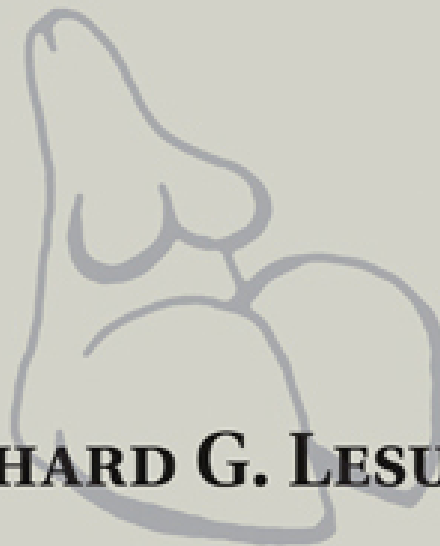# Interpreting Ancient Figurines

Context, Comparison, and Prehistoric Art

Richard G. Lesure

Interpreting Ancient Figurines

This book examines ancient figurines from several world areas to address recurring challenges in the interpretation of prehistoric art. Sometimes figurines from one context are perceived to resemble those from another. Richard G. Lesure asks whether such resemblances should play a role in our interpretations. Early interpreters seized on the idea that figurines were recurringly female and constructed the fanciful myth of a primordial Neolithic Goddess. Contemporary practice instead rejects interpretive leaps across contexts. Dr. Lesure offers a middle path: a new framework for assessing the relevance of particular comparisons. He develops the argument in case studies that consider figurines from Paleolithic Europe, the Neolithic Near East, and Formative Mesoamerica.

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To my parents,
Frank and Nancy Lesure

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Acknowledgments

It was Joyce Marcus who, twenty years ago, as my graduate advisor at the University of Michigan, first encouraged me to pursue my fascination with Formative figurines and to think expansively about their interpretation. I am deeply indebted to Joyce for her insights, advice, indulgence, and unflagging encouragement over many years. John Clark, as director of the New World Archaeological Foundation and co-director of the Mazatán Early Formative Project, encouraged and facilitated my first significant analysis of figurines from the Soconusco region of Mexico. I have benefited greatly from his inspiring example and keen thinking.

Colin Renfrew's invitation to participate in the planning of the symposium entitled "Image and Imagination: Material Beginnings" (Cambridge University, 2005) came at a low point in the writing of the book, when the project I had set for myself increasingly seemed impossible. The interactions surrounding that conference were important in shaping the specific topics of the case studies. Mary Voigt and Rosemary Joyce provided detailed, insightful commentary on a full (much longer!) original draft of the book. Reinhard Bernbeck, Jeffrey Blomster, Cecelia Klein, and Olga Soffer all contributed crucial feedback on chapters pertaining to their areas of expertise. Numerous other scholars working in the various world areas considered here have also suggested references, patiently answered questions, tried to correct my misperceptions of evidence, and asked pointed but helpful questions concerning my goals or procedures.

In conceiving this volume, I sought to avoid reading all figurines by extrapolating from some particular case. Still, the discussion benefits from primary observations of figurines from Mexico, Ecuador, Iraq, Turkey, Malta, and the Southwestern United States. I particularly acknowledge the institutions and individuals who contributed to the recovery of the two collections I personally excavated in Mexico, chief among them the Consejo de Arqueología of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (Mexico), which issued permits for the work, but including as well Joaquín García Bárcena, Michael Blake, Aleksander Borejsza, David Carballo, Jennifer Carballo, and John Clark. Some of the wonderful figurine drawings of Jeremy Bloom and Laura Baker, created from the originals in the field, have found their way into this book. Numerous institutions contributed to the funding of my work in Mexico, including the National Science Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the New World Archaeological Foundation, the H. John Heinz III Fund of the Heinz Family Foundation, the University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States (UC-Mexus), the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and the UCLA Academic Senate.

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Introduction

This book is about the comparison of objects that at first glance seem similar but that, on further reflection, cannot be compared. My interest is in the interpretive implications of that first glance.

The objects in question are small statuettes – figurines – made in clay, stone, and bone by unknown artisans, deep in prehistory. Although archaeologists have found vaguely similar figurines at prehistoric sites in different parts of the globe, the objects in question had no straightforward utilitarian purpose but were instead expressive and meaningful. Whatever those meanings were, we can be sure that they differed from place to place and epoch to epoch. In that sense, the figurines are not comparable.

Yet, when the figurine in hand reminds us of those from elsewhere, it can be difficult to resist the urge to compare. Indeed, in an earlier era of interpretation, archaeologists abandoned themselves to that impulse. They claimed that similarities among figurines bespoke similarities in meaning. If prehistoric figurines from different continents were predominantly female, then the objects must have been depictions of goddesses or perhaps a single primordial Goddess.

Archaeologists today congratulate themselves for being beyond that interpretation. We are not so naïve as to treat "female" as a stable category that would have the same meanings in all cultures. We also do not imagine a "primitive psychology" that would lead all prehistoric peoples to the primordial Goddess. Societies, we insist, are organized by culturally constructed – not predetermined – categories. Meaningful objects like figurines are to be understood *in context*, in an analysis sensitive to historical particulars.

The Problem

From the standpoint of this new contextualism, comparison can appear to be a suspect enterprise, compromised by the interpretive excesses of our predecessors. Analysts facing the practicalities of interpreting figurines continue to compare, but they avoid unseemly fanfare. The legitimacy of comparative glances between contexts is not the subject of explicit reflection.

Interpreting Ancient Figurines

A basic premise of this book is that the similarities that seduced our predecessors actually *demand* comparison. Comparative efforts, however, should be brought into the open where they can be subjected to theoretical and empirical scrutiny. The question becomes: If the figurine being interpreted reminds us of others, should we banish the thought – or pay it serious attention?

Much of my discussion concerns a specific claim of resemblance: the idea that figurines were female, in one prehistoric context after another. The perception of recurring femaleness is of particular interest because it has prompted the most ambitious comparative claims (that figurines depict a primordial prehistoric Goddess) and the most vigorous particularistic responses (that "femaleness" in one context necessarily has nothing to do with "femaleness" in another). My basic question in this case becomes: If we perceive the figurine in hand to be female, should our interpretation take notice of numerous previous claims that figurines – from other contexts – were female? Or should we dismiss the thought? Furthermore, if we decide that such comparisons are relevant, how should we account for them? In the chapters that follow, I develop a framework within which such questions can be treated as empirical problems. In extended case studies, I consider the Paleolithic figurines of Eurasia, Neolithic figurines of the Near East, and Formative-period figurines of Mesoamerica.

Toward a Solution

In response to the stalemate between those who explain female figurines with reference to a universal process and those who reject such claims out of hand, I shift the question of whether to compare to another level. The goal is to establish grounds for making empirically informed assessments of the relevance of (particular) potential comparisons prior to interpretation. In other words, before deciding what to say about a set of ancient figurines, we would assess the relevance of any perceived resemblances to other figurines.

This is a perilous agenda. Archaeological evidence, it is widely agreed, is theoretically constituted.[1] In that sense, "evidence" cannot precede "interpretation." It is helpful, however, to view the analysis of figurines as a process with certain characteristic steps. Although all evidence is infused with theory, observations of figurines become increasingly loaded with theory during the course of analysis. Perhaps, then, the relevance of comparisons across contexts could be assessed early in the process when numerous interpretive paths are still available.

I suggest that the proper moment for such considerations is before material patterns are reformulated into the social terms from which interpretations are constructed. Pausing at that point, the analyst can glance ahead to a set of questions that are repeatedly posed of images. Scholars working from diverse theoretical perspectives ask similar questions because images – as material objects that depict something not present – elicit a characteristic set of questions. Although the entire set is worth posing, particular images may invite one question but discourage another.

A crude analysis of a fifteenth-century painting by Andrea Mantegna – actually, the mere beginning of a full art-historical analysis – illustrates the type of logic I use. The center of attention in Figure 1 is a scantily clad man shot full of arrows. We would never dream of interpreting this as an image of, for instance, the ideological constitution of masculinity in fifteenth-century Italy, even if that were a topic in which we were intensely interested. Instead, we identify the specific, named subject of the image: St. Sebastian at the moment of martyrdom. Of course, our identification in this case is aided by a rich documentary record that is unavailable for prehistory, but images invite certain types of interpretive statements and hinder others.
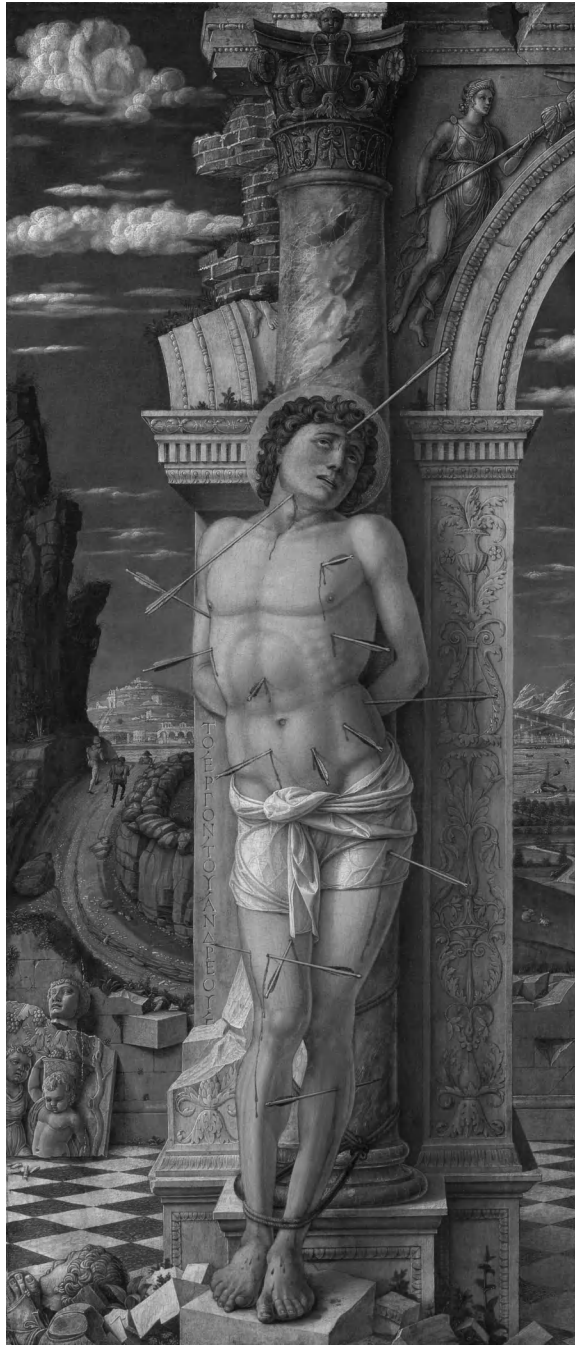
Figure 1. Andrea Mantegna, *St. Sebastian*, ca. 1457–1459. Oil on wood, 68 by 30 cm. Image courtesy of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

This painting demands iconographic analysis. The clothing (or lack thereof), the arrows jabbing out at all angles, the upward lift of the face, and the incongruous setting of the figure amid Classical architectural ruins lead us to dismiss any thought of the image as an illustration of an ordinary person of Mantegna's time. Much can be said of this brilliant, quirky image (note the form of a horseman in the cloud in the upper-left corner), but identification of the specific, intended subject of the painting is essential. When the observable features of this painting prompt us to ponder one question ("Who is depicted here?") instead of another ("How did fifteenth-century Venetian artists conceive of the masculine social self?"), we narrow the field of possible final interpretations – in both form and content – without having yet produced our answer ("St. Sebastian"). It is in this sense that empirical considerations can be brought into play "prior" to interpretation.

My purpose in this study is to systematize such observations as an aid to assessing the relevance of resemblances between contexts. The results are abstract, framed in terms of likelihood and probability. If figurines that resemble one another invite different questions from an analyst, then the resemblances are most likely superficial and irrelevant. If figurines in two cases instead elicit the same question (e.g., "What specific subject is depicted here?"), then even if the final interpretations are different, the modes of analysis employed and the general form of eventual answers are likely to resemble one another. An initial perception of resemblance in that case has a richness likely to yield interpretive similarities even among analysts working unbeknownst to one another.

These are the types of considerations that I enlist in my assessment of the interpretive relevance of similarities across contexts. My discussion pursues several interlocking goals. I develop a framework for the comparative analysis of prehistoric imagery, focusing particularly on the challenge of linking evidence to interpretation (Chapters 1–3). I also seek to establish the legitimacy – and, indeed, the importance – of three specific domains for cross-contextual interpretive work. Each case study (Chapters 4–6) addresses one of those domains. The three case studies constitute the major part of the book. The motivation in part is to give the analytical framework a difficult "test drive" in which both its possibilities and limitations become clear. However, I hope also to prove the framework by making substantive contributions in the case studies. My specific topics are: (1) Is there likely to be any cross-cultural explanation for femaleness in prehistoric figurines?; (2) What can we say about "Formative figurines" (from Mesoamerica) as a general phenomenon, and how should such statements relate to the interpretation of individual collections?; and (3) Should "goddesses" play a role in a narrative of Neolithic figurine making in the Near East? In the remainder of this introduction, I situate the research program with respect to a series of larger endeavors.

Pluralism in Archaeological Theory

My efforts here are inspired by a widespread recent trend toward pluralism in archaeological theory, particularly the idea that different approaches to understanding the past might be complementary rather than simply competitive. During the 1980s, competition reigned supreme. Archaeology appeared starkly disunified, divided into competing bastions of virtually incommensurate theories and methods.[2] A *processual* tradition viewed cross-cultural models that explained key transformations in social life – the origins of agriculture, the rise of urbanism – as the highest goal of the field. In contrast, a postprocessual, or *interpretive*, tradition viewed all cross-cultural generalizations with skepticism and emphasized instead the pervasiveness of meanings – understood to be unstable, contestable, and specific to an individual culture.

In the 1990s, that antagonism ebbed away.[3] Some investigators now find grounds for unity: Peter Kosso in the way arguments are constructed, Christine VanPool and Todd VanPool in

an adherence to science, properly construed. Timothy Pauketat perceives the emergence of a new paradigm that transcends the opposition between processual and interpretive approaches.[4] Other scholars emphasize continued disunity but cast it in a positive light. Michelle Hegmon finds that "instead of theoretical animosity, there is refreshing dialogue." In her view, "theoretical disunity" is a source of "dynamism."[5] Allison Wylie argues that both processual and interpretive archaeologies recognize archaeological data as theory-laden but still capable of constraining claims about the past. For Wylie, disunity among the sources that archaeologists draw on to formulate their arguments is actually the source of constraints on speculation, yielding a "mitigated objectivity."[6] The prospect of disunity without rancor led Bruce Trigger to look toward a "pragmatic" theoretical future.[7]

In outlining a holistic theoretical synthesis, Trigger suggests that "although every early civilization was unique in its totality, some aspects were shaped by factors that were culturally specific, whereas others can be understood only in terms of cross-cultural generalizations."[8] Because the factors influencing social life are myriad and complex, satisfactory archaeological accounts of ancient societies require multiple forms of explanation. Thus, one challenge for a pluralist archaeology is how to choose among different interpretive strategies.[9]

Trigger's discussion provides an agenda for the comparison of prehistoric figurines. Any collection of figurines deserves to be richly *contextualized* – that is, studied as a unique cultural expression based on evidence from its context of recovery. Resemblances to other contexts might or might not be relevant, and they could conceivably be accounted for in different ways. There may be historical linkages among the contexts. Alternatively, resemblances could have been generated by similar causal processes unfolding independently in unrelated contexts. These two possibilities require different forms of explanation – *historicist* and *universalist* – to be selected as appropriate given a particular collection of archaeological materials.

I treat the processual and interpretive traditions pragmatically, as sources of conceptual tools to be drawn on as needed in the course of analysis. Although my efforts certainly fall into the school that Hegmon terms "processual-plus," I try to follow VanPool and VanPool's admonition to avoid reducing one approach to the other.[10] I address the issue of femaleness among prehistoric figurines by contemplating the possibility of a universalist explanation while simultaneously insisting that a potential analytical outcome must be that there is no common explanation for any perceived resemblances. I thus reject *both* the processual subterfuge of assuming that a common explanation must exist and shifting discussion to what that might be *and* the equally dogmatic interpretive denial that any common explanation could exist. Ideally, I would like to dismiss such theoretical presuppositions and look to the evidence in assessing the relevance of cross-contextual linkages. That goal, however, returns us to the acknowledgment – which Wylie identifies in both processual and interpretive traditions – that evidence does not exist before it is interpreted.

Stability of Evidence in the Face of Theory

Archaeologists seek to investigate one phenomenon (ancient social life) by observing a very different phenomenon (the archaeological record). Translation between the two is thus a central task. Wylie finds that archaeologists draw on different types of information to achieve that goal. When the information has diverse sources, it is often constituted by different theories. As a result of such diversity, evidence is (sometimes) capable of constraining or even overturning the framing assumptions of theory.[11] Wylie identifies two particularly important sources of this mitigated objectivity: (1) the *security* of the background knowledge used to link material evidence to social

inference; and (2) a condition of theoretical *independence* between background knowledge and inferential conclusions.[12]

I intend to grapple with the challenge of comparison by making systematic use of the ways in which figurines impose constraints on interpretation. Both independence and security have a role in the interpretive tools that I introduce. Because my focus is on a single class of object, any independence would be what Wylie calls "vertical" – that is, independence occurring along a single strand of inference from material pattern to social cause. The security of the tools that I introduce is quite modest – I posit no determinate links between material pattern and social cause – however, it is nonetheless significant.

My efforts to promote the constraining effects of figurines as evidence center on the framework described in Chapter 3. That framework does not introduce any new methods. The idea instead is to systematize existing practices in order to enhance the possibility that evidence might resist the impositions of theory. Images solicit characteristic questions (e.g., "What does it depict?") posed independently by interpreters pursuing different theoretical agendas. Furthermore, analysts answer such questions by drawing on established strategies for linking evidence and interpretation. These are *art-historical methods* and, to a considerable degree, they are independent of the theoretical issues at play in the interpretation of prehistoric figurines. Figurine analysts already exploit this independence in developing their linking arguments, but they do not do so systematically when deciding whether to compare.

My framework also addresses the security of linking arguments used to build from observations of figurines to social interpretations. For Wylie, one dimension of security is the credibility of an imported theory in the field in which it was originally produced.[13] Of course, art history is hardly a source of stable theory. It may seem surprising that I draw on traditional analytical perspectives from that discipline rather than the latest theoretical currents. That decision is deliberate, and I make it with an eye toward security. Sources of chronic tensions – such as "form" versus "subject matter" in art history – point to fundamental intellectual cleavages, even if the way that scholars conceptualize the divide is always changing.

Another source of security – particularly pertinent to the issue of comparison but again modest in absolute terms – is found in the process of building interpretations based on observations of figurines. In Wylie's formulation, one strategy for enhancing the security of a linking argument is to eliminate alternative possible linkages.[14] Again, my approach is limited in comparison; the intent of my framework is to provide a systematic means of identifying alternative linking strategies and gauging how productive they might be. The purpose is not to eliminate alternatives but rather to weigh their prospects. For instance, some prehistoric figurines, like Mantegna's *St. Sebastian*, demand a concerted iconographic analysis, whereas others discourage it.

Linking Contexts in a World Art History

My scheme is to map out possible paths available for the analysis of images. Qualities of (particular) images can invite one type of analysis while hindering another. The goal is to enlist such observations in assessing the relevance of (particular) cross-contextual comparisons before any final decision is made (in any given instance) concerning the path that the interpretation will take. In Wylie's terms, I am attempting to develop tools to enhance the stability of inferential arguments elaborated from prehistoric figurines, based in part on an appeal to art-historical analyses of images.

I describe the scheme in Chapter 3, but it is useful to comment here on how this study relates to recent efforts by art historians to reconceptualize a Eurocentric endeavor into a "world art history."

For James Elkins, that task is "far and away the most pressing problem facing the discipline."[15] A glance at some of the different directions that art historians have taken helps to clarify my goals.

Clearly, a "world" art history constitutes an expansion of scope of the discipline, involving (among other things) an extension to contexts previously ignored. How will a single subject matter be constructed from this diversity? In other words, what sort of *linkages between contexts* will be identified in a world art history? Although art historians have answered the question in several different ways, I pursue only one.

First, contexts may be linked by the transfer of objects and ideas among them. For David Carrier, contacts between distinct aesthetic traditions (European, Chinese, Indian, Islamic) should become the new central subject of art history, with contemporary multiculturalism (rather than European modernism) the new vantage point from which we look back at the history of art.[16] However, such an agenda has little relevance here.

A second approach posits linkages between contexts based on human psychology – for instance, universal aspects of people's responses to images. David Freedberg seeks to develop such a *theory of response* by undermining the divide between "high" and "low" art and the disjunction between the image and the real world – for, repeatedly, across contexts, people treat images as if the prototype resided within them. What seems clear in the case of pornography should not be ignored in the study of high art. Art historians "need not be ashamed to see the image come alive; indeed, we should speak of it."[17]

Douglass Bailey draws on such perspectives in his recent study of prehistoric figurines from Southeastern Europe.[18] He inquires into the cognitive effects of the general characteristics of figurines, particularly their miniaturism, dimensionality, and anthropomorphism. This is certainly an important category of work for the study of figurines,[19] but it is not the direction I take here. One problem is that when applied to a particular context, an approach based on theories of cognitive response tends to yield little beyond generalities.[20] The problem is exacerbated by empirical challenges of prehistoric settings. Freedberg's stunning exemplifications of the "power" of images derive ultimately from the documentary record of people's behavior *around* images, not from the images themselves. With the documentary record absent, comparison of figurines between two contexts from the standpoint of a theory of response tends to lead to a restatement of what we already knew at the outset, once we had determined that figurines were present in the two cases.

It is a third approach to the linking of contexts in a world art history that, in my view, holds the most promise for addressing problems of comparison in studies of prehistoric art. In this case, linkages between contexts are provided by principles of art-historical interpretation. David Summers envisions a world art history achieved not through borrowing from other disciplines but rather through attention to the "continuities and patterns demonstrated in generations of art-historical practice and research"[21] – an agenda that, from our perspective here, holds out prospects of independence and potentially even security as a contribution to linking arguments on prehistoric figurines. Summers's principles are intended to facilitate contextual analysis. Their universality means that they can be enlisted as tools of interpretation in radically diverse contexts. Of particular interest is that – in contrast to approaches based on a theory of response – attention is focused on detailed scrutiny of the qualities of works.

Summers's principles take the form of a near-overwhelming variety of concepts. Some relations of constraint are posited between them. For instance, *distinction* involves features of an artifact superimposed on its *configuration*, with the latter defined as those characteristics that suited the artifact for the purposes for which it was made. Images are *real metaphors* in which one object stands for something that is not present. Summers details numerous possibilities for the elaboration

of real metaphors.[22] Two gouges may be recognizable as eyes if they occur in *relation* to one another at the top of a rock, whereas three-dimensional shaping moves an object toward *figuration*. Putting a face on something enhances the *presence* of a real metaphor by creating a front and a back and by making it possible for the viewer to address the object face to face.

The delineation of concepts of this sort is helpful and it is wonderful to encounter numerous prehistoric examples in Summers's book. In contrast to Carrier, he clearly envisions a world art history that embraces the prehistoric. It is distressing, however, to find Summers's actual analyses of prehistoric works to be repeatedly disappointing. Speculation on original symbolism looms large. In the end, then, I have not followed Summers's approach in detail. In the framework for the analysis of images described in Chapter 3, I attend to what I view as important "continuities and patterns demonstrated in generations of art-historical practice," reaching back in particular to George Kubler and Erwin Panofsky to delineate a simple map of analytical modes.

Goals of This Study

A few words of clarification on the goals and stance of this study may help forestall potential misinterpretations. The fact that I contemplate ambitious cross-contextual questions and give detailed attention to figurines of different world areas should not be taken as an indication that I am proposing an all-encompassing interpretation of figurines. The tools I develop are meant to promote rather than stifle interpretation. My framework is a source of suggestions, not a machine that spits out finished products. Still, I am claiming that the analytical strategies developed can be applied to radically different contexts. Justification of that claim has led me to apply the strategies well beyond my primary area of expertise (Mesoamerica).

The contextualization of individual collections is and will remain the most fundamental analytical activity in the study of prehistoric figurines. Still, I hope to establish the importance of certain domains of interpretive work other than context-specific analysis. Because these domains are regularly ignored – or even rejected as illegitimate paths of inquiry – some critique of "business as usual" in figurine studies is a necessary part of my argument. In the skeptical stance I adopt herein, no one has "proven" anything in our social interpretations of figurines; we have merely "argued" this or that. I am particularly interested in how we might assess the relative strengths of such arguments. In fact, I view comparison of *interpretations* as a solution to the problems raised by the comparison of *figurines*.

Finally, although this is a book on archaeological theory, there is little "theory" in these pages. By that, I mean that there is no exposition of a social theory concerning how ancient societies operated. Even the three lengthy case studies do not yield detailed social conclusions. My focus instead is on interpretive theory. It is my claim that at this moment, to advance archaeological theory (broadly construed), what we need is not more (social) theory but rather deeper *analysis* in the service of the theories we already have. Although my focus is on the process of analysis rather than interpretive end-products, this effort is intended merely as a contribution toward that larger endeavor that is the social interpretation of figurines.

Organization of the Book

My first three chapters identify important conceptual resources. Chapter 1 reviews the checkered history of universalist logic in the interpretation of figurines and argues that procedures of hypothesis testing developed in processual archaeology constitute an important heuristic tool. The testing

of a universalist explanation for female figurines identifies important domains for comparative work. Chapter 2 examines the emerging strategy of contextualization in the study of prehistoric figurines and explores its larger implications, including its opposition to universalism and its challenge to ambitious comparison. The way forward is to base comparison on contextualist principles. Although an oppositional tension between contextualism and universalism is inevitable, the two interpenetrate in the domain of rhetoric.

In Chapter 3, further attention to rhetoric yields a framework for understanding the interpretation of imagery and, derived from that, a guide to comparison. The basic goal is to take advantage of the way in which patterning in particular collections of figurines is propitious for the application of certain analytical procedures while simultaneously discouraging to others. Comparison thus can shift to an abstract level in which the question is no longer whether figurines from two different collections meant the same thing but, instead, how likely it is that analytical engagement with observed patterning will produce similar interpretations.

Chapters 4 through 6 each apply the framework to a distinct domain for comparative work. Universalist explanation at the largest of scales is the topic of Chapter 4, which assesses the likelihood of a common explanation for femaleness as a theme in Paleolithic figurines from Eurasia, Pre-Pottery Neolithic figurines from the Near East, and Formative figurines from Mesoamerica. Chapter 5 considers the use of universalist logic in context-specific interpretations, where it is often a critical link in the argument. The problem concerns the unexamined implications of such implicitly universalist claims for historically related cases of figurine making. Formative Mesoamerica provides a case study in which the goal is to enlist the framework proposed in Chapter 3 to adjudicate between competing general understandings of figurines.

Chapter 6 returns to the problem of grand history, a topic signaled in Chapter 1 as fruitful for comparative effort but one in which analysis ventures onto the perilous territory of the Goddess. My framework again has a role in that it can highlight the texture of figurine patterning across long time spans – texture that should prompt reformulated choices among analytical procedures. I ultimately separate the Goddess narrative from grand history as a category of analysis; we should discard the former but retain the latter. Indeed, to finally put the Goddess to rest, it will probably be necessary to make interpretive progress on the large-scale empirical resonances that form the characteristic subject of grand history.

Chapter 7 pulls the various strands of the argument together to contribute, first, to the general problem of how incomparable figurines are to be compared and, second, to the question of femaleness as a cross-contextual resemblance between figurines.

Chapter 1

Universalist Explanation and Prehistoric Figurines

"The first god was a goddess!" proclaimed Etienne Renaud in 1929. A dozen tiny figurines from Arizona, perhaps two thousand years old, were the immediate inspiration for Renaud's "bold paradox." Just inches tall, they were roughly shaped in clay with crude facial features and punctate designs suggesting clothing or ornamentation. All had prominent, modeled breasts. To Renaud, these were "fetishes of the feminine principle of fecundity and reproduction" depicting "a goddess of life." He supported this contention by embarking on a world tour of ancient female imagery. The itinerary included Western Europe, the Balkans, Southern Russia, Anatolia, Cyprus, Crete, Egypt, and the Near East before he crossed the Atlantic again to finish in Nicaragua and Panama. In case after case, female figurines appeared in the most ancient archaeological strata. Surely, this revealed a deeply rooted "worship of the life-giving mother" and "betray[ed] the same psychology in primitive man of different continents."[1]

Renaud's article succinctly lays out a once-common universalist vision in the study of prehistoric figurines. The goal was to account for the perception that the earliest prehistoric figurines, everywhere, were female. Today, archaeologists are immediately suspicious of Renaud's sweeping cross-cultural generalizations. His drawings, in which a single image stands for each region (Egypt, Crete, Nicaragua), at best seem quaintly amusing. We now insist on serious attention to local variation and context. We also are suspicious of the assumption that the category "female" is stable across contexts. Ambitious cross-cultural explanations are regarded with skepticism. Faced with resemblances between contexts, archaeologists explain them in historicist terms (as the result of the direct transmission of ideas between contexts) or dismiss them as irrelevant.

Still, despite accumulated evidence and greater interpretive sophistication, the most ambitiously cross-cultural of Renaud's claims of resemblance have not quietly disappeared. Although no longer a center of attention, they nevertheless percolate on a back burner. At what we would now identify as the sites of early agricultural villages in many places – the Near East, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, parts of India and Pakistan, Mesoamerica, and parts of South and North America – archaeologists find small clay or stone figurines. They often identify the figures

as depictions of women. Furthermore, explanations for femaleness formulated for one context are often at least implicitly universalist; they could easily apply in other contexts as well.

Universalism, I conclude, needs to be engaged with, not summarily dismissed. I begin the task of engagement by reviewing problems with the universalist vision that perceived all figurines as mother goddesses. I then explore what we might gain from processual archaeology, an alternative universalist tradition formulated in part to address some of those problems. The procedures of hypothesis testing prove to be a valuable resource, even if they are not sufficiently powerful to allow us to directly "test" common recent (implicitly universalist) explanations for femaleness among prehistoric figurines. I evaluate instead an older suggestion that links female figurines to agriculture and pottery. The hypothesis is falsified, but from the wreckage emerges a series of topics for discussion in subsequent chapters.

