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Lynn Meskell

Abstract

Neolithic animals comprise more than half of the total figurine assemblage at Çatalhöyük (7400–6000 cal. BC), with some 741 horns and 449 quadrupeds, as opposed to only 187 human figurines. Many figurines, whether of wild cattle, boar or deer, are small, detailed, finely modeled and demonstrate anatomical knowledge and specificity. Their miniature quality allows them to do what real animals, plastered animal installations and wall paintings cannot – to socialize, and to facilitate embodied and immediate interaction between humans and wild animals. Figurines are active things in themselves and their small scale invites an intimacy, control and democratization of experience that was not possible with large-scale narrative paintings that were relegated to a few houses or with plastered bucrania retrieved from hunting. In this society of things, figurines are conduits between very different material scales and they effectively embody and communicate across the species divide in expedient and intimate ways.

Keywords

Neolithic Çatalhöyük; animal figurines; miniature; scale; circulation.

What do figurines want?

Unlike their anthropomorphic counterparts, animal figurines often receive limited scholarly attention and are typically viewed as ‘indifferent objects’ – mundane, ubiquitous and ‘poor things’ (but see Nanoglou 2008, 2009; Rollefson 2008). Yet I would argue that they are central to the practice of everyday life at Neolithic Çatalhöyük. Following Mitchell’s seminal work *What Do Pictures Want* (2005), I suggest that figurines want to neither be reduced to a ‘history of images’ nor elevated to a ‘history of art’ but to be seen as complex individuals occupying multiple subject positions and identities. They do not want to be interpreted, decoded, worshiped, smashed, exposed or demystified. Mitchell (2006) asks us to slow down the reception of images for prolonged contemplation and consider socio-historic modes of interpretation, which is very much in line with a contextual archaeology and the kind of comparative figurality I would propose here. He wants us to consider

the critical space in which images could function, not merely as illustrations but as cases that might transform or deconstruct: figurines might then be sites of theoretical discourse not merely passive objects. Regardless of their size, ubiquity, circulation or deposition, figurines have a tendency to look back at their maker, or to respond to them, even to want something. But this is not a projection of personhood, rather a call to engage with the ‘lives and loves’ of images. It is Mitchell’s provocative thesis (2005, 46) that only through a dialogue with other things – a society of things – might figurines come to recollect what they want. In this article I ask specifically what these tiny animals ask of us and what their miniaturization affords that is impossible across other material scales of animal figuration and experience at Çatalhöyük (Fig. 1).

Çatalhöyük was discovered in the 1950s and excavated between 1961 and 1965 by James Mellaart (1962, 1963, 1964, 1966) and more recently by Ian Hodder (2006, 2012). The site is particularly well known for its agglomerated architecture with rooftop entry, elaborate wall paintings, plastered reliefs and bucrania. The small animal figurines at Çatalhöyük have a high clay content that provided the best fabric for crafting the expedient, small, figural pieces with minimal effort (Fig. 2). Some 32 per cent of animal figurines are fine or fine-to-moderate in their modeling quality (Nakamura and Meskell 2013, 205), suggesting a wide range of makers. The clay sources used to manufacture figurines are within 100m of the mound (Avis 2011) and so easily accessible by all residents. Clay figurines were not fired, but lightly or passively baked by the sun, by being adjacent to ovens and hearths, or burned post-depositionally in middens (Meskell et al. 2008). Rather than being durable effigies, it was the act of making that was significant and they may never have been intended to endure. This is supported by their secondary depositional contexts outside, rather than inside buildings, typically in middens that are general refuse areas, but also places of activity that involve animals and related activities such as penning and butchering (Martin and Meskell 2012, 406). Significantly, they do not occur in burials (Nakamura and Meskell 2013). So we can envisage the lifecycle of these figurines as being intimately connected to the villagers for their procurement, making, using or ultimate deposition. Following Clark (1978), Gosden (2005, 194) posits that assemblages or populations of artifacts such as these exhibit their own specific ‘behavioral’ characteristics that can prove more complex than the simple sum of those characteristics.

