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To cite this article: Lin Foxhall (2015) Introduction: miniaturization, World Archaeology, 47:1, 1-5, DOI: [10.1080/00438243.2015.997557](https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2015.997557)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2015.997557>



Published online: 27 Feb 2015.



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From almost as early as people made things, as far back as the Palaeolithic (Hiscock; Weitzel et al. this volume), humans have experimented with scale to conceive and construct miniature objects. ‘Humanity is the measure of all things’, said Protagoras, and to a considerable extent the archaeological evidence from a wide range of cultures bears this out in the case of miniatures.

It is difficult, and perhaps not altogether helpful, to try to define ‘miniature’ too tightly, given the astonishing number of cultures and the broad range of contexts in which miniaturization appears. Nonetheless, there are a number of characteristics that miniatures regularly share in common. A miniature reproduces in some sense, at smaller scale, another object, whether natural or man-made. Hence it is an imitation or a model (though not necessarily a precise one) of another thing, so that the significance of the miniature and the significance of the original remain linked (and needless to say this may not be in the same ways in all cases). One could think of this as a kind of ‘intertextuality’ of materiality, where miniatures epitomize, echo and reverberate meanings captured in and associated with other objects, while creating new meanings of their own, which potentially enrich and alter both the miniature itself and its prototype. However, the issue of scale is critical, and is discussed in more detail below.

Often miniatures are made in a different material from the prototype, for example miniature animals in clay (Meskell this volume) and metal, miniature houses in ceramic or miniature textiles in lead (Foxhall and Stears 2000; Foxhall 2000). In some cases such differences in material may form part of the significance of the miniature in its own right, and contribute to the surprise and to the story of the entanglement of that type of object with people’s lives. But this is not always the case: bonsai (Bailey 2005, 29–30) is an interesting example of the deployment of specific practices and techniques to create miniature versions of the same kind of object, the living tree, in the same medium, while miniature versions of ceramic vessels made in clay are common in the Mediterranean from prehistory through historic times (Knappett 2012; Barfoed; López-Bertran and Vives-Ferrándiz this volume), and miniature points were crafted from the same kinds of stone as full-sized ones (Hiscock; Weitzel et al. this volume).

Certainly it is not the case that miniatures were simply ‘cheap and cheerful’ or ‘inferior’ versions of ‘real’ objects, although miniatures display a wide range of technological skill, precision and standards of craftsmanship in their manufacture. In many cases, however, it is clear that reducing an object to a miniature scale increases the technical difficulty of making it, especially where the craftsman is attempting to articulate specific details very precisely, such as facial features or textile patterns. Such skilled workmanship might add considerable amounts of time to the production of some miniatures, although of course manufacture in miniature

might reduce the amount of materials needed – a consideration where the material was rare or especially valuable.

Though miniatures are smaller versions of their reference points or prototypes, sometimes very small versions, the process of miniaturization need not stop there. The internal proportions of the original object need not be retained, so that a miniature is not necessarily a scale model. Further, dimensionality may also change, so that a fully three-dimensional object may be rendered in miniature in only two dimensions (see Karnava this volume on Cretan Hieroglyphic signs as miniatures) or with the third dimension significantly suppressed or flattened as in the case of the lead representations of clothing, tools and figurines commonly found in archaic and classical Lakonian sanctuaries, or depictions of humans, body parts and animals in plaque form (Wace 1929; see also Kiernan this volume). The possibility raised by Weitzel et al. that their early South American miniature points were made to be viewed from only one angle perhaps constitutes another example of distorted dimensionality. Or, a miniature may represent only a fragment of the prototypical whole, as in the representations of body parts common in Iron Age Italic sanctuary settings (Hughes, see also Karnava; Kiernan this volume). Nonetheless, despite these distortions, the prototypes remain recognizable in their miniature renderings.

In the case of natural objects, such as plants or animals, the scale of a miniature is small measured in relation to the original prototype. But, nonetheless, its small size also triangulates with the human body as well as with the original object. This opens a new way of relating to an object or potentially creates a new dimension to wider social discourse with a category of objects. The animal figurines from Çatalhöyük (Meskell this volume) are a good example. In the case of an object that is normally larger than a human in real life, but in its miniature manifestation is much smaller, such additional facets to the relationship could be particularly vital in revising the users' engagement, for example enlarging the spectator, in Bailey's terms (2005, 33) perhaps to suggest some degree of control or omniscience.

Objects manufactured by people are generally made to a scale that affords effective and efficient use by humans in relation to their intended functions. We do not usually make tools that are too heavy or cumbersome to wield (Odler this volume), clothing that is too large or too small to be wearable, cooking pots that are the wrong size for the amount of food that we want to cook or that cannot feasibly be put on the fire, cups or water jars which are too heavy to lift or which hold an inadequate amount of liquid for their intended purpose. Indeed, numerous manufactured objects, including many of those which serve as prototypes for miniatures, were at normal size initially designed to interact smoothly with human body (Bailey 2005, 28–9; Hodder 2012, 49), and are in some sense scaled to it. Almost by definition then, the smaller scale of a miniaturized manufactured object does not offer the same affordances, and cannot interact or function in relation to the human body in the same way.

In many cases, this renders the miniature versions of objects deliberately dysfunctional, at least for their original purpose. Model furniture and model houses and other buildings offer good examples of this, because the scale of the originals is completely dependent on the human body. Indeed, Pemberton (1970, 293) incorporated the loss of original function into the very definition of a miniature. But, such a definition may be too narrow since, in other cases, the change of scale enables new affordances, altering or distorting the original functionality of the prototype, but nonetheless carrying its resonances (Knappett 2011, 180–1, 2012). For example, many miniature pots can still hold liquids, food or other substances, albeit in smaller amounts

than the prototype. But these substance may be different ones, such as perfume, oil or drugs, than those for which the originals were generally intended (McPhee and Pemberton 2012, 213). It is conceivable that these smaller amounts of the same (or different) substances might be deployed for new purposes when contained in miniatures (Knappett 2012, 93–6).