The Mediterranean Goddess

Renaud's 1929 paper is a minor effort, noteworthy primarily as an early attempt to treat ancient female imagery in both Old and New World settings as a single analytical problem. At the time he wrote, his themes of fertility, reproduction, motherhood, and the primordial worship thereof were familiar ground in a growing literature on ancient figurines in several world areas.[2] For the Neolithic and Chalcolithic ages of the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean, issues of debate centered on whether female figurines depicted goddesses or reflected a form of social organization in which women were prominent. A matriarchal or matrilineal stage in the development of human societies had been a topic of armchair speculation among nineteenth-century anthropologists. The idea ultimately became lodged in works with ongoing influence, including Frederick Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) and Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (expanded third edition, 1913).[3] For instance, the worship of ancestors, combined with the practice of tracing kinship through the female line, might have led to a psychological propensity to invent mother goddesses.[4]

Such ideas resonated with accumulating archaeological evidence, both historical and prehistoric, from the Eastern Mediterranean. In resulting interpretations, universalist strands of argument were often mixed with a grand historicism such that it may be unclear whether claims were specific to Mediterranean civilization or applicable to all humanity. Goddesses – for example, Ishtar, Astarte, and Inanna – figure prominently in ancient texts from the ancient Near East. Were these historical deities quite ancient? The early Israelites were understood to have combated debased Canaanite fertility religions involving ritual prostitution, and small terra-cotta images of nude women from Levantine sites were considered paraphernalia of those cults. All these claims reinforced the notion that female divinities preceded male divinities.[5] Female imagery in the art of Minoan Crete fell comfortably into the goddess framework, which could then be extended to the underlying Neolithic levels at Knossos.[6] For the more daring, the Paleolithic figurines of Europe and Asia beckoned (Figure 2). Here was female imagery many thousands of years older than the Neolithic figures, suggesting a grand sweep of mother-goddess worship from the Paleolithic Willendorf figure to the historical Ishtar.[7]

Today, archaeologists are apt to remember the early years of figurine interpretation only for the most outrageous of such schemes. There were, however, significant interpretive debates. One lively venue was the journal *IPEK*, dedicated to the "primitive" arts, both ethnographic and prehistoric. In the years before World War II, it published a series of descriptive and interpretive articles on prehistoric figurines, centering on Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean but ranging as far as

India and Japan. Were figurines idols, amulets, or toys? Did they represent deities, worshipers, concubines, or ordinary people? Many of the alternatives to the mother goddess proposed by archaeologists today were already debated in the pages of *IPEK* eighty years ago.

Still, by mid-century, it was common for archaeologists to ascribe figurines from an extensive region – stretching from Southeastern Europe across the Eastern Mediterranean to Mesopotamia and as far as the Indus River – to worship of mother goddesses or even a single Goddess. The logical path between figurines and goddesses could run in either of two directions: the scholar of prehistoric religions turned to the figurines as evidence of goddesses, whereas the figurine analyst turned to scholarship on ancient goddesses for inspiration.[8]

The result was a discourse in which certain issues were debated and others were left unexamined or even unthinkable. Increasingly sophisticated formal analyses of figurines explored the variability in images and considered a range of potential uses for the objects, yet somehow ultimately ascribed all of them to worship of a mother goddess. Thus, figurines with an "emphasis on sexual characteristics and disregard for appendages" were thereby marked "as belonging to the Mother-goddess cult," whereas figurines that had arms and showed no sexual characteristics what-soever also were assigned to the same cult.[9] The only explanation for this type of reasoning is that a battery of assumptions protected claims of mother-goddess worship – and the identification of figurines as an expression of that worship – from critical assessment. Analysis of variability in imagery or context simply filled in the details.

This interpretive practice was ripe for challenge, and that was taken up by Peter Ucko in 1968.[10] Examining a variety of assemblages from across the Mediterranean and Near East, he collated details on size, construction, and context. He pointed out that some figurines seemed clearly male, and a great many were completely sexless. Delving into historic material from the Mediterranean and ethnographic descriptions of peoples in Africa, Asia, and the Americas who made small human images, he proposed a variety of possible functions for prehistoric figurines. Ucko concluded that their meanings and uses varied from place to place and even within any one community. Indeed, he was inclined to emphasize rather mundane uses, including the possibility that figurines were toys.

Ucko's book is a seminal work for modern figurine studies, but there was another unrecognized dimension of the mother-goddess discourse that he did not adequately expose: a pervasive male bias, or *androcentrism*. "The great religious ideals which have permanently impressed themselves on the world seem always to have been a product of the male imagination," Frazer assured his readers in the *Golden Bough*. "Men make gods and women worship them."[11] Often, androcentrism was more subtle, as in the pervasive assumption that men – not women – made and used female figurines. This assumption seems to have been propagated in various ways, including the simple imprecision of language such as the dual usage of "man" to refer to both people generically and males specifically. The move from generic to specific use is clear in the following passage about female figurines from Nippur: "If this is the mother goddess of primitive man, he certainly made her to his own likeness. . . . She has no personality distinct from his own wife."[12] This type of thinking helped to set the terms for debate.

The "Easy" Equation of Femaleness and Fertility

Figurine studies in other parts of the globe were influenced by the large scholarly outpouring on the Mediterranean and the Near East, but they were not a direct reflection of it. Indus figurines typically were labeled mother goddesses, and direct links to female divinities of contemporary

Figure 2. Paleolithic figurine from Willendorf (Austria), Gravettian era. Note obesity, diminutive arms resting on a breast, woven cap, and lack of face. Limestone, 11 cm. (Drawn by Alana Purcell, after Grand 1967: Figure 81.)

Hindu tradition were claimed.[13] In the New World after Renaud, there was little enthusiasm for identifying female figurines as representations of deities. Youthfulness and feminine coquetry rather than divinity seemed to characterize American figurines, from the "pretty ladies" of Central Mexico to the Valdivia tradition of the Ecuadorian coast.[14] Although figurines were not labeled goddesses, they were ascribed to "fertility cults."[15]

One theme from the Americas is a universalist vision quite different from that which led from "primitive psychology" to a primordial Goddess. An early example is Noel Morss's brief conclusion to a descriptive monograph on figurines of the Southwestern United States in which he considered reasons for the "parallel appearance of abundant clay gynecomorphs in the earliest agricultural and ceramic stages of culture."[16] He made two suggestions: (1) figurines were probably a common artistic invention in settings where ceramic technology had emerged for other purposes; and (2) an agricultural economy created pressures to increase the labor force and thus led people to desire more children. That, in turn, created an impetus for cults associated with fertility and reproduction. Because woman was a natural symbol for reproduction, figurines in early agricultural settings were female.

Later in this chapter, I return to Morss's materialist explanation for figurines. However, the point of interest here is that despite divergences from the interpretive traditions of the Old World, Americanist figurine studies before 1970 – like their counterparts in other areas – were often androcentric. For example, figurines from Tlatilco, Mexico, served "as company for the dead in a future life and . . . [thus] represented the good things of this life, like pretty women" – even though women and children were more likely to be buried with figurines than men.[17] Again, it was men who made, used, and enjoyed figurines, even in the face of contrary evidence. Indeed, for

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some authors, the notion of "fertility cult" provided an easy way to account for female figurines. Femaleness obviously stood for fertility, and, at that point, interpretation ceased.[18] "That the female figurines are connected with fecundity we can easily assume," insisted Morss, despite having just reviewed ethnographic evidence that fertility cults in his area of study involved images of the wanted child rather than the mother.[19]

Marija Gimbutas was the first to counter this androcentric current of figurine studies (Figure 3). Gimbutas was a creative synthesizer who assembled staggering quantities of data and yet saw through the details to a bigger picture beyond. In her work in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, she combined archaeology and historical linguistics, gradually working out her own distinctive and elaborate vision of prehistory.[20]

Gimbutas's synthesis was something of a mirror image of androcentric figurine scholarship. She replaced male bias with female bias, envisioning a peaceful, egalitarian, woman-centered epoch in the prehistory of the Eastern Mediterranean and Southeastern Europe, brought to an end by invasions of warlike, patriarchal hordes from the Russian steppes. This work struck a chord in feminist thought far outside archaeology. Modern feminist devotees of a Goddess found justification in Gimbutas's work for their suspicion that an androcentric establishment conspired to hide the cataclysmic origin of male dominance and patriarchy, an event from which derived the subjugation of women in the present.[21] The problem is that in this case, the archaeological establishment – if it can be said to exist – is almost certainly correct. Gimbutas's grand scheme is compromised by a host of problems in theory, logic, assumptions, and even the details of field recording.[22]

A very different, self-consciously theoretical, feminist approach arose in archaeology in the mid-1980s, and it is this alternative path in the reaction against androcentrism that has proven most important for figurine studies of the last twenty-five years. To erase deeply ingrained androcentrism while keeping Gimbutas at arm's length, feminist archaeologists have had to craft their rhetoric with care, especially in the Mediterranean where Gimbutas's footprints are still so fresh. Margaret Conkey, Lynn Meskell, Ruth Tringham, Lauren Talalay, and others convincingly rose to this challenge in the 1990s.[23]

One of the intellectual currents in this new work is the countertradition that advocates variety in figurine representation and use. Its legacy goes back, through Ucko, to the prewar pages of *IPEK*. A second intellectual current is recognition of the area in which Gimbutas most problematically failed to depart from androcentric scholarship: her adoption of the same "easy" assumptions made by Morss and many others concerning an essence of womanhood. The *essentialization* of women – that is, the claim that there is a universal essence that is everywhere their most fundamental characteristic – is a major factor in the perpetuation of androcentrism. At best, suggest feminist theorists, essentialist arguments should be viewed with suspicion; at worst, they should be categorically banished from scholarly discourse.[24] A third source of inspiration is more recent feminist theory inspired by broadly postmodern themes such as an antipathy toward universalist arguments; an interest in the social construction of knowledge; and a penchant for finding variety, instability, incommensurability, and untranslatability wherever academic scrutiny is directed. Here, I concentrate on the second theme, gender essentialism.

Why is it so wrong to claim that there is an "archetypical feminine," a universal set of associations of "woman" with motherhood, nurturing, and fecundity that lie behind the repeated occurrence of female figurines in prehistory? After all, the essentialization of women need not be the intellectually simple endeavor portrayed in retrospect by recent figurine studies. Erich Neumann's Great Mother archetype is rich with tensions and contradictions, even violence.[25] There is abundant difference,

Figure 3. Marija Gimbutas (right) discussing figurines (on table) at the Sitagroi dig house, Greece, 1968. Photo courtesy of Ernestine Elster.

variety, and transformation in an analysis of female symbolism that stretches from the Paleolithic Willendorf figurine to the drawings of modern psychotics. Although he acknowledges cultural variation, Neumann finds behind it an irreducible, primordial female essence: "that conservative, stable, and unchanging part of the feminine which predominates in motherhood."[26] Morss's easy assumption can be expanded into a dizzyingly complex vision of the workings of the human mind.

The basis for an initial feminist response actually was published in Paris in 1949, a few years before Neumann wrote. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir argued that the "eternal feminine" should be understood not as primordial essence but rather as a result of an "economic, social, and historical conditioning" of women. Yes, says Beauvoir, woman can be all that her (particularly male) critics have claimed, but the behaviors ascribed to woman are "not dictated . . . by her hormones or predetermined in the structure of the female brain: they are shaped in a mold by her *situation*."[27] Although Beauvoir granted more to the essentialist side than scholars would today, the notion that women are what they are because of a "situation" that is contingent rather than immutable is still the basis of contemporary responses to essentialisms. For the moment, it seems possible to undermine the easy assumption of Morss and even Neumann with Beauvoir's notion of situation. If a universal symbolic essence of woman is to figure prominently in our explanation of why prehistoric peoples made female figurines, it should be only because other evidence *in addition to the theme of femaleness* leads us to that conclusion in one case after another.

An Alternative Universalism

The earliest universalist explanations for ancient female images posited a primitive psychology common to all humanity. Among the diverse exemplars of the tradition, gender essentialism is

simply assumed. There is also no serious reflection on how universalist arguments are to be evaluated with archaeological evidence. Thus, Renaud and Neumann – even the more historicist Gimbutas – plucked images out of context. They never identified archaeological patterns that could *disprove* their fundamental claim: that ancient female imagery deserved a unitary explanation. Because any pattern found by archaeologists proved their point, the basic hypothesis was unfalsifiable.

From the early 1960s, processual archaeology was formulated – at least in part – as a reaction against such characteristic rhetorical problems of "traditional" interpretations. This alternative to primitive psychology is no simple antidote for gender essentialism. Yet, both context and falsifiability based on archaeological observations are pervasive concerns. There is enough sophistication and diversity in this tradition such that figurine analysts crafting interpretations find it a useful resource.

Although archaeologists working in the processual mode have held universalist models with cross-cultural applicability as their ideal, in actual practice, they mix universalist and historicist logic, as Colin Renfrew pointed out in the 1980s.[28] Interpretations invoke processes that are general enough to be applicable to multiple cultural contexts, yet they are formulated for application to a specific context; their authors rarely go on to systematically evaluate universalist claims by testing them in other contexts. To take Renfrew's analysis farther perhaps than he intended, we might say that archaeologists often take advantage of the plausibility of universalist logic – that is, its ability to convince – without seriously assessing its validity.

The charge still seems apt, particularly in the study of ancient imagery, in which an historicism favoring the particularistic holds sway. Thus, we need to look beyond overt cross-cultural comparisons if we are to properly examine the role of universalist logic in interpretations of prehistoric figurines. Contextual studies employing logic that is implicitly universalist should not escape scrutiny. Few recent studies explain female figurines in the explicitly universalist terms proposed by Morss. Nevertheless, universalist strands are often to be found woven into broadly historicist accounts, in which they regularly play key roles in the argument.

Analysts propose that prehistoric figurines were ritual in purpose or, more specifically, objects of household ritual in communities organized largely on the basis of kinship. It follows that the archaeological frequency of figurines informs us about the ancient frequency of ritual – that is, more figurines mean more ritual. Such arguments may be applied to appropriate settings across the globe. Although not particularly sophisticated, this argument constitutes a minimal framework that establishes a social relevance for figurines and renders them appropriate subjects for investigation in archaeology's processual mode.

Figurine analysts who adopt something like this framework, steer clear of any strong gender essentialism, and inquire specifically into the femaleness of figurines, tend to produce a variation on four basic explanations. One possibility is that female figurines occurred in economies that relied critically on female productive (or reproductive) labor. In such economic conditions, women were particularly valued and female symbolism was prominent in ritual; thus, people made female figurines.[29] Alternatively, perhaps figurines were a response to stress. When women or their progeny were perceived to be particularly threatened by disease or witchcraft, female figurines were produced to ward off such threats.[30] Third, figurines could be an index of contests over power. Perhaps people made female figurines when the bodies, labor, or offspring of women were the subject of ideological struggle.[31] A final possibility is rather less ambitious as social science: Perhaps figurines are female because women made them. In this view, figurines were an expression of the interests and concerns of women; they were "by, for, and about" women.[32]

What Would a Cross-Cultural "Explanation" Look Like?

All four of these ideas are to be found in the interpretive literature on prehistoric figurines of the last twenty years. They appear not as full-fledged explanations but rather as strands of logic in what are, in each case, more complex interpretive tapestries. To identify these different possibilities, I focused on how *femaleness* of figurines was accounted for, usually with an implicitly universalist argument in an otherwise contextualist study.

Actual studies that account for femaleness of figurines in similar ways are often, in their totalities, quite different from one another. For example, when Bolger suggests that the disappearance of "birthing" figurines in Chalcolithic Cyprus was related to the declining status of women with increasing socioeconomic complexity and patriarchy, she is making an "esteem-for-women" argument. However, so is Voigt when she suggests that female cult figures in later levels at Çatalhöyük (Turkey) "could be related to the increased value of female labor in more fully agricultural subsistence systems."[33] Marcus's explanation for why figurines from Formative Oaxaca (Mexico) are female is a by-for-and-about-women argument, even though she emphasizes the idea that figurines represented ancestors: According to Marcus, male ancestors are rarely depicted because women made the figurines. McDermott's idea that Paleolithic Gravettian figurines of Europe accurately depicted what women saw when they looked down at their own body may initially appear unrelated to Marcus's idea, but it intersects in what is here an important point: Figurines were female because women made them.[34]

These observations clarify the end product that might result from a successful effort to identify a worldwide explanation for femaleness among prehistoric figurines. A common explanation would account for only a small part of what there is to be explained about any particular collection.

None of the four suggestions relies on terms specific to a single time or place; indeed, each can be identified in the writings of figurine analysts working in various parts of the world. As Renfrew suggested for processual arguments more generally, figurine analysts exploit their plausibility without inquiring into their universalist implications. At first glance, however, there seems to be nothing to stop us from doing so here. These hypotheses appear to be exactly of the sort that is of interest in the processual tradition. It is therefore tempting to conclude that we might test these against one another, select the best, and proclaim it as the explanation for femaleness in prehistoric figurines. However, things are not so simple; these ideas are so heavily overburdened by theory that they are impossible to test against each other.

Evidence Still Overburdened by Theory

After the frustration of explanations that did not admit the possibility of their own falsification, the processual tradition has much to recommend it. Unfortunately, if we were to test the four hypotheses on female figurines against each other, problems would immediately arise. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and equally plausible arguments can be made for seemingly opposed interpretations.[35] However, there is a larger aspect to these problems – a rhetorical dimension involving the very conditions of possibility of convincing archaeological arguments.

The subject matter of universalist explanations in archaeology is lodged, characteristically, in the social domain. We investigate the origins of agricultural economies or the development of urban life. In contrast, in the case of figurines, the purported universality derives not from anthropological concepts but rather from the objects themselves. There appears to be something

to explain in universalist terms because "figurines" found in one context remind us of "figurines" from another.

Renfrew, in the brief sketch of universalist explanations discussed previously, recognizes this contrast, noting that at times archaeologists investigate classes of events (such as the development of urban life), whereas in other cases, they seek to explain a pattern that they perceive in the archaeological record.[36] Yet, explanations of patterns usually differ from explanations of classes of events only at their outset. Patterns have no social content; if they are to be explained in social terms, they need to be given some such content. Therefore, the first step investigators take is to reformulate a pattern as the result of a social process. From that point forward, the pattern is linked to a (hypothetical) class of events. Once the problem is reformulated in that way, hypotheses are then concocted with respect to those derived social terms. One result can be observations that are so overburdened with theory that the possibility of falsification is compromised.

For example, consider the first three strands of recent universalist logic on femaleness in figurines: People made female figurines to express their esteem for women, or to relieve the stress of threats to women's health, or as ideological tools in struggles for power over women. Certainly, these three suggestions are not mutually exclusive (esteem might be related to concern for health), and it is unclear what archaeological patterns would constitute clear evidence against any of them. However, the fundamental reason that these suggestions are difficult to evaluate against each other is that they are completely pervaded by theory. All three derive directly from general theoretical positions concerning the role of material culture in society. In the first case, material culture is a reflection of society; in the second case, it is part of the equilibrium functioning of society; in the third case, it becomes an instrument of conflict, manipulation, and transformation.

In all three cases, the archaeological remains (i.e., figurines) are rendered meaningful in social terms by appealing to general theory. Then, a specific hypothesis for femaleness is devised based far more on those ascribed meanings than on archaeological patterns. Debates characteristic of high-level theory by that point infuse the hypotheses so thoroughly that no shred of archaeological evidence would convince proponents of their falsity. To those convinced that people "actively" manipulate material culture as they pursue social strategies, a hypothesis founded on the premise that objects are mere reflections of social reality will seem, ipso facto, wrong; any patterns that are or are not found among the figurines will not matter.

Thus, processual archaeology's framework of materialist explanation provides no easy method for explaining the recurrence of femaleness in figurines. Yet, the concern with testing of universalist models is an attractive resource. When applied to a simple hypothesis – that is, Morss's suggestions on agriculture, pottery, and gynecomorphs – the illuminating results set an agenda for the chapters that follow.[37]

Test of a Universalist Model[38]

Morss's explanation for the "parallel appearance of abundant clay gynecomorphs in the earliest agricultural and ceramic stages of culture" was two-pronged. First, people who mold clay into pots are likely to invent further ceramic arts to meet other needs. Second, in small-scale agricultural societies, reproduction of the labor force is a pervasive concern and, therefore, fertility is a focus of cultic activity. To complete the logic of his argument, Morss made the "easy" assumption that femaleness stands universally for fertility. In summary, then, early agriculturalists made female figurines of clay because they were already making other things from clay, they were worried enough about fertility as to make it a focus of ritual, and femaleness provided a natural symbol for

Figure 4. From a worldwide perspective, cases of prehistoric figurine making are clustered in macro-units of space and/or time: Paleolithic Eurasia, Jomon Japan, Neolithic of the Near East and its huge halo, and Formative Mesoamerica with its more modest halo.

their object of concern. This thesis has a kind of elegance that is rare in functionalist arguments because it addresses something specific to the objects – that they are made of clay.

To test this universalist hypothesis, let us take "figurines" to be small clay sculptures under 20 cm in height and accept the opinions of previous investigators on any presence of female imagery. Furthermore, let us deal with Morss's essentializing assumption that femaleness equals fertility by treating it as an argument in need of empirical justification. Thus, other evidence of fecundity as a symbolic theme (aside from "femaleness") must be present in the imagery for Morss's thesis to be supported.[39]

Procedures appropriate for the testing of universalist models direct us to avoid historically linked cases. We need to look for independent cases of "early agriculture" and "early ceramic technology" to determine if they are associated with female figurines in clay. Of course, the appearance of agriculture and pottery – I use the latter term to refer specifically to containers of fired clay – was far from perfectly coordinated. Let us therefore decouple Morss's two criteria, looking for independent inventions of either pottery or agriculture. Let us also take note of any cases of female figurines predating either pottery or agriculture.

Areas of the world in which pottery emerged independently and before agriculture include the Southern Sahara, the Lower Amazon, and Japan. Areas in which agriculture emerged independently include the Fertile Crescent of the Near East, the Yellow and Yangzi Rivers in China, the Southern Sahara, Mesoamerica, and the Andes Mountains.[40] Finally, there is one significant case of figurines identified as female that predates either agriculture or pottery: the Upper Paleolithic figurines of Eurasia.

Following Morss's claim that figurines in early agricultural or early pottery contexts are "abundant," let us look for relatively homogeneous and coherent traditions of figurine making, setting aside isolated finds or highly heterogeneous assemblages in which the category of "figurine" seems an analytical fiction. Results of such an effort are summarized in Figure 4.
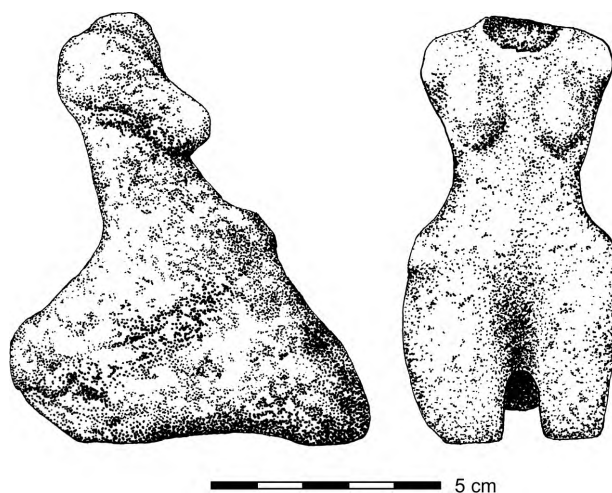
Figure 5. Highly schematized anthropomorphic clay figurine from the Ceramic Neolithic site of Umm Dabaghiyah, Iraq. Note seated posture, female breasts, and fleshy buttocks and thighs. (Drawn by Alana Purcell, after Kirkbride 1972: Plate VIII.)

In four instances, more or less abundant clay figurines arguably are associated with early pottery and/or agriculture. In the Jomon period of Japan (12,500 to 400 B.C.), figurines date to the time of the earliest pottery; however, they remain rare for thousands of years thereafter.[41] Many of the figurines may be female based on the depiction of breasts, but there is only occasional evidence for fertility beyond femaleness. By the time figurine making had become common, after 3500 B.C., the most striking pattern was a spectacular degree of variation in body form and decorative elaboration of torsos. Although figurine making appeared with early pottery and cohered as a tradition for thousands of years, it is embarrassing for Morss's thesis that it *disappeared* with the introduction of agriculture around 400 B.C.

Small anthropomorphic figurines appear in the earliest Neolithic villages of the Near East, although animal imagery is sometimes numerically predominant.[42] Unsexed, minimally anthropomorphic images are most numerous, but figurines with female breasts are common finds. Breasts are among a set of persistent traits that also includes fleshy buttocks and thighs, a seated posture, a lack of artistic attention to the head, and an emphasis on overall bodily form rather than naturalistic detail (Figure 5). There are distinct hints of fertility as a theme, but they are concentrated in time and space; fertility was one theme among others. A final striking pattern is evident: Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures surrounding the Fertile Crescent in most directions developed traditions of small anthropomorphic images in clay (or sometimes stone), often with similar themes (Figure 6). Cases are found to the east, along the Indus Valley; to the north, in the Transcaucasus; to the west through Anatolia, on various Mediterranean islands, and across much of Southeastern Europe; and to the southwest, along the Nile Valley.[43] It is as if there was a "halo" of Neolithic traditions of figurine making surrounding the Fertile Crescent. Within the halo, the probability of occurrence of figurines is high; outside the halo, the probability decreases rapidly.

In the Americas, cultigens arose in Mesoamerica and the Andes, but some (e.g., maize) spread widely beyond the original heartland long before the appearance of agricultural villages. Therefore, it is not entirely clear at what point in the sequence and in what size area we should look for the appearance of gynecomorphs. The earliest spread of cultigens does not appear to have
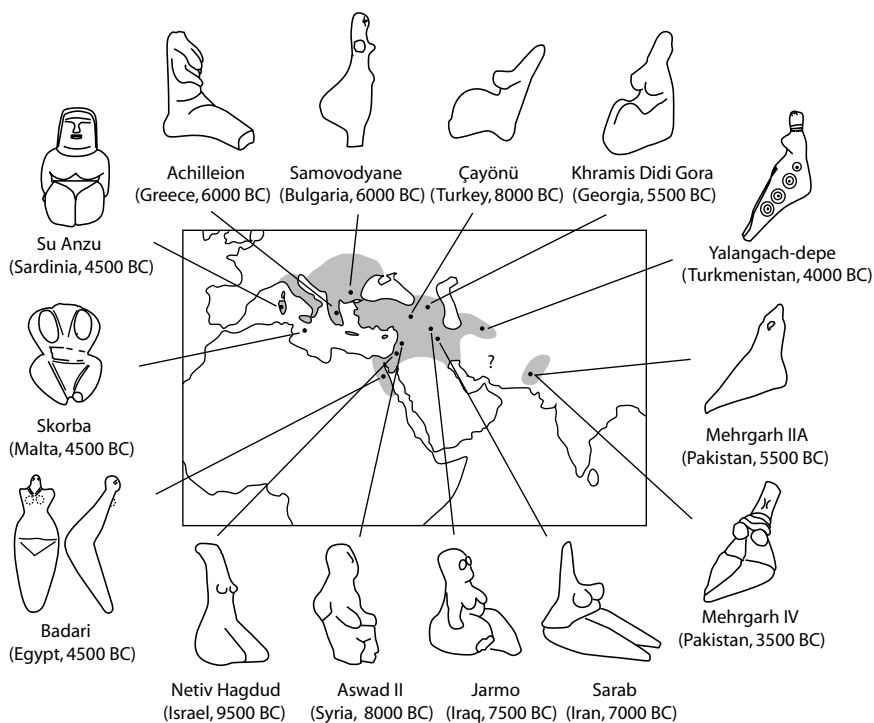
Figure 6. The halo of anthropomorphic figurine making around the Fertile Crescent (in gray) with sketches of figurines bearing some or all of the following traits: fleshy buttocks and thighs, seated posture, female breasts, schematic heads, and emphasis on overall bodily form. Figurines are rare in some of the areas included and, in some places, they postdate the beginning of the Neolithic. Dates are rough estimates in calendar years.

been associated with figurines. The earliest pots (along the Amazon) were occasionally adorned with effigies, but those depict animals, not people. "Formative" village life, typically involving sedentism, ceramics, and agriculture, appeared in a mosaic pattern beginning in the late fourth millennium B.C. across an area larger than the two agricultural heartlands, including northern South America and Central America. Anthropomorphic figurines appear in the earliest Formative period – plausibly partially fitting Morss's model – in two concentrations within this larger field of possibilities. The first is the Valdivia tradition of coastal Ecuador, the earliest Formative in the Americas. The transition to the Formative is later in Mesoamerica (second millennium B.C.), but the cases of figurine making are numerous. A recurring suite of traits includes female breasts, standing posture, and a tendency toward naturalism rather than schematization in overall bodily form. Elaborate attention to the head and face yields either naturalism (Figure 7) or strong stylization (Figure 8) but not, as in the Near East, schematization. Fertility is at best a minor theme.

It is intriguing that Valdivia figurines have certain affinities with the Mesoamerican suite of traits, raising the possibility of distant historical connections between the cases. Faces are schematic, but elaborate hairdos are important. As in the later traditions of Mesoamerica, figurines stand and the head is the center of attention. The possibility of far-flung historical connections is also raised by a scattering of figurine-making traditions to the north of Mesoamerica, into the American
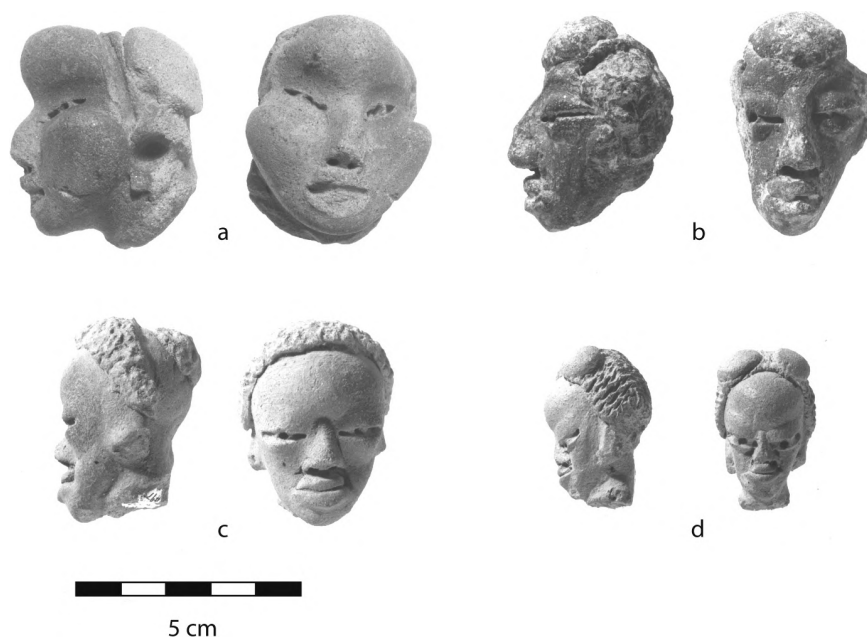
Figure 7. Naturalistic figurine heads from Paso de la Amada (Mexico), 1500–1300 B.C. Fired clay.

Southwest – subjects of Morss's monograph as well as the original inspiration for Renaud's bold paradox.[44]

In other cases of early agriculture or pottery across the globe, anthropomorphic figurines are absent. In the Southern Sahara, the earliest figurines are zoomorphic. Along both the Yangzi and Yellow Rivers of China, there are no early traditions in which figurines are truly "abundant." Finally, of course, in the Paleolithic of Europe, figurines regularly identified as female appeared long before agriculture or pottery.

From a worldwide perspective, traditions of "female" figurines are *not* reliably associated with earliest agriculture and/or pottery. American Formative cases, taken together, are an imperfect positive case, although there are a plethora of instances in Mesoamerica. A positive association of pottery and figurine making in the case of Jomon Japan actually becomes negative when we consider agriculture because figurines disappeared with the introduction of rice farming.

Furthermore, in the cases in which figurines do appear, evidence for fertility as a symbolic theme is present infrequently or erratically distributed in space or time. Other sorts of themes are more prominent. In the Near East, schematization, obesity, and a seated posture are recurring themes. In Japan, stylistic variation is prominent. In Ecuador and Mesoamerica, the focus of attention is the head or face. In all cases, fertility was no more than a localized, intermittent, or secondary theme among whatever messages were conveyed by figurines.