Çatalhöyük currently has 2,500 recorded figurines of humans, animals and abbreviated forms throughout its 1,400-year sequence (Table 1). We have done intensive work on spatial densities of figurine categories through time, by individual excavation unit. Animal figurines (including both quadrupeds and isolated horns) peak from the South Area in Level P and in the North Area (specifically the 4040 excavation area) at Level I. These two levels are roughly contemporaneous in date though they come from the south and north areas of the East Mound respectively (*c.* 6400–6300 cal. BC). However, the 4040 excavation area of the site has the greatest concentration of quadrupeds and the widest range of taxa, including much less frequently depicted boar, bear and fox. During this time there are significant changes in house size, environmental shifts towards drying, cattle domestication and an increase in sheep and goat herding with more complex herd management suggested (Henton 2013; Russell et al. 2013). Writing about the Greek and Balkan Neolithic, Nanoglou (2008) sees figurines acting as reference points for people’s lives and building a world that incorporated new members, by way of domestication, into the social world. But in the case of Çatalhöyük the focus is upon crafting exotic animals, with an eye to the world outside, even though domesticated animals were assuming a greater role in village life.

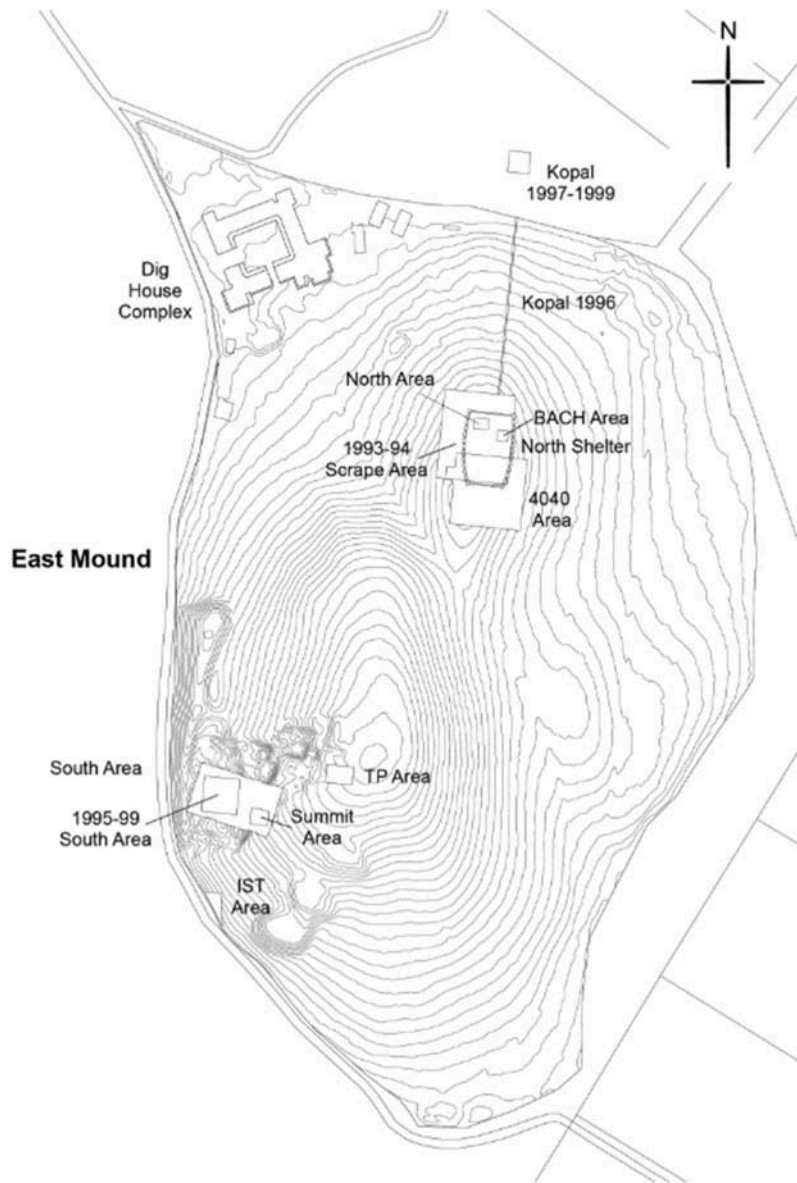


Figure 1 Site map of Çatalhöyük.

