
Chapter 11

Refiguring the Corpus at Catalhöyük

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In this paper I have several aims and my discussion oscillates between a refiguring of the 1960s project materials at Catalhöyük and the finds from the new excavations since the early 1990s. First, I want to present a more comprehensive and representative range of figurines from the site, balancing out the sensationalized finds of the so-called 'Mother Goddess' images. This includes forefronting the abbreviated human forms in clay, the ubiquitous animal figurines and the prominence of clay bucrania and horns produced possibly as metonyms. I then want to give a sense of the findings from preliminary spatial analysis conducted in the 2005 season, thus providing a framework for the context and circulation of figurine materials. This leads to a consideration of the constitution of figurine worlds at Catalhöyük, to challenge the very special notion of the category of figurine, and to decentre it as art, perhaps even as religion in the conventional sense — or at least differentiate between types of figurines or between the image of the figurine and those in wall paintings and so on. Central to these challenges are the possibilities for revising assessments of the figurines by using various media such as video and experimental reconstruction (see Meskell & Nakamura 2005). These provide ways of viewing the materials that potentially offer new windows onto ancient constructions.

By developing these aims, the larger existential issues of self-reflection, of negotiating self and sexuality, of relations between human and animal worlds, might thus come into sharper analytical focus. Advocating evidence for 'spirituality' in a tightly focused religious sense may prove difficult, whereas an exploration of one's place in the world, a network of related sensuous experiences between other people, species and places may be more readily deduced from the materials. I would like to move away from the sterile attempts to deduce function and meaning from a visual reading — the, 'Is it a deity or not?' type of equation. Instead I want to work around the objects, weaving together patterns of figurine making, technology, use, mobility and discard, coupled with

the traversing of categories from figures to plastered features to wall paintings. In this way I hope to build up more of a life-world for the Neolithic community, taking into account the inherent visuality and materiality of a figured corpus. It is not enough to say that these figurines are *representations* or visual proxies, they are *things* in themselves with their own spheres of interaction. By employing the notion of representation we infer that figurines stand in for something real and are a reflection of that reality, of someone or something. And yet these objects are not necessarily referents for something else tangible, but could be experienced as real and tangible things in themselves (Meskell 2004; 2005). They may not simply be emblematic or allegorical devices as the term figuration also implies. And while this is not tantamount to arguing for figurines as necessarily agentic beings, such possibilities should not be dismissed through an elision of language.

Given our knowledge of aesthetic spheres at Catalhöyük, this prompts us to ask whether there was something special about settling down in tightly packed communities in the Neolithic that made its inhabitants more attentive to the contours of personhood and sexual identity; were they playing with classifications and categories that we might find unfamiliar? But first of all we have to balance the scales in terms of readily identifiable genders, as the numbers of male, androgynous, phallic and ambiguously sexed figures need to be recalculated. This is a task we have taken seriously over our first two seasons and we are close to achieving a fuller picture of the entire range of material. A notion of *becoming* at this site might then have encompassed experimental imagery that incorporates various sexual symbolism or combines innovative ways of viewing attributes depending on viewpoint, movement and circulation (Fig. 11.1).

At the outset I want to make clear that this is very new work conducted by Carolyn Nakamura and myself over two short seasons in 2004 and 2005. During that time we had to devise and construct an entirely new data base system for recording and analysing the

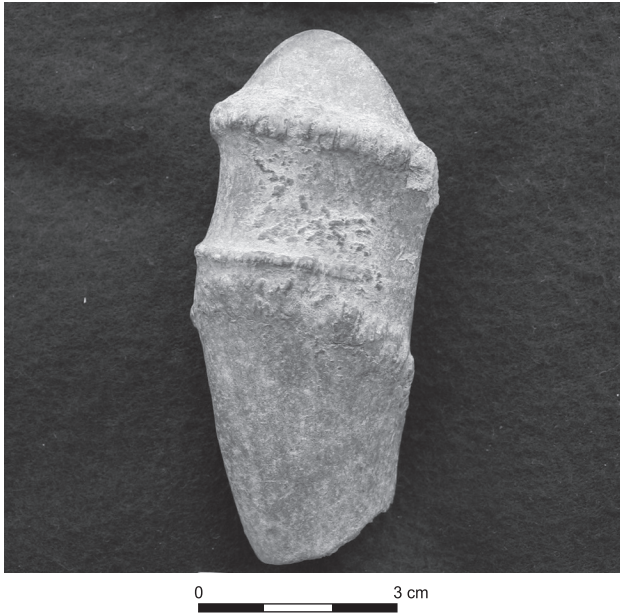


Figure 11.1. *Phallus* from Çatalhöyük excavations 1996 (1505.X1).

materials from the 1960s, from our predecessor on the project during the 1990s and then from the new seasons. This has been a mammoth task in itself, representing recording over 1500 clay and stone objects (not all of which can be readily classified as figurines). The data base design process did not simply involve archiving the collections, but engaged a critical rethinking of analytical and interpretive categories orientated towards a more integrative approach to figurine studies. Refocusing figurine research towards such areas of overlap prompts a productive rethinking of our taxonomic framework in terms of processes of resource acquisition, technological and gendered production and use, rather than in terms of the end product. Basically, I want to reconsider the whole notion of the figurine-as-thing to one of the figurine-as-process.

Refiguring the archive

New excavations at Çatalhöyük under the directorship of Ian Hodder began in 1993 and have continued to the present, and while Mellaart's fieldwork might well be termed 'extensive' the current project would best be described as 'intensive' (Hodder 1996; 2000; 2005; 2006a). The site comprises a series of 'superimposed buildings (rather than rebuilds or alterations of existing buildings)' (Farid 2007, 42), and as a result of this particular building technique, has an accumulation of some 21 m of deposit in approximately 18 layers of occupation (Hodder 2006b, 17). These layers were divided up and numbered by Mellaart in a system

that remains in use by the current project. There are 15 superimposed building levels from 0 to XIII, the latter being the earliest. However, Level VI has two levels, VI-A and VI-B respectively. Çatalhöyük is currently dated from 7400–6200 cal. bc (dates now 7400–6000 cal. bc) and is considered late in the central Anatolian sequence (Cessford *et al.* 2006; Hodder 2006b, 15).