Historicism on a Grand Scale?

Morss was wrong, but that negative result does not mean that this exercise in hypothesis testing has been useless. A possible result of our attempt to identify figurine making among "the earliest
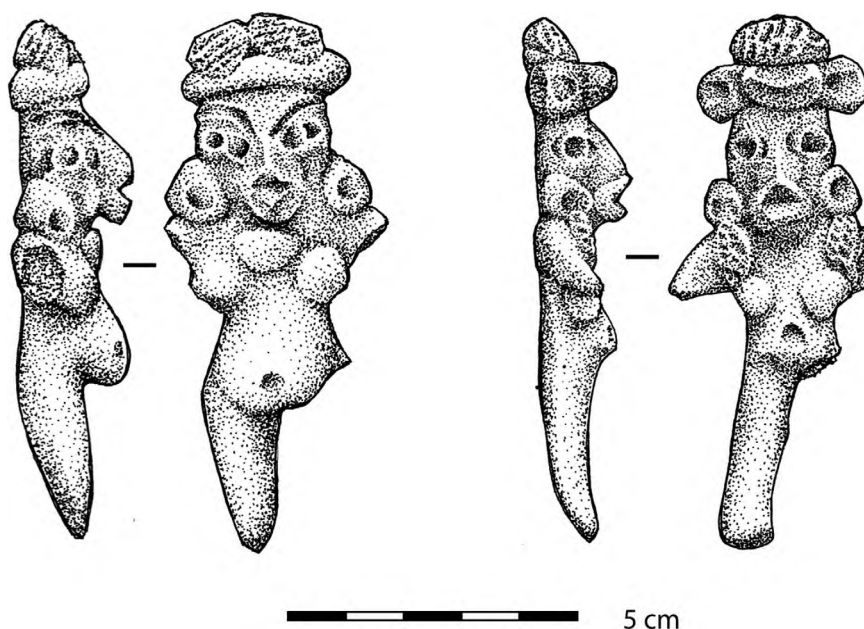
Figure 8. Stylized figurines from Tetel site, Tlaxcala (Mexico), 800–600 B.C. Coaxomulco type; fired clay. (Drawn by Jeremy Bloom.)

agricultural and ceramic stages of culture" could have been no observed patterns in the appearance of figurines. Traditions of figurine making might have appeared and disappeared at random in each area. Consider, for example, the mainly zoomorphic clay figurines of the Shijahe culture (Middle Yangzi Valley, China, later Neolithic).[45] Shijahe figurines have coherence as a tradition, but that tradition was localized in space and brief in duration in archaeological terms, without significant antecedent or legacy. Localized traditions of that sort – appearing out of nowhere, flowering briefly, and fading for good – seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

Instead, prehistoric figurine making is distinctly clustered into macro-units of space or time. Examples include the staggering longevity of figurine making in Jomon Japan; the concentration of traditions in Mesoamerica and the Fertile Crescent; the possible extension of Mesoamerican traditions into the American Southwest; the intriguing correspondence of central themes between Valdivia and Formative Mesoamerica; the vast halo of figurine making surrounding the Fertile Crescent; and even the general absence of Neolithic figurines along the Yangzi and Yellow Rivers. Where figurines are part of coherent local traditions in which recurring patterns of style and subject matter can be identified, we find that they are surrounded by other similar traditions. Furthermore, where figurines appear, the tradition tends to persist – however shifting or intermittent in its details – for thousands of years. In cases without figurines, their absence seems equally persistent. It would appear that an explanation of figurine making (or the absence thereof) in one case must involve references to the making (or not making) of figurines in other associated cases. More generally, explanation must address the specifics of those macro-units of space and time that characterize figurine making. The effort to take universalist arguments literally has led to historicism.

However, the historicism we face is distressingly grand in outline. The macro-units identified in the analysis indeed are "macro": twelve thousand years in the case of Jomon and, potentially,

from Samarkand to Sardinia and Kiev to Khartoum in the case of the halo about the Near East. We must chart our course with care if we attempt historicist interpretation at such scales. Grand-historicist argument was intertwined with universalism in primitive-psychology interpretations of figurines. Is it possible to pursue grand history yet avoid essentialism, lack of attention to context, and imperviousness to falsification?

Continued Relevance of Universalism

The testing of Morss's hypothesis has gotten us out from among the "trees" of Mesoamerican or Near Eastern figurine traditions for a look at the "forests." Those are unexpectedly few – an observation conducive to grand-historicist scrutiny of each case. Two other observations, however, signal the continued relevance of universalist inquiry: There is more than one "forest," and those forests contain a great many "trees."

Traditions of scholarship associated with the records of Upper Paleolithic Europe, Jomon Japan, Neolithic Near East, and Formative Mesoamerica all emphasize femaleness among figurines – although in each case there also is significant recent dissent. It is far from clear what common causal thread might unite these cases, but there are certainly grounds for deeper comparisons of the "forests."

Probably more important are grounds for inquiry into a subtler universalism. A macro-unit such as Formative Mesoamerica includes numerous cases of figurine making. Furthermore, many spectacular early cases in Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean populate the "halo" around the Neolithic of the Near East. When a context-specific study – in the midst of one of these "forests" of figurine making – draws on universalist logic to make key interpretive links, the claims made have larger implications. Does the same logic apply to other nearby cases? Does it capture a key dimension of figurine making across the macro-unit?

The Path Ahead

I have begun this discussion by applying the testing procedures of processual archaeology to a simple explanation of the recurrence of female figurines in multiple prehistoric contexts. Although few contemporary authors are as explicit as Morss, the universalist logic he proposes to explain figurines is regularly woven into context-specific interpretations of particular collections. The results of formalized analysis raise serious doubts about any systematic connections among agriculture, pottery, and gynecomorphs, and they recommend caution even to those who would draw on these connections as strands of plausible logic to be incorporated into contextualist interpretations.

Still, the evaluation of Morss's thesis is helpful in the identification of three domains of comparative inquiry. First, there are four independent cases of early figurine making with recurring claims of femaleness, which provide a basis for a reformulated comparison of world areas. Second, there is need for universalist inquiry of a more narrow scope, an assessment of the use of universalist logic by investigators whose collections cohere in a larger tradition (e.g., Formative Mesoamerica). Third, there are those larger traditions themselves – the macro-units of space and time – each of which calls for historicist inquiry, but historicist inquiry of an extraordinarily ambitious and fundamentally comparative sort. I devote a chapter to each of these three avenues of inquiry (Chapters 4, 5, and 6, respectively).

In each case, comparison considerably beyond the confines of any particular sequence is necessary. How can meaningful objects from different contexts be compared? Before proceeding, we need to develop further resources for the comparative analysis. In Chapter 2, I enlist contextualist method in the service of cross-contextual analysis. Then, in Chapter 3, I map out the questions that investigators pose of images as an aid for selecting interpretive paths in particular instances.

Chapter 2

Comparison and Context

Figurines, we now insist, should be interpreted in context. Attention is to be directed to variation within collections and to the spatial positioning of figurines with respect to one another and to other finds. Contextual method, however, has its own larger context. Programmatic statements on the contextualization of figurines direct us to "identify the dimensions of meaning pertaining to particular societies."[1] Culturally specific meanings are further characterized as shifting and unstable. After all, "the meaning of figurines is likely to have been varied and varying, more ambiguous than fixed."[2] With contextual analyses of meanings emphasizing variety, ambiguity, instability, and contestability, one might well wonder whether there is any legitimate basis for cross-contextual comparison of prehistoric figurines. By adopting contextualism, do we restrict comparison to relatively small scales of space and time? Is universalism to be rejected altogether?

The goal of this chapter is to grapple with and move beyond such radical doubts about the comparison of figurines from different contexts. I argue that a tension – even an opposition – between contextualist and universalist approaches is real. Indeed, contextualist critiques of universalist explanation and grand history reinforce and extend the concerns about these approaches already raised in Chapter 1. Attention to context is nevertheless compatible with comparison – even comparison that is directed at subsuming multiple contexts in a common explanation. Legitimate contextualist concerns can be addressed by placing the principles of contextualization at the heart of comparative analysis. Instead of comparing figurines as isolated objects, we compare contextualizations.

Social Categories in Context

Roy Dilley identifies "context" as a central concept for sociocultural anthropology, placing it on one side of "a theoretical dialectic that is the motor of disciplinary debate."[3] Is anthropology about the basic unity of all humans or the specificity of each culture considered in its own terms? Contextualism, in this scheme, is opposed to – yet also dialectically related to – universalism.

Ladislav Holy framed that opposition as a paradigm shift rather than an ongoing dialectic with, he suggested, significant implications for the status of comparison. Positivist anthropology treated ethnographic facts as objective and unproblematic and identified comparison leading to cross-cultural generalizations as a primary goal. Interpretive anthropology would emphasize instead the subjective status of ethnographic facts and would challenge the imposition of external categories (the ethnological categories of the observer) on individual contexts. The focus of research was to be "culturally specific cognitive worlds."[4] The ethnographer, for instance, might inquire into the meaning of general categories, such as "male" and "female," in a particular cultural context. Comparison, in this view, was no longer a path toward cross-cultural generalization; it was instead a heuristic tool that would bring specificity more clearly into focus.

The dichotomy that Holy draws is simplistic. Strathern points out that the goal of understanding cultures "in their own terms" and thus "in context" was central to modernist anthropology (from Malinowski).[5] Like Holy, she saw (in 1987) a shift underway; however, the move was not toward more context. Rather, postmodern anthropology challenged the authority of the ethnographer as transcendent mediator between the context of the reader and the context of the people studied. Dilley concurs, noting that one promising response to such concerns is an orientation toward "how local social agents themselves define relevant context in connection with their own interpretive practices."[6]

In this light, efforts to undermine the privileged position of the ethnographer seem less a radical break with modernist anthropology than an attempt to more fully realize the goal of understanding cultures "in their own terms." Modernist anthropology both championed context and took cross-cultural comparative analysis as a larger goal. Contextualism is better understood as part of a never-to-be-resolved theoretical dialectic than as a paradigm to be chosen over (or rejected for) other paradigms.

Still, the shift that Holy characterized as a change of paradigm is evident in feminist anthropology's efforts to destabilize social categories that transcend local systems of meaning. That work, in turn, shaped the strategy of contextualization of prehistoric figurines. Influential feminist studies in the early 1970s grappled with perceived universals such as male dominance.[7] The goal was to undermine the idea that relations between the sexes were unalterable consequences of human biology by demonstrating the social or symbolic bases of recurrent patterns such as men's domination of women. One suggestion was that "mutual accommodation of human history and human biology" made universal patterns "intelligible" but not inevitable.[8] Such work considerably elaborated on Beauvoir's concept of the "situation" of women (see Chapter 1), but it was still posed in universalist terms.

Michelle Rosaldo had argued for links between sexual inequality and a division between domestic and public spheres; however, by 1980, she was "troubled" by the consequences of her own "universalist account."[9] Models formulated to account for universal patterns contributed little to the understanding of individual cases. In fact, they encouraged investigators to assume similarity when they should look for difference. Rosaldo and others turned their attention to the social relations in which women were enmeshed in particular contexts. They deemphasized broad categories (woman/man) in favor of more subtle criteria of social differentiation.[10]

"Age" assumed considerable interest. It is a source of instability because as individuals grow older, they move from one age-based category to another. Age also structures sexuality; people have different sexual identities at different points in their life. Thus, age undermined the idea that woman-versus-man was everywhere and always the primary division of humanity.

A division between (biological) sex and (cultural) gender was useful in an initial critique of the idea that man and woman were immutable categories. However, the sex–gender distinction itself

began to acquire transcendental status. One response was to attenuate the causative link between sex differences and gender.[11] In some societies, three, four, or more genders might be identified.[12] Sex as an analytical category also was destabilized. Certainly, human reproduction is inarguably binary; yet, the category "sex" is multidimensional because it references physical attributes, capacities, sensations, and experiences – all of which change as the body ages.[13] Those do not sort themselves naturally into two stable categories, woman and man. Categorization always involves choice on the part of an observer. Consequently, the categories do not have an existence outside the intellectual milieu in which they are imagined and discussed: What women are depends on context.

In summary, contextualization in anthropology involves an effort to understand local systems of meaning from within. In a sense, contextualism is opposed to universalism, and comparison assumes different roles at the two extremes. The focus is either on similarities that are then to be explained or on differences that highlight local specificity. Although the dichotomy is simplistic – for example, it ignores history – it captures legitimate contextualist unease with the linkages between contexts constructed in universalist research. The destabilization of transcendent social categories in feminist anthropology has been particularly powerful, raising concerns about whether the "femaleness" of figurines is an appropriate topic for cross-cultural explanation. The meaning of femaleness would have been different in each prehistoric context.

Archaeological Context, Social Context

Archaeologists make a basic distinction between "archaeological context" and "social context." We observe archaeological context as part of our efforts to reconstruct social context. To consider an artifact "in context" is thus to consider its physical surroundings in stratified deposits, with the goal of understanding some aspect of ancient social life.

One strategy is to assess archaeological contexts according to how clearly they point toward social contexts of interest. The link can be relatively direct (primary context) or complicated by the discard of objects distant from their original location of use (in secondary context). Discussion of context in studies of prehistoric figurines focuses on the rare but tantalizing instances of figurines discovered in primary contexts. Joyce Marcus shows how close attention to context in such cases may provide a glimpse of the ritual uses of figurines.[14]

Ian Hodder explores the larger theoretical implications of context for archaeology.[15] There are many points of similarity with sociocultural anthropology. The focus of interest is particular historical contexts. The contextual approach is opposed to universalism – in this case, to processual archaeology, which is characterized as reductionist and insensitive to local meanings. Again, general categories are not universalist hypotheses but rather tools that reveal specificity.[16] The imposition of external categories must be avoided; instead, understanding internal categories is the goal, although Hodder points out that "meanings" should not be equated solely with the intentions of past actors. Also to be considered are the historical circumstances in which people's subjectivities are formed.[17]

In an important departure from the anthropological treatments discussed previously, Hodder considers historical transformations in relation to context. The problem is that quite different local systems of meanings may be historically related – for instance, as two points in time in a long sequence of cultural change. Hodder's solution is to treat "context" as a flexible concept that can be extended to large temporal or spatial scales.[18] A context is the domain in which similar objects

had similar meanings, indicating transfers of information among them. Of course, objects that look alike may have different meanings, so an important question is whether similar-looking objects were used or treated similarly. Thus, the relevant context for any particular object is subject to interpretive debate.

In this scheme, cross-cultural comparison has a role similar to Holy's formulation for anthropology – it is a heuristic tool for understanding specificity. Comparison of archaeological objects, however, has a central role in the interpretation of cultural meanings. To interpret an archaeological "object" – which may be an attribute, artifact, or type[19] – in context, one compares it directly to other objects and then considers the resulting networks of similarities and differences in relation to the physical context of recovery.

Figurines in Context

Numerous studies of prehistoric figurines have appeared since the early 1990s. They draw on diverse theoretical perspectives and reach conclusions as varied as the objects being interpreted. Yet, despite the diversity, a shared strategy for placing figurines in context is perceptible.[20] The analytical work involved is consistent with what Hodder characterized as contextual archaeology and with the larger associations of context in sociocultural anthropology.

The focus of most studies is a single "context," which often means the collection recovered in a single archaeological project. Although extension through time is often considerable (hundreds or thousands of years), extension through space is restricted to a particular region, a valley, or even a single site.

The goal of interpretation is to reveal internal social categories and culture-specific meanings. Analysts give careful attention to variation among the images, archaeological context, and occasionally other finds as well. Recurring topics of theoretical interest include sex, gender, identity, power, physicality, habitus, social construction of subjectivity, and content of social relations. Feminist anthropology is an important source of insight, and social identities are imagined to have been multiple, unstable, and negotiated. Social differentiation is conceived of as composed of multiple axes of difference – for example, age, gender, ethnicity, and class – that actors may have activated and manipulated in their ongoing interactions with others.

This general orientation toward social differentiation poses numerous analytical challenges for the archaeologist. We want to avoid imposing external, predefined categories on the prehistoric context under investigation. The aim, instead, is to discover internal categories, conceived of not only as historically specific but also unstable even within a particular society. As different analysts present their efforts to grapple with these challenges, the outlines of a viable general strategy are emerging.[21]

An important methodological precept is to resist hasty classification of the figurines as, for instance, "women" and "men." Instead, analysts should record the occurrence of primary or secondary sexual characteristics as individual attributes and look for patterns of association with other attributes (e.g., clothing, ornament, posture, or indications of age). In this framework, "female breasts" do not necessarily lead to categorization of a figurine as "woman," nor does "penis" lead to the designation of "man." Breasts are simply breasts, penises are penises, and their presence or absence *as attributes* is investigated in relation to all other attributes.

Analysts point out that figurine makers chose – deliberately – to either include or exclude each attribute. When we set aside our assumption that the images should divide first into females

and males and only secondly into other sorts of categories, we clear the way for exploration of the context-specific choices made by ancient figurine makers in representing social identities and differences. We position ourselves to discover certain dimensions of local meanings. An exemplary application of the strategy is Rosemary Joyce's article on Playa de los Muertos figurines of Honduras (900–200 B.C.). Arguing that "rather than being concerned with distinctions between male and female," the figurines "may more accurately be characterized as emphasizing transitions in age, perhaps primarily of sexually female subjects," Joyce consistently refuses to refer to the images as depicting "girls" or "women."[22]

There is room for refinement of method. For instance, is there a point in the analysis in which it becomes appropriate to categorize? How do we know when we reach it? If we resist categorization altogether, do we risk imposing a new, a priori default – that is, the absence of gender categorization – on the evidence?

A recurring dilemma is whether omissions as well as depictions of sexual attributes should be regarded as "deliberate" moves on the part of the figurine maker. Ian Kuijt and Meredith Chesson follow that line of argument in interpreting anthropomorphic plaster statuettes from Pre-Pottery Neolithic deposits at 'Ain Ghazal (Jordan, 8500–7000 B.C.). Primary sexual characteristics are absent except perhaps on one of the statuettes, and most bear no evident secondary characteristics, although a few have female breasts (Figure 9). Kuijt and Chesson conclude that the ancient artists "deliberately construct[ed] the majority of these statues as ambiguous, with limited, if any, indication of sexed or gendered identities."[23] However, it is possible that gender was encoded in ways not obvious to an archaeological observer. For example, contemporary public restrooms aggressively enshrine binary gender categories, and they are regularly labeled iconically (Figure 10). The men's-room icon, according to the logic sometimes used by figurine analysts, looks "deliberately ambiguous" with respect to sex. However, such an interpretation – as an attempt to discover internal categories – is simply wrong. Culturally knowledgeable actors know that the absence of a skirt makes the icon categorically male.

For modern analysts, most of the 'Ain Ghazal statues are certainly "ambiguous" as to sex, but they are only definitively ambiguous *to us*. Were they ambiguous to their ancient makers and users? Perhaps. However, it may be that the absence of "female breasts" on three of the thirty statues and busts[24] gendered the "ambiguous" figures. Articulating these alternative interpretations as hypotheses would encourage attempts to recruit evidence for and against them.

Categorization may well be appropriate in the later stages of analysis, but social categories always require a supporting argument on the part of the analyst based on patterns internal to the collection. That requirement (rather than an effort to rule out any social categorization) may be the most effective tool in holding off the creeping return of a priori gender categories.

Although ongoing methodological discussion of this sort is necessary, a promising strategic orientation toward the contextualization of prehistoric figurines – which encompasses theoretical postulates on the multidimensional nature of social categories as well as a method that builds from associations of attributes to the identification of internal categories – is now widely shared. Sometimes the contextualizing arguments of figurine analysts converge even further. A recurring idea is that the traits depicted on figurines may actually illustrate localized perceptions and portrayals of social difference. In other words, suites of traits represent a culturally specific kaleidoscope of intersecting dimensions of differentiation, not as devised by analysts but rather as viewed from within – by the people who made and used figurines. In this sense, figurines provide a kind of "window on society."

Not all figurine collections are appropriate for what I refer to as *window-on-society analysis*. Generally, the uses of the figurines must have been such that ordinary people regularly came into
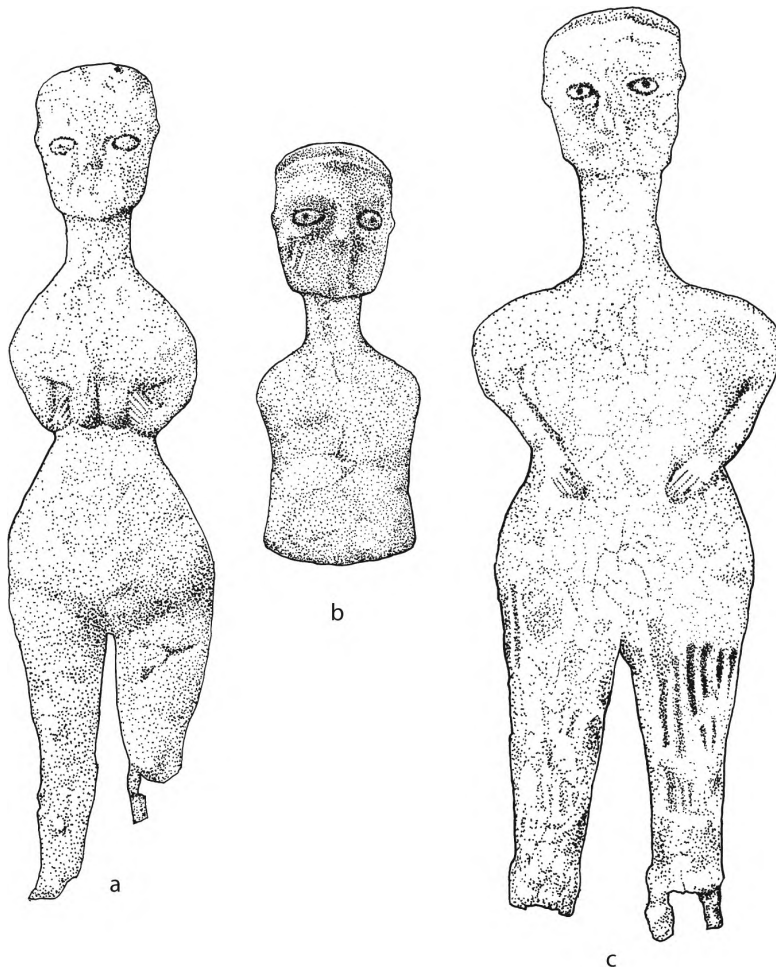
Figure 9. Plaster statues from the 1983 cache at 'Ain Ghazal (Jordan): (a) Statue 35, with hands beside small female breasts; (b) Statue 33, sexless; (c) Statue 38, sexless, with traces of painted lines on leg. Figure at left is 84 cm tall, others to scale. (Drawn by Alana Purcell, after Tubb and Grissom 1995, Figures 4, 6, and 8.)

contact with the objects. Furthermore, the subject matter of the figurines should not be rulers, gods, or characters from myths but rather stereotyped, publicly shared representations of ordinary people.

When such conditions are met, figurine analysis may be able to illuminate context-specific interplays of multiple dimensions of social difference. We may be able to glimpse how identities were constructed or subjectivities formed. Careful observation of internal variation in the collection (e.g., Which traits are present? Absent? Which traits regularly co-occur?) may provide a basis for inferences concerning absences and presences in the discourses that framed social relations and negotiations of power. Those observations, in turn, may help us characterize both structures of domination and contexts in which those structures were contested or subverted. With the

Figure 10. Image on restroom door: "Deliberately ambiguous" or "explicitly sexed"?

appropriate collection, window-on-society analysis makes prehistoric figurines directly relevant to topics of great theoretical interest.

Beyond Context Narrowly Defined: Comparing Cases of "Female Figurines"

The contextual interpretation of individual collections is the most fundamental task in the analysis of prehistoric figurines. In what ways, however, does one contextualization impinge on another? For instance, if a theme of femaleness emerges from the interpretation of figurines in two distinct contexts, does that constitute an instance of similarity between the two cases and, therefore, something to be explained? Following Hodder's flexible approach to context, we could ask whether the relevant context should be reformulated to include both cases. Instead, I choose to reserve the term *context* for relatively small scales of space and time. The analytical problem becomes whether to link two "contexts" rather than whether "relevant context" should be redefined at a larger scale. Although some reasons for that choice are noted in the next section, the two ways of conceptualizing the problem are not fundamentally different.

When two contextualizations yield "female figurines," I propose setting aside two extreme responses: that femaleness in one case necessarily had nothing to do with femaleness in another or, alternatively, that the two cases must have had similar causes. It would be most consistent with the goals of contextualization to turn to the figurines themselves for guidance. The strategy of contextual interpretation provides tools for discovering that two expressions of femaleness that, at first glance, seemed similar are, in fact, quite different. Thus, instead of simply comparing figurines,
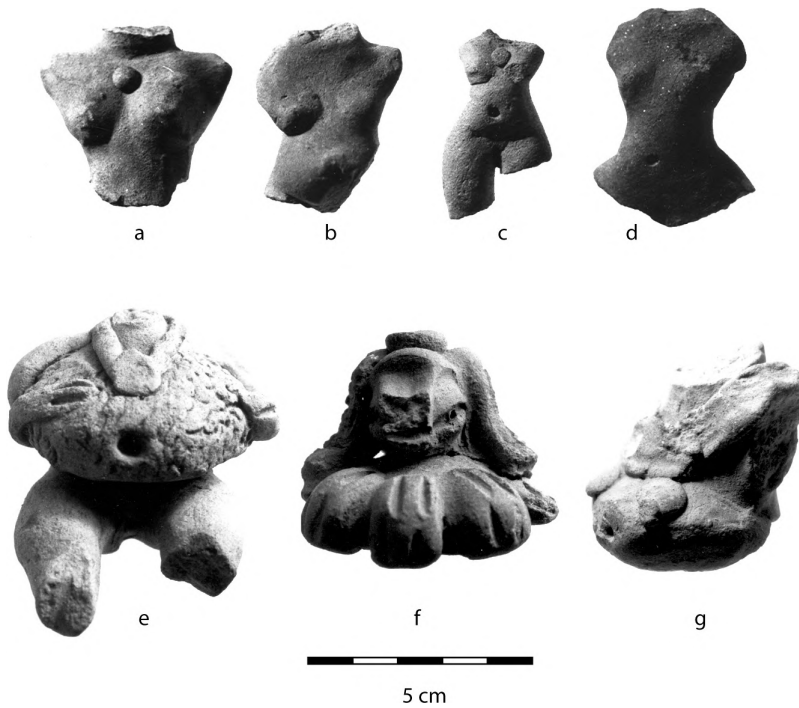
Figure 11. Figurine torsos, Paso de la Amada and other nearby sites (Mexico), 1700–1300 B.C.:
(a-d) young women without arms; (e-g) fat, costumed, seated anthropomorphs with arms and
hands. Fired clay. (Photos by Lesure.)

we might compare contextualizations. The point is easily made, but considerable complexity accompanies it. Indeed, this entire book is an extended exploration of that theme.

One consideration is whether there are suites of co-occurring traits. Observing femaleness in two collections of figurines, we can begin to contextualize that observation by looking at what other traits co-occur with femaleness in each case: Are those similar or completely different?

Another issue is the status and stability of femaleness as a category in the two collections. Gender (in its local instantiation) is not directly observable in prehistoric figurines. If elements of a gender system are inferred from a set of figurines, they emerge at a late stage of analysis. By contrast, identification of sexual attributes is routinely part of the early stages of analysis. Such identifications may (or may not) pave the way for inferences concerning gender. If contextual analysis is conceived of as a series of steps beginning with attributes and ending (as appropriate) with social categories, then the analytical trajectory – as it unfolds in the interpretation of two different collections – is itself a differentiated process and thus an arena in which divergences between the collections might be observed. At what point in each analysis does the attribution of "femaleness" arise, and what is its subsequent fate as the analysis proceeds?

A few examples clarify these suggestions; I choose three New World, Formative-era collections that I have examined personally. The first consists of fired-clay figurines of the period 1700–1300 B.C. from Paso de la Amada and other sites of the Soconusco region of Mexico. Redundant patterns among a variety of attributes revealed two basic categories that involve distinctions of subject matter (Figure 11). Figures in the first category (80 percent of the assemblage) are standing

and nude. Sexually female based on breasts, belly, and hip form, they depict young women of reproductive age. Associated themes include lack of arms and a visual emphasis on the head involving diverse hairstyles and naturalistic attention to faces (see Figure 7).

The second set of representations (17 percent of the assemblage) consists of obese, anthropomorphic figures. A few have the flattened breasts of older women, but others bear no sexual attributes. Most are seated, and many are clothed or otherwise ornamented. Most appear to have been wearing elaborate masks. I suspect that these were depictions of elders, both men and women, who donned masks and other paraphernalia during community rituals. Although gender is a salient theme here, the figurines do not oppose "female" to "male" (or any other gender). Femaleness, age, and ritual role are the dimensions of social differentiation expressed in the collection as a whole, with an overarching theme perhaps the indebtedness of young women to their elders. Categorization as an analytical move is strongly supported. The resulting categories seem to reflect a context-specific expression of social differentiation, and in my first paper on figurines, I proposed a detailed interpretation.[25]

The second example is from another part of Mexico, Central Tlaxcala, a half-millennium later (900–500 B.C.). Certain basic associations of themes at the sites of Amomoloc and Tetel are similar to those at Paso de la Amada (and, indeed, recur throughout Formative Mesoamerica). Figurines with breasts (here, the only common attribute suggesting femaleness) are basically nude and are usually standing. The visual emphasis again is on faces and elaborate coiffures, the former in this case being highly stylized rather than naturalistic (see Figure 8).

Redundant patterning again justifies categorization; however, the categories most readily defined are stylistic (Figure 12). In other words, attributes cluster into "types" that seem to constitute different ways of representing similar subject matter. Therefore, the categories that emerge from the attribute analyses are not directly amenable to interpretation in terms of a system of social differentiation viewed from within.

Analysis of the predominant type (Cuatlapanga) is better suited to our present purposes (Figure 13; see also Figure 12a,b). There is considerable variation, most obviously among the elaborate headdresses but also in posture, arm position, and the presence of ornamentation. About 70 percent of the torsos bear two lentil-shaped tabs on the upper chest, whereas 14 percent have a single, round tab in the pubic region. I interpret these as stereotyped sex attributes: The first represents female breasts and the second represents schematized male genitals (or a loincloth).[26] Despite the variation, redundant categories – that is, divisions of subject matter distinguishable by patterning across multiple attributes – do not emerge at this new level of analysis. Although there are what appear to be simple, stereotyped, stylized sexual attributes, figurine makers did not treat those as if they were identifiers of fundamental social categories. To the extent that it is possible to determine in the fragmentary collection, "female" figurines were not distinguished from "male" figurines by headdress, ornamentation, posture, arm position, or body paint. Certainly, that finding reinforces the contextualist principle that maleness and femaleness need not be foundational social categories.

Yet, in the Cuatlapanga type, the depiction of sex attributes is not so inextricably tied to other dimensions of differentiation as at Paso de la Amada. By comparing figurines with "female breasts" to those with "male genitals," we might be able to see through to expressions of gender, even though this was not a central concern of the figurine makers. The result of such considerations in this case suggests a lack of systematic gender differentiation. It is tempting to see the Cuatlapanga figurines as the product of a discourse that undermined or even denied rigid gender categories.