Figurines are signifiers of a larger landscape, a world of wider resources, experiences and places (see also Jones 1998; Ingold 1996).

The range of taxa identified in the figurine corpus does not include any animal or 'type' that is not represented in faunal remains at Çatalhöyük. Yet the faunal remains include a broad range of species, such as birds, fish, rodents, small carnivores and reptiles that are not depicted in figural form. While 449 quadrupeds were examined in detail, some 250 have less than 50 per cent preservation, making species identification problematic, and those from the 1960s excavations are often now inaccessible. From our identifiable corpus it is clear that people most commonly



Figure 2 Dog figurine 19342.X16. Photo by the author.

Table 1 Levels and dates for Neolithic Çatalhöyük. Courtesy of Camilla Mazzucato

<i>Levels</i>		<i>Date (years BC)</i>
<i>Mellaart</i>	<i>South-4040</i>	
0,I,II	TP6	6400–6000
	South T – 4040.J	
	South S – 4040.J	
	South R – 4040.I	
	South Q – 4040.H	
(V)	South P – 4040.H	6500–6400
VIA	South O – 4040.G	
VIB	South N – 4040.G	
VII	South M – 4040.F	6700–6500
VIII	South L – 4040.F	
IX	K	7300–6800
X	J	
XI	I	
XII	H	
Pre XII	G1,G2,G3,G4	

made cattle figurines (44), followed by boar/pig (15), then equid (9) and deer (8). Caprines overall number 11, and the representations of goats far outnumber sheep (Fig. 3). This presents an opposite picture to the ratio of sheep:goat in the faunal remains, where sheep always



Figure 3 Goat figurine 2250.X2. Photo by the author.

outnumber goats by far (Russell and Martin 2005; Russell et al. 2013). Despite the faunal realities, the material world of figurines enables us to contemplate how things themselves create the grounds for our understanding of them. People came to know these miniature animals in their own modes, as constitutive, rather than purely on our terms (Gosden 2005, 197, Mitchell 2006). Thus object worlds have their own logics and material legacy that can be somewhat independent of people's initial intentions (Gell 1998). Taking the material world seriously then means that archaeologists should consider its impacts on human and human-animal relations.

Considering the relationship between the human maker and the thing reduced (the animal) forces us into 'an anthropocentric world where the scale of the human dictates all spatial relationships' (Bailey 2005, 29) and has the concomitant effect of mastery. Yet if we look comparatively at the size ranges of both animal and human figurines it is clear that there is no natural or realistic size relationship between the two; in fact, many anthropomorphic figures are smaller than their zoomorphic counterparts. Thus the two categories of figurines were not meant to interact together realistically, to be assembled in a narrative dialogue together, human and animal. Human figurines probably signify concerns like personhood, aging, sexuality, maturity and a preoccupation with flesh (Nakamura and Meskell 2009). Their roles, like those of their animal counterparts, could be interpreted as didactic. Animals too could be shown in various stages of their lifecycles (Fig. 4), indicated for example by the rounded nose of an adult boar or the flat upturned snout of a juvenile (Martin and Meskell 2012, 411). The attention to anatomical species-specific detail suggests a familiarity, knowledge and insight that was shared



Figure 4 Boar figurine 13103.X1. Photo by the author.

and circulated. It is not simply that these figurines are proxies for hunted beasts; only 12 per cent show signs of stab or puncture marks. A broader interpretation might be that ‘control’ of animals was the wider preoccupation – the process of molding them between human hands, showing and representing them to others, ultimately leading to wider discussion, familiarity and negotiation. Yet I am not suggesting they be granted subjectivity or agency by well-meaning interpreters who think that anthropomorphism is the greatest compliment (Mitchell 1996, 82). Resisting anthropomorphism might instead make the miniature autonomous, self-sufficient and beyond desire.