There are many reasons why Çatalhöyük remains distinctive, but one major factor is that the

narrative character of the wall paintings remains unparalleled in Anatolia and the Near East at this date. And the sheer amount of the art — its concentration in so many houses in one site — remains particular. Indeed, the main mystery of Çatalhöyük remains the question of why all this art and symbolism, this flowering of imagery, should occur in this place at this time (Hodder 2006b, 16).

In this paper I focus on one important corpus within what Hodder and others (Last 1998) generally term 'art' — the figurines — and where appropriate link these objects to other visual forms whether wall paintings or plastered features (see also Nakamura & Meskell 2004; 2006; Meskell & Nakamura 2005).

At a fundamental level we need some dialogue between the two periods of excavation in terms of material culture — even if not the stated contexts, given the levels of specificity in recording during the 1960s (Todd 1976). The scale and speed of the early work uncovered a dazzling array of materials, yet lacked the benefit of Hodder's careful, contextual methodologies. This is evidenced very clearly with the figurine corpus. If one were to take the Mellaart finds at face value, specifically the published pieces, and thus ignore the wide variation in figurine types, then one might posit that two rather different sites had been excavated (see Mellaart 1962; 1964; 1965; 1966; 1967; 1975). Mellaart would have uncovered a large number of impressive stone and clay pieces, whereas conversely our project would have found more mundane clay examples of quadrupeds, bucrania (miniature clay models that resemble the plastered real remains in houses at Catalhöyük), abbreviated human forms and so on. Though we have found impressive examples, the mundane dominates numerically. One way to challenge this picture is to re-excavate Mellaart, to literally work in his areas and through his spoil heaps. A training and educational excavation (TEMPER), under the aegis of the wider project, carried out the latter and we now have a very good idea of what Mellaart overlooked or even discarded. Our findings indicate that he missed significant numbers of figurines (anthropomorphic and zoomorphic) along with fragments of each; non-diagnostic pieces, shaped clay pieces and scrap that is probably ceramic debitage.



Figure 11.2. Female marble figurine from a mixed fill deposit, Çatalhöyük (10475.X2.)

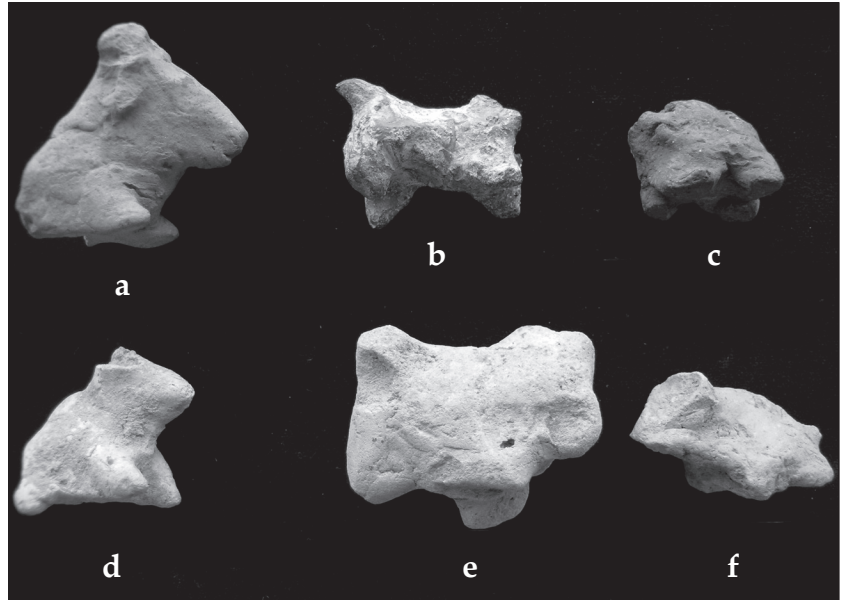


Figure 11.3. Zoomorphic? clay figurines from Mellaart's Level VI, Çatalhöyük: a) 318.1; b) 172.1; c) 305.1; d) 315.1; e) 331.1; f) 321.1).

Of those clay examples that he did record that were of a less-than-spectacular nature (over 80 examples) most were very obvious quadrupeds with features such as heads and horns intact. He also collected conspicuous abbreviated human forms, though they are often less than 5 cm in height they are obvious to the eye. We do not have a range of horns or bucrania from Mellaart's sample and he did not pick up undiagnostic fragments of figurines, as we do. In sum, this skews significantly the numbers and types of figurines for which the early excavation is known with a bias in favour of the evocative carved stone examples or complete clay forms and an under-representation of everyday types.

In excavating in the Mellaart area (now called South Area) we have similarly uncovered the figurine forms we find in such rich abundance in the newly chosen excavation areas from the 1990s onwards. For example, we do find small clay abbreviated human figures, ceramic cattle horns and bucrania, geometric pieces and many indeterminate forms. If we take these *in toto*, those from the spoil and from the old excavations in Mellaart's area, we have some 355 figurines: 158 are anthropomorphic and 154 zoomorphic, which includes 61 abbreviated human forms and 23 horns. This starts to balance out the preponderance of formal stone pieces with the more ubiquitous clay varieties.