Valdivia fired-clay figurines of the period 3300–2100 B.C. on the coast of Ecuador provide a final example.[27] Sexual attributes are unusually varied relative to other early figurine traditions of
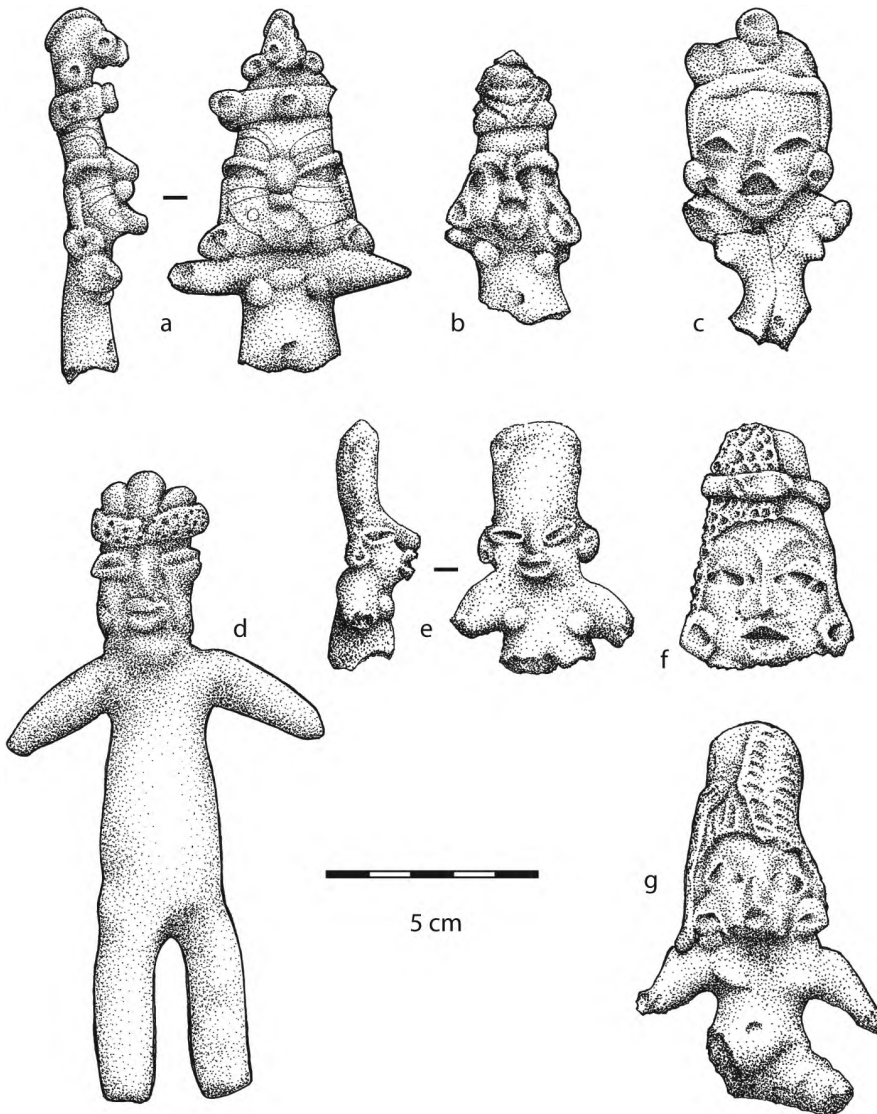
Figure 12. Distinctive figurine types from Tlaxcala (Mexico), 900–500 B.C.: (a-b) Cuatlapanga type (C1 variant); (c) Ehco type (E2); (d-e) Amomoloc type; (f-g) Coaxomulco type (C10). Note particularly the different forms of the eyes. (Drawn by Jeremy Bloom.)

the Americas (Figure 14). About 84 percent have modeled breasts, but those vary in prominence from weakly defined bumps to exaggerated protrusions. About 39 percent of the figurines bear elaboration in the pubic area: a modeled, conical protuberance or a flat, triangular area demarcated by grooves, roughening, and/or punctations. There are two other significant dimensions of variability: hairstyle and arm position.
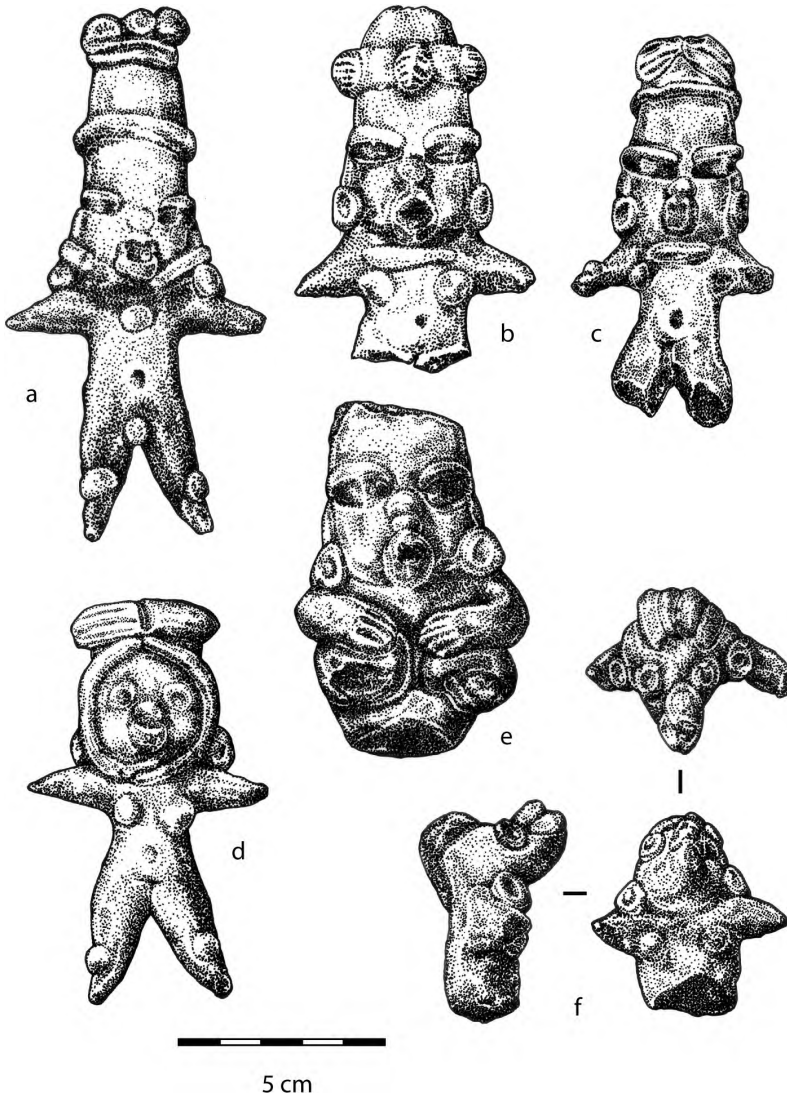
Figure 13. Variation in subject matter in the Cuatlapanga figurine type (Tlaxcala, Mexico, 800–650 B.C.): (a) "male" figurine with lentil-shaped pubic appliqué; (b-d) "female" figurines with lentil-shaped breast appliqués; (e) seated figurine without sexual attributes; (f) figurine with lentil-shaped breast appliqués shown wearing zoomorphic mask. (Drawn by Laura Baker.)

As discussed in Chapter 1, these common, co-occurring themes are surprisingly similar to those of Formative Mesoamerica despite significant separation in space and time (Figure 15). The figurines mainly are standing, heads are the center of attention, and elaborate hairstyles are important.

Two markedly different readings of variation in imagery have been proposed. One scheme interprets the pubic protuberances as penises. This is probably the most widely held view, although some investigators voice misgivings about the occurrence of figurines having both "penises"
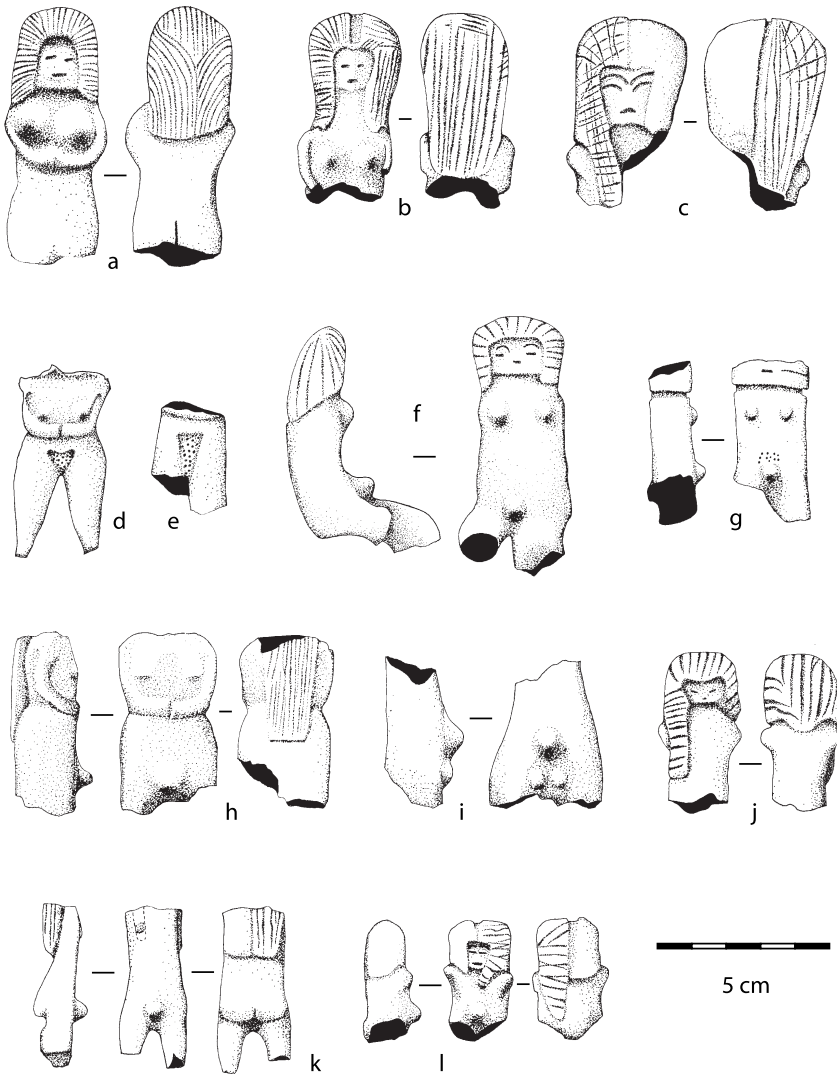
Figure 14. Valdivia figurines (Ecuador): (a–b) figures with prominent breasts; (c) head with asymmetric, partly striated hair; (d–e) torsos with punctate pubic triangles, at least one with moderate breasts; (f–h) figures with pubic protuberances and breasts of decreasing prominence; (i) torso fragment with pubic protuberance and "testicles"; (j) figure with no breasts; (k–l) figures with pubic protuberances and no breasts. Note correlations of arm form (i.e., no arms/stub arms/arms folded beneath chest) and hairstyle (i.e., symmetric/asymmetric, striated/unstriated) with sexual attributes. Fired clay. Drawn by Lesure from collections at Banco Central, Quito (i); Banco del Pacífico, Guayaquil (f); and Complejo Cultural Real Alto (all others).

Table 1. Patterning of Sexual Characteristics on Valdivia Figurines

Real Alto Site

Pubic Area	Breasts					Totals
	None	Weak	Moderate	Prominent	Exaggerated	
No elaboration	0	1	6	26	10	43
Demarcated pubes	0	0	3	7	1	11
Pubic protuberance	13	3	2	0	0	18
Totals	13	4	11	33	11	72

Museum Collections

Pubic Area	Breasts					Totals
	None	Weak	Moderate	Prominent	Exaggerated	
No elaboration	2	1	25	62	23	113
Demarcated pubes	0	0	5	13	7	25
Pubic protuberance	26	11	12	3	0	52
Totals	28	12	42	78	30	190

and prominent female breasts.[28] Costanza Di Capua, in contrast, views the pubic protuberances as stylized depictions of a convexity of the pubic region evident in adolescent girls. In her view, all the figurines are sexually female; age, rather than sex, is the central structuring principle. Breast, pubis, hair, and arm patterns mark stages in the development of females from prepuberty to adulthood. Pubic protuberances, which appear in association with small breasts, would have symbolized the emerging sexuality of girls. Furthermore, girls' hair was partially shaved or depilated, whereas mature adults, with prominent breasts, had a full head of hair. Di Capua engages the material at a more detailed level than other investigators, but she includes only unprovenienced materials and does not provide counts or percentages.

The stimulation of these two coherent but apparently mutually exclusive interpretive positions drew me to Ecuador to investigate for myself. Welcomed graciously by Di Capua in Quito and Mariella Garcia in Guayaquil, I was able to examine the large excavated collection from Real Alto at the Complejo Cultural Real Alto, as well as unprovenienced collections at various museums.[29] The museums' sample is relatively intact but problematic because some pieces are likely fakes. Because of these concerns, I analyzed Real Alto and Museum data separately. Results in the two cases are similar.[30]

In this case – and in contrast to the Tlaxcala sites – the different dimensions of variation (chest, pubis, hair, and arms) are strongly related, but – in contrast to Paso de la Amada – the patterns are not categorical. For instance, breast prominence, which I subjectively classified in five categories, is inversely related to the presence of pubic protuberances (Table 1). Furthermore, figurines with small breasts and/or pubic protuberances tend to have no arms or stub arms (Figure 14g, j, k, l), whereas figurines with prominent breasts and no protuberances tend to have full arms hugging the body (Figure 14a, b, d). An asymmetric hairstyle and a head only partly covered with hair

Figure 15. Locations of figurine traditions discussed in this chapter.

striations are more common on figures with pubic protuberances and weak or no breasts (Figure 14j, k, l), but the majority of hairstyles in all cases are symmetric and fully striated.

The results are more damaging to Di Capua's model than to the alternative, partly because Di Capua is more ambitious than other interpreters in that she provides a logic for relations among attributes. Detailed analysis reveals various patterns that violate that logic. For instance, Di Capua views arms as a mark of emerging agency in society. Prepubescent girls had no arms, pubescent girls had arm stubs, and adults had fully depicted arms. Although those patterns are present as noncategorical tendencies in the data, there also are rare cases of dynamic arms that gesture in various ways. According to Di Capua's logic, these appear to display more agency than other forms, yet they are at least as frequent among the supposed youngsters as among the adults.

Therefore, I favor sexual differentiation as the primary structuring principle in the representational system and interpret pubic protuberances as penises (a single piece with low-relief testicles bolsters this argument; Figure 14i). Still, there is evidence here of considerable symbolic play, and it may be that the two seemingly mutually exclusive models could actually be combined. It is plausible that the absence of breasts referenced the chests of both girls and men. Even if pubic protuberances are considered sexually male, female sexual attributes are numerically predominant

in the collection. It is conceivable that the fundamental subject matter was female sexuality and its emergence over the life course, as well as its unstable relationship to male sexuality.

The representational system in the Valdivia case is both strongly patterned and pervasively lacking in categorical divisions. In contrast to the Tlaxcala case, redundancy of patterning supports a claim that sexuality, particularly female sexuality, was the central subject matter. In contrast to the Paso de la Amada example, femaleness as subject was not inextricably tied to other dimensions of social differentiation. Yet, the sexual symbolism expressed was neither binary nor categorical.

As evident in these examples, attribute analyses of figurines may generate categories of various sorts. Categories may be founded on subject matter and, arguably, direct clues to ancient expressions of social differentiation (Paso de la Amada). However, they also may be based in stylistic differentiation, thus denying any easy inferences concerning social differences (Tlaxcala, initial analysis). Figurine collections also can resist categorization. In the second level of analysis of the Tlaxcala collection, redundancies failed to emerge among the variables. In the Valdivia case, there were redundancies, but those were tendencies without categorical divides. These results emphasize the importance of careful contextualization. Each case is different and must be understood in terms of variation unique to it.

Still, should interpretation of the cases proceed along entirely different lines? There are similarities. In each case, a theme of "femaleness" emerges. There are the "young women" of Paso de la Amada (80 percent of torsos), the "female breasts" of Tlaxcala (70 percent of Cuatlapanga torsos), and the female sexual attributes of Valdivia (perhaps unfair to quantify, but let us say breasts moderate or larger, no pubic protuberances: 74 percent at Real Alto, 71 percent in museums' sample). In each case, "femaleness" manifests itself in locally specific terms: redundantly coded but inextricably linked to age in Paso de la Amada; as an attribute in Tlaxcala in counterdistinction to "maleness" but not part of any convincingly identifiable category of subject; and redundantly coded but not categorically distinct from male sexuality in Valdivia. Yet all three cases share other themes in addition to femaleness: nudity, predominantly standing posture, the head as a focus of attention, and elaborate coiffures.

As noted in Chapter 1, the similarities are sufficient to prompt speculation concerning a distant historical connection between the Formative figurine-making traditions of coastal Ecuador and Mesoamerica. That is impossible to verify and I pursue it no further. The point here is that we cannot absolutely rule out the possibility that these three cases are all (in Hodder's usage of the term) part of one greatly extended "context."

These points raise the question: Should local interpretations of figurines in each instance include some common thread of argument that accounts for the apparent points of similarity? Or, stated differently, should an interpretation proposed for one collection impinge on interpretations of the other collections? Joyce's suggestion (stemming from other Formative Mesoamerican collections) that nude, standing, elaborately coifed figurines display an interest in the beautification and social presentation of the body could plausibly account for most of the shared features of these cases.[31] Should that interpretation be adopted in all three cases? Joyce's more specific reading of Playa de los Muertos figurines as depicting differences in age is strikingly similar to Di Capua's interpretations of Valdivia. Given that far-flung similarity, should we consider whether an interpretation along those lines might be extended across Formative Mesoamerica?

These are productive questions that could enrich and strengthen the interpretations of particular collections. Furthermore, it appears that the contextualist method can be profitably recruited as a basis for comparative analysis, not least because it is so effective at pointing to difference. The following three principles address the problems of comparative analysis focused on similarities: (1) If we reject the a priori stance that there can be no common explanation for apparent

similarities (such as the prominence of "femaleness" in different figurine traditions), it is only fair to not presuppose that a common explanation must exist. One possible outcome of comparison must be that there is *no* common explanation. (2) It is not possible to produce a universally valid set of criteria for what constitutes, for example, femaleness and look particularly or even specifically for that criterion. Instead, the input for comparative analysis must be local contextualizations. Femaleness, if it is sustainable as a pattern, must emerge in one local analysis after another. It should not be imposed externally irrespective of local patterns of variation. (3) Any explanation transcending individual contexts is more persuasive when it actually helps to make sense of variation in the cases it claims to cover. That point combines the universalist idea that general statements should explain with the contextualist insistence that generalities should confront local specificity.

Context, Essentialism, and Grand History

Grand history emerged from the testing of Morss's agriculture–pottery–gynecomorph model as a promising domain of inquiry, but it is not one that has been recently pursued by figurine analysts. Certainly, the scale of a history that would cover huge spatiotemporal units is alarmingly grand. One factor in contemporary reticence toward histories framed at such scales is that previous efforts (such as those of Gimbutas) now seem pervasively essentializing well beyond the gender essentialism considered in Chapter 1. Yet, grand history appears more amenable to a contextualist contribution than universalist approaches because – despite its scale – it relies on historicist explanatory forms. Indeed, a glance beyond figurine studies indicates that contextualist archaeology has already taken on grand history and solved its more egregious essentialist problems. I note that contribution by comparing Gimbutas's "Old Europe" to Hodder's *Domestication of Europe*. The comparison also reveals a lingering essentialist challenge in contextualist grand history.

The central topic of inquiry for grand history is social entities that dwarf individuals and events. As conceptualizations of those entities are extended to larger scales of space and time, it becomes increasingly unclear how they are affected by human happenings in any particular context. In what I call *theoretical essentialism*, institutions or frameworks of thought appear to take on the character of inborn essences.

For instance, Gimbutas identified cleavages in the archaeological record of 4400 to 2900 B.C. as signaling the incursion of Indo-European pastoralists from the steppes of Southern Russia into areas long settled by the agriculturalists of Old Europe. As her thinking on the topic developed, she increasingly saw the two "cultural systems" involved as dramatically opposed: "the first [Old Europe] was matrifocal, sedentary, peaceful, art-loving, earth- and sea-bound; the second [the Indo-European system] was patrifocal, mobile, warlike, ideologically sky oriented, and indifferent to art."[32] In Gimbutas's treatment, ethnicity, kin-reckoning, worldview, aesthetic sense, and modes of conflict resolution are perdurable to the point of innateness rather than historically created. When these strands are collapsed together and dichotomized, it seems virtually impossible to escape the implication that they are manifestations of an underlying essence.

This type of theoretical essentialism has been widely recognized – and criticized – in Gimbutas's work. Another dimension is less widely remarked upon. *Analytical essentialism* emerges in interpretive engagement with the archaeological evidence from different contexts as those are collectively reformulated from material to social terms. A characteristic argument of historicist archaeology is that an object in one context resembles that in another because there was transmission of ideas between the contexts. Similarities of archaeological remains are the result of social processes such

as connection, contact, or identity. It hardly seems problematic to imagine direct sharing between contexts narrowly separated in time and space, but as we push toward larger scales, the analyst's search for direct linkages can generate *sameness* as a default postulate.

Objects in one context are always different from those in another. Linking contexts thus involves privileging certain similarities over at least some differences. When the analyst identifies an apparently compelling similarity between two far-flung cases, that interim result tends to reorder the subsequent weighing of similarity and difference in cases *intermediate* between those in space or time. When such prior claims of resemblance bracket intermediary cases, similarity rather than difference tends to become the default position in cases that are chronically ambiguous. Far-flung claims of historical connection thus tend to be self-fulfilling when analysis turns to intermediary cases. Similarity is assumed unless proven otherwise, vague resemblances become essential sameness, and falsifiability is compromised.

When we consider Gimbutas's interpretations of Neolithic through Bronze Age Europe in the context of her early work on historical linguistics and Lithuanian folk art, *all* of the archaeological cases can be seen as intermediary instances bracketed by prior observations that skewed the analytical advantage to similarity. Gimbutas was inspired by the striking conservatism of Lithuanian, her native language ("in its accentual system Lithuanian preserves for words a pitch accent that Classical Sanskrit had already given up"[33]), and by its consequent importance for scholarly work on the history of the Indo-European languages. Gimbutas also claimed a remarkable conservatism for Lithuanian folk art, seeing three-thousand-year-old resonances in contemporary gable decorations and Easter eggs – and even suggesting continuity of images from the Upper Paleolithic.[34]

Certainly, Old Europe as a system of similar scope to the linguistically attested construct of Indo-European languages was Gimbutas's fundamental intellectual contribution, and it is appropriate to see the increasing grandiosity of her claims in late works (e.g., *Civilization of the Goddess* and *Language of the Goddess*) as an effort to push her new construct to its limits. However, from the perspective of her entire intellectual career, Gimbutas's Neolithic to Bronze Age archaeology was already bracketed by linkages between Paleolithic Europe and contemporary Lithuania. Without denying a role for intellectual style and personal history,[35] I suggest that her axiomatic privileging of similarity over difference was, in part, an analytical product of grand-historical analysis. Bracketing of intermediary cases in the process of reformulating material patterns in social terms prejudiced her entire approach to archaeological diversity. She wrote books that were stunning compendia of that diversity without perceiving any challenge to the postulate of underlying similarity.

In *The Domestication of Europe* (1990), Ian Hodder considers spatial and temporal scales similar to those addressed by Gimbutas, but he draws on contextualist principles of interpretation.[36] His topic is the reproduction and transformation of symbolic structures across prehistoric Europe, from Anatolia to the British Isles. Despite this vast scope, he appears to solve the problem of theoretical essentialism. His sense of the form that a truly long-term structure might take is less reified and ultimately more plausible than that of Gimbutas. Whereas Gimbutas's structures verge on being actual institutions (a Goddess, a religion), Hodder's are more abstract and flexible – "structural principles." He insists repeatedly on interpenetration between concrete actions and long-term structures. The latter should have been reproduced by the former. It is important that Hodder's analysis, by operating on multiple levels, renders such theoretical claims more than mere lip service; the attention to recurring contextual associations of artifacts is a prime example of the crucial smaller scale of analysis largely missing in Gimbutas's work. Finally, the analysis conveys a sense of the malleability as well as the continuity of long-term structures.

The Domestication of Europe is less successful in the analytical dimension of the essentialist challenge. The pertinent issue is whether the weighing of material similarity and difference between

contexts generates a self-fulfilling and ultimately unfalsifiable postulate of essential sameness, particularly through the bracketing of intermediary cases. It is of concern that Hodder considers radically different archaeological records to have been produced by transformations on one basic underlying structure. He derives the "domus" as key metaphor from the archaeological prominence of houses in Southeastern Europe; he ultimately lands in Southern Britain where traces of Neolithic houses are frustratingly rare. Is the domus still relevant in the latter case? Hodder addresses that issue by moving step by step across Europe, noting material continuities and discontinuities across each step. Continuities become evidence of the continued propagation of the basic symbolic structure, whereas differences provide a basis for characterizing its gradual transformation.

As method, this scheme is of interest for addressing the problem of bracketing: We can move in steps through the intermediary cases, in each case weighing similarities of the material record against differences. Still, this strategy alone seems insufficient to resuscitate falsifiability. Between key steps in the argument in *Domestication*, differences appear to outweigh similarities. An important example is the later Neolithic of Central Europe, when highly visible longhouses disappear and long burial mounds make an appearance. It is only if the primary archaeological manifestation of the domus at this point can be transferred from longhouse to burial mound that there is any hope of claiming all the diverse contexts considered to be manifestations of a single symbolic structure. The idea that the form of the burial mounds referenced that of longhouses goes back at least to V. Gordon Childe, and it was the subject of an earlier article by Hodder.[37]

The reassessment of that article in *Domestication* ends on a distressing note. Certainly, there are many points of similarity between the longhouses and tombs, and it appears that "the jury is still out" on the issue of direct inspiration. However, Hodder ultimately downplays (without necessarily abandoning) the argument of deliberate referencing. His new proposal is that the later burial mounds resemble earlier longhouses because they each derive from the same symbolic structure. In other words, he finds a lower-level interpretive construct (direct copying of house form in the construction of tombs) to be unstable in the face of the evidence. He therefore suggests explaining similarity of form by shifting to a higher-level construct (a long-term symbolic structure) that is inherently more difficult to identify in manifest appearances than its lower-level counterpart.[38]

If we posit that the same structure was operative in both cases, then the similarity of form makes sense because each could have been derived independently from the shared structure. Why do the highly abstract claims about structure appear to have sufficient stability to explain these similar-but-different archaeological cases? Because the cases are already bracketed by a larger-scale argument of structural continuity – an argument that begins to resemble one of essential sameness.

Here, then, is a new manifestation of analytical essentialism. The early and late Neolithic of Central Europe have become intermediary cases in which basic structural similarity is the default analytical assumption. Why does the shift from early to late Neolithic in Central Europe not mark the end of the domus? Because it was already decided that the domus continues farther to the northwest in later time periods. Falsifiability again has been compromised.

A contextualist approach to grand history modeled on Hodder's *Domestication of Europe* addresses the problem of theoretical essentialism and, with that, much of figurine analysts' concerns about this category of inquiry. Analytical essentialism, however, represents a lingering challenge, one that I address in Chapter 6. The question is: Once we embark on an analysis tracing the propagation of a symbolic structure across vast reaches of space and time, how do we know when to stop?

It is in part because contextualist theory fails to solve the problem of analytical essentialism that I restrict the term *context* to relatively small scales of space and time. I thus identify the analytical challenge of grand history as the decision of whether to link contexts. This choice is attractive

because it facilitates a holistic archaeology in which we no longer begin with an absolute divide between historicism and universalism. Cross-*cultural* comparison is not segregated as a special form of analysis; rather, it becomes one modality of cross-*contextual* comparison.

The Interpenetration of Contextualism and Universalism

The idea of applying contextualist principles to universalist inquiry, at first glance, may seem hopeless. There are legitimate reasons to think of contextualist and universalist approaches as opposed to each other. They have different topics of emphasis; they make use of different sorts of logic; and they draw on different criteria to evaluate knowledge claims. Still, many archaeologists today are receptive to the idea that both approaches are useful, and Roy Dilley's suggestion that contextualism and universalism are related in a dialectical tension is attractive.

For the interpretation of prehistoric figurines, I propose to treat universalism and contextualism as reciprocally dependent sets of analytical tools. The domain of universalist explanation can be advanced realistically only by enlisting a contextualist approach to comparison. Likewise, the contextual interpretation of individual collections regularly draws on universalist logic, which must be recognized and evaluated as such.

Context in the Service of Universalism

The reciprocal dependencies between universalism and contextualism emerge most clearly when we step back from debates over which features of our objects of study are most important (e.g., similarities or differences) and recognize the analysis of figurines as a rhetorical process. Both approaches actually presuppose the same outcome – the textual exposition of an argument designed to convince. Although the arguments take different forms, they are in each case built up by beginning with observations of figurines and moving toward statements about ancient societies. Each approach to the interpretation of figurines faces characteristic hurdles in the process of developing a convincing argument. Within each approach, those hurdles can be (or have been) addressed by enlisting resources from the other approach.

Explicit, universalist hypotheses concerning prehistoric figurines are rare and the results disappointing. One might well ask: Can we actually do without them? I am not inclined to reject categorically any analytical approach. In a holistic archaeology, it seems wise to keep our options open. Furthermore, universalist logic is regularly woven into contextualist studies. Those strands of logic are convincing only to the extent that they (occasionally) face empirical scrutiny on universalist terms. We should therefore maintain the category of universalist hypothesizing even if all hypotheses ever proffered are eventually rejected.

As discussed in Chapter 1, implicitly universalist suggestions – concerning, for instance, why prehistoric figurines are recurringly female – abound. They prove difficult to convincingly test, in large part because theory constitutes evidence so much in its favor that falsifiability is compromised. A major part of the problem for the case of figurines is that universalist hypotheses are framed in social terms, whereas we think there might be a common explanation because we observe similarities among archaeological patterns. It is in the process of reformulating material patterns into social terms that falsifiability is compromised. Furthermore, when we start from observed material similarities, the social terms that we select usually set us up to "discover" a common explanation. We end up privileging similarities over differences and assuming that a common explanation must exist.

Enlisting contextualist strategies of comparison addresses some of those problems. Contextualist principles require that one possible outcome of the effort to formulate a common social explanation for material similarities must be that there is no common explanation. The strategy of building up from local contextualizations keeps open that possibility because we are directed to weigh similarities against differences. In Chapter 4, my renewed effort at cross-cultural explanation draws on both of these contextualist themes.

Universalism in the Service of Contextual Interpretation

Universalism needs contextualism, but I would contend that contextualism also needs universalism. Given the cultural specificity of contexts, the latter seems a difficult case to make – until we consider interpretation as a rhetorical process. Whether or not ancient social contexts were each unique, it is most assuredly the case that archaeologists' interpretations of those contexts are not unique. Individual interpretive texts belong to larger genres, and contextual interpretations are justified, in part, through cross-references to other interpretive texts. Furthermore, the range of questions that analysts pose of their materials and then attempt to answer is not infinite, and each question has only a finite number of analytically interesting responses. Finally, we label objects "figurines" because they share certain formal traits. If we further consider that the images in question are often small and rather schematic, then it is perhaps not surprising that figurines from unrelated contexts regularly have properties in common – for example, formal qualities or contexts of recovery – beyond those minimal properties that render them "figurines." Contextual interpretation thus involves asking a finite number of questions – each with a finite number of possible responses – of objects that share material properties. One result is a convergence of interpretations.