Species specificity

Douglass Bailey (2000, 2005, 2013, 2014) was one of the first archaeologists to consider the material, physical and psychological effects of figurines as miniatures. For Bailey (2005, 29) the miniature is not a model, it does not convey complete accuracy and precision; rather it results from human experimentation with the wider world. Each figurine combines the maker’s eye, hand and knowledge to manipulate the world. I would go further, suggesting here that small animal figurines from Çatalhöyük are about subjective and selective representation and care; they materially embody the inhabitants’ preoccupations and concerns. There are even examples that could have been fashioned by the same individual. Two equids from the South Area (12508.H3 and 12502.H4) are almost identical, as are two foxes or small carnivores (12648.X2 and 12980.H8) both from 4040 H. Two very similar goats (2250.X2 and 19305.X5) are both small, finely modeled with extremely detailed ears and horns. Indeed their small size forces a kind of selectivity and so archaeologists must be attentive to what is detailed and what is omitted. Miniaturism gains force, according to Bailey, from its inherent qualities of compression. As a result value is enhanced: ‘miniaturism concentrates and distils what is normal in people’s routine day-to-day activities and thoughts and then produces a denser expression of that part of that reality’ (2005, 32).

Recalling that the miniature affords selective representation and prioritization, I turn now to the Neolithic preoccupation with rendering certain animal traits and disregarding others. For example, figurine makers were not interested in showing the texture of animal coats, their particular patterns or other markings which they certainly had the skill to perform if desired. Although in some cases equids’ manes (Fig. 5), or boars’ backs were elaborated by pinching, making ridges or scoring (e.g. 12972.H1, 12508.H3, 12524.X8), in general it is the shape of the animal head and body that is salient rather than its exterior (for parallels, see Horwitz and Goring-Morris 2004, 172). Taken together and examined as a corpus, figurines are highly detailed, finely modeled and anatomically specific. They seek to capture the quintessential elements of each animal species: the horse’s mane, the boar’s snout, the deer’s antlers and the goat’s beard. This confirms their suitability for didacticism and as conduits between humans and between other material forms. It suggests an inter-artifactual domain for materializing animals at Çatalhöyük, as a set of relations between relations, where each rendering of an animal figurine, installation or painting fits within the universe of existing forms (see Gell 1998; Gosden 2005, 195).

Rendering heads and tails in detail, regardless of figurine size or modeling quality, was paramount. We see a similar tendency in the anthropomorphic examples, where attention to heads, headlessness and head removal (Meskell 2008), as well as delineating the buttocks (Nakamura and Meskell 2009), were central concerns. But with the animals it is always the presence of the head, the



Figure 5 Horse figurine 12972.H1. Photo by the author.

attention to particular head shape and correct rendering of the ears, horns, tusks and beards that is compelling. The ratio of head to body among the quadrupeds also underlines the dominance of the head over the body (1:1 ratio = 4 per cent, 1:1.5 ratio = 29 per cent, 1:2 ratio = 38 per cent, 1:2.5 = 16 per cent, 1:3 = 13 per cent) is not a reflection of reality. Louise Martin developed a methodology to record the morphology of the discrete ‘body parts’ that make up each figurine, such as heads, horns, necks and torsos, legs and tails. In this study of well-preserved quadrupeds Martin found that head shape is consistently species specific and ranged from being long and pointed to short and blunt, to triangular and wedge-shaped. Wild cattle, the most prevalent animal depicted, have a heavy triangular wedge-shaped head whereas deer have finely modeled heads and relatively long narrow snouts (one has evidence of removable antlers), and equids have long faces with rounded or pointed snouts, sometimes with upstanding ears and in one instance a mane. Horn morphology and placement also reveals detailed knowledge: the shape of the horn base, whether they came off the side of the head or from the top, ‘V’-shaped or vertical (see also Schmandt-Besserat 1997). In cattle figurines, the shape of the head and horn placement were the critical signifiers (Martin and Meskell 2012). This pattern holds for the plastered faunal installations where the head and/or horns are prioritized at the expense of the rest of the animal, as evidenced in Buildings 52 and 77 (Russell et al. 2013, 221). This is also the case with the bench with embedded wild sheep horns in Building 52 (Tung 2013, Fig. 6).

As important as the head was the presence of a tail, regardless of figurine type, size or modeling quality. While particular tails seem to characterize equids and carnivores, for most of the quadrupeds it was simply the presence of a tail that was critical rather than its accuracy (Fig. 7). Animal tails are



Figure 6 Horn installation from building 52. Photo courtesy of Jason Quinlan.