The new project is also uncovering more of the complex stone and clay examples for which the

early excavation was famous. In 2004, in a mixed fill deposit, excavators retrieved a marble figurine that is reminiscent of the types that Mellaart publicized. The female figure (10475.X2: Fig. 11.2) holds its arms up to its breasts and incised lines indicate the breast divide, pubic triangle/stomach, and divided legs on the front; similarly incised marks delineate arms, divided legs, and a horizontal detail across the upper legs on the back. The head and face appear to have been worked, but possibly modified or defaced, suggesting either that no facial details were executed or that they were removed. There is a suggestion of hair or some form of detail around the head. Even despite the damage to the base of the figurine, it is unlikely that it ever had proportioned feet or that it was ever freestanding. The dimensions are 7.5 cm in height, 4.9 cm in width and 3.5 cm thick. The base material and detail of this example in terms of workmanship has tended to overshadow the clay examples in terms of scholarly emphasis. Other examples to be discussed later include two marble pieces and a clay example that combines skeletal elements (see below).

While the now famous examples in stone may seem compelling, they are greatly outweighed in number by their counterparts in clay and plaster. So diverging from a Western materialist perspective, those objects that are made of stone may not necessarily have more symbolic weight *in toto* than the myriad clay forms that were constantly and repeti-

tively made. What it says is that we perhaps need to turn this material hierarchy on its head and focus more on the density and ubiquity of these clay renderings: expedient, consistent, mundane and deeply ingrained in everyday practice. What perhaps mattered most on a daily level was the regular making of zoomorphic or anthropomorphic figurines in the available clays and plasters that were to be found locally and used in ceramics, wall preparation, and so on. We do not have an established industry of bone figurines (though personal adornment may also be linked to the category of figurine, see below). Plaster is an interesting material for figurines, one that again might speak to the everyday nature of manufacture. Plaster was used throughout all the domestic spaces and so repeatedly, probably on a seasonal basis, that the residents seem to be taking the plaster, mixing it with portions of marl, and shaping everything from phallic forms to abbreviated figurines to horns (Fig. 11.3).

Becoming bodies

The new figurine project at Çatalhöyük has also taken a new direction in terms of embodied imagery and the concomitant rethinking of gender and sexuality. While this represents new work, it is also in a preliminary stage. We might approach the archive through various modes of viewing, leading to other ways of interpreting, and different angles and viewpoints (literally and metaphorically). On a primary level what seems to have been most salient at Çatalhöyük was the presentation of personhood, not a specifically gendered person with discrete sexual markers, but an abridged version of the human form, reduced to an elongated torso or trunk seated on two stubby legs. The trunk is often fashioned into a head, nose or folded hair-like element. Despite their simplicity they are indicative of the human form, and there is some variability in detail to break the general uniformity of base shape. Many are bent forward and, as they have disproportionately long pillar forms, they begin to look rather phallic. This pillar can either end in a conical base or a divided pair of stumpy legs: the latter type also begins to resemble male genitalia when viewed from various angles. These are generally made in much finer, cleaner fabrics such as marl, than the zoomorphic figures. As a set they are unevenly fired and were probably ‘passively fired’ (Nurçan Yalman pers. comm.) near ovens or hearths during routine activity (Fig. 11.4).

Other figurine makers took this trunk or pillar-like style to another level, the phallic form of the cylindrical body and elongated neck may have been evocations of sexual ambiguity, the blurring of sexual



Figure 11.4. Phallic pillar-like figurines from Çatalhöyük: a) 324.1; b) 303; c) 8589X; d) 347.1; e) 162.1; f) 312.1; g) 343.1 (a, b, d–f from Mellaart’s level VI; c from 2002 BACH excavations.)

features or sexual complementarity combining differently gendered bodies. We have seen similar but perhaps more striking examples from prehistoric Mediterranean (Knapp & Meskell 1997) and Near Eastern contexts (see Kuijt this volume). We also see similarities in the worked bone assemblages, specifically items of personal adornment (Russell 2005, 442–3), which show phallic forms, specifically the pillar shape ending in a knob or groove. Other examples have a pillar offset by two spheres, one either side, creating an image of male genitalia. In many of these instances we have discovered that using video to record the figurines as they are moved and handled provides a more embodied set of perspectives and we can begin to witness some of the visual punning that we think underlies many of the fabrications.

Many researchers at the site are beginning to ask why masculinity is so strongly demarcated across a range of imagery (Hodder 2006b). For example, in

wall paintings of people and animals, maleness is very evident. Animals being chased, teased or hunted seem to be usually male, with their sexual organs erect. As a consequence of sexual dimorphism, it is true that the male of each species is generally more obvious and with more highly elaborated features; one need only think of the horns of bulls, goats, antelope, the lion's mane, for example. Also their coats are often more patterned and they are almost always larger in size. Maleness could also represent aggression, the thrill of the kill, animals that are more difficult to bring down, with the act of doing so representing an act of bravery, skill and prowess. Such a feat may fortify the reputation of an individual, perhaps even indicate manhood or maturity, and such animals (or parts thereof) may have been retrieved and kept as pride and proof. This is not to say, however, that women were not also involved in the hunt, nor children for that matter — all sorts of human forms are shown in the famous murals. Perhaps such image making represents a wide cross-section of the community and maybe all needed to be involved at certain hunting events.

Our future research seeks to question whether the Neolithic was a sexual revolution, a period of 'self' exploration at a level not experienced before. Is the coming together of people in clustered communities a way of seeing the self differently, exploring the contours of a sexed self, of understanding self-fashioning in less than binary terms? Many of the contributions in this volume are also grappling with the issue of ambiguity and the blending of sexed elements. In this way too figurines could be part of a *process* rather than a finished and contained product. They might then be experimental media where potentials for manipulation (Bailey 2005) are executable in malleable materials that are not always possible in fleshed reality. What we would like to focus on in coming seasons is to explore the nature of personhood as a visual category. How did the visual presentation of the self mesh or diverge from other spheres of selfhood, like that presented in the household, through the processes of burial and re-circulation, and across a range of experiential settings?

