter 30). These are technological themes that merit exploration in figurine assemblages elsewhere. Figurines could also be pierced or incised with holes to assist firing or for the insertion of dowels, sticks, reeds, pegs, or string, or, as with some Harappan figurines, to allow their being attached to other objects or placed on sticks (Chapter 22). Figurines could also be pierced to facilitate their being worn, as with some Minoan pierced anatomical parts (Chapter 29). In other instances, cavities, holes, or incisions might be unconnected with manufacture and instead used to offer libations (Chapter 8) or for the addition of secondary materials, as with a Dorset period wooden figurine from the North American Arctic that had its neck pierced and filled with red ochre (Chapter 17). Holes pierced through figurines could also perhaps relate to the depiction of internal organs, as Mizoguchi suggests in Chapter 23 for holes pierced vertically through some Jomon Incipient period figurines. Other figurine cavities remain unexplained, as with the perforations found on examples of Santarém figurines from the Amazon (Chapter 19).

1.9 CONCLUSIONS: THE 'STATE' OF PREHISTORIC FIGURINE RESEARCH

The 'state' of prehistoric figurine research varies regionally. In areas where there is a significant history of figurine research, Mesopotamia (Chapter 25) or the Levant (Chapter 24), for example, the agenda has moved beyond inventory and description to a greater extent than areas where research has been much more limited and where even basic summaries are lacking, as in West Africa (Chapter 8). Perhaps because of the wealth of data in both Mesopotamia and the Levant, comparisons are made across different regions and time periods (see Chapters 24 and 25) that would be difficult to achieve elsewhere.

It is also surprising that in some regions where it might be assumed that figurines have been the focus of significant archaeological attention this is not correct and they have instead been somewhat neglected, as with Olmec (Chapter 12) or Aztec (Chapter 14), or prehispanic Andean (Chapter 18) figurines. In other instances, varying regional trends in research are discernible, as manifest by recurrent interpretive themes—shamanism in the Americas (Chapters 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, and 19), or a focus upon age in parts of Africa (Chapters 7 and 9). What is certain is that both strong empirical research and focused interpretation are vital in successful figurine research (Chapters 2 and 3), as all the contributors in this Handbook achieve.

Increasingly, interdisciplinary approaches in figurine research are also key (Chapter 2). Through exploring the application of techniques such as computed tomography (CT) scanning to look inside figurines, DNA analysis to examine what substances might have been added to or used in conjunction with figurines, and X-ray fluorescence (XRF), instrumental neutron activation analysis (INAA), and other elemental analysis methods, new insights into prehistoric figurines can be gained. INAA has been used effectively on Olmec (Chapter 12) and Aztec figurines (Chapter 14), and Sears describes, in Chapter 11, how XRF, INAA, and microscopy were employed to investigate the pastes used in Mayan figurines. Macro and microscopic study of Upper Palaeolithic figurines from Western and North Central Europe has indicated how mammoth ivory figurines were made (Chapter 37).

This Handbook brings together prehistoric figurine research from around the world. It is essentially a summary of work in progress that also indicates the many directions this research could focus upon. These are many, one that can be briefly isolated here as tying together various themes already isolated—materiality, gender, sex, personhood, fertility, power, agency, sensory perception, performance—is the role of figurines within medicine and healing.

This is identified by several contributors, as can be inferred through the large numbers of figurine fragments found near Aztec sweatbaths where curative rituals were performed (Chapter 14); or through the 'votive' body parts found in the Minoan peak sanctuaries that seem to have functioned to facilitate healing (Chapter 29); or by the potential pathological conditions (oversized breasts, buttocks and stomachs, distorted phallic forms) found at the Mnajdra Temple on Malta (Chapter 32); or by a possible diseased individual represented by a female figurine from the necropolis of Cannas di Sotto on Sardinia (Chapter 35); or by a wooden figurine from a burial on Southampton Island in the North American Arctic, which was drilled with holes corresponding with lesions on the accompanying woman's skeleton (Chapter 17). However, medicine and healing could be explored in more detail in relation to figurine assemblages elsewhere. The concept of visual 'synecdoche' as described by Farbstein in Chapter 30 might be pertinent here, where the part is used as a referent for the whole—eyes, arms, vulva, and so on. Figurines, complete or fragmentary, can potentially reference human concern with the maintenance of health and the avoidance and curing of disease and disability in varied ways (Insoll 2015).

Another future research direction is the magical role of figurines. This is a subject touched upon by some contributors, but in general not considered at length. For example, in Chapter 15, Schaafsma indicates how some Basketmaker III figurines from the southwest of North America could have been used for black magic; in Chapter 26, Daems describes how some Iranian prehistoric figurines, perhaps perceived as miniature beings, were possibly able to be manipulated for magical purposes; and, in Chapter 27, Orliac and Orliac refer to Easter Island figurines being used for both black and white magical purposes. The overall absence of magical interpretations for figurines perhaps reflects the decline of magic as an interpretive theme (see Merrifield 1987). Magic as a concept can be misunderstood, ill defined, simplistic, sometimes perjorative,

but notwithstanding this, it is conceivable that some figurines must have had magical roles, particularly where ‘magic captures the intractable power of things’ (Nakamura 2005: 24), and ‘traces a mode of thinking that is layered, reticular, and corporeal’ (ibid.: 39), that is, well suited to figurines.

Finally, and unfortunately, prehistoric figurines can also attract attention as objects with financial value and as such become commodities traded in the international art and antiquities market (Chapters 4 and 28). Archaeologists have a role, a voice, and a degree of power here in speaking out against this trade, the destruction of archaeological sites, and the decontextualization of figurines.

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