Such a loss of functionality or change of affordance and purpose may startle or herald a transformation of context. In other words, the change in scale may serve to make the ordinary extraordinary, signalling a change in the sociality of an object which mirrors its change in relation to the body. Hence, a miniature can serve as a physical manifestation of a thought experiment, a kind of gateway to fantasy or alternative realities (Bailey 2005, 33–5) which allows the users to think the unthinkable. At Çatalhöyük, the miniature animals could signal the imagining of out-of-the-ordinary relationships to the animals that populated the world of the inhabitants, open to a wide range of individuals via the miniatures. In Hellenistic Babylonia, miniatures could be vehicles through which people experimented with aspects of different identities they encountered in this complex, multi-cultural society (Langin-Hooper this volume). In contrast, in Iron Age Iberia, their performative potential appears to be entangled in socialization and the communication of values, not just of children, but of adults as well (López-Bertran and Vives-Ferrándiz this volume).

Miniatures, then, may regularly signal a desire to engage with the material world in a deliberately different way. Changing perspective may also change relationships, turning the user away from the ‘everyday’ or ‘real life’, or at least into another dimension of it. Intimacy is enabled and enhanced by the small scale (Bailey 2005, 38; Langin Hooper this volume), allowing a new range of encounters. The illusion of control may be enhanced by a combination of small size and simplification.

Bailey (2005, 29) distinguishes miniatures from models by suggesting that the latter ‘do not seek accuracy in representation’ and are not ‘precise and exact’. However, others have noted that miniatures are sometimes extremely accurate renditions of full-sized objects (Knappett 2012, 99). Kiernan (this volume) has highlighted the importance of ‘reality’ in some northern European Iron Age and Roman miniatures for understanding both the prototypes and the significance of miniatures themselves in context. Selbitschka (this volume), too, has emphasized that realism played an important role in the meanings and functions of Chinese tomb miniatures of the fifth–third centuries BCE.

Frequently those who craft miniatures are selective in the features they choose to emphasize or to represent clearly or accurately. Bailey (2005, 32) suggests that miniatures ‘manipulate reality’ through abstraction and compression. Abstraction, this process of selection, omits some features and compels the user to employ their knowledge or imagination to fill in the rest. Compression focuses the users’ attention differentially to particular features, intensifying their significance in relation to other less highlighted, or absent, elements. Many of the articles in this volume have observed such selectivity of representation. For example, Karnava points to the use of a part for the whole in Cretan Hieroglyphic script; Langin-Hooper focuses on different manifestations of performative potential; Meskell observes the detailing of animal heads and tails on otherwise rather generic bodies; Odler specifies the identifiable details of model tools; Selbitschka comments on the care taken to depict facial features; Kiernan notes that only very basic characteristics are needed to signal model coins in Iron Age European settings.

Miniatures appear in a wide range of archaeological contexts across different societies. Frequently, even within a single society, the same miniatures may appear in many different

settings playing a variety of roles. In Chinese and Egyptian funerary contexts miniatures seem to be connected with very specific and elaborately formulated ideas about the afterlife (Selbitschka; Odler, this volume). However, the ways in which miniatures feature in funerary contexts in many other societies suggest that the comparatively formalized roles of miniatures in these two cases may be unusual, and elsewhere their significance in death is less easy to pin down (see Kiernan; López-Bertran and Vives-Ferrándiz this volume).

Sanctuary contexts are another setting where miniatures regularly appear, often apparently as votive gifts (and sometimes clearly indicated as such by inscriptions) (Van Straten 1992; Van Straten 1981; 1992). However, other interpretations, such as commemoration of ritual events or actions may also be possible in some cases (Barfoed; Kiernan; Karnava this volume; Knappett 2012, 93), and we should be careful not to constrain the notion of ‘votive’ too tightly, as these case studies demonstrate. Work and activity sites (Hiscock; Weitzel et al. this volume) and settlements also have their share of miniatures, and the interpretation of these is not always easy, as at Çatalhöyük where animal miniatures may appear in middens at the edges of settlement areas (Meskell), in Iron Age Iberia where they seem to be associated with households (López-Bertran and Vives-Ferrándiz) or in Hellenistic Babylonia where the funerary and the settlement contexts can be intermingled (Langin-Hooper).

The potential roles of miniatures as ‘toys’ is not explored in depth by any of the articles in this volume, but the case studies of both López-Bertran and Vives-Ferrándiz and Langin-Hooper could serve to broaden the concept of ‘toy’ and expand the significances of ‘play’ very considerably. Even in modern, Western societies ‘toys’ and ‘play’ are not restricted to children: how many adult men own Play Stations, X-Boxes and model railways, and how many adult women collect dolls or teddy bears? That playing with miniature objects as ‘toys’ might serve to develop or reinforce social or moral values or identities through physical engagement with a material object via bodily movement and performance (Sillar 1994) is an aspect of their ‘intertextuality’ that emerges clearly in both of these studies.

Miniatures are entangled with many aspects of life, death, the supernatural and divine, in some case weaving them together. They serve worship, play, ornamentation, learning, socialization and social engagement, thought experiment. Undoubtedly they were entangled in many ways that are now lost to us. But, the widespread urge to remake the world in miniature suggests that changing the scale of things opens up pathways for people to reimagine the world.

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