Questions of context

As a general premise at Çatalhöyük the figurines and shaped clay objects as a collective are found in secondary contexts, they are primarily in room fill, fill between walls, middens, burial fill and rubbish areas. Occasionally they have been found on or near floors. In the new excavations we do not see the patterns that Mellaart's early work would suggest; that figurines (specifically anthropomorphic) are found in special or cultic area, associated with features such as

platforms, shrines, grain bins and so on. For example, Mellaart (1964) described finding a 'goddess figurine' painted red in an associated shrine, we too have found red paint on clay figurines but none of those come from such grandiose contexts since the whole notion of what constituted a 'shrine' has been cogently deconstructed (Hodder 2006b). Mellaart often claimed that figurines (goddess figurines, specifically) were found only in shrines, whereas rigorous excavation over the past decade has shown them to be consistently in rubbish and fill deposits, alongside vast quantities of animal bone, plant remains, ground and chipped stone and other small finds. Interestingly, when we do excavate rooms with plastered bucrania and benches with protruding horns, as was done in the 2005 season, there were no figurines to be found, human or animal. This space would definitely have been categorized as a shrine area by Mellaart. One of the rare instances where we may have evidence of purposeful deposition comes from the 2004 season, space 227 in building 47, where a carved stone figurine seems to be placed on or close to the floor perhaps in association with a number of animal bones and worked bone, obsidian fragments, and worked stone. The excavator (Bogdan 2004) believes that this was not consistent with room fill but an assemblage purposefully left there after which the room was backfilled. This may be ultimately difficult to substantiate (Hodder pers. comm.); however, the finds uncovered may relate to the closing of the house or an associated event.

Figurines commonly evoke notions of a 'Mother Goddess', the female domestic sphere, and ritual or cultic activities, but such ideas alone do not account for the striking diversity of the Çatalhöyük assemblage which features objects spanning a spectrum of highly elaborated to abbreviated forms, human and animal depictions, and range from careful to quick disposal/depositional contexts. Although some of the objects likely derive from ritual activities, the majority is associated with contexts suggestive of more everyday practices. Furthermore, a strict division between the 'everyday' and the 'magical' or 'ritual' might not have been operative in the past; allowing for this possibility marks another example of our concerted attempt to challenge taxonomic structures or binaries in all levels of interpretation (Nakamura & Meskell 2004). Our recording and analysis attempts to unpack descriptive categories as much as possible and gives equal footing to a diversity of interpretive possibilities.

If we think of a range of uses or rationales for making figurines we arrive at the usual suite of suggestions: amulets, talismans, narrative devices, images of individuals or ancestors, tokens, training devices, deities, gaming pieces, objects of magic or manipula-



Figure 11.5. *Reconstruction of a figurine decorated with feathers, grasses and beads. (Drawing: John Swogger.)*

tion, initiation, contracts in clay, and so on (Talalay 1993). Does this really help us at Çatalhöyük? All of these possibilities have degrees of merit, yet since we lack the primary contexts, they can only be suggestive. However, we can potentially analyse across various media to try and ascertain a symbolic life-world — it is important to note that figurines did not exist in a vacuum for the people of the Neolithic, they must have worked in conjunction with other forms such as wall paintings and plastered features. They must have had symbolic resonances across these classes, perhaps even working cross-platform, literally.

This enables us to say certain things. For example, wall paintings of an anthropomorphic nature do not generally resemble those images from the figurine corpus. The wall paintings generally show humans in active positions with their arms and legs clearly delineated. In the plastered wall features we typically have splayed individuals, arms upraised with all the limbs clearly delineated, and with no sexual features. This is at variance with the many anthropomorphic figurines in their abbreviated and

sometimes sexed forms. In addition, quantitatively there are more males shown in wall paintings than female, and many figures show no sex characteristics at all. The human forms in painting are much more realistic, and more detailed. This is at variance with the anthropomorphic figurine corpus.

There are a few examples that do resemble the larger, more detailed pieces from the figurine corpus. A white female with upraised arms from Level IV looks remarkably like a corpulent figurine type, with small, undistinguished feet (Mellaart 1962, pl. XIII). Another of the figures known as ‘leopard dancer’ (although we would not use such terms), has a painted area around his head comprised of dots. Interestingly there are several figurines of various types and shapes that have holes around or on the head indicating hair or a specific hairstyle or decoration. Looking at ethnographic groups is a useful reminder that we often forget about paint for the face and hair, coupled with other decorative elements.

Moreover, if we look at the wall paintings from Mellaart’s excavations, they feature both humans and animals, some of which may assume mythical proportions. Leopards clearly have captured the imagination in two-dimensions (Hodder 2006b) but have little resonance in the ceramic figurine assemblage. However, the famous red bull is shown (undoubtedly dead) in a wall painting surrounded by humans, and the image of cattle and of metonymic bucrania is ubiquitous in the clay figurine assemblage as well as plastered house features. Yet there is only one little known wall painting that shows animals in a form we would recognize from the figurine assemblage.

Mellaart claimed correctly that animal figurines could be pierced or maimed after modelling, but was largely incorrect in his assumption that they were placed in pits after use. These animals look rather different again to the images in wall paintings. The majority of the figurines represent cattle and domesticates, and there is a notable absence of the exotic fauna evidenced in the wall plastering of leopards and the painting of animals such as stags and birds. Moreover, we have several examples of pierced anthropomorphic forms, as Nakamura has noted, which calls into question the notion that this action is simply about hunting magic. Previous interpretations somewhat narrowly posit that stab marks signify the killing of animals (and by association, people); if that was the case then why are so few individual animals ‘ritually stabbed’ within the corpus?

We do have tangible evidence that skeletal elements from boars, vultures, goats and bulls were all embedded into walls with plaster coatings and mouldings. These probably have a stronger connec-

tion to the types of zoomorphic figurines we find and I will have more to say about this below. One possible interpretation is that interactions with ancestors or sacred beings were perhaps mediated through the animals, as is the case with cattle for the Zulus today. In this case it is not that the specific animals are in any direct way the ancestors in question, but they are the medium through which they can be contacted — an embodiment of sorts. The plastered animal parts at Çatalhöyük may also relate to real or mythical events and encounters outside the confines of the settlement, within the wider landscape, with powerful animals and equally powerful human hunters. Interestingly Douglas Baird (2003) has found examples of plaster objects containing animal bones at his site at Pınarbaşı in a seventh-millennium context. Basically we should envisage other interpretations that move beyond simplistic notions of goddess and bull worship.