For example, anthropomorphic figurines often bear no obvious traits that allow them to be sexed. Investigators faced with such figures tend to ask a similar series of questions. Were these just "humans," gender unspecified, or could there be subtle clues of dress or hairstyle that would actually have allowed them to be readily assigned to a gender category? Alternatively, could they have been "sexed" by the absence of sexual attributes; that is, are they a third gender? Could they be children or sexless supernatural creatures? The possibilities are clearly numerous but not infinite. Investigators who scrutinize different contexts regularly account for sexless figures in similar ways.

In Chapter 3, I explore the issue of convergence among interpretations to develop a final tool for the comparative analysis of figurines. The point here is that interpretations of prehistoric figurines mutually implicate one another. In such circumstances, the use of universalist logic in contextualist interpretations has significant larger implications. I introduce the topic with a critique of my own previous work.

My first paper on figurines dealt with the Paso de la Amada collection discussed previously (see Figures 7 and 11). During the period 1700–1300 B.C., two basic representations recurred. The most common images were standing, nude females. I interpreted them as depictions of young, marriageable women. The other category consisted of obese, masked anthropomorphs, perhaps elders garbed so as to emphasize their ritual roles in community life. I emphasized what I considered a consistent irony among the images. Figurine artists depicted the youthful women without arms, as if they were incapable of action. The seated, obese, and seemingly passive "elders" were shown with both arms and hands (see Figure 11). Yet, surely reality would have been different, with young women (and men) vigorously active and elders more passive? Perhaps, I speculated, this seeming paradox among the figurines reflected an ideological claim by elders that privileged their own spiritual activities over the labor of the young. Depiction of elders with and young women

without hands was a reminder that the productive labor of the young, although necessary, was but a feeble contribution compared to the ritual knowledge and ceremonial ministrations of the elders.

My reading, although speculative, still seems plausible. I went further, however, to ask why "young women" and "elders" but not "young men"? To answer that question, I noted the similarity of the gerontocratic ideology proposed for the figurines with Jane Collier's "equal bridewealth" model of social relations in small-scale agricultural societies.[39] Iconographic patterns among the figurines seemed to reflect the gerontocratic ideology of the model and therefore provided grounds for supposing that other features of the model – related to the ideology but unobservable archaeologically – also would have been present.

In particular, Collier's derivation of the ideology from social relations surrounding marriage hinted at an explanation for the absence of "young men" among the Paso de la Amada figurines. In Collier's model, the right of women's kin to give women away in marriage causes young men to rely on their elders for help in acquiring wives.[40] If young women in ancient Soconusco were given away in marriage exchanges among kin groups, then perhaps it is not surprising that people made images of young women without arms and elders engaged in the ritual activities that validated their authority. Furthermore, elders might have been interested in calling attention more to their relationships with young women than with young men because the latter would have been forced to come to the elders of their own accord to seek help in obtaining a wife. Household rituals thus ignored young men and focused on the indebtedness of young women to their elders.

My proposed explanation for the missing representations of young men was perhaps clever but, in retrospect, it is unacceptable. Figurine making was widespread in Formative Mesoamerica, in what were plausibly "equal bridewealth" societies; therefore, my logic should apply in those cases as well. Yet, some of the empirical patterns incorporated in my argument are widespread (such as the prevalence of young women and the absence of young men), whereas others are restricted entirely to Paso de la Amada – particularly the presence of arms on seated, fat figures and their absence on standing females. The lack of this last trait in other assemblages is of particular concern because the implied irony was a linchpin in my argument, justifying the claim that the figurines' messages were nakedly political. This provided grounds for the one evidential link between the archaeological case and Collier's model: the appearance of a gerontocratic ideology. I explained one instance of a widespread pattern through recourse to a universalist model but justified the link between pattern and model with a narrowly local set of attributes. I did not consider the implications of the convoluted linkages I was making between generalities and specifics.

The Paso de la Amada paper can now be identified as an example of the analysis of figurines as a "window on society": I suggested that the subject matter of the figures provided a window on ideological struggles and social tensions. Other analysts, working with different collections of Formative figurines, also have followed a window-on-society approach. They also tend to draw on some universalist formulation as a key step in the interpretive reformulation of archaeological patterns in social terms. The problem is that the universalist logic in case after case, as in my Paso de la Amada study, has unexamined expansive implications in that it should apply all across Formative Mesoamerica – and yet, no two analysts choose the same universalism.

As we have seen, context-specific interpretation requires general categories. Nevertheless, those categories are regarded as *unstable* – to be altered, discomfited, or reinterpreted in confrontation with local specificity. Categories of that type appear in the contextual interpretations of figurines, but those are not the issue here. In my Paso de la Amada study (and others discussed in Chapter 5), the universalist logic is stable in confrontation with local material patterns that are unstable

and difficult to interpret. The stability afforded by the claim that similar social patterns hold elsewhere is actually what makes interpretation possible.

Given the diversity of Formative figurines, it is plausible that the social interpretation in one context should look different from that in another. However, if we choose different universalist formulations for each interpretation, we risk undermining their universality – the feature that justified their application in the first place. Therefore, when a contextualist study draws on universalist logic to make sense of archaeological remains in social terms, how do we evaluate the results? I examine this issue in Chapter 5.

Toward Comparison

My topic is the comparison of prehistoric figurines from different contexts. The objects may be physically similar, or they may turn up in similar archaeological contexts, but surely they had different meanings. The issues are: Should our interpretations explain the similarities, and, if so, what form should those explanations take? An early approach to the perception that prehistoric figurines were recurringly female identified the images as goddesses and explained them as expressions of a primitive psychology. In such work, universalist and grand-historicist logics were often woven together into accounts that were impervious to falsification and ignored context.

As archaeology developed in theoretical sophistication, distinctions between universalist and historicist logics became more systematic, and self-conscious procedures for hypothesis testing and contextualization were developed. For a while, these conceptual tools coalesced into two hostile camps, but it seems possible now to treat both processual and interpretive archaeologies as valuable sources of conceptual tools. Even given the tendency of theory to constitute evidence in its own favor, the testing procedures developed in processual archaeology prove heuristically useful. The strategy of contextualization developed in interpretive archaeology promises to address some of the persistent problems with comparisons across contexts. Although contextualism and universalism are alternative approaches to explanation that often seem to be in tension, a pragmatic stance allows us to avoid partisanship. We can focus on the practical challenge of devising satisfying explanations of figurines and drawing on either contextualism or universalism, as appropriate, in a particular stage of analysis or area of inquiry.

In addition to the foregoing, another resource proves important in addressing the problem of cross-contextual comparison of figurines. I develop that resource in Chapter 3 by building on the considerations of rhetoric introduced here. The starting point is the observation that figurines from two different contexts in fact may be similar.

Chapter 3

The Questions We Ask of Images

Figurines from different contexts may be physically similar or they may resemble one another as assemblages. For instance, contexts of recovery may be similar or predominant themes may be shared. The question I am pursuing is how – or whether – such observations should affect our social interpretations. The challenge is to reformulate material similarities into social terms without overburdening them so heavily with partisan theory that our conclusions are from that point foreordained and archaeological evidence no longer matters. Our newly acquired contextualist strategy prompts us to begin by considering the resemblant traits in their original contexts, in interplay with other traits. We would then compare the resulting contextualizations. It is a promising strategy, but the way forward still seems difficult. Let us therefore jump to the end-products of analyses. Sometimes the social interpretations of similar figurines from unrelated contexts resemble one another. Is it possible to identify the source of such convergence?

Let us consider a specific case. Five papers find that prehistoric figurines from different time periods in different parts of the world depict women at different stages of their lives.[1] Patricia Rice argues that figurines of the European Paleolithic "represent women of different ages in proportion to their probable actual frequency in the population." According to Avi Gopher and Estelle Orrelle, Yarmukian pebble figurines from the Southern Levant some twelve millennia later comprise a record of age differences among females "from girlhood up to perhaps menopause." The figures marked "events and rites of passage" in the lives of females. I previously described Costanza Di Capua's suggestion that Valdivia figurines – three thousand years after the Yarmukian and on the other side of the globe – reflect "particular ritual and symbolic acts" pertaining to "the successive stages in physical development of the human female" from preadolescent to fully adult. I also have already discussed Rosemary Joyce's conclusion that Playa de los Muertos figurines of the first millennium B.C. on the Atlantic coast of Honduras, some 2,000 km to the northwest of Valdivia, depicted "transitions in age, perhaps primarily of sexually female subjects" from childhood to adult. Finally, from the same epoch and still in Mesoamerica but another 1,000 km to the west and north is Chalcatzingo, where Ann Cyphers finds figurines that depict "the fertile stages of the female lifecycle," including "puberty, stages of pregnancy . . . and childrearing."

The convergence of interpretation in these diverse contexts is not prompted by specific theories of social life or positions taken by the authors in debates among culture historians, processualists, or interpretivists. Rice's paper – with its insistence on replication of results by independent observers and its notion that art is a distorted reflection of "reality" – is naïvely processual. Joyce, in contrast, wholeheartedly embraces the categorical instability of interpretivist theory. The other three are eclectic mixes of theoretical strands not so readily classifiable in general terms but without any single shared source of inspiration.

The convergence is not the result of theory. It occurs because the five analysts ask the same question of the figurines (What do they depict?), which their iconographic observations prompt them to answer in similar ways.[2] Approaching interpretation from different theoretical perspectives, they all nevertheless inquire into what the figurines depict – because that is a question prompted by the nature of the material. Here is the domain in which to construct a framework for comparison in figurine studies: analytical questions prompted not by specific interpretive theories but rather by the fact that figurines are images.

A Framework for Comparison

Figurines are iconic objects – that is, they resemble something else. As representations, they prompt similar sorts of questions from analysts, irrespective of theoretical orientation. What are those questions? The discipline that must be consulted is clearly art history, but there we find a bewildering range of possible foci including subject matter, period, intentions of the artist, and expectations of the audience. There is considerable hand-wringing over the concept of "style": whether it is properly applied to individuals, groups, or periods; whether it is synchronic or diachronic; and whether it is a central disciplinary concern or a hopelessly compromised concept that should be discarded altogether.[3] There also is an extensive literature introducing semiotic, poststructuralist, and postmodern perspectives to the analysis of art.[4]

In the midst of this cacophony, a brief article by George Kubler is of particular interest.[5] Kubler acknowledges disputes between "technicists and connoisseurs, formalists and iconographers, historians and semiologists . . . humanists and scientists" but senses, in this multiplicity of competing voices, a potential for complementarity. Recurrent disputes signal analytical fracture points, divides between different perspectives in art history. If we look past these disputes, perhaps we can see the different perspectives behind them as additive, in that together they provide a fuller picture of our subject. Kubler diagrams that subject by proposing three fundamental categories (shape, meaning, and time), each with an "infrastructural" and "superstructural" manifestation (Figure 16). The result is six dimensions: craft and format (shape), signage and modus (meaning), and period and sequence (time). "This triadic pairing," he claims, "accounts for all essential characteristics of works of visual art, when they are considered as anonymous products by craftsmen working within inherited collective traditions."

Kubler's sense that analytical perspectives might be legitimately different yet complementary and that recurrent disputes might signal significant rhetorical divides is inspiring. His interest in anonymous craftsmen is also well suited for prehistoric investigations. Shortly, I too produce a "triadic pairing" of analytical modes; however, the details of my framework diverge from those of Kubler's. In particular, his infrastructure/superstructure divide seems of limited analytical relevance.

A more productive division is to be found in Erwin Panofsky's framework for investigating the subject matter of artworks. Panofsky distinguished between *iconography*, the identification of conventional subjects, and *iconology*, a deeper level of analysis that reveals symbols, attitudes,
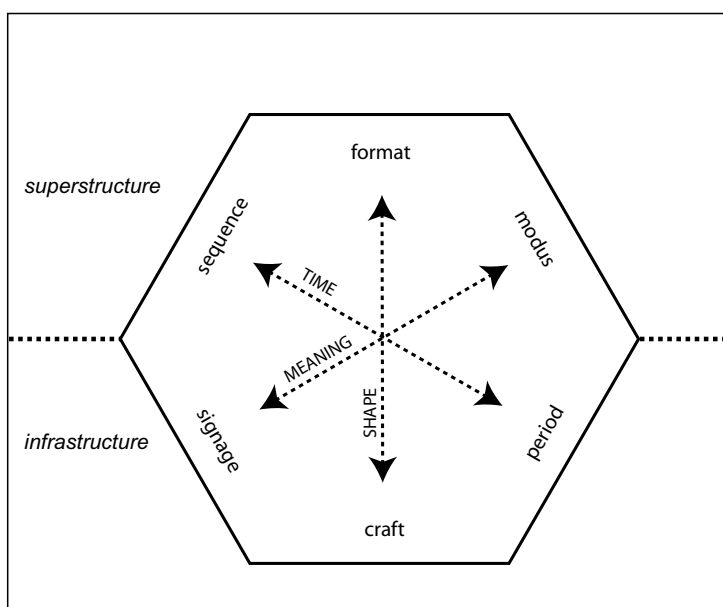
Figure 16. George Kubler's six dimensions of visual style. Diagram by Lesure, after Kubler (1985: 421).

dispositions, and cultural principles not necessarily recognized by the artist.[6] In Panofsky's scheme, these constitute distinct levels of art-historical analysis. Likewise, T. J. Clark, in laying out the goals of a social history of art, noted that although we might "start from" the "immediate conditions of artistic production and perception" such as patronage, sales, and criticism, the idea is to move toward a deeper analysis of the interconnections among form, pictorial traditions, historically specific theories of art, ideologies, class relations, and "more general historical structures and processes."[7] Again, we have two levels of analysis but, in this case, in the study of social context rather than subject matter.

Drawing on these art historical sources and on my own previous rhetorical analysis of interpretations of prehistoric figurines[8] – and setting aside connoisseurship and the life histories of individual artists as irrelevant for the study of prehistoric figurines – I propose that scholars interpreting images face two key analytical decisions. Those decisions, and their intersection, map out divergent understandings of how images signify (Figure 17). The first decision concerns the accessibility of signification to the original users: Is the significance of images a surface phenomenon easily accessible to discursive formulation, or a structural phenomenon not routinely formulated discursively? In other words, is the significance in which we are interested something people would readily tell us if we were to travel back in time and ask them? Or are we after something deeper, something that – even if recognized by the original makers and users – might have been difficult to put into words? The second decision concerns the location analytically accorded to significance: Should it be treated as an autonomous system of ideas referenced by the images (subject matter); as deriving from the objects (form); or as emerging from the social circumstances in which the objects were produced, used, and exchanged (social context)?

	Analytical decision #2: Significance derives from...		
Analytical decision #1: The significance of images is...	subject matter	form	social context
a surface phenomenon	*What did the image depict?* **(iconography)**	*How did the figure's form relate to objects in circulation at its time of manufacture?* **(synchronic stylistic analysis)**	*What was the image used for?* **(analysis of use)**
a structural phenomenon	*What symbolic implications did the subject matter have?* **(iconology or symbolic analysis)**	*How was the figure's form determined by its position in a sequence of changing forms?* **(diachronic stylistic analysis)**	*How did the image express or even constitute social relations?* **(social analysis)**

Figure 17. A "map" of the possibilities for interpreting prehistoric images. Responses to two basic analytical decisions create a matrix of six possibilities. A characteristic question corresponds to each cell of the matrix (in italics). Efforts to respond to those questions can be identified as distinctive analytical modes (in bold).

The intersection of these two decisions produces a kind of triadic pairing similar in structure to the scheme proposed by Kubler, with six resulting perspectives on the signification of images. By constituting significance differently, each perspective poses different questions of images, as suggested in Figure 17. Regarding significance as a surface phenomenon, we might locate it in social circumstances and ask: "What was the intended purpose of the image?" Alternatively, if we regard significance as a system of ideas referenced by the images, we would ask an iconographic question: "What did the image depict?" The questions change when we shift from a "surface" to a "structural" conception of signification. Behind the manifest subject of an image are layers of iconological significance, which may be felt or sensed rather than explicitly or even consciously formulated. Likewise, the investigation of social circumstances, as noted by Clark, moves beyond the immediate circumstances of production, use, and exchange to the structural analysis of social relations.

The middle column in Figure 17 addresses significance that emerges from the *form* of an image, as it relates to the form of other images, irrespective of subject matter. A long tradition in art history attempts to grasp that significance with the concept of style. Given the protracted debates about style noted previously, with their numerous fracture points, it is not as easy in this case to identify questions characteristic of surface and structural approaches to signification. A single, classically stylistic question of form might be thought of as covering both cases: "Why does an image take the particular form that it does?" Still, various themes from the literature on style echo my distinction between significance that readily can be put into words and that which resists discursive formulation. Style signifies through senses, intuitions, and "the emotional suggestiveness of forms."[9] Styles of individual artists consist of "acquired disposition[s]" that are "not just psychological, but psychophysical."[10] Occasionally in the art-historical literature and

regularly in archaeological writings, a contrast is drawn between active and passive manifestations of style.[11] That tension conceivably could be identified with the surface-versus-structure distinction I seek to make here. The distinction between active and passive style, however, does not involve the posing of fundamentally different questions.

A different formulation, inspired by Kubler's pairing of period and sequence, is more analytically productive. We can ask the "surface" question of how the form of an image was related to others in its period of manufacture, a question that will prompt us to inquire into both active stylistic displays and the emotional suggestiveness of forms. Or, we can ask the "structural" question of how the form of an object was the result of a long sequence of gradually changing forms, a sequence typically sensed only vaguely or not at all by the original users of the images.

One of the claims behind Figure 17 is that although the significance of images can be conceived in different ways, it is possible to identify the sources of that divergence and to imagine that, collectively, the perspectives might add up to a more complete understanding. To explore the full significance of an image, we would tour all the cells of the table. A second point is that the different perspectives correspond to *analytical* divisions in that each can be associated with a set of questions prompted by the nature of images – questions, in other words, toward which analysts gravitate no matter what their theoretical orientation.

It is therefore possible to identify a distinct *analytical mode* associated with each perspective: a characteristic set of questions along with strategies for answering them through appeal to empirical evidence. The modes are identified in Figure 18 – framed, as before, by the analytical decisions concerning significance but organized hexagonally rather than as cells in a table. These modes are not to be conceived of in the narrow sense of "how to analyze a particular class of data" but rather in an expansive sense acknowledging that each addresses a different dimension of the significance of images. In a later section, I comment briefly on each mode. First, however, it is necessary to ask: Just how stable is this framework as a basis for developing linking arguments in the interpretation of prehistoric figurines?

Stability of the Framework

I aspire to develop strategies for reformulating observed similarities among figurines into the social terms from which an interpretation can be constructed while maintaining some possibility for the evidence to resist the imposition of theory. The conceptual resources culled from processual and interpretive archaeologies in Chapters 1 and 2 are important, but my hopes really center on the framework described in the previous section. Although there is still an important step in making the framework into a scheme with practical analytical utility, it seems useful to pause briefly to consider just how reliable the scheme might be.

Allison Wylie identifies two important sources of stability in linking arguments: the *security* of the knowledge used to establish inferential links, and the *independence* of such background knowledge from the interpretive conclusions.[12] The framework of Figure 17 is substantially independent of the theories that figurine analysts characteristically bring to bear on their material, a claim bolstered by instances of interpretive convergence noted in the beginning of this chapter. The security of the framework is less clear. For Wylie, an important dimension of security is the credibility of imported theories in their field of origin. Security in that sense would appear to be a problem here because no art historian (to my knowledge) has formulated the significance of images in precisely the form of Figure 17. Furthermore, the formulations that art historians have produced all differ
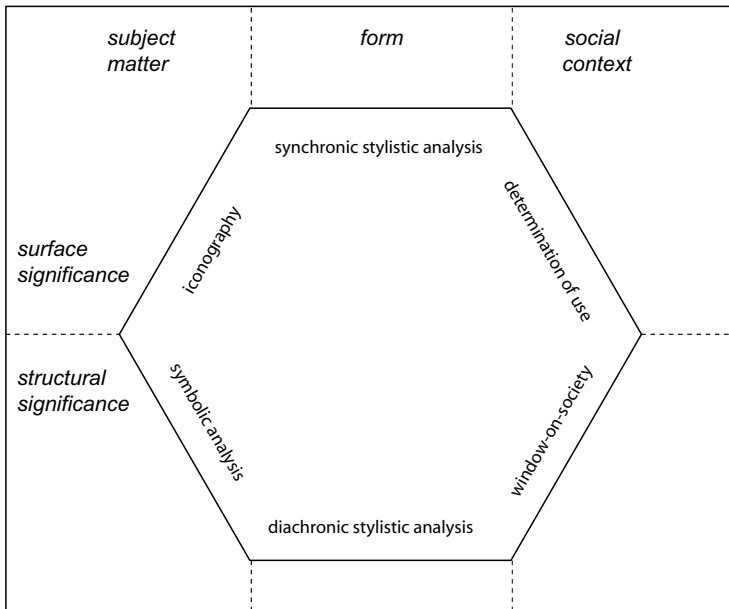
Figure 18. Analytical modes from Figure 17, arranged in a hexagon.

from one another. Finally, many of the most current interpretive trends in art history – feminism, semiotics, and postcolonialism – are in fact imports to art history itself and, in some cases, derive from the same theoretical sources currently popular in the interpretation of prehistoric figurines.[13] Thus, an attempt to build *security* by borrowing the most manifestly "credible" approaches from recent art history – those that elicit the most current interest – would compromise *independence*.

Art history is not in any simple way a source of credible linking arguments. There is no sense in looking for a single, uniquely reliable theory of the signification of images. However, Kubler's attention to chronic divisions among formalists, iconographers, and so forth opens up an alternative strategy. We should look for recurring sources of tension – divisions across which arguments exasperatingly recur; divisions that theorists repeatedly strive to overcome, undermine, or decenter with results that inevitably prove unsatisfactory. The inference we would draw is that something real in the texture of how images signify lies behind those divisions, even if no account of that texture ever satisfies scholars for long. The credibility (in Wylie's sense) of any such particular account deployed as background knowledge in the interpretation of figurines would be modest, even equivocal, but the prospects for security seem better than if we were to import "current" theory that was itself a recent import to art history.

Given this context, my decision to reach back to Kubler, Panofsky, and Clark may seem more reasonable. Also, my classification of divergent approaches to signification – although it will surely be as ephemeral in its specificity as any other such scheme has proven to be – does capture recurring sources of tension, particularly in the columns of Figure 17, which correspond (from left to right) to subject matter, form, and social context.[14] The distinction between surface and structure as corresponding to distinct modes of analysis is made less pervasively by art historians, but Panofsky's explicit formulation is justly famous.

Although the distinctions and cleavages on which the classification is based have some claim to stability in the sense that I propose, they have been (and no doubt will continue to be) synthesized in different ways. Michael Ann Holly, in an early work, suggested that the levels of Panofsky's framework (with the addition of the "pre-iconographic" level discussed later) collectively "teach us how to read images."[15] Her scheme involves an expansion of the scope of iconology to cover everything on the lower row of Figure 17. In my opinion, both Holly's proposal and Kubler's scheme (see Figure 16) shortchange the social history of art. Kubler also lumps both iconography and iconology into "signage," a category that is then disproportionately weighty in relation to modus ("one of a variety of manners selected by the artist according to the content needing expression," such as the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders for columns[16]).

Kubler's scheme is particularly attentive to subtle modalities of form that would all fall in the middle column of Figure 17: formal choices related to content (modus), enduring means of presentation such as the canvas or the scroll (format), and relations among objects in a temporal series (sequence). In this sense, David Summers's *Real Spaces* can be seen as an updating and expansion of Kubler's suggestions.[17] Summers builds up a phenomenological dimension that is not prominent in Figure 17. He identifies people's immediate and actual engagements with objects in "real spaces" (subsumed under "use" in my classification) as comprising the foundation of a world art history divorced from Eurocentric assumptions. Whether or not the concept of real spaces achieves a separation from Eurocentric foundations is debatable,[18] but there is one significant practical disadvantage to Summers's approach. By placing original spatial settings that no longer exist and that remain uncertainly understood at the core of signification, the scheme favors generalized and speculative interpretive accounts. Thus, whereas the phenomenological emphasis is of theoretical interest, Summers's approach is not promising as a source of security for linking arguments.

Throughout, Summers draws extensively on iconography/iconology without giving that dimension of meaning much critical attention. The focus of his efforts is a vastly expanded lexicon of modalities of form that go well beyond Kubler's distinctions such as modus and format. From the standpoint of alternative conceptualizations in art history, I suspect that a source of dissatisfaction with my proposed framework will be that I have lumped a great deal of complexity in the middle column of Figure 17 ("form").

A Brief Tour of the Analytical Modes

Although all the analytical modes identified in Figures 17 and 18 provide valuable insight, my strategy for comparison entails weighing the prospects of the different modes in particular instances. I build toward that scheme in the following comments on each mode. Interpretive moves of interest for the study of figurines are sketched with reference to a culturally eclectic range of historical and contemporary cases in which a rich array of evidence allows for stronger conclusions than anything possible in the prehistoric cases discussed in Chapters 4 through 6.[19]

Iconography

Analysis in iconographic mode asks what images were intended to represent. Much archaeological work on figurines is concerned only with the first of three levels of analysis in Panofsky's scheme – that is, pre-iconographical description. This initial step involves identifying elements of an image

and assigning them to "natural" categories – for example, that is a human hand resting on a thigh; over there is a human torso with a bird's head. A full iconographic analysis moves beyond such questions to identify conventional themes and probe their further connotations.[20] Given the importance of textual evidence to iconographic studies in art history, it is not surprising that prehistoric cases can be frustrating. Investigators are often limited to characterizing subject matter in a general way. For instance, were the referents of the images understood to be deities, ancestors, or particular individuals?

Iconographic clues in the image may point to a specific or more generalized human subject. By *specific subject*, I have in mind a figure that the original users would have identified by name – a particular deity, a culture hero, a character of legend or myth – and which can be thought of as existing apart from the representation itself (even if that "existence" is mythical). The alternative, a generalized human subject, lacks any such specific referent. For example, the human figures in seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings are "types" rather than nameable individuals: a quack doctor, a cobbler, a woman spinning thread, a peasant family (Figure 19).

If the image under consideration had a specific subject, the move from pre-iconographic to fully iconographic analysis is particularly important. When we are dealing with prehistoric imagery, finding support for a claim that there was *some* specific subject can be a triumph. Sometimes artists provide visual clues, or *attributes*, to encourage recognition of a subject – for example, St. Simon is distinguished by a saw, St. Sebastian by the arrows emerging from his body (see Figure 1). The masks of katsina dolls from the Hopi villages of Arizona are crowded with identifying attributes. Colton assembled an elaborate key, consisting of forty-three cross-referenced tables, as an aid to identification of the specific subjects depicted.[21] Among masks with horns on the side of the head, the White Ogre is distinguished by white paint, a big snout, and a crow's foot on the forehead, whereas the mask of Ho-ó-te is black, with a medium snout and a moon on one cheek.

Although the use of what I refer to as "attributes in the art-historical sense" varies by culture and epoch, the presence of such coding may be helpful in characterizing the subject matter of images even when specific referents remain obscure.[22] The referents of katsina dolls, for example, are somewhat complicated. Katsinas are spirits who allow themselves to be impersonated by Hopi men in a yearly cycle of rituals. Small-scale representations of the spirits are, most immediately, depictions of the impersonators. A specific original intent of the dolls was to teach children to recognize the impersonator/spirits.[23] As a result, the use of attributes (in the art-historical sense) in this case is obvious. An archaeologist presented only with the dolls would probably be able to characterize them generally as depictions of specific mythological entities and might even gain some sense of the impersonator/spirit relationship.

Another iconographic consideration is whether a specific narrative is being referenced. Recurring attention to particular items of clothing, elaborate gestures, contrived postures, or specific activities can provide important clues. For instance, even if we knew nothing of the stories behind images such as Laocoön and his sons tangled up with snakes, Christ nailed to a cross, or Brahma floating on a lotus plant above the sleeping Vishnu, we would be able to surmise the existence of *some* such narratives.

In contrast, a generalized subject emerges as a possibility when iconographic analysis is largely exhausted in the pre-iconographical stage (in which natural categories such as "man on a donkey" and "woman collecting clams" are recognized). Hints of complex narrative or coding strategies conducive to the identification of particular subjects would be absent. If the images were intended to be recognized as generalized social types, we would expect a certain degree of naturalism – enough to promote recognition of their "social" qualities – and, furthermore, some sort of variation

Figure 19. Adriaen van Ostade, *The Cottage Dooryard*, 1673. Oil on canvas, 44 by 39.5 cm. Widener collection. Image courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

among the images understandable as variations in the way people look, the things they do, and so forth.

In summary, I am arguing in iconographic mode for a scrutiny of human images for clues that might allow a basic characterization of subject matter. Do we seem to have generalized depictions of "people" or do repeated traits or arresting details insist that we contemplate more specific subjects? By art-historical standards, the question seems crude; however, with prehistoric materials, a convincing answer would constitute significant progress.

It is useful to consider some complications. Images may depict specific subjects but bear no identifying "attributes." The Lega of the Democratic Republic of the Congo use anthropomorphic figurines of wood, ivory, or bone in initiation rituals. The images depict named mythological characters, yet many lack formal clues identifying them as a specific subject.[24] Still, in this case, careful observation of the objects in context would probably lead an analyst to suspect specific
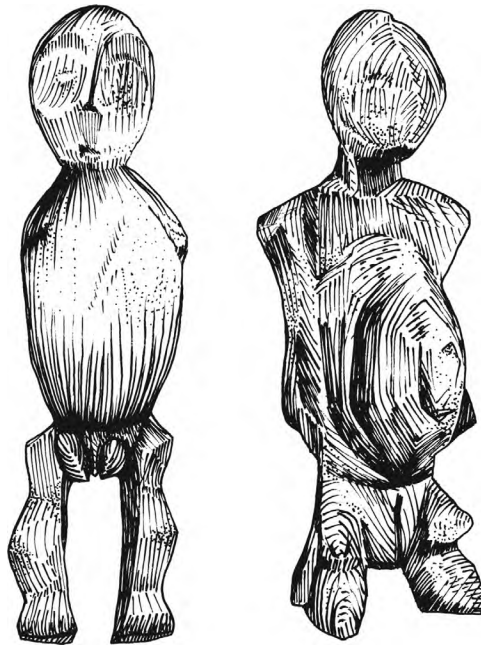
Figure 20. Two Lega wooden figurines (Democratic Republic of the Congo), both images of Wayinda, a woman guilty of adultery during pregnancy. In this case, the distended belly serves as an attribute promoting recognition of the specific subject matter. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after Biebuyck 1973:Plates 67 and 68)

subjects even in the absence of ethnographic information.[25] First, some characters are actually depicted with "attributes" that promote identification. Wayinda, a woman guilty of adultery during pregnancy, is depicted with distended abdomen and genitalia (Figure 20). Other characters are depicted by images with, for example, one arm or multiple faces. Our imagined analyst would note that schematization discourages any effort to identify social types and that some features do suggest attributes. Contextual information would reveal that the figures were carefully curated among sets of diverse objects, including shells, tusks, seedpods, and pieces of wood. Differential patination, damage and continued use, and – in some cases – evidence of material periodically scraped from the backs of the figures would suggest long-term use. We would be led to characterize the figurines as important ritual objects displayed either in isolation or with different sorts of objects; we might well then correctly surmise specific subjects assigned as much in microtraditions associated with individual objects as in the formal qualities of the works.