Figure 7 Bear figurine, 19390.X3. Photo by the author.

typically large and exaggerated in the wall art (bulls, deer, boar, leopard). The remainder of the quadruped body is often robust and nondescript, the legs non-specific, with hoofs absent. Many of the quadrupeds are made with deliberately flattened hooves or bases indicating that they were meant to be free-standing, as opposed to many anthropomorphic examples that do not and thus may have been more mobile (Meskell 2007).

A matter of scale

Douglass Bailey (2005) has written eloquently on matters of scale regarding human figurines, an approach that is even more compelling when applied to an animal corpus and its related faunal remains and representations on a site like Çatalhöyük. Too small a scale, he notes, and the figurine and the details become blurred and detailed rendering becomes impossible. Too large a scale becomes redundant or physically impossible. All scale is related to the human body as the quintessential relationship, so object making is either life-size, smaller than life-size or larger

than life-size. While not inferring any universal sense of human embodiment, I explore the potential differences of engaging with figurines as compared with the significantly larger, more imposing plastered features and narrative wall paintings featuring humans and animals together. While the concerns for the same species and their anatomical characteristics remain constant, the social lives of these figural representations were probably very different.

I have argued above that the recognizable taxon characteristics of individual figurines seem to have been important. Those concerns also extend beyond the figurine corpus and are present in the species specificity of the wall paintings (Nakamura and Meskell 2006; Hodder 2006). However, wall paintings depicting animals are found in only sixteen houses, a relatively small number of the total buildings (Czeszewska 2014). Their visual cues might have been legible only to a particular subset of the community, whereas figurine ubiquity and deposition suggests an immediate, personal and widespread engagement. Mellaart (1967) notes that the famous bull painting (Shrine AIII.I) was over six feet long and the wall with the paired leopards (Shrine VI.B.44, painted with over forty layers) was almost as long. Such monumental productions were not always the norm throughout the site. In fact their rarity and scale may have created a distancing effect, unlike the everyday figurines that demanded to be touched and this intimate proximity had rich and complex embodied effects (Bailey 2014, 32). What figurines want, in Mitchell's sense (2005, 2006), is physical attention, immediacy and to cause tangible effects on their human counterparts.

Small, expedient figurines promote a kind of democratization: everyone can make and engage with zoomorphic figurines, as evidenced by their ubiquity and distribution across the site. They are part of a suite of routinized and repetitive practices at Çatalhöyük (Hodder and Cessford 2004). And in the society of things figurines are ready to hand and immediate, while still having the capacity to reference more elaborate, complex and highly skilled things that may have been out of reach for some individuals. Here I am thinking of the elaborate plastered, horned benches, wall-mounted bucrania (Twiss and Russell 2009) and the large narrative wall paintings. The animal art and body-part installations also show a preoccupation with wild animals such as cattle, boar, deer and leopards, rather than the domesticated sheep and goat that the inhabitants clearly relied on in practice. We might be able to say then, that making figurines was not a mimetic process (Mauss 2001; Taussig 1993) of



Figure 8 Installation of bull horns from building 77. Photo by the author.

food production nor was it focused on the household economy, but rather a broader symbolic economy of desire, distance, danger and possibly even dread (Fig. 8) (Whitehouse and Hodder 2010; Hodder and Meskell 2011). Moreover, the subjects of the installations overlap significantly with the famous paintings of wild cattle, deer, boar, just as they do with the animal figurines. The images of wild beasts are represented on a scale that dwarfs human actors, whereas the plastered faunal remains in walls and benches within buildings were obviously to scale and enabled more lived interaction. The figurines are the opposite, they demand to be regularly handled, manipulated and mastered. Such a reduction in size demands closer scrutiny and an embodied proxemics. This intimacy might enable new ways of seeing and potentially understanding the subject (Bailey 2005, 38). Taken together, I would argue that these miniature animals effectively connect to, enliven and make real the major beastly subjects of some historic or mythic events.