Off the pedestal

A central aim is to try and rethink the categories that Mellaart so successfully instantiated, to try and refigure the corpus: to take them out of the static position of religious statues, destined to spend their lifetimes sitting it out upon altars and pedestals. This interpretation was tacitly influenced by Mediterranean and Egyptian traditions of cultic statues, and Mellaart's vision of Çatalhöyük was heavily influenced by his knowledge of these Bronze Age civilizations (Meskell 1998). In fact, Mellaart used these comparative data sets as analogous ethnohistory, his own type of ethnography through the vastly richer and more recent aesthetic and textual records. While we are not interested in identifying or using modern Turkish ethnographic traditions to understand the Neolithic, it is instructive to look at other cultural repertoires in order to, in a sense, defamiliarize and divorce ourselves from Mellaart's vision.

Today we also tend to present figurines in the same static and unmoving genres, diligently producing technical drawings that place figurines in their sitting, upright postures. By showing conventionalized views of these objects we may risk failing to acknowledge the possibilities that figurines were handled, moved and thus viewed in a variety of positions. Working with John Swogger we are currently attempting to re-imagine some of these clay figurines as being carried on the person, possibly within skin or textile bags, probably with a range of other portable items (organic and inorganic). There is evidence of wear on the small anthropomorphic and zoomorphic examples in clay. It is more difficult to determine wear on stone examples as the process of manufacture also

includes various forms of abrasion. It is difficult not to reflect on Zuni fetishes (Fane *et al.* 1991) and the portability of those material beings, their need for food and sustenance and so on. Like the Zuni example, it is possible that some figurines may have been worn about the body by means of string or twine, attached in some way to other things. It should also be noted that the abbreviated anthropomorphic figures sit on bases for the most part, and some of the stone examples do. However, notable marble examples have no feet, never sit on stools or chairs nor do they have flat backs suggesting that they may have been positioned in reclining postures or circulated through the site and thus regularly handled. Here again the use of hand-held video provides another instructive layer of viewing as it challenges the static renderings we are familiar with and brings the figurines to life. It also allows us to recreate a process of handling, turning and circulating figurines, as was the case in antiquity.

There is the danger that we tacitly imagine that the pieces retrieved, whether in clay or stone, *are* as they *were* originally — devoid of not only paint, but also the possibilities for beading, clothing, the addition of cloth, skin, twine, grasses and so on. All of these materials occur frequently at the site (and are readily identified in other ethnographic contexts). A closer examination of the carving, abrasion, and surface patterning may reveal differences in wear around areas such as grooved 'waists' on some of the stone figures analysed in 2004 and 2005 (Fig. 11.6). The 2005 season also revealed tools, both obsidian and ground stone, which may have been used for carving and working the stone figurines at the site (Karen Wright pers. comm.).

In the 4040 area during the 2005 excavation a further marble figurine (12102.X1) was excavated from another midden context. Similar to the example found in 2004, this piece combined a solid base with, most likely, a phallic neck. But in this recent case the long neck has been carefully cut off, probably with obsidian and other stone tools, perhaps even polished after removal (Fig. 11.6). Another example of a removed limestone head occurs with a figurine now in Ankara (79-8-65). It may be a speculative connection at this juncture, but the removal of heads also occurs in human burials, and the circulation of heads after death has been repeatedly identified at Çatalhöyük. Also we have several clay figurines that have dowel holes for what appear to be detachable heads as well as the small spherical heads which may have been used to complete some of the composites (Fig. 16.7). What might the transfer of heads tell us about the social construction of belief, memory and identity? It is possible that the role of myth and



Figure 11.6. Stone figurine from midden at Çatalhöyük with grooved 'waist', from 2005. (12102.X1.)



Figure 11.7. Clay head with dowel hole, found in fill during the 1996 excavation (1056.H1.)

storytelling may have been central and 'figurine worlds' may have proffered a rich vehicle via which to explore narrative and experience — the exploits of individuals, encounters with animals, mythic

or historic. The ability of figurines to be malleable, to change identities through the transfer of heads, presents an interesting set of possibilities and leads us away from static forms into the notion of figurine as process.

When we experimented with re-creating these forms we all encountered various levels of difficulty. First of all, despite their inherent simplicity the figurines (zoomorphic and anthropomorphic) are of a particular cultural style and their forms were something that the inhabitants at Çatalhöyük could achieve through practice — however they remained very foreign to us even though we were constantly handling and examining them. At the outset I imagined that they would only take about five or six moves to recreate, whereas even the most experienced modeller among us took some 15 moves to make an abbreviated form initially, although quickly got it pared down to 6 moves. Of course there are differences between working with clay and working in oven-bake clay modelling paste. Another issue was size. Each person struggled to model the correct size for the copy, with everyone exceeding the size of the original. While we are witnessing certain routinized behaviours and gestural habits that appear to be all very generic — generic depictions of generic humans — within that general schema there is variation, and no two pieces are the same.