If the recognition of specific subjects can be a challenge, my suggestion that iconographic analyses of artworks composed of generalized human subjects "end" in the pre-iconographic stage also is overly simplified, as even the briefest glimpse into studies of Dutch genre painting reveals. Individual figures in these paintings are composed into recurring, conventional scenes – merry companies, street scenes, domestic life of the family – that take on meaning as specific subjects. Furthermore, details in the paintings can be productively subjected to iconographic analysis. In van Ostade's *The Cottage Dooryard* (Figure 19), William Robinson points out that the vine clinging to the house was probably "an image of fertility and conjugal felicity" inspired by Psalm 128.[26]

Panofsky's notion of "disguised symbolism" – in which what would appear to be ordinary objects carry larger symbolic meanings – has helped spur ambitious symbolic interpretation of Dutch genre paintings.[27]

Iconology or Symbolic Analysis

Shifting from surface to structural focus but with attention still on subject matter, we move from iconography to iconology. The suggestion is that images signify more than simply what they depict; manifest subject matter evokes emotions, ideas, and symbols. Panofsky identified this perspective as an analytical mode beyond the iconographic stage: "the discovery and interpretation of these 'symbolical' values (which are often unknown to the artist himself and may emphatically differ from what he consciously intended to express) is the object of what we may call 'iconology' as opposed to 'iconography.'"[28]

I refer more often to symbolic analysis than iconology, but I consider the two interchangeable. My use of *symbol* is meant to recall symbolic anthropology and the Geertzian goal of "thick description." Thus, I am departing from the current vogue of Peirce's typology of signs, in which *symbol* is applied more narrowly.[29] The "symbolism" pursued in thick description as well as in Panofsky's iconology is more useful for my purposes than Peirce's contrasts among symbol, icon, and index.

Symbolism has an equivocal reputation in the study of prehistoric art. A few analysts charge in with great enthusiasm, whereas many others shun the topic altogether. Those who make the attempt identify prominent themes, symbols, or networks thereof in the worldview of the people who created the artworks in question, with the imagery treated as clue to or symptom of those more abstract ideas. An iconographic analysis is the place to begin, but some information in addition to the objects themselves is essential. The textual records of later periods may provide grounds for identifying specific linkages among ideas in earlier, prehistoric settings. Some analysts draw symbolic interpretations from analogy to unrelated societies. For instance, Haaland and Haaland built a symbolic interpretation of prehistoric figurines by appealing to human universals, to ways of thinking said to be typical of early agricultural villages, to the structural entailments of different kinds of social formation, and to particular ethnographies that provide glimpses of the symbolic richness of real systems.[30] Hodder, by contrast, has sought to reconstruct systems of symbols through recurring associations of artifacts in archaeological context. For example, if images of women are found in houses, then "woman" and "house" were linked concepts.[31]

I focus on one dimension of the many that comprise symbolic analysis, formulated as a proposition. We can specify certain empirical conditions in which claims concerning cultural themes or key symbols are likely to be strong. If the themes or symbols in question were socially important, we would expect people to have appealed to them in a variety of situations. Furthermore, images referencing them would have had a multiplicity of purposes and contexts of use. The archaeological result is likely to be different sorts of artworks bearing similar imagery. The works would vary in material properties. They might be made in diverse media or appear in different archaeological contexts, in association with artifacts of various functions. However, *imagery* would be consistent across functional classes, indicating that similar themes or symbols were being referenced in a variety of circumstances.

Arguments revealing disguised symbolism in Dutch genre painting draw on a related logic, although the contextual relations among figures and elements within the paintings themselves are

equally if not more important.[32] In this case, images may recur in words as well as on canvas. Textual sources (such as sermons) and text/image combinations (such as emblems) constitute recurrences of the themes observed in the paintings, thereby bolstering the case for symbolic resonance of the imagery. However, the entire argument is greatly enhanced in this case because the texts go a long way toward actually explaining the symbolism. For prehistoric materials, the modest claim that the referents of certain images had *some* larger symbolic resonance would count as significant achievement.

If we were given the full array of Hopi material culture (with perfect preservation) but denied access to textual commentary, based on the logic proposed here we might correctly infer a larger symbolic resonance for the imagery of katsina dolls. There would be the actual, full-scale masks, which the dolls reference in abbreviated form. Related imagery also recurs on pottery and kiva murals – not everywhere, all the time, but consistently enough to spark notice. One caveat is important: The argument that imagery that appears on a variety of objects in multiple contexts is symbolically significant has merit, but it does not necessarily follow that the most widely recurring imagery references the "most important" ideas. That observation is relevant to the late nineteenth-century Hopi case. The most common katsina imagery would have been relatively low on a hierarchy of increasingly esoteric (and important but also dangerous) religious knowledge.[33] The same pattern is found in other situations across the globe, such as Western African cases surveyed by Goody, where the indigenous High God is not represented in imagery, even though lower supernatural entities are.[34]

Synchronic and Diachronic Analyses of Style

Stylistic analysis, broadly conceived, traces similarities and differences of form among images and then attempts to account for them. In a useful formulation, Gell suggests that whereas iconographic attributes refer to the subject matter of an image, stylistic attributes reference other objects in the same style. These relations of form – deriving from the fact that one object looks like another because it was formed in a similar way – comprise an important dimension of the "cognitive saliency" of artworks.[35] In the terms I use here, formal relations of this sort create two further dimensions of the "significance" of images, accessible through synchronic and diachronic analysis of style.

Despite the useful clarity of Gell's distinction between iconographic and stylistic attributes, the relationship between subject matter and style is inherently unstable. It varies with context such that style can become subject matter and vice versa. The same instability might be identified between style and criteria of use (to which I turn shortly). The reason, I think, is that the dimension of signification that emerges from the objects themselves – and which we attempt to grasp with notions such as "style" – is inherently malleable. Not by nature discursive, it can be difficult to put into words. One consequence of this ineffability is a need for a flexible approach to analysis. Style might be productively investigated at a variety of scales and degrees of inclusiveness, depending on the context and the ingenuity of the investigator. Relations of form may be explored among figurines, between figurines and other sorts of images, or among images and a variety of different objects.

Diachronic Analysis. Diachronic analysis of style focuses on sequences of changing forms. The topic is relations of form between objects used at different times, by different people. The taxonomic efforts of many traditional art-historical or archaeological studies provide the beginning point

for work on this dimension of signification. Still, whether insights drawn from such analysis legitimately constitute "signification" is a concern. The evolutionary and teleological assumptions behind many art-historical studies seem to emerge more from the assumptions of the analyst than from the material. Traditional taxonomic efforts in figurine studies, when they venture toward signification, tend to fall into the same traps, telling stories of unfolding refinement or decay and decadence.

Because this mode of analysis is premised on a rejection of the perspective of any individual maker or user of artworks – a necessary move in the effort to apprehend sequence – the entire effort, on contextualist grounds, can seem flawed. Gell's thinking on style is again useful. He acknowledges contextualist concerns but emphasizes the importance of the attempt to grasp the intertwined implications of constancy and change perceived in stylistic sequences. In a kind of compromise with contextualization, he recommends that the analyst move about the sequence, considering its implications from the diverse perspectives of the different "nows" it joins together.[36] Such a perspective has not been much developed in figurine studies, but it might particularly enrich interpretations of the *ends* of figurine traditions, which tend to draw on generic narratives little altered in confrontation with particular sequences of figurines.

Although there seems to be potential for reformulating diachronic analyses of style along these lines, I mainly set aside this mode of analysis in this book. Rather, my consideration of form centers on synchronic analysis of style.

Synchronic Analysis. Synchronic analysis of the significance that emerges from objects themselves concerns relations of form among objects that would have been in circulation at one time. A characteristic goal in this analytical mode is to show how similarities and differences of form enhanced signification. For instance, the way images are made may reinforce or even create relations of similarity or difference in another social domain. I use this vague notion of "other domain" because there are many possibilities. For instance, domestic and sacred spaces can be thought of as created by the objects they contain. The material forms that populate a sacred space, through their relations with other forms previously experienced, impart a significance to culturally knowledgeable visitors, eliciting immediate behavioral responses such as hushed voices or gestures of respect. Prehistoric figurines sometimes figure in interpretations identifying such culturally created divisions of space. For example, Joyce Marcus incorporates Tierras Largas–phase figurines from San José Mogote (Oaxaca, Mexico) into a division between domestic and public and between women's and men's ritual. In this interpretation, clay figurines in general were a form that helped constitute domestic spaces.

The relevance of relations between forms to social relations, particularly relations of hierarchy or identity, is of particular interest to figurine analysts. Deliberate manipulation of form in negotiations of social identity and difference emerged as a popular theme in archaeological writings beginning in the 1980s. Similarities and differences of form among images may act subliminally to shape the identities and dispositions of people of different ages and genders. Analyses of this sort are well developed in figurine studies without necessarily being understood as "stylistic" in nature. Given the characteristic flexibility of investigations into this domain of significance, it is perhaps not surprising that arguments concerning the cognitive saliency of synchronic relations of form are so intertwined with other modes of analysis that they are not often recognized as deriving from a distinguishable analytical perspective.

Spatial scale has an important role in synchronic analysis of style. A typical example is a study of Kwakiutl masks that distinguishes, in telescopic fashion, the hands of individual makers, local styles, tribal styles, and elements of a general Northwest Coast tradition.[37] My focus is on the smaller range of such scales, although my concerns depart from the telescopic practice of identifying

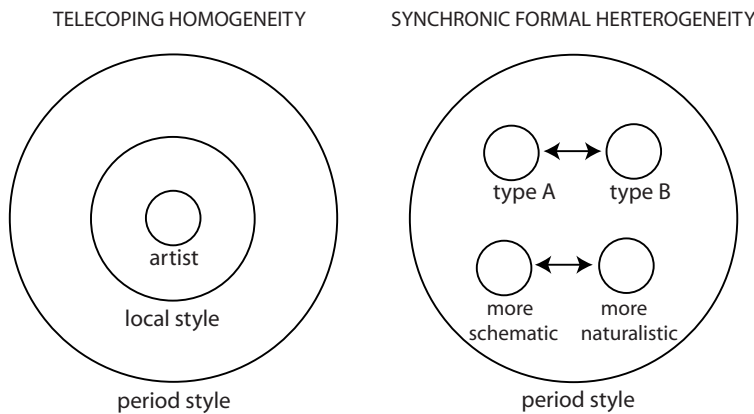TELECOPING HOMOGENEITY   SYNCHRONIC FORMAL HERTEROGENEITY

Figure 21. Two approaches to synchronic stylistic analysis. The most common approach catalogs telescoping homogeneity (left). The approach favored here (right) looks for heterogeneity within a period style – for example, distinctive "types" or gradations of schematization.

homogeneity at a series of increasing (or decreasing) scales. I instead look for heterogeneity at localized scales – the juxtaposition of images whose differing forms would have referenced contrasting choices on the part of their makers (Figure 21). Two themes that recur in the analyses of subsequent chapters are the juxtapositions of distinct stylistic "types" of figurines and variable degrees of schematization of the human form.

Turning to the sort of historical and recent cases I have been using as examples, it rapidly becomes clear that although the analysis of localized heterogeneity is a recurring component of stylistic studies, it is just one part of a larger agenda dominated by work in the mode of telescoping homogeneity. An example of formal heterogeneity is Jongh's comparison of two paintings by the seventeenth-century Dutch artist, Frans Hals. Hals employed strikingly different techniques in the two paintings. The wealthy subject of a portrait is rendered in subtle strokes to yield a naturalistic glow, whereas the "working-class type" in his genre painting is defined in "dynamic, coarsely brushed strokes."[38] The contrasting formal qualities of the works were simultaneously an expression of class divisions as a natural order and a material perpetuation of that order.

Stylistic studies of Christian crosses emphasize successive period styles, yet there also is sometimes synchronic formal heterogeneity. A multiplicity of "types" of crosses is particularly striking in Ethiopia.[39] Differential schematization – ranging from an unadorned cross to naturalistic renderings of the crucified Jesus – occasionally has been the subject of intense philosophical, theological, and political struggle. Through contrasts with other potential forms, the formal qualities of crucifixes referenced decisions on the part of makers and users – decisions for which they were sometimes willing to die.

Use

I have to this point considered perspectives that treat the significance of images as referencing subject matter (iconography and symbolic analysis) and as emerging from form (diachronic and synchronic stylistic analyses). The final pair of analytical modes traces significance to the social circumstances in which images were used. Corresponding to the surface perspective is the question of use: For *what purpose* were prehistoric figurines used? Often, researchers try to remain agnostic

concerning specific uses, but the desire to grasp the intended purpose of these enigmatic objects is difficult to banish. Popular suggestions include toys, amulets, teaching aids, objects of worship, votive images, vehicles of magic, curing aids, and tokens of economic or social relationships.

Some helpful work has turned to ethnographic descriptions of people observed making and using small human images in diverse parts of the globe.[40] Mary Voigt identifies several documented uses of images (as objects of worship, vehicles of magic, teaching devices, and toys or aesthetic objects). She then attempts to characterize the archaeological patterns that those uses would generate. Archaeologists who find such patterns thus have a basis for identifying the original uses of a particular set of figurines. Particularly important here is, again, not the imagery of the figurines but rather material properties of the objects and the contexts in which they are found. For example, one argument of this sort already widely employed in figurine studies concerns the size of images. Smaller images tend to be used in more intimate settings and larger images in more public settings, where visibility at some distance is desirable.[41]

Whether frameworks like that proposed by Voigt consistently allow us to identify particular uses, the systematic (if imperfect) relations they establish between material attribute and function are important. If images were used for a single purpose, we would expect consistency of medium, scale, context, patterns of wear or damage, and function of associated artifacts. When there is variation within such parameters – and particularly when there is correlation between them (e.g., small clay images turn up in houses whereas large stone images are found in temples) – then it is possible to argue for multiple uses in the collection. Such concerns comprise a simplified subset of possible investigations into the issue of use; my focus in this case is amply justified in instances cited by Voigt.

Figurines as a Window on Society

The final analytical perspective again considers meanings to be social products but seeks to delve beneath the explicit purposes people ascribed to images. Analysis from this perspective presupposes some theory of how societies work at a level beyond actors' surface understandings. Consequently, it is particularly difficult here to protect analysis from the tendency of theories to constitute evidence in their own favor. I focus on an analytical mode with significant current popularity in figurine studies, the perspective that views figurines as a "window on society."[42] The basic premise is that "structural" dimensions of social life – for instance, unresolved tensions, distributions of power, or social relations – affect the topics about which people habitually think, talk, and argue. When people create an anthropomorphic image – for any number of "surface" reasons – they inscribe in that image references to such discourses. In this way, structural dimensions of social life contribute to the form taken by images. In the archaeological case, the images become evidence on structure – in some cases, a window on society. Differences among images are interpreted as expressions, reflections, or indexes of differences among people.

As discussed in Chapter 2, this analytical mode is not relevant to every collection of prehistoric figurines. Because the approach views representational distinctions among the figurines as evidence of a discourse on social difference, its claims are more plausible when the analyst can show that different images were used together, thereby inviting direct comparison.[43] Subject matter must be "people" in a generalized sense or (better yet) stereotyped depictions of social categories. Figurines thus provide the most effective window on society when a traditional iconographic analysis beyond the pre-iconographic stage – that is, the recognition of specific subjects – largely fails.

Studies of Dutch genre paintings begin by noting the works' "ostensible capacity to proffer unmediated access to the past" through their stylistic naturalism and everyday subject matter. The need for caution on the part of the analyst is then enjoined.[44] This point is important and provides an opportunity for brief clarification. What I intend by window on society is more sophisticated than an analysis that would fail to recognize, for instance, that some scenes from daily life are often depicted whereas others are rare, and many conceivable scenes do not appear at all. The "window" in some figurine collections, as in Dutch genre painting, is into culturally and ideologically mediated perceptions and presentations of everyday life. Salomon, for instance, sees van Ostade's domestic scenes (see Figure 19) as constituting "moments of negotiation" or "experiments in social formation." When she further suggests that "what is being negotiated and how is implicated in the nexus of socially constituted categories such as class, masculinity and femininity, and that least studied social category, age,"[45] the statement resonates with those made by figurine analysts operating in window-on-society mode.

It is thus telling that Salomon begins her work by noting that certain qualities of the imagery of Dutch genre paintings – their "fictive 'realism'" – make them "particularly propitious" for this sort of cultural analysis.[46] Certain images, particularly those with generalized human subjects, invite window-on-society analysis, whereas others (e.g., those with specific religious subject matter) discourage it. This seesaw relationship between iconography and social analysis – empirical patterns favoring one and hindering the other – is a theme that I develop into the final step of my framework.

Choosing between Analytical Modes

I have been theorizing about the interpretation of images, but the resulting theory is not the ultimate goal. Instead, the idea is that rhetorical insight would help the analyst effect transitions from archaeological patterns to another and ultimately more interesting theoretical domain: understandings of ancient societies. The transition is particularly tricky when investigation involves comparison of figurines between contexts (recall that I include implicit as well as explicit comparison and thus find it even in contextualist studies). The framework must be able to facilitate universalist or grand-historical insight but also provide grounds for rejecting one or both when circumstances warrant.

The challenge is to reconfigure an archaeological pattern without overburdening the resulting social terms with preconceived theory. My strategy has been to inquire into what can be said about prehistoric figurines given their nature as images and manufactured objects. I propose using the resulting framework to establish a new level of synthesis between material pattern and social interpretation – a synthesis involving only the vague outlines of social terms, with little in the way of fixed, specific content. Such a synthesis could be the starting point for interpretation and debate by partisans of particular theories – debates that would provide an arena for the emergence of specific interpretations.

The construction of such a synthesis entails work at multiple levels. There is the decision concerning what constitutes the "significance" of images (see Figure 17, rows and columns). The possibilities there include abstractions framed at a level appropriate for articulation with specific theoretical positions. There also are the characteristic questions concerning images generated within the six perspectives on signification (within the cells of Figure 17). Finally, those questions

become the foundation of analytical modes (see Figure 18), each of which encompass strategies for bringing empirical evidence to bear on specific sorts of questions.

One more step is needed, however. The framework as it stands has little power to delimit a field of interpretation because, ideally, all six perspectives should be considered. Certainly, art historians characteristically range across all those modes (and more) in the study of cases with rich textual documentation. For the analysis of a particular context, consideration of as many modes as possible adds richness to the understanding of the figurines under study.

However, my interest here is comparative: accounting for similarities *between* two or more contexts (or else rejecting perceived resemblances as irrelevant). In such circumstances, all modes are not necessarily equally valuable. Suppose that figurines look similar in two cases because in each one a particular conventional subject (e.g., the goddess Astarte) was represented. In that case, any analysis that did not take up iconography would be seriously compromised because that analytical mode provides the conceptual tools needed to identify conventional subjects. Of course, we would not know about Astarte in advance – that insight would have to come from the analysis. Is there any way that we could allow empirical patterns to prompt us to privilege iconography as an analytical mode in such circumstances? If we could identify characteristic empirical patterns that promote – even demand – serious scrutiny from a particular analytical mode (or perhaps inhibit analysis from another), then we would be in a position to at least ameliorate the rhetorical problems of comparison in figurine studies.

My solution is to group the six analytical modes into the pairs that appear as opposites on the hexagonal arrangement in Figure 18, elaborated in Figure 22. Empirical patterns conducive to comparative analysis in one mode of each pair are less favorable or even a deterrent to analysis in the other mode. The strength of this seesaw effect is strongest in the pairing of iconography with window-on-society social analysis. To weigh the two perspectives, we *attempt to characterize subject matter*, looking for complex narrative, attributes deployed as visual clues, and other considerations described earlier (under iconography). When recognition of conventional subject matter cannot be pushed much beyond the pre-iconographic stage, raising the likelihood of generalized human subjects, then a key enabling condition for analysis from the window-on-society perspective will be met, while true iconographic analysis will be simultaneously hindered. If – beyond the lack of material for full iconographic analysis – there is sufficient naturalism that differences between the figurines seem plausibly interpretable in terms of differences in the way people might look or act, then prospects for the window-on-society approach will be even better. If, conversely, there are hints of specific conventional subjects, then we would be remiss not to begin with a serious effort at iconographic analysis.

Turning more explicitly to the issue of comparison, to assess similarities among figurines from two contexts, and following contextualist principles (see Chapter 2), we examine subject matter independently in each case and then compare the results. If we are prompted in both contexts to the same analytical mode (either iconography or window on society), then that mode emerges as a promising interpretive field within which to account for similarities. If we are prompted in opposite directions in the two cases, then we have a potential lead for exploring differences: The two representational systems might be structurally quite different.

Similar, if less pronounced, tensions can be identified within the other pairs of analytical modes. The analysis of use is counterposed with symbolic investigations. To weigh the promise of these analytical modes, we *examine imagery in relation to material properties*. I pointed out earlier (under "use") how variation in such attributes as size, medium, archaeological context, use wear, and associations with other artifacts can be a basis for assessing variability in use or purpose even if we
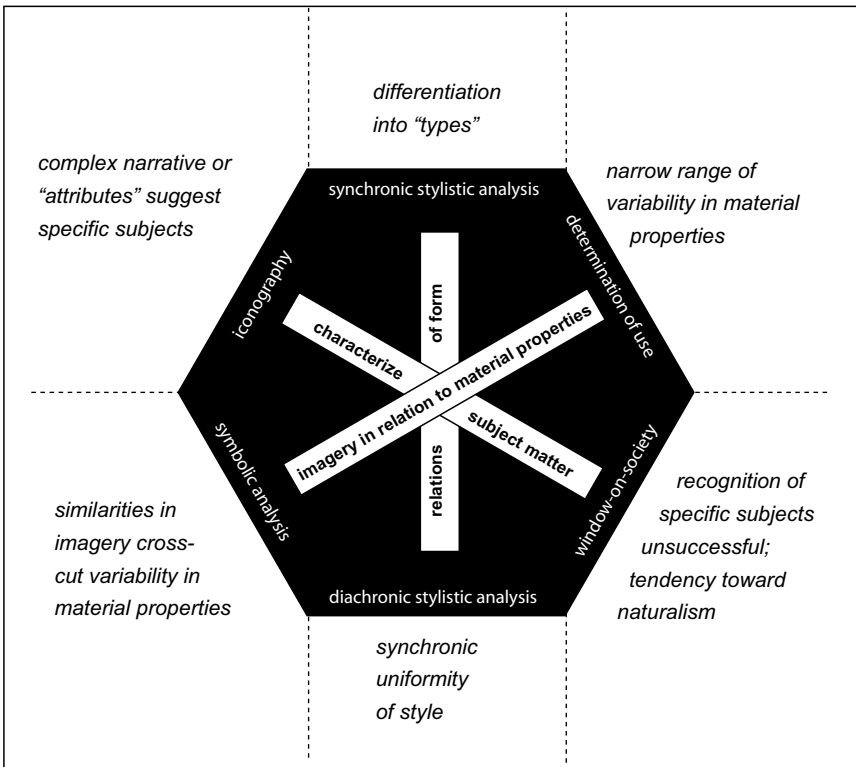
Figure 22. Guide to comparison of imagery. Analytical modes in white letters. Relevant classes of evidence shown in white boxes at center, each linking a pair of analytical modes. Outside the hexagon are characteristic patterns favorable to the pursuit of each analytical mode. The paired analytical modes are in tension with one another: Patterns favoring application of one discourage the other.

cannot be specific as to what those purposes were. Little variation in such properties points toward a narrow range of uses. Greater variation – especially correlated variation among the different criteria (e.g., large figures in stone, small figures in clay) – points toward multiple uses among the representations. As noted previously in the symbolic-analysis discussion, when assessment of representations as objects indicates multiple uses but the same iconographic patterns recur among those different sorts of representations, then similar subject matter was relevant in multiple situations and we may have a basis for identifying cultural themes or key symbols. If representations were used in only a narrow range of circumstances, or if imagery differed according to use, it does not mean that the society in question had no key symbols, only that the representations provide little basis for investigating them.

In a comparison between two cases, similarities in objective characteristics of images raise the possibility that the figurines may have been used for the same purpose in both cases; we would be remiss not to inquire into what that might have been. If in both cases we find imagery crosscutting variation in material properties, then a path is opened to comparison in the symbolic domain. The possibilities of investigating use are not hindered in this case; rather, serious possibilities for

symbolic analysis are opened up. Two possible directions seem available when we make symbolic comparisons. We might claim that specific symbols were actually shared between our two cases. An alternative would be that, in both cases, imagery was symbolically productive but the specific web of symbols was quite different.

The final pair of modes is synchronic-versus-diachronic perspectives on style. We weigh the promise of these modes through a preliminary *assessment of relations between forms*. As noted previously, the significance that these analytical modes seek to grasp is often ineffable and may never have been discursively formulated. Interpretations of relations of form can appear in multiple guises and often are found intertwined with strands of argument deriving from other modes. Still, what I term *synchronic formal heterogeneity* − that is, variable schematization of the human form or the coexistence of multiple types − demands sustained stylistic analysis in the synchronic mode. By *types*, I mean alternative, internally coherent, and readily identifiable constellations of formal traits. Whether the types overlapped in their distribution or were bounded and nonoverlapping, promising grounds for synchronic stylistic analysis would exist. Conversely, when coherent stylistic divisions do not emerge from the preliminary assessment of form, then sustained synchronic analysis of the imagery is more difficult. Diachronic analysis is relevant to both situations, but it is likely to "take a back seat" to synchronic concerns in the first set of cases and to emerge into its own in the last case, in which any particular period is characterized by stylistic uniformity.

Summary of the Framework

In summary, the framework for reformulating archaeological patterns (among figurines) in social terms begins with an assessment of three aspects of the data: subject matter, imagery in relation to material properties, and relationships between forms. This assessment is preliminary, an evaluation of the degree of fit between observed patterning and a set of idealized patterns that, in turn, either directs us toward or nudges us away from each of six modes of analysis available for exploring the significance of images. Analysts beginning from diverse theoretical perspectives converge on those questions, lending a degree of stability to the associated analytical modes.

Furthermore, the modes in question have a social content. On the one hand, the "significance" of figurines is constituted differently in each analytical mode. Because theories of social life also conceive signification in diverse ways, a network of connections can be imagined between analytical mode and theory. All modes are not equally relevant to the agenda of a particular theory. On the other hand, each analytical mode poses certain questions about images and ignores others. When we choose one analytical mode over another, we narrow the range of possible (social) conclusions that we might eventually draw from the imagery under analysis.

We have thus (partially) reformulated an archaeological pattern in social terms. As intended, the reformulation is not a final interpretation; it merely delimits the interpretive field by directing us to a narrowed set of analytical modes. Certain theories may be disadvantaged by the terms of debate, but there is likely to still be plenty of scope for alternative interpretations and hypotheses. An advantage of having analytical modes deeply embedded in the scheme is that the potential for disagreement about how alternative interpretations are to be evaluated will also have been constrained. A narrowed selection of analytical modes, each with its established strategies for confronting question with evidence, will already have been incorporated in the terms of debate.

Toward the Case Studies

In subsequent chapters, I experiment with the resources developed in Chapters 1 through 3 in the course of extended case studies. The following three chapters correspond to the three paths for further inquiry discussed in Chapter 1 and further developed in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 pursues comparison of world areas in the aftermath of falsification of the agriculture–pottery–gynecomorph thesis. Chapter 5 delves into universalist inquiry as applied to a single world area – in this case, the Formative period of Mesoamerica. In Chapter 6, I take up grand history and confront the Goddess.

Chapter 4

A Cross-Cultural Explanation
for Female Figurines?

Could there be a general cross-cultural explanation for the making of female figurines by prehistoric peoples? We considered a specific suggestion along these lines in Chapter 1. The results were not encouraging, although the effort got us out from among the "trees" of prehistoric figurine making in the Mediterranean and Mesoamerica. From a worldwide perspective, it became apparent that trees were clumped into "forests" of considerable spatial and temporal scope and that the forests were few in number.

Still, there were at least four deep-prehistoric cases. In each case, figurines have regularly been identified as female. Universalism-as-usual would examine those cases to see what they have in common. We might then declare any commonality to have "caused" the making of female figurines. Yet, there are many plausible causes for image making, with no accepted means of sorting among them. Any commonality found will be heavily laden with theory and likely impervious to falsification. Moreover, the as-usual approach distracts attention from the possibility that there may be no common explanation by ostentatiously debating what the best explanation (now assumed to exist) might be. It is no wonder that there are those who reject cross-cultural explanation altogether.

My goal in this chapter is something else: As an experiment in holistic archaeology, I put contextualist method to work in the service of universalist explanation. The idea is to build a synthesis of patterning midway between "evidence" and "interpretation." In the trajectory of the entire projected analysis, the synthesis is to occur before material patterns are irrevocably reformulated into social terms – before we choose our favorite domain for causation and set aside the possibility that no common explanation exists. I enlist the contextualist strategies of comparison introduced in Chapter 2 and the analytical framework developed in Chapter 3. Having assessed specificity of subject matter, imagery in relation to material properties, and relations of form, I take advantage of the seesaw effects between opposed pairs of analytical modes (see Figure 22). The question becomes: Does observed patterning prompt us to take up similar, partially overlapping, or wholly different sets of analytical modes in the cases being compared? Such procedures are not designed to produce *a* universalist explanation. They yield instead an abstract assessment of the

Table 2. Simplified Archaeological Periods in the Three
Cases Considered

Period	Range in Calendar Years
Paleolithic Eurasia	
Initial Upper Paleolithic	46,000–36,000 B.C.
Early Upper Paleolithic	36,000–20,000 B.C.
Late Upper Paleolithic	20,000–11,000 B.C.
European Epi-Paleolithic	11,000–9700 B.C.
Neolithic Near East	
Earlier PPN or PPNA	9700–8500 B.C.
Later PPN or PPNB	8500–7000/6500 B.C.
Pottery Neolithic	7000/6500–5300 B.C.
Mesoamerica	
Early Formative	1800–1000 B.C.
Middle Formative	1000–400 B.C.
Late Formative	400 B.C.–A.D. 200
Classic	A.D. 200–900

prospects for explanation, of the likelihood that a common explanation for truly distinct cases of prehistoric female figurines might be found.

For cases, I consider three of the deep-prehistoric "forests" of figurine making that emerged from the "wreckage" of the agriculture-pottery-gynecomorph hypothesis (Chapter 1): Formative Mesoamerica, the earlier Neolithic of the Near East, and Upper Paleolithic Eurasia. After delimiting the cases and reviewing methodological issues involved in applying contextualist strategies, I consider the consistency of the category "figurine" and expressions of femaleness across each case. I then launch the analysis proper by considering each domain of patterning. The goal is to assess, across each case, the degree to which evidence demands attention from one analytical mode or another. After the cases have been internally synthesized, I compare the syntheses.

At the risk of foregoing suspense, let me say that the prospects for a worldwide explanation of prehistoric female figurines seem limited but not nil. Although my focus is on the middle part of the analytical trajectory from evidence to interpretation, I end with a universalist suggestion of limited scope. In the process, I begin to develop specific interpretations of Near Eastern figurines to be developed further in Chapter 6.