Figurines may have had roles in a wide array of real engagements that bound people and animals in the Neolithic in similar ways to how the Çatalhöyük wall paintings link with themes of hunting and baiting wild animals and the animal part installations appear to link with consumption practices of key animals. But, unlike these more fixed, displayed animal representations, the figurines seem more likely to be transactional things, made, used and discarded. This interpretation accords well with the depositional context of quadruped figurines in middens and external areas, regardless of where the transactions with real animals and animal carcasses took place, either on or off site. Their small size and ease of manufacture enables a democratization of things, where figurines could serve as conduits for social action (exchanges, teaching, negotiations, ritual) that concern human-animal relationships. For example, the plastered bucrania and horned benches most likely relate to hunting events, probably accompanied by feasts, that would not have been common events at the site. Given the relatively small number of bucrania preserved from Çatalhöyük, mostly from burned buildings, we might posit that such remains were prized and curated, then retrieved and reinstalled in later buildings (Louise Martin pers. comm.). Hunting wild cattle and boar must have involved considerable skill and bravery and would not have been possible for everyone. Many of these events must have been relegated to history and, in the case of the wall paintings, probably to generational memory or myth. So, in this society of things (Mitchell 2005, 122), figurines offer a mobile and material connector between very different time scales that are represented in the larger static paintings and installations (Fig. 9).

Given the vast human history of depicting animals, Berger (1980, 6) explains that it is because their 'lives are distinct but run parallel' to our own. Like humans, animals are born, they are sentient and mortal and so resemble us, but in their anatomy, habits and physical capacities they differ. They are both *like* and *unlike*. Wild animals came from over the horizon, thus they belong *there* and *here*. Fabricating and using animal figurines mediates that proximity

PRESENT: FIGURINES	scale smaller than life size, handleability, immediacy, democratization, personal, conduits for representations on different scales
HISTORY: INSTALLATIONS	scale is life size, real animal remains, not personal and not in every house, repeated plastering and painting
MEMORY: PAINTINGS	scale larger than life size, animals dwarf humans, distant history, memory or myth, inaccessible to some

Figure 9 Figural scales at Çatalhöyük.

and difference, the fundamental tension that they are like us and knowable to us, but at the same time fundamentally strange and other. The figural scale is key: they are in our hands, shaped by us, but also impel our engagement. Those possibilities for mastery are more tenuous when one confronts the real remains of large animals curated in their life-like forms or, even more compelling, the living beast in the landscape.

Conclusion: lifecycles in miniature

Small, finely modeled animal figurines, particularly those of exotic, non-domesticated species dominate the figural assemblage at Çatalhöyük. Attention to species specificity is largely articulated by a consistent depiction of head types and tails. For their makers a figurine should be a recognizable animal, probably identifiable to other people at Çatalhöyük (Martin and Meskell 2012, 402). These miniature beasts are made from locally sourced materials, probably in external spaces, and are handleable, mobile and widely circulated. Figurines can accomplish what real animals or plastered animal installations and wall paintings cannot: they make possible democratized access and individual social relations between humans and wild animals. Their miniature scale invites an intimacy, control and action that are not possible with large-scale paintings or plastered bucrania relegated to a minority of buildings. In this society of things, figurines are conduits between very different material scales and they effectively embody and communicate across the species divide in expedient and intimate ways. From this perspective, the idea of what figurines want might provide a more evocative question than that of what figurines mean.

Figurines are things in themselves with their own lifecycles, histories and connectivities. Objects of material culture demand equal rights with language, not to be turned into language (Mitchell 2005, 2006). Mitchell thus calls for an idea of visuality equal to their ontology, by tracing ‘the lives and loves’ of things rather than projecting personhood or agency onto figurines. The tendency to endow them with immediacy is fundamental to their ontology, but is always underpinned by historical and cultural specificity. At Neolithic Çatalhöyük we might consider zoomorphic figurines as animals, while also residing within a system of natural signs, living images and an indigenous taxonomy of animated things. And their materiality asks of us, then and now in different ways, to engage in that multiplicity in intensely tactile, sensory and visual ways. Archaeological discussions of ancient materiality have typically focused on sacred, ritual or performative things, rather than the quotidian and ubiquitous. Indeed, these subjects are typically what theory overlooks in its drive for a mastery over things (Mitchell 2005, 116). But such classifications and separations are likely misdirections. Instead, this article has aimed to embed the miniature into an economy of desire, a society of things, small scale and large, mediating the wild and domestic, in object relations at Çatalhöyük and extending out into the wider Neolithic landscape.

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