Figurines as process at Çatalhöyük

The notion of figurine as process can refer to almost every stage in the life of a figurine. From its inception the gathering of materials for making represents a social process of procurement, whether sourcing local stone, clays or combining the plaster from regular wall-plastering activities with marl to fashion figures of remarkably fine quality and light appearance. In all of these activities we could imagine a collective sphere where various individuals were present and where collaboration took place. In the case of ceramic examples, following on from retrieval were stages of preparation and cleaning of clays. Many but certainly not all of our examples are made from relatively clean clay with little chaff and small-grained inclusions. In the case of the stone examples it seems that most of the marble and calcite came from within a 15–20 km radius of the site. As stated above, the lithic and ground stone assemblages also include the tools with which figurines may have been carved, suggesting also that they were completed on site. The project's ground stone specialist, Karen Wright, believes she has identified an area of Mellaart's old excavation that functioned as a stone figurine workshop. While it is

possible that figurine manufacture may have been a secretive skill, shared by a few, our evidence suggests that the making of such pieces occurred in or around houses, in a domestic context using materials readily at hand. The next stage in the process of making could be both formal, as in the case of carved stone, or more informal and everyday in the case of shaping anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images. In the case of the latter, the routinized making and individual variation suggest many people were fabricating figurines in and around the settlement much of the time. They would have had easy access to the materials, and given the short space of time it takes to shape abbreviated forms, people could have made them at regular intervals.

Albeit difficult to reconstruct, we might posit that everyday social lives may have incorporated much image making, from the repeated layers of wall painting, embedding and plastering parts of animals, to decorating with stamp seals on skin or fabrics, crafting items of personal adornment, and of course making figurines. Given the quantity of clay scrap and non-diagnostic pieces found in domestic contexts (over 500 at the last count), we might suggest that figurine making occurred in and around houses and did not explicitly occur off site. We have initiated a preliminary analysis of finger print size, and while it is too early for anything conclusive, we can conjecture now that these were not clay toys made by children as some have suggested (Hamilton 1996, 224; 2006). Since many are lightly fired, various team members have commented that they are 'passively fired' by hearths or ovens, again in domestic contexts. To date there is no evidence for specially built kilns at Çatalhöyük and, as with other clay objects, these were exposed to heat during other processes of cooking, burning, and heating or lighting houses. Again these were all public activities or at least household practices.

The notion of when figurines were finished *per se* is an interesting one. We only have to think of Cycladic examples, that we now know were painted, to recall that our aestheticized image of pristine, minimal and modernist bodies is a misconception. The Çatalhöyük figurines of all materials may have had secondary materials added, as outlined above; certainly many examples were painted, but more than that it is possible to imagine the addition of organic items: cloth, skin, fabric, grass, beads, feathers, string and so on (see above). These may have been removable and transferable, in a similar way to the heads, for various moments and contexts, whether events, seasons, ceremonies, rituals or narratives. We can thus posit moments of dressing, decorating or undressing, all of which require moving and handling — all of which are processes in themselves. Given that we have various examples of

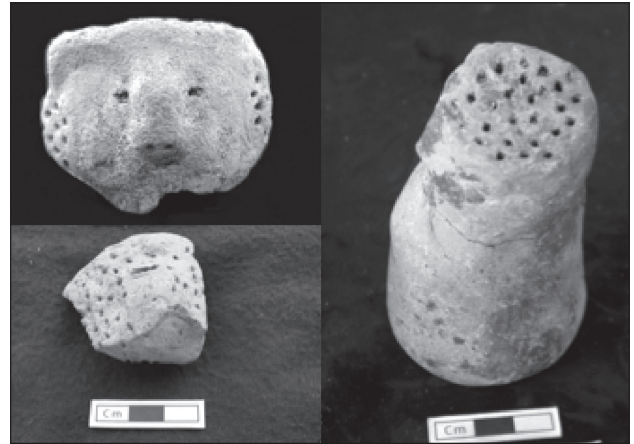


Figure 11.8. *Figurines from Çatalhöyük showing holes possibly meant for decorations of feathers, grasses or other organic material (see Fig. 11.5).*

figurines pierced around the face, ears and hair, their makers could have attached organic materials or beads. Such possibilities are illustrated by the myriad African figures that have grasses, string, human hair or feathers attached (see Figs. 11.5, 11.8 & 11.9).

Organic matter such as wood, textiles, cloth, leather, basketry, string, marsh grass, fur, and so on does not generally survive, but in the place of these materials we do sometimes have phytoliths. Many of Mellaart's incredible finds of organic materials were as a consequence of his excavation of a particular area where firing acted as a type of preservation. The materials were burnt and thus preserved in carbonized form, which means that some imaginative reconstruction is required as part of the current excavations. Hans Haelbeck worked for a month on Mellaart's materials, consisting of a sack of wooden vessels, beads, pendants and fur, often with thread preserved, which then went to the Ankara Museum. In the 1960s excavations, knotted threads and fabric with selvedge fringe, apparently remains of a string skirt, were also found (Mellaart 1967; 1975). The new excavations have also found remains of string. All of these materials are suggestive in terms of extra-somatic details and decorations for the figurine corpus.

Given that the evocative imagery presented by Mellaart has resisted, or avoided, vigorous challenge in the time that has elapsed since his publications, we do need to call upon some radical ways of rethinking or refiguring the archive. Figures were probably moved about during their use-lives as well and it is unlikely that they were static; as outlined above, many cannot stand unaided. Though we can say little about their original use-lives from the excavation and contextual data retrieved, we know from their use-wear,