The Three Cases

My cases are three macro-units of prehistoric figurine making: Formative Mesoamerica, the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Near East, and the Paleolithic of Eurasia. They are significant here not because of agriculture or pottery – both actually absent in the Paleolithic case – but rather because they are independent, originating instances of figurine-making traditions, with the figurines in each case regularly perceived (by modern analysts) as female. I consider, specifically, the Formative period in Mesoamerica from its origins through 200 B.C., the Later Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Near East, and the Upper Paleolithic of Western Eurasia (Table 2).
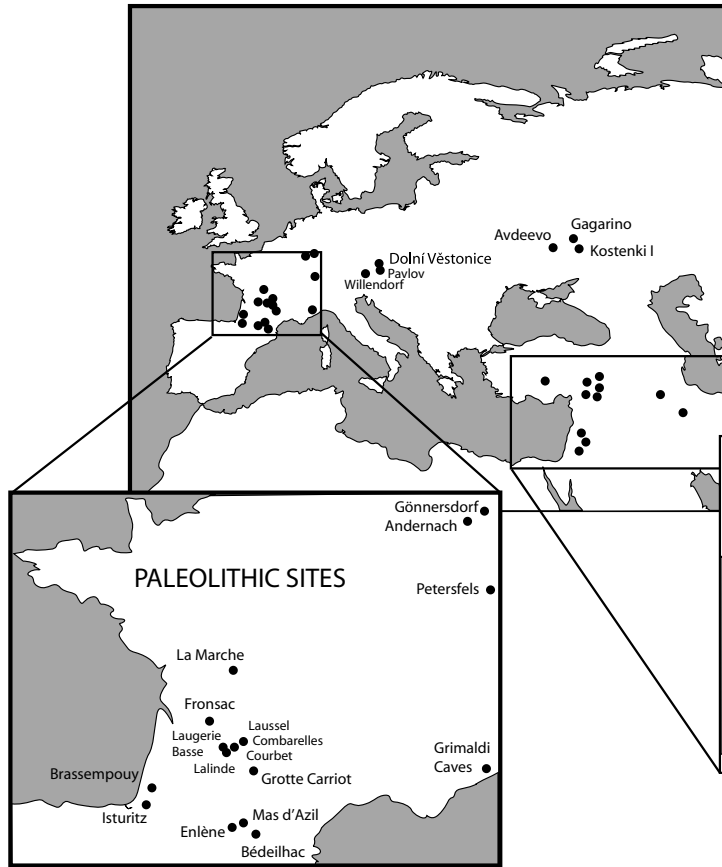
Figure 23. Paleolithic and Neolithic sites discussed in this chapter.

I use *Later Pre-Pottery Neolithic* in the discussion that follows – abbreviated as *Later PPN* or *PPN* – in an attempt to find a label appropriate for the entire Near East. It corresponds to PPNB in the Levantine sequence.[1] Although the Upper Paleolithic lasted from about 46,000 B.C. through 9700 B.C. in calendar years, the periods of most interest are the Early and Late Upper Paleolithic. For comparability with the other cases, I use B.C. rather than the more typical *before present* (B.P.) dates for the Paleolithic; I have estimated calendar years in all cases. For locations of sites mentioned in this chapter, see Figures 23 and 24.

Of course, setting spatial and temporal boundaries for these cases involves arbitrary impositions, although those are fewest in the case of Mesoamerica, where figurines are essentially unknown before 1800 B.C. and disappear as common household objects in some areas after ca. 200 B.C. In the Near East, figurines are present in the Earlier PPN (9700–8500 B.C.), but they are rare and enigmatic for that and other reasons (see Chapter 6). Figurine making in the Near East continued after 7000 B.C., and there is the huge surrounding halo of Neolithic-Chalcolithic figurine traditions (see Figure 6). Still, the 7000 B.C. boundary is not arbitrary; I argue in Chapter 6 for important changes during the seventh millennium B.C.
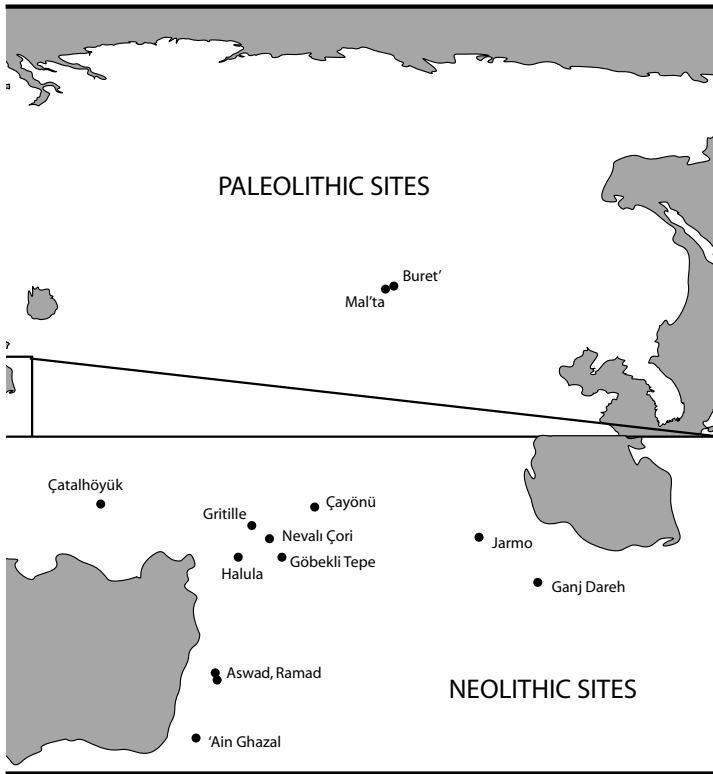
Figure 23 (continued)
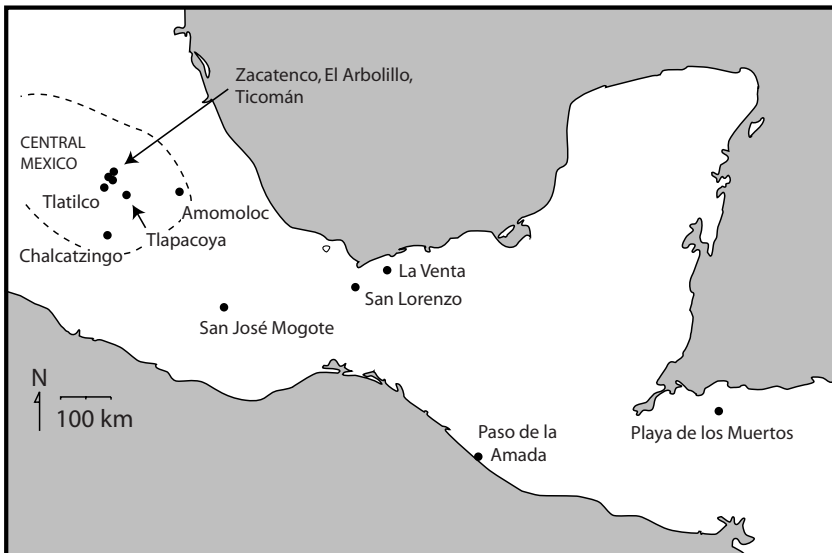

Figure 24. Formative sites discussed in this chapter.

A focus on the Early and Late Upper Paleolithic captures most of the production of figurines in Europe and Western Asia during the Pleistocene. I ignore the few highly diverse anthropomorphic figurines of the Initial Upper Paleolithic (Aurignacian). Traditions of figurine making declined or even disappeared in the last thousand years or so of the Paleolithic in Europe (Azilian in the Franco-Iberian sequence), providing an appropriate boundary for that case. Within these larger boundaries, figurines are not evenly distributed in time and I concentrate on two eras: (1) the period 29,000–20,000 B.C. referred to as the "Gravettian age"[2]; and (2) the period 15,000–11,000 B.C., or "Magdalenian age," although I focus on the Middle and Late Magdalenian. I use the widely recognized labels from the Western European sequence; specialists working to the east would use more locally relevant labels. There is debate about whether figurine making in the Magdalenian case is a development from the Gravettian or a wholly separate tradition of imagery.[3] In each era, however, similar figurines were made across extensive regions, thus raising the issue of comparison. I suspect – although I do not attempt to prove – that images of the two periods of focus were not independent cases but rather, despite the length of time involved, "historically" linked.[4]

These decisions concerning time and space yield two cases (PPN and Formative) more similar to one another than either is to the third (paired, Paleolithic) case. The overall period of focus in the Paleolithic is ten times as long (eighteen thousand years) and the area covered, from the Pyrenees to Lake Baikal (Southern Siberia), about a hundred times as large as that of the other two cases. Even the two eras of emphasis within the Paleolithic case (nine thousand and four thousand years) are long compared to the PPN and Formative eras. Furthermore, if we contemplate explaining figurines with reference to external social causes, there is more promise for a PPN–Formative comparison than for either of those and the Paleolithic. Both PPN and Formative cases figure in narratives of the transition to agriculture and settled life in their respective regions. However, such concerns are immaterial because I am asking a different question. The goal is to scrutinize the actual materials that (at first glance) seem similar and then ask: How likely is it that independent, contextualizing interpretations of these cases would lead in similar directions?

Refining the Contextualist Method

A central methodological principle is that comparison should be founded on multiple local con-textualizations. For instance, if femaleness is to be sustained as a pattern suitable for explanation at a large scale, it should be because it repeatedly emerges as an important theme in local analyses.

Complications inevitably arise. Collections of prehistoric imagery vary greatly in how amenable they are to interpretation. At least some of those differences are unrelated to the ancient past but derive instead from the skill, luck, or ruthlessness of archaeologists in wresting artifacts from the earth. A common approach to regional synthesis privileges exceptional assemblages – Çatalhöyük for the Neolithic Near East, Tlatilco for Formative Mesoamerica, or Dolní Věstonice for Paleolithic Central Europe. Such collections are often treated as a key to understanding the imagery of a vast surrounding region. That analytical move, however, involves problematic leaps between contexts, rendered all the more dubious by findings of ethnographers concerning variation among related living traditions of expressive culture.[5]

My general orientation toward "flashy" assemblages from special sites is that they do not exem-plify themes that were everywhere present. Instead, I expect them to be cases in which what was (in fact) everywhere present was elaborated or taken in new directions. For example, if we were

to develop an iconographic argument identifying a specific goddess at, say, Çatalhöyük, any move to extrapolate that deity to a much larger region based on minimal iconographic criteria ("These sites also have female figurines!") must be avoided. Regional synthesis involves looking for both general similarities and patterns of local variation.

Still, the reality of prehistoric evidence frustrates lofty ideals. It proves counterproductive to reject any extrapolation from special assemblages. Sober weighing of the plausibility of such claims seems a promising compromise. The imagery of the Late Upper Paleolithic (Magdalenian) site of Gönnersdorf in Germany is one instance in which materials from a "special" assemblage provide crucial clues to interpreting imagery in various media at other sites from Southwestern France to Ukraine. I draw particularly on an early analysis by Andrée Rosenfeld and an update by Gerhard Bosinski.[6] Excavations yielded hundreds of engraved slate plaquettes with nearly three hundred schematized human images. The human form is viewed in profile and the focus is on torso, thighs, and buttocks, the latter extending prominently to the rear. I refer to these as *profile figures*. A gradient of schematization allows highly abbreviated signs to be linked to recognizably anthropomorphic images (Figure 25). On the basis of the Gönnersdorf finds, images in more modest assemblages from other sites – even isolated instances – appear convincingly identifiable as anthropomorphic; in other words, this "special" site allows decipherment of a set of *conventions* for depicting the human form.

Both Rosenfeld and Bosinski push the argument further, toward *content*, by suggesting that the subjects of the figures were not simply anthropomorphic but also female. The most common anatomical details added to the torso-buttocks-thighs configuration are arm stubs and breasts. Typically, however, figurines lack any diagnostic sexual attribute except (debatably) the overall form of the buttocks and thighs. Rosenfeld considers various interpretations of the presence/absence of these and other anthropomorphic details. The lack of correlation among such attributes or between any one of them and features such as context, posture, and composition leads her to favor the idea that all were optional embellishments rather than attributes critical to the identification of the image. Minimal, highly schematized versions, in her view, were identifiably "female." The argument is convincing; it is relevant to this discussion because at Gönnersdorf and other sites, figurines follow conventions recognizable from the engravings (Figure 26). The methodological point is the success, in this case, of an orientation to special assemblages that balances skepticism concerning extrapolation with pragmatism in the face of interpretive challenge.

The Figurines

One contextualist concern is whether the category "figurine" can be legitimately extended to radically different contexts. Therefore, a preliminary question is: If we apply the strategy of multiple local contextualizations to the cases under consideration, would a roughly comparable category "figurine" – small, self-contained sculptures with no obvious functional attributes – emerge from each? The answer is surprisingly close to "yes," particularly if we sufficiently relax our functional definition – which excludes sculpted attachments to pots or carved handles of tools – to allow inclusion, in some instances, of items pierced for suspension.

Sizes seem to be comparable: typically 4 to 18 cm for the Gravettian age; 2 to 15 cm, with most below 10 cm, for the Magdalenian; 2 to 10 cm for the PPN; and 5 to 15 cm for the more common solid figurines of the Formative. Although the few outliers in the first three instances are not of
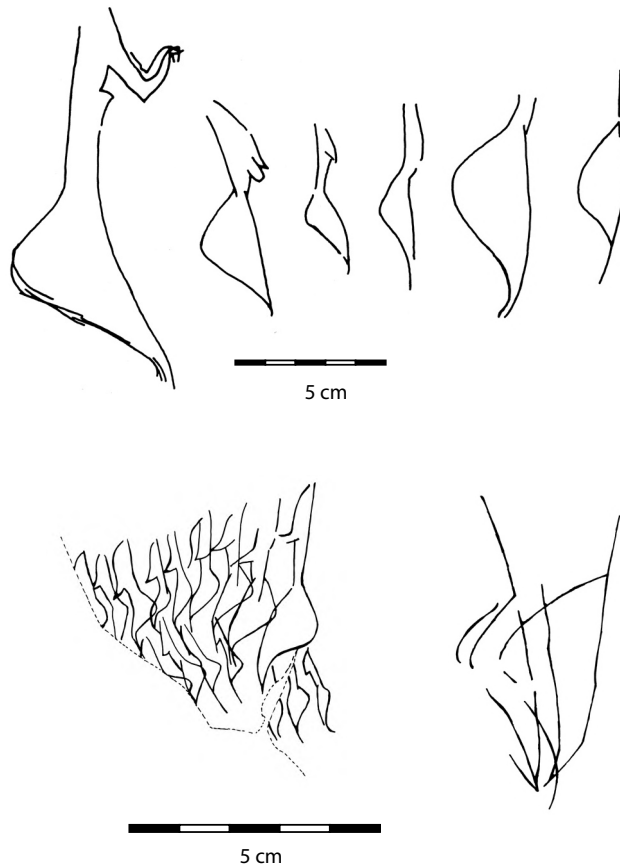
Figure 25. Magdalenian-era "profile figures" from Gönnersdorf (Germany), engraved on slate plaquettes. Top: Gradation of differential schematization observable in the corpus. Bottom: Images often multiple and superimposed (right) or perhaps forming larger compositions (left). (Redrawn by Alana Purcell from Bosinski and Fischer 1974: Figures 29, 30, 31.)

much concern, in the last, large figures more than 20 cm tall – usually hollow in contrast to their smaller counterparts – are a regular occurrence.

Media are variable. Fired clay is the primary medium in Mesoamerica. PPN clay figurines often are more fragile – fire-hardened or even sun-baked – but some are also stone rather than clay. Paleolithic figurines of both eras of interest are the most varied. Materials include ivory, antler, bone, polished stone, chipped stone, and – at a few sites – fired clay. In general, the same sorts of imagery characterize these multiple media, although there may be exceptions, such as the figures from Mas d'Azil and Bédeilhac (France), both made from horse teeth and both displaying unusual attention to the face.[7]

Hints of a practical logic can be sensed in choice of material. Formative figurines are probably better fired than those of the PPN because they coexisted with pottery production. Of course, mammoth ivory – a favored material in the Paleolithic – was unavailable to Holocene figurine
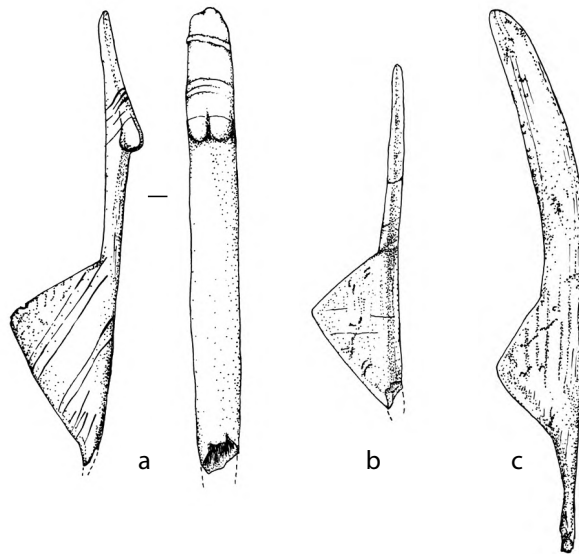
Figure 26. Highly schematized profile-figure figurines from Gönnersdorf (Germany). The imagery matches that of the engravings (see Figure 25). Ivory (a–b) and antler (c); (a) approximately 7cm, others to scale (Redrawn by Alana Purcell from Bosinski and Fischer 1974: Plates 72:S1a,b; 73:S2b, 74:S9a.)

makers. It was versatile but by no means easy to work; it is not surprising that Paleolithic artists often chose other materials. Regional variation in the Paleolithic case suggests that localized traditions also had a role in choice of medium. Use of fired clay is concentrated at Pavlovian sites in the Czech Republic, whereas marl and chalk were used mainly at Kostenkian sites on the Russian Plain. Still, in all three cases, it appears that people had various materials available and their choices were consistent with (without reducing to) a practical logic concerning availability and ease of working.

Moving beyond size and material, it is noteworthy that whereas the specific objects against which "figurine" takes on definition vary significantly *between* the cases, there are widespread similarities *within* them. Analogous boundaries between figurines and objects that appear with figurines or are almost-but-not-quite figurines recur in local contextualizations.

Paleolithic figurines have been given definition against images of women as a general class or against other forms of art, whether *parietal* (in caves) or *mobiliary* (decorated tools of various kinds, personal ornaments, engraved plaques); I consider the second approach here. In both the Gravettian and Magdalenian eras, small self-contained sculptures (figurines) are often anthropomorphic, whereas mobiliary art with functional or utilitarian attributes is more typically zoomorphic. Exceptions at a regional scale include a more frequent occurrence of animal figurines in Central and Eastern Europe, but most exceptions are localized: a surprising number of animals from Isturitz (France), hundreds in clay from Dolní Věstonice (Czech Republic), and numerous bird pendants from Mal'ta (Siberia).[8] In rare cases, just part of the human body is represented. Some of these last pieces diverge dramatically from themes familiar in figurines (sculpted heads from Brassempouy and Dolní Věstonice), but other instances fit in easily (an abdomen and legs from Dolní Věstonice and a bust from Grimaldi).

Holes for suspension suggest that some anthropomorphic figures served as pendants; this functional variant is common at only a few sites, widely scattered in space and time, including the Grimaldi Caves (Italy), Petersfels (Germany), and Mal'ta. In the last case, the holes are at the base of the legs; therefore, the figurine would have been suspended head-down, like the bird pendants from the same site (Figure 27).

In the Formative case, I am concerned with solid figures no taller than 20 cm but more typically 5 to 15 cm. Human images predominate, although there are usually animals (especially dogs) as well. Solid figurines contrast with other figurative objects in clay: hollow figures (20 to 30 cm but ranging up to 60 cm), modeled figurative vessels, effigy attachments to vessels, and whistles. The large hollow figures are rare and tend to be badly broken. Although anthropomorphic like the solid figurines, they usually differ in iconography and style from their smaller counterparts. Most local contextualizations under the rules I have set out here would again yield a rough category of "figurine," comprising only the smaller solid figures, although specialists typically use the term more broadly to refer to an iconographically and functionally more diverse set of materials.

In the Near Eastern PPN case, the difficulty is the boundary that distinguishes figurines from other objects of modeled clay. Among anthropomorphic figures, there is often a gradation from recognizably human (albeit schematic) and 4 to 10 cm in height, to minimalist "humanoids," "stalks," or "objects" 2 to 6 cm in height. The latter sometimes comprise a substantial portion of an assemblage. Whereas individual pieces in the second group may have no clear anthropomorphic traits, others do, such as the "double-wing-based objects" from Jarmo with recognizably human faces.[9] Animal figures are sometimes abundant ('Ain Ghazal, Jarmo, Ganj Dareh), as are geometric shapes in molded clay. "Figurine" is an acceptable category only if we acknowledge the indistinct boundary with other molded-clay objects.

A final issue is the texture of occurrence of figurines across each case – that is, the numbers at individual sites and the variation between sites. Such variation is least prevalent in the Formative case, and, overall, figurines are more common there than in the other two cases. In the PPN case, figurines are less common than in Mesoamerica, although at a few sites, startling numbers have been recovered. Finds vary from site to site and even between phases at a single site to a greater extent than is explicable by the scale of the excavation. Figurines are least common in the Paleolithic case. Many sites from both periods of interest yield no figurines whatsoever. The objects, although not common, probably had long use-lives and thus entered the archaeological record rarely, perhaps in many cases for idiosyncratic reasons.[10] The fired-clay figurines of Dolní Věstonice and other Pavlovian sites constitute a dramatic local exception, particularly if they were made with the intention that they would break apart when fired.[11] Figurines are notably less frequent in the Magdalenian than in the earlier Gravettian era. Although there is certainly texture here, the universalist idea of comparing "figurines" from these cases appears to withstand contextualist scrutiny.

Femaleness and Associated Attributes

Were the figurines female? Some observers would answer, quite simply, "no." To phrase the issue in a more analytically useful manner, the question is whether femaleness is a prevalent theme at the largest of scales within each of the three cases – that is, the spatiotemporal macro-unit as a whole. It does not mean that every constituent instance must fit; exceptions to and even dramatic inversions of overarching patterns are to be expected. Still, those really should be "exceptions" that characterize smaller scales of space or time.
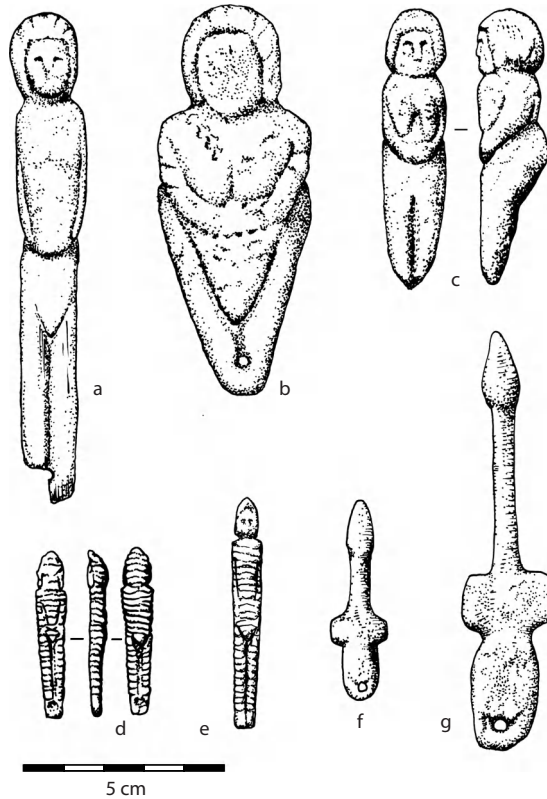
Figure 27. Paleolithic bird and human figurines and pendants from Mal'ta, Siberia. Note that some
   are pierced in order to be suspended with the head down. Ivory. (Redrawn by Alana Purcell
   from Abramova 1967: Plates 44:3,8; 46:7,8; 48:8; 52:3,4.)

Any claim that "femaleness" in imagery from two contexts constitutes a link between them risks
resurrecting "female" as a transcendent category. In Chapter 2, I proposed an analytical scheme that
ameliorates the problem by directing attention to *differences* between two sets of "female" figurines.
Figurine analysis consists of a series of steps from the enumeration of attributes, to the study of
their articulation, to the identification (as appropriate) of categories among the images. Finally,
an attempt may be made to read patterns of variation among the figurines in terms of a context-
specific scheme of social differentiation. Thus, we might ask: How does "femaleness" as theme
manifest itself across this series of stages? Do multiple attributes cooperate to prompt identification
of images as female? Or is femaleness a recurrent attribute but of secondary importance in the
constitution of categories?

Applying that perspective here indicates that femaleness is arguably a prevalent theme in each
case. (The qualifier "arguably" is indispensable for the PPN, which is complicated by extreme
schematization.) There is, however, considerable difference in the manifestation of femaleness
between cases as well as – particularly in Mesoamerica – *within* them.

Gravettian-era anthropomorphic figurines are most numerous at sites on the Russian Plain
(Kostenki I, Avdeevo, Khotylevo, and Gagarino), and scholars working directly with those mate-
rials have been inspired to produce local contextualizations. Both Zoya Abramova and Mariana

Gvozdover distinguish four basic figurine types, although based on somewhat different criteria.[12] In both classifications, naturalism versus schematization is an important axis of differentiation. Schematic figurines are not definitively sexed, but overall bodily form may allow them to be read mainly as women (Abramova) or as a combination of women, men, and generalized people (Gvozdover). Naturalistic figurines, however, are female based on redundant suites of attributes including breasts, overall bodily form, the positioning of fat deposits, and – in some cases – genitalia; they can be further subdivided by degree of fatness (Abramova) and posture (Gvozdover). At Avdeevo, 72 percent of the fourteen classifiable figurines are naturalistic and female, 7 percent are schematic and possibly female, 7 percent are schematic and possibly male, and 14 percent are schematic anthropomorphic roughouts.[13] Similar results – naturalism versus schematization as a major axis of differentiation, naturalistic figurines sexed and schematic figurines unsexed, femaleness numerically predominant and signaled through the cooperation of multiple attributes, females subdividable in various ways – are obtained in two larger collections from Western Europe: Brassempouy (France) and the Grimaldi Caves (Italy).[14] Those are also the results of recent synthetic efforts that base conclusions on a pooled sample from multiple contexts.[15]

Human imagery is generally quite varied in the (later) Magdalenian era and any characterization of it as "mainly female" would ignore males, sexless anthropomorphs, and caricature or portrait heads. Much of the variation, however, appears among engravings from, for example, la Marche, Mas d'Azil, and Enlène (France). If we focus only on figurines, then a claim concerning femaleness as the prominent theme becomes more reasonable. Henri Delporte identifies two modes of Middle–Late Magdalenian human images: *schematic* and *realistic*.[16] However, figurines in the realistic category are extraordinarily variable – an anthropomorph above two animal heads from Isturitz, the Bédeilhac figurine with its emphasis on the face, the slender *Venus impudique* of Laugerie Basse – such that they appear to have little relationship to one another. The Courbet figurine classified by Delporte as "realistic" is regarded by another author as closely tied to the schematic profile figurines of Gönnersdorf and Petersfels.[17]

Realistic versus schematic is simply not a useful breakdown of the Magdalenian figurine corpus. It is more promising to identify a dominant large-scale complex of shared imagery – the schematic profile figures (see Figures 25 and 26) – to which more than 50 percent of Middle–Late Magdalenian figurines belong and for which femaleness can be inferred as significant based on representational variability in the Gönnersdorf assemblage. Figurines that do not fit into the profile-figure complex are instead a heterogeneous hodgepodge in which femaleness is merely one among other themes and for which no coherent large-scale understanding seems possible. I focus on the profile-figure group, in which femaleness is implicit but pervasive, associated with radically reductive schematization, emphasis on the middle body, and a preference toward profile view even for three-dimensional images.

In Formative Mesoamerica, local contextualizations recurrently point to a prominence for femaleness among the small solid figurines. The coding of femaleness, however, is variable. For example, at Paso de la Amada, many pieces are naturalistic, and breasts, belly, and hip form indicate femaleness (and youth) as central themes (see Figure 11). At Amomoloc, by contrast, femaleness in the Cuatlapanga type is indicated by a single stereotyped trait: the lentil-shaped breast appliqués (see Figure 13). There are few correlations between breasts and other traits. Thematic emphasis in this case was on stylistic variation. Attributes recurrently associated with femaleness in Formative Mesoamerica are a predominance of standing postures, symmetrical hand positions with lack of gesture (arms stiffly protruding from the body), detailed elaboration of the face and head, and nudity relieved most commonly by ornaments such as necklaces rather than clothing.

The Near East is the most difficult case. Some analysts see femaleness everywhere; others claim it has only a limited role.[18] Investigators have sometimes reached opposite opinions about the same collection. Femaleness is often implicit, I argue, but implicit more enigmatically than in the case of the Magdalenian profile figures. In the Later PPN, comparison is facilitated by certain widely shared representational conventions and the recovery at several sites of numerous anthropomorphic figurines – a few dozen up to, in some cases, hundreds.

Turning to these larger collections – 'Ain Ghazal (MPPNB), Tell Aswad, Ramad (I-II), Nevalı Çori, Çayönü, Jarmo, and Ganj Dareh – the fundamental reason for diversity of interpretive opinion quickly becomes clear. Enigmatic schematization is pervasive. Still, even Ganj Dareh (Iran), with the most unrelentingly schematic of the collections, yielded an abbreviated spectrum from extremely schematic to more naturalistic. My attempt at local contextualizations (based on published descriptions and inspection of original pieces from Jarmo) suggests a recurrent cluster of traits that manifests itself in both more or less schematic versions (Figure 28). There appears to be a coherent ordering of traits between different levels of schematization. The most schematic images incorporate a core set of attributes (Figure 28, lower register; Figure 29, Set I). Increasingly naturalistic versions add additional attributes in a (roughly) predictable order (Figure 28, middle and upper registers; Figure 29, Sets II and III). I refer to this interrelated set of traits as the *Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex*. At some sites (Jarmo, Aswad, and possibly 'Ain Ghazal), the full spectrum appears (Sets I, II, and III). At other sites (Ramad and Çayönü), only part of the gradation is represented. At still other sites (Nevalı Çori and Ganj Dareh), themes from the Seated Anthropomorph complex seem to be present but in a form that is significantly transformed or reworked. There are definitely other images and likely other schema present in the collections (Figure 30).

What justifies identifying the extremes illustrated in Figure 28 as related expressions? Why not call the minimally anthropomorphic figures that exhibit only core traits "humanoid" without claiming a referential link to more naturalistic seated females? To do so would be to ignore the most interesting element here, the recurring, systematic *relations* between traits. Posture and schematized humanness form the irreducible core of the Seated Anthropomorph, optionally embellished (Figure 29) first by obese thighs, then by female breasts, and finally by additional anthropomorphic attributes that are sufficiently subtle to not distract attention from the core and the more basic embellishments.

Figurine artists made a variety of images during the Later PPN. Still, across this spatiotemporal macro-unit, they produced some figurines that drew on a recurring complex of interrelated traits. "Female" attributes – breasts, perhaps also lower-body morphology – were fundamental elements of the complex, whereas "male" attributes were peripheral or absent. The complex is prominent across multiple contextualizations at the scale of the PPN macro-unit, with explicit femaleness more or less salient at different sites. As in the Magdalenian case, femaleness is secondary to other more obtrusive attributes – in this case, a gradation of schematization. Yet, femaleness is so reliably associated with those attributes that it is difficult to imagine that the networks of ideas they referenced did not somehow include femaleness, whether or not individual unsexed images were identifiable as female.