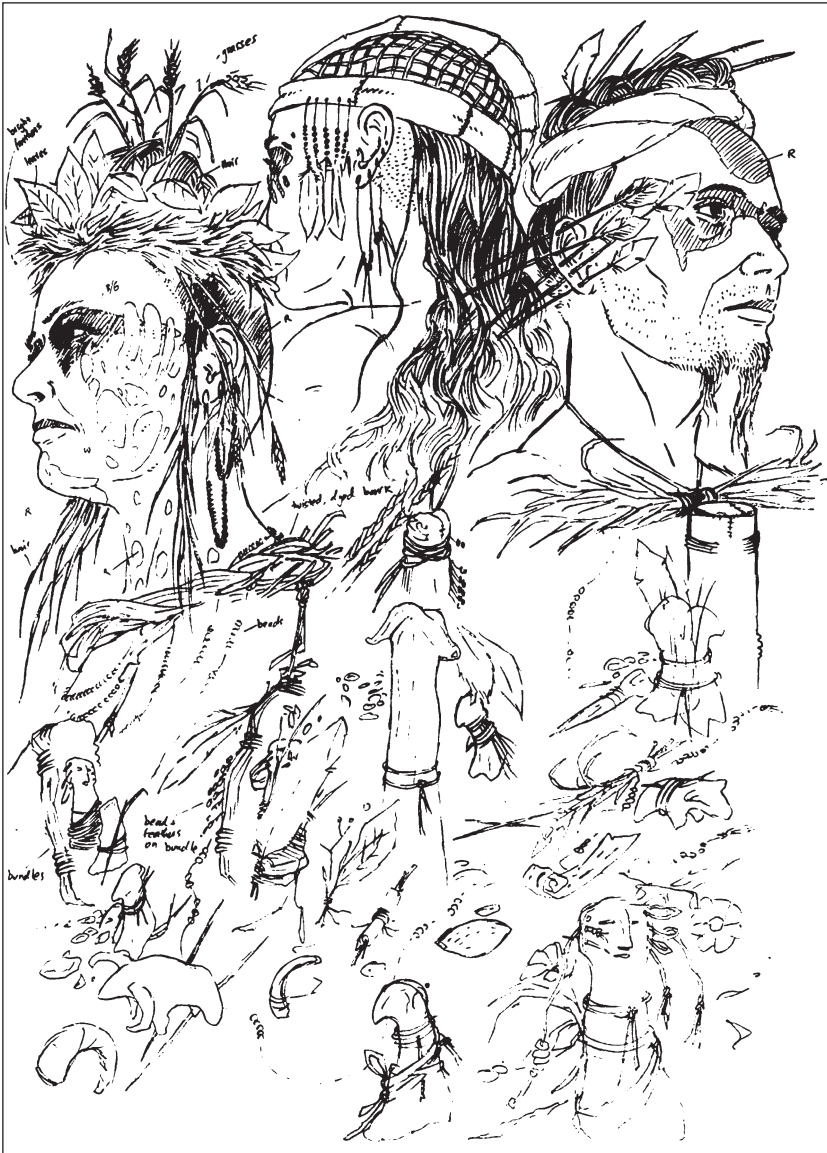


Figure 11.9. Reconstruction drawing showing possible uses of organic material in both body and figurine decoration at Çatalhöyük (see also Figs. 11.5 & 11.8). (Drawing: John Swogger.)

damaged state and their final deposition in fill, that they were not like ‘cult statues’ that were spatially and temporally separated from human affairs. These were incorporated into practice, a moving and mobile suite of embodied actions.

One suggestion we have is that the small clay human forms (and perhaps some of the animal figures) were collected together in small skin or woven bags, worn or carried, as evidenced in other ethnographic contexts. They could have been carried together with other evocative objects such as pebbles or stones, objects of amuletic value, organics, bone objects, both decorative and functional, or other types of

miniatures. Native American fetishes, for example, were often carried or worn on the person and treated like the animal spirit that it manifests, and were fed ground turquoise from miniature pots. Natural products like sage were imbued with sacred valences and were carried in what were considered sacred bundles. The significance of these objects is formed through action not in isolation or distanced contemplation. They are things to be *used*.

We might posit that the people who made the clay examples were probably different to the individuals who fashioned the stone pieces. Perhaps the large complex stone and clay pieces really belong to another category. Researchers tend to put these all together under the heading of figurines, but perhaps the informal clay examples are really a different sort of *thing* — not simply because some would say they are ‘crude’ but rather because of their expediency or frequency, as opposed to the larger-scale projects. A related point is that there are very few points of aesthetic overlap between such groups of objects; Which are significant? Certainly the contexts are related since they are all (almost without exception) found in building fills and midden areas. The clay example found in 2005 with skeletal features (see Fig. 11.10) was also found amongst collapsed building materials in decontextualized fill. While they are undoubtedly purposefully included in such deposits for the most part, we struggle to reconstruct

the contexts of their primary use. It is difficult to imagine that being placed in fill should be their *raison d’être* for manufacture of course, which may not be wholly incorrect in all cases. One thing that mitigates against that possibility is the practice of movable heads, as mentioned above, and the general idea of transforming figurine identities by their appearance. They are things in process, in motion, and thus temporally situated. While this may seem an obvious statement, the various things we tend to call figurines may have had very different roles and purposes for people at Çatalhöyük and it may prove misleading to categorically lump them together.

Almost all of the clay figurines of this very general type have missing heads, although damaged we might posit that many also had dowel holes for detachable heads. One figurine that does retain the head is now in Ankara museum (79-803-65) though it has been restored (from the present state we cannot be sure, but this looked originally as if it were all one piece). The ears and nose are prominent, the eyes less so and there is little sign of a mouth. There is a head ring present and an incised line at the top of the forehead. Apart from this exception most clay figurines whether sexed or not are missing heads: stone heads remain intact in the main. However it is notable that we have several marble examples that have been intentionally decapitated, such as the example found this year in the 4040 region (12102.X1, see Fig. 11.6).

Figurine 11967.X7 found in the Istanbul area is a unique piece for which I have found no parallel examples across this site, for the Anatolian Neolithic or for the European Neolithic for that matter. It combines the typical corpulent female on one side with her hands resting on pendulous breasts, with a back view comprising an articulated skeleton (scapula, delineated vertebra, pelvis). The whole effect is heightened by the style and posture of the arms that are reduced to bones ending in detailed fingers that rest on the breasts (see Ankara 79-803-65 and 10475.X2 for parallels). The shoulder blades arch like wings and the bones protrude much higher than they normally would for a human body. The overall effect is chilling for some, reassuring and legible for others who have seen the figurine.

There are traces of red paint around the chest area in the form of concentric loops (see Ankara figurine 79-20-65 for parallel), on the wrists, around the pelvic region suggesting anklets on the folded feet below (all on the corpulent side of the figurine, see Ankara figurines 79-20-65; 79-656-65). There is no sign of red paint on the back of the figure. A prominent dowel hole indicates that originally the piece had a detachable head, almost certainly in ceramic material. The hole was made with the usual kind of stick we see in figurines with stab marks, punctures and perforations. A marked depression in the area of the head suggests it fits snugly into this curved space. Yet examining the depth of the depression in contrast to the height of the shoulder bones shows



Figure 11.10. *Clay figurine (11967.X7) from the Istanbul area showing skeletal features.*

that the exaggerated shoulders would have risen much higher than anatomically possible.

Thinking through the figurine with other materializations at Catalhöyük, such as the plastered animal parts, I have begun to think more about the idea of embedding, particularly the hard forms of bodies, the skeletal or horn and claw elements of animals that survive after fleshy decay. We see so many instances where cattle horns, boar tusks, vulture beaks, weasel and fox skulls are embedded in walls, platforms and features — all of which are the distinctive, bony elements that both present the individual animal and successfully survive death. With the addition of plaster and shaping: some retain their life-like forms for perpetuity, others remain lumpy and hidden. So too with this figurine, the bony, skeletal part of the human body that survives death and burial is both embedded and revealed. The villagers regularly saw human skeletons as they dug down to retrieve skulls and objects from burials (Hodder 2006b). Just like the embedding of real animal parts, its materiality grapples with the embedding of real human parts within a shaped human living form. The notion of embedding real human bones in some manner like the animal parts may have been taboo; whilst unimaginable in many societies, it is not in all, as the Maya circulation of worked human bone makes apparent (Meskell & Joyce 2003). So we are perhaps witnessing an extension of the community's treatment of the animal world, more specifically the dangerous animal world, and an application of this treatment to the human body. The aesthetics of fleshing out the skeleton can also be seen in the form

of plastered skulls, the earliest Anatolian example of which was found last year at Çatalhöyük. Carolyn Nakamura and myself (2005) have suggested that the heads of figurines, possibly even detachable ones, resemble the plastered skulls with their high foreheads and smoothed, minimal facial treatment, lacking in mouths and detailed features. Clays and plasters may have had a specific set of associations with bodily flesh as well, whether human or animal flesh, as numerous cases from the site may suggest.

Keeping the dead close by and rendered permanent (at least in living memory) was made possible through this process of embedding; whether burying them under platforms and plastering over them, plastering skulls and burying them with descendents, embedding the bony parts of animals as plastered protrusions, or perhaps even making clay images of the human form with protruding skeletal elements. Were these attempts to transform, display and render permanent the iconic and durable elements of human and animals: skulls, horns, beaks, claws and so on? Duration is a recurring theme in a great many human societies, both ancient and modern and, while being careful not to impose Egyptian notions of death and burial (something Mellaart was very keen to apply), it would not be inconceivable to envisage that the Çatalhöyük residents were concerned with their own sense of history and memory. That making of history applied equally to the embedding of specific animals as to people, to the rendering permanent of particular individuals, possibly even events such as the capture and killing of an aurochs or bear. The fabrication of history and memory might not have been focused solely upon human beings, but upon animal and spirit worlds as well. While these ideas are briefly sketched, my aim for future work is to link the figurine corpus more closely with these other materialities and to reconfigure the whole as *process* rather than inert objects of worship or contemplation. Here we are approaching a corpus of objects through which we can talk about spirituality and its embodied iterations.

Final thoughts

This paper has attempted to cover many aspects of a figured life-world at Neolithic Çatalhöyük. While it is too early for us to draw many definite conclusions it is hoped that the groundwork for analysis and interpretation in our upcoming seasons has been laid; what is described above is all part of our ongoing work. We plan to continue to experiment with ways of embodying figurines and their surrounding practices of making, circulation and deposition by using various

new forms of media coupled with creative reconstructions. We also want to embed figurines themselves into wider visual and material worlds at Çatalhöyük and continue to rethink and refine the specific taxonomies that we readily construct and instantiate as archaeologists (Meskell 2004). We are already some way to rethinking certain material hierarchies and associations and sometimes inverting them.

We also have some very pedestrian tasks at hand, such as the balancing up of previous work with our own findings. This is particularly true in terms of species and gender categories where humans rather than animals, and similarly women rather than men, have been over-emphasized in the corpus. This leads to a further rethinking of sexuality and self, particularly in the context of the Neolithic, and in the light of the myriad tantalizing images of a specific brand of masculinity from other sites such as Göbekli (Schmidt 2002) or Nevalı Çori. There is much more to be done on the notion of community at Çatalhöyük; the site is a very specific locality that may have visual and material links to other sites in central Anatolia, but retains a unique set of associations and practices. It may be that the experience of village life, and the choices of clustered housing and intramural burial tell us a great deal about social life at this time. The ubiquity of image making in general at the site suggests that what we would consider 'ritual' or 'religious' things and acts infused and comprised the everyday to such an extent that it might be impossible to parse out. Again the specificities of our categorical understandings are unlikely to mesh with the ancients'.

In terms of the themes that are most evocative at present, the notion of figurine as *process* rather than end *product* must be the first. It is inextricably linked to the idea of circulation and mobility; figurines are not static but mobile and potentially shifting things. Part of that malleability is their inherent range of possibilities for identity changes and narrative, evidenced at Çatalhöyük by the detachable heads and ceramic anthropomorphic bodies with dowel holes. In addition, we have the removal or severing of heads in the case of stone human figurines. The idea of storytelling, coupled with memory and identity are evocative. And finally this connects to the wider practice across media of embedding skeletal parts and plastering or covering them with cultural materials that replace impermanent natural ones. In doing so both animals and humans were preserved, they survived death and decay, and were incorporated into the very fabric of houses and spaces at the site. They served as ever-present reminders, fleshed out, of their former selves and former existence, redolent with memories, stories or myths that are steeped in their attendant materiality.

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