Relations of Form

In the preceding sections, I have delineated the three cases, compared the actual objects involved, and considered the prevalence of femaleness as a theme. The cases were so different that it was
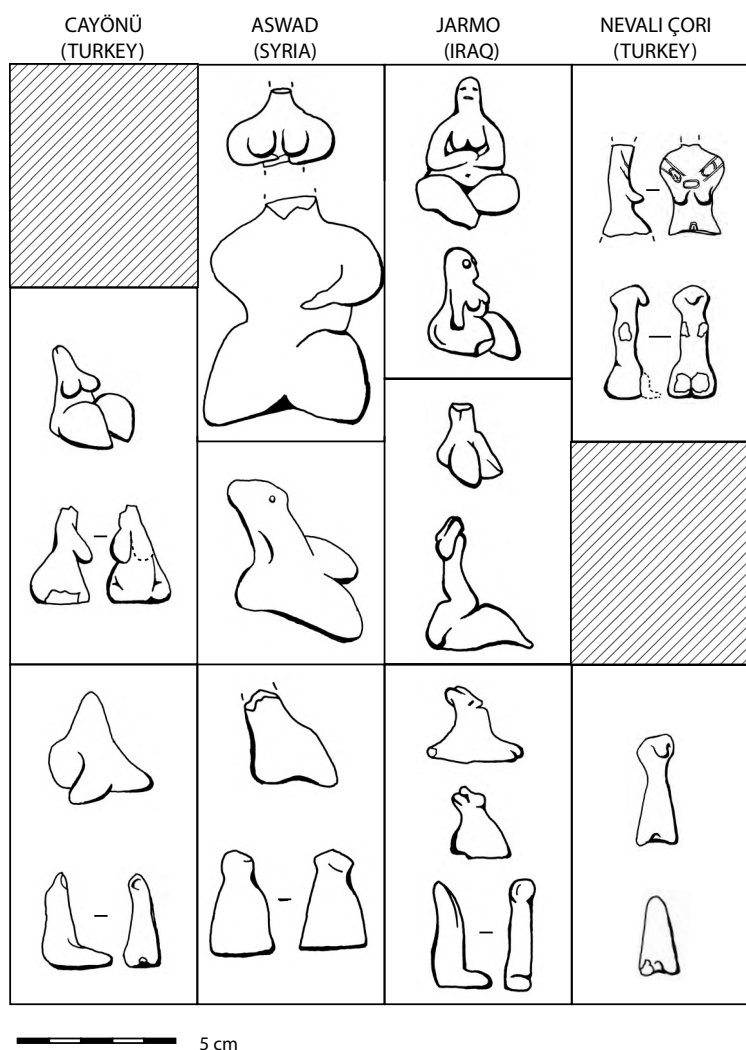
Figure 28. Seated, anthropomorphic images in clay from four Pre-Pottery Neolithic sites. Note gradation of increasing schematization from top to bottom. (Drawn by Lesure based on images in Broman Morales 1983, 1990; Contenson 1995; and Morsch 2002.)

difficult to imagine what commonality might explain figurines. Still, the actual objects appeared comparable in various ways, and femaleness – the particular theme that I am following – was arguably prevalent at the scale of each macro-unit. These two points establish conditions necessary to proceed to my guide to comparison. The basic goal is to take advantage of the seesaw relationships between pairs of analytical modes: Certain patterns of evidence favor or even demand serious consideration from one analytical mode while simultaneously discouraging consideration from another. I exploit these seesaw relationships to assess the likelihood of finding a cross-cultural explanation for "female figurines."

I. Core Traits of the Seated Anthropomorph

  1. Minimally but recognizably human

  2. Emphasis on overall bodily form of legs, torso, and head (individual legs undifferentiated, arms absent or reduced to stubs, and faces or even heads given scant attention or left out altogether)

  3. Seated posture

II. Minimally Naturalistic Themes

  4. Fullness of figure ranging to obesity, centering on the thighs and hips, and often yielding an overall body morphology that appears (arguably) female

  5. Separation of the legs likely, in contrast to the single mass of (2)

  6. Female breasts, often ample

III. Naturalistic Embellishments

  7. Arms, resting symmetrically on the body in a position that directs attention to more fundamental traits such as breasts or thighs

  8. Naturalistic head with basic facial features and a simple headdress

  9. Multiple, readily distinguishable types of either headdress or overall form of head

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Figure 29. Traits of the Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex. Traits are added in roughly the order indicated, beginning with minimally human bits of clay, thus suggesting formal interrelationships between what are, at first glance, very different images.

I begin with relations of form. Of interest here is the significance of the form of an image relative to other forms. Although the two analytical modes are diachronic versus synchronic perspectives on style, due to space concerns, I focus only on the degree to which we are prompted toward *synchronic stylistic analysis* in the three cases. When operating in this mode, analysts try to show how similarities and differences in the way objects were made created or maintained social differences. Evidence provides "grist" for such an analysis when we find juxtapositions of objects made in different ways. The basic interpretive argument would be that objects referenced their own making and its relationship to the making of other objects. The concept of style helps us translate a nondiscursive dimension of meaning into discursive terms.
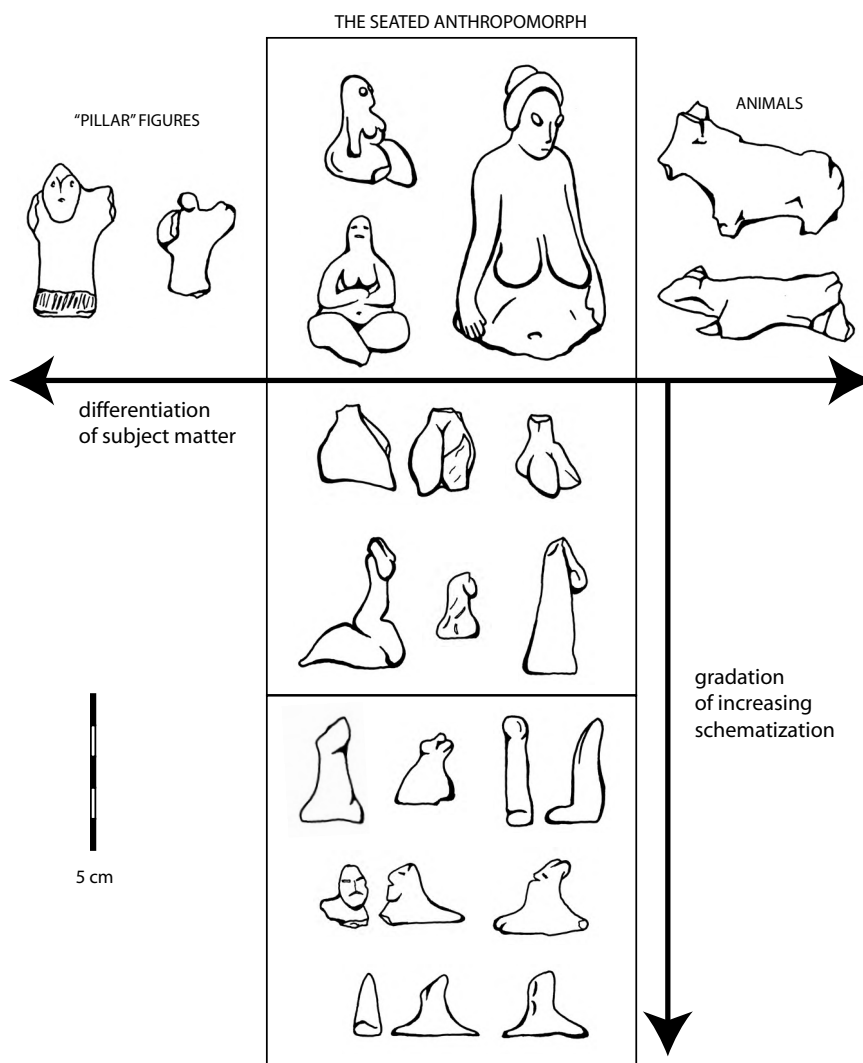
Figure 30. The iconic system of clay figurines from Jarmo (Iraq), interpreted as involving two dimensions: differentiation of relatively naturalistic subjects (horizontal) and gradient of schematization from naturalistic to highly schematized (vertical). Seated Anthropomorphs emerge as female only at the naturalistic end of the gradient of schematization. (Images redrawn by Lesure from Broman Morales 1983.)

Gravettian

Studies of Gravettian-age Paleolithic figurines note stylistic differences between regions: Those from Siberia differ from those of Eastern Europe, which, in turn, differ from those of Central and Western Europe.[19] Such differences are not the focus of my attention here. Instead, stylistic assessment following the scheme of multiple local contextualizations is directed *within* particular
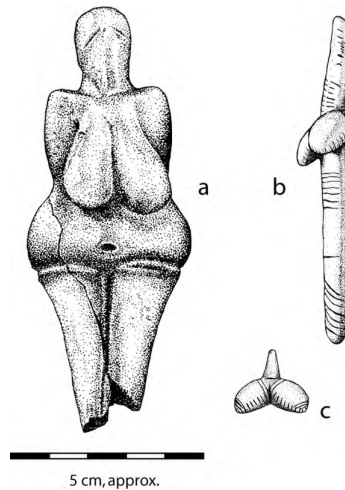
Figure 31. Clay figurine (a) and schematic carvings in ivory (b, c) from Dolní Věstonice (Czech Republic), Gravettian era; (c), pierced for suspension, appears to depict breasts. (Drawn by Alana Purcell based on Kozlowski 1992: Plate 12, and White 2003: Figures 101, frontice.)

contexts. We are particularly seeking alternative, internally coherent, readily identifiable constellations of formal traits that would have referenced not subject matter but rather how the objects were made.

The most widespread such pattern for the Gravettian era is a distinction between naturalistic and schematic. It is important to distinguish between two types of schematization: (1) highly reduced anthropomorphic images diverging markedly from standard canons of figurines but bearing a "finished" appearance (Figure 31b,c); and (2) schematic images with rough surfaces that, with further working, conceivably could have been shaped into a naturalistic figurine (Figure 32a). The former are generally rare in Gravettian-age deposits (Dolní Věstonice and other Pavlovian sites are a localized exception). The latter (unfinished) pieces, although not as common as naturalistic images, are widespread in distribution (Siberia to the Atlantic), occurring alongside the more obviously finished pieces.[20] Sometimes referred to as *ébauches*, schematic figurines of the second type typically are interpreted as roughouts for naturalistic figurines abandoned during manufacture. Considerable evidence can be marshaled in support of that position, including the blocky features and rough surfaces. Two figures from Gagarino that were still joined head to head and apparently abandoned at different stages of manufacture are particularly suggestive.[21]

Gvozdover has argued instead that the so-called roughouts were actually finished products, and Dobres elaborates on that idea in terms relevant to those of interest here, emphasizing the centrality of the act of making.[22] Gvozdover makes two important points in support of her argument on *ébauches*: (1) contextual evidence suggests that they were treated in the same ways as naturalistic ("finished") images; and (2) the *ébauches* of the Russian Plains sites could not have been carved into naturalistic figurines with leg orientations of either of the two most common types.

Because Gvozdover's sample of *ébauches* is small (six) and because she finds hints of the existence of additional naturalistic postures beyond the two identified to date, I remain skeptical of the second claim. White's recent reanalysis of Brassempouy (France) suggests that there is considerable complexity behind the formation of individual assemblages.[23] Two figurines found there refit; they

apparently were broken during manufacture of what was intended to be a larger piece. Both were subsequently reshaped but each again broke, and they were abandoned near one another at the cave entrance. White thinks that the Brassempouy assemblage consists mainly of pieces abandoned after frustrated efforts to work partially desiccated ivory. Successful efforts would have been removed by the makers and therefore are not part of this particular archaeological assemblage.

I consider *ébauches* to be unfinished roughouts, but Gvozdover's contextual observations – considered in light of the appearance of *ébauches* in multiple materials (both ivory and marl at Russian Plains sites) for which manufacturing parameters would have been different – suggest that fabrication of figurines could be a drawn-out process. Objects at different stages of manufacture would have had "social lives" – that is, they would have been used for some social purpose – before being subjected to further manufacturing steps. In such circumstances, visually striking constellations of attributes would have referenced the process of making (rather than subject matter), as suggested by Dobres.

Magdalenian

Schematization is a major issue for the Magdalenian case as well but it manifests itself differently. Schematized images are finished pieces, not *ébauches*, and they are not the odd piece but rather the norm. Did the degree of schematization of a Magdalenian figurine reference the making of the image? Although Delporte does not make quite that argument, his division between realistic and schematic series can be taken to imply something of the sort. However, I have already expressed my skepticism concerning the integrity of the "realistic" category. The profile figures of the schematic series are widespread and internally coherent and, indeed, involve an intelligible gradient of schematization, although in engravings rather than figurines. These figures comprise a well-defined stylistic and iconographic complex. The realistic category, in contrast, is likely an analytic fiction. In cases in which a dozen or so figurines are known (Gönnersdorf, Petersfels, Mezin), those are overwhelmingly of the schematic series, a point not favoring any regular juxtaposition of schematized and naturalistic versions.

The primary locus for the significance of form in the Magdalenian case is elsewhere. Figurines of the profile-figure complex are sufficiently rare to suggest that they were typically used as isolated objects rather than in sets. The strong linkages between the imagery of the figurines and images in other media – particularly the slate plaquettes at Gönnersdorf but also parietal art (Fronsac, Combarelles, Grotte Carriot) and small pendants (Petersfels, Neuchâtel) – suggest that the figurines referenced the highly stereotyped and widely shared formal unity of the profile figure (see Figure 25).

Pre-Pottery Neolithic

For the PPN, as for the Gravettian, there has been interest in stylistic variation among regions[24]; however, the topic of interest here is again alternative, contemporaneous constellations of traits at much smaller scales. One relevant pattern is variation, particularly in the Southern Levant, in the numbers of figurines found at sites relatively close to one another. Plausibly, the act of making a figurine in one community referenced decisions in other communities to *not* make figurines. Another recurring pattern is variation within individual collections in what appear to be stylistic attributes of heads. In Level II at Ramad, for example, some faces have projecting snouts, whereas others are basically flattened discs.[25] Given relatively coarse chronological control, it is difficult to rule out change over time as the source of such variation.
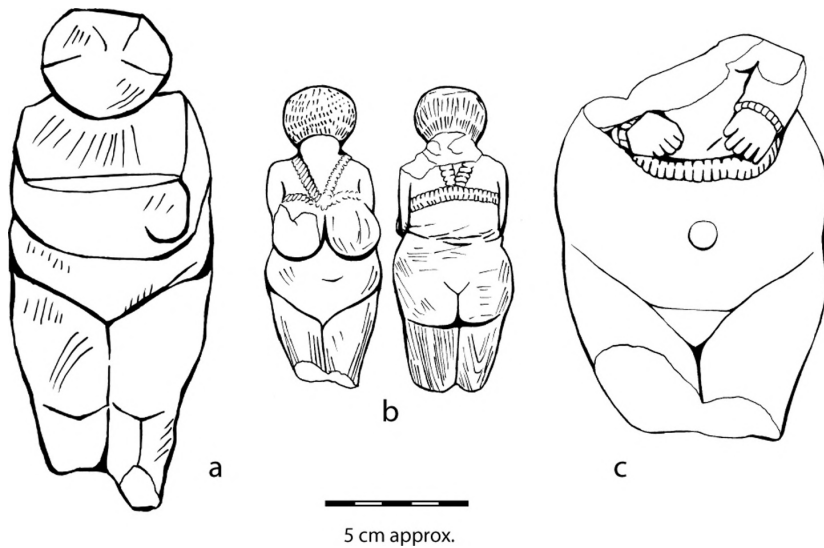
Figure 32. Figurines from Kostenki I (Russia), Gravettian era: (a) roughout (*ébauche*); (b) naturalistic figure, depicted with woven head covering and chest straps; (c) fragment of a statuette, depicted with woven belt. All in marl. (Drawn by Alana Purcell based on Kozlowski 1992: Plates 21, 23; and White 2003: Figures 108, 110.)

A third pattern is of more interest. A gradient of schematization of the human form (from relatively naturalistic to highly schematic) appears repeatedly as a key dimension in PPN collections across the Near East. Sometimes the gradient is subsumed in the Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex described previously; other cases are more complicated. Because gradients of schematization occur at the same scale as prevalent femaleness – that is, throughout the entire "forest" of PPN figurine making – when we craft an explanation for one of those phenomena, we also need to consider the other. For the case of the Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex, I am suggesting that in addition to whatever the images actually depicted, figurines referenced a choice on the part of their makers among a graded series of possibilities for schematization of the human form. Formal traits referenced an entire scheme of variation in clay objects.

In some cases, the fan of references prompted by the form of a Seated Anthropomorph figurine may have extended beyond the minimally anthropomorphic to purely geometric clay objects.[26] The problem of establishing a boundary between clay figurines and other small clay objects has bedeviled analysts of the larger PPN collections. There are, on the one hand, indisputably anthropomorphic objects and, on the other, geometric forms that even the most imaginative observers do not read as human; however, the boundary between the two is often unclear.[27] Furthermore, when archaeologists find more figurines, they find more molded geometric forms – particularly small spheres but also cones, discs, cylinders, and other shapes. These tokens sometimes have been interpreted as gaming pieces, but Schmandt-Besserat contends that they were used as counting devices, perhaps to formalize transactions such as promises of the future contribution of goods to public ceremonies.[28] She notes continuities over several thousand years in the shapes represented, leading to better understood, three-dimensional counting devices during the fourth millennium B.C. and then to the early Sumerian script. The rigidity with which Schmandt-Besserat casts this entire system back to the Neolithic is problematic,[29] but the idea that tokens
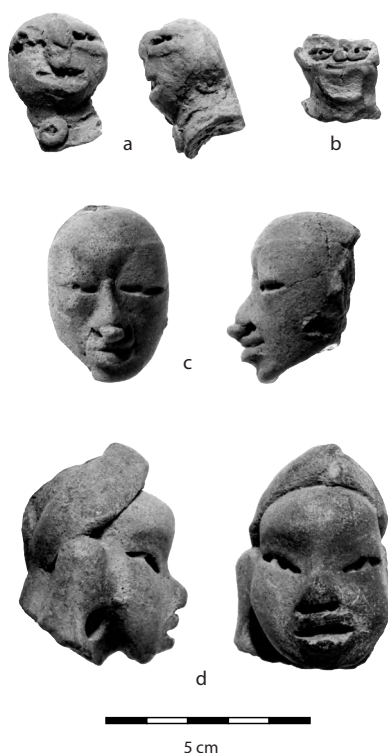
Figure 33. Figurine heads in fired clay, Paso de la Amada (Mexico), 1700–1300 B.C.: (a-b) crude; (c-d) naturalistic. The relation between crude and naturalistic modeling is partly but not entirely chronological.

were counting devices is appealing, as is the further suggestion that they could have referenced things being counted (e.g., commodities) rather than simply themselves. Tokens were iconic in a simple way, referencing quantities of particular sorts of things.

The suggestion may illuminate something of the nature of the interface between anthropomorphic figurines and tokens. In a given assemblage, schematized figurines tend to be more common than naturalistic ones. A further striking feature of PPN assemblages is the effort expended in making most figurines stable and freestanding – a concern not reflected in the Formative, Gravettian, or Magdalenian cases. Why was it important for PPN figures to stand freely? Surely, the answer is that they were put on display in *groups*. Yet, at the more schematic end of the spectrum, individual pieces were almost identical. Were groupings of figures not showcases for the differences between them but rather signifiers of collectivity? If so, then the messages conveyed by the more schematic figurines would have been related to those hypothesized for geometric objects because the latter also signified other objects as a collectivity.

Formative

Variation in schematization is present in Mesoamerican assemblages (Figure 33), but it has not attracted much attention from investigators.[30] The more striking pattern is variation among images
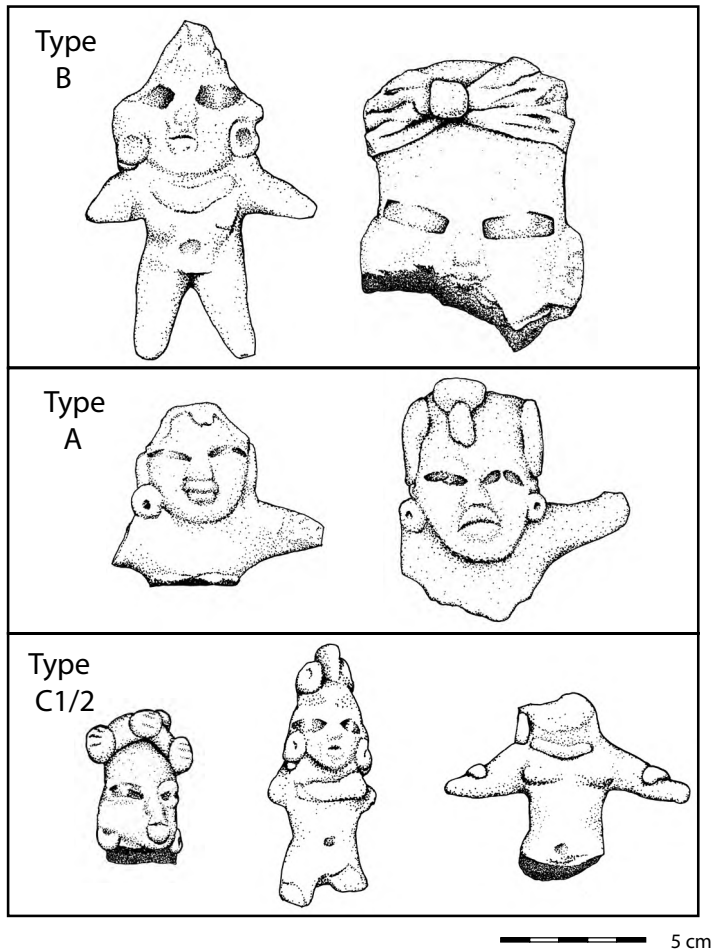
Figure 34. Classification of ceramic figurines from Zacatenco (Mexico). Each type is composed of a visually distinctive style based particularly on paste color and the ways in which facial features are depicted. (Catalog Numbers 30.0/7080, 6858, 7306, 6808, 6940, 6870, and 6924. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Drawn by Alana Purcell.)

of similar degrees of naturalism. Some of the differences likely are tied to differences of subject matter (see Figure 13), but many are instead stylistic (see Figure 12) – they likely referenced not any particular subject but rather the ways in which images were made.

In this sense, the Formative case diverges significantly from the others considered here: Synchronic stylistic differentiation seems often to have been a major component of variation. This distinction is reflected in the kinds of categories generated by figurine analysts. In the Near East, categories are usually based on differences of subject matter or schematization. Certainly, there is nothing for the PPN similar to Vaillant's alphanumeric typology for Zacatenco, El Arbolillo, and Ticomán (Mexico), with its divisions emphasizing specific attributes such as the form of the eyes or mouth (Figure 34).[31] Although such synchronic stylistic variation is recurringly present

in Mesoamerica, its salience differs by region and time period. In one fascinating epoch (1400–1000 B.C.), figurines in "Olmec" style appear at sites across Mesoamerica, sometimes in conjunction with local styles (see Chapter 5). The important point here is that although Formative figurines typically referenced their own making, the nature of those references likely varied from context to context. We can claim that stylistic variation is important at the scale of the Formative macro-unit, but the claim is not powerful because it likely glosses over considerable subsidiary variability.

Results

The question here has been: Is an explanation of "female" imagery in each case likely to require inquiry into how the figurines referenced their own making and the making of other objects? Because femaleness was expressed at the macro-unit scale, I reasoned that if we were prompted toward synchronic stylistic analysis across that entire area, there would be reason to suspect that this analytical mode might have a role in explaining femaleness of the figurines. Furthermore, if we were thus prompted in all the macro-units, we would have identified a possible arena of inquiry in which a cross-cultural explanation of femaleness in prehistoric figurines could be constructed.

There are similarities among the cases. In all four instances, we are indeed prompted to take up the tools of synchronic stylistic analysis. Furthermore, in both the PPN and Gravettian cases, alternative ways of making figurines involve a distinction between schematized and naturalistic. Differential schematization recurs at the scale of the macro-unit itself. Because that is the same scale at which we find femaleness to be a prominent theme, it seems possible that in each case, femaleness and differential schematization may be related to one another.

Nevertheless, significant differences between the cases do not bode well for the prospects of cross-cultural explanation. Differential schematization in the Gravettian case involves stages of manufacture, whereas in the PPN case, it involves varying conceptualization of the human form. Schematization is significant in the Magdalenian as well, but a contrast with naturalism is less important than an easily identifiable reduction of the human form that primarily would have linked rather than differentiated objects. Of even greater concern is the wholly different set of patterns in the Formative case. Stylistic variation in images displaying similar degrees of naturalism recurs at the macro-unit scale and plausibly suggests that synchronic stylistic analysis should be enlisted in any attempt to account for prevalent femaleness in Mesoamerican figurines. However, the suggestiveness of form in Mesoamerica is so different from what we find in the PPN or Gravettian that there is little likelihood that analyses of these cases would yield similar results.

Specificity of Subject

The next topic for discussion is the pair of analytical modes for which a seesaw effect – that is, patterns favoring application of one mode while hindering another – was strongest. The two modes are iconography and analysis of figurines as a window on society. Because the empirical concern here is subject matter of the images, I begin in each case with a brief reprise of how femaleness is manifested and with what other themes it is associated.

Full iconographic analysis would go beyond the pre-iconographic stage to identify conventional themes and probe further connotations. Such work is a challenge in the absence of texts contemporary with the imagery. Still, we can look for clues to the degree of specificity of the

subject matter. Was the figurine illustrating a scene from a complex narrative? Are there traits that might have served as "attributes" in the art-historical sense – clues placed by the artist to facilitate identification of the image?

If the case for specificity of subject matter is weak – that is, if the possibilities for iconographic analysis are exhausted in the pre-iconographic stage – then we would have identified the basic conditions in which the figurines might serve as a window on society. We then would look for further patterns that favor that mode: a degree of naturalism such that "social" differences among images can be recognized and evidence that figurines depicting different social subjects indeed were used together, thus inviting comparison.

Mesoamerica

Femaleness as theme recurs in contextualizations across the Formative macro-unit, but its salience varies from one context to another. Themes with which femaleness is associated include a standing posture and detailed elaboration of the face and head.

In some collections, there are indications of specific subjects, particularly in Central Mexico where figurines in general are common. Acrobats appear in strange body contortions, and some figurines have two heads. A set of elaborately clothed figures from Tlapacoya has been subjected to iconographic analysis far beyond the pre-iconographic stage.[32] These latter figures are sometimes depicted as people wearing masks, complicating any effort to treat them as depictions of the supernatural subjects referenced in their attire.

Overall, supernatural imagery is rare in figurines. Although one or another contextualization may call for iconographic analysis, figurines hinting at complex narrative or bearing "attributes" in the art-historical sense form a minor part of all but a few "special" assemblages. Furthermore, the specific subjects involved, although typically regional rather than site-specific in distribution, do not appear at the scale of the spatiotemporal macro-unit as a whole.

What about our alternative, the window-on-society approach? There is sufficient naturalism that differences among images might have referenced differences among social subjects. Several questions follow: What are the differences in subject matter? Were images depicting different subjects used together, prompting their comparison? What types of social differences were referenced by variation among the figurines?

Because Mesoamerica is a topic of Chapter 5, this discussion is brief. Although most figurines (usually) stand, some sit. Whereas most figures (usually) are stiffly positioned with short arms projecting to the sides in a way that does not draw the viewer's eye, others gesture in some way. The repertoire of arguably sexual traits varies. In some areas (especially Central Mexico), males seem to be depicted alongside females (see Figure 13), but they are always a minority. Figurines with no apparent sexual traits are always present, occasionally in significant numbers. There is variation in the prominence of bellies, and, in any collection, a few figurines are indisputably pregnant. At Chalcatzingo, pregnancy is an unusually prominent theme.[33] In small collections, it may appear that each headdress is unique; however, as sample size grows, it becomes apparent that headdress form was chosen from a large but not infinite set of possibilities. Hair treatment has been used to argue for the representation of girls and women at different life stages at San José Mogote (Oaxaca, Mexico) and in the Ulúa Valley (Honduras).[34] Rarely, figurines hold things – a baby, a dog, or a ball.

This variation is "pre-iconographic" in character, raising the possibility that the subject matter of the figurines may have been generically social. Such a claim is more plausible when it can

be shown that figurines depicting different subjects were actually used together. Contextual data concerning that issue are anecdotal but supportive.[35]

Overall, the Formative case seems promising for the window-on-society approach. Still, although multiple contextualizations reveal generally favorable patterning, the results of window-on-society analysis – that is, proposals concerning social referents – vary among contexts. Ann Cyphers, Rosemary Joyce, and Joyce Marcus – writing about three widely separate cases across Formative Mesoamerica (Chalcatzingo, Playa de los Muertos, and San José Mogote, respectively) – suggest that important social referents were girls and women at different ages or life stages.[36] However, that scheme does not seem to apply to the Paso de la Amada and Amomoloc collections discussed in Chapter 2. That result is symptomatic of a general pattern in Formative Mesoamerica: Figurines had social referents, but that social content varied from place to place and epoch to epoch. This theme of an overarching pattern characteristic of the macro-unit with significant subsidiary variation we have already seen for Mesoamerica, in both expressions of femaleness and promptings toward synchronic stylistic analysis.

Gravettian

In the earlier of the two Paleolithic cases, multiple attributes code a majority of figurines as female in one context after another. Thus, more pervasively than in Mesoamerica, femaleness is a primary rather than secondary theme. Bodies tend to be lozenge-shaped with emphasis on some aspect of an obese, nude torso, whether breasts, belly, buttocks, or thighs (Figure 35). The head is small relative to the body and facial features are abbreviated or absent altogether.[37] The lower legs tend to taper almost to a point and arms are unnaturally thin, with hands typically resting on the belly or breasts. Although most figures are basically nude, some bear items of clothing or ornament, including caps, straps, belts, and bracelets (see Figure 32). Many of the figurines with a headdress have no face (Figures 2 and 32b).

Facelessness certainly has iconographic interest, although the implications are far from clear. Other hints of specific subjects are localized in distribution.[38] Dynamic gestures or body positions are exceedingly rare and each case seems unique.[39] Two possible exceptions clarify the issue of specific subject matter. Marshak draws attention to similarities between facial features of the complete, fired-clay figurine from Dolní Věstonice and those of a strange "horned" anthropomorph engraved on a mammoth tusk from nearby Předmostí. He suggests that the correspondences point to the "unreal head and face" of "a non-human female 'spirit.'"[40] Although the interpretation is questionable (identifying attributes do not appear on other figurine heads from Dolní Věstonice[41]), Marshak's claims are exactly what we are looking for to assess specificity of subject matter. Because the attributes are found only in Pavlovian sites of Moravia, if this is a specific spirit, it was *local* in its distribution. The Siberian sites of Mal'ta and Buret' yielded a series of thin figures with legs, body, and head (except face) covered by striations or gouges, usually interpreted as a depiction of clothing (see Figure 27d,e).[42] Other elongate objects from Mal'ta bear similar decoration, which might have had some referential significance. Again, no images like these are known from other regions. In both cases, therefore, themes that plausibly signal specific subjects are localized, in contrast to those that recur across the entire Gravettian-age macro-unit, such as lozenge shape, nudity, and obesity.

If Gravettian-age figurines did not have specific, nameable referents, is their subject matter appropriate for window-on-society analysis? There is sufficient naturalism to read social differences among the images. Other topics for consideration are the same as before: variation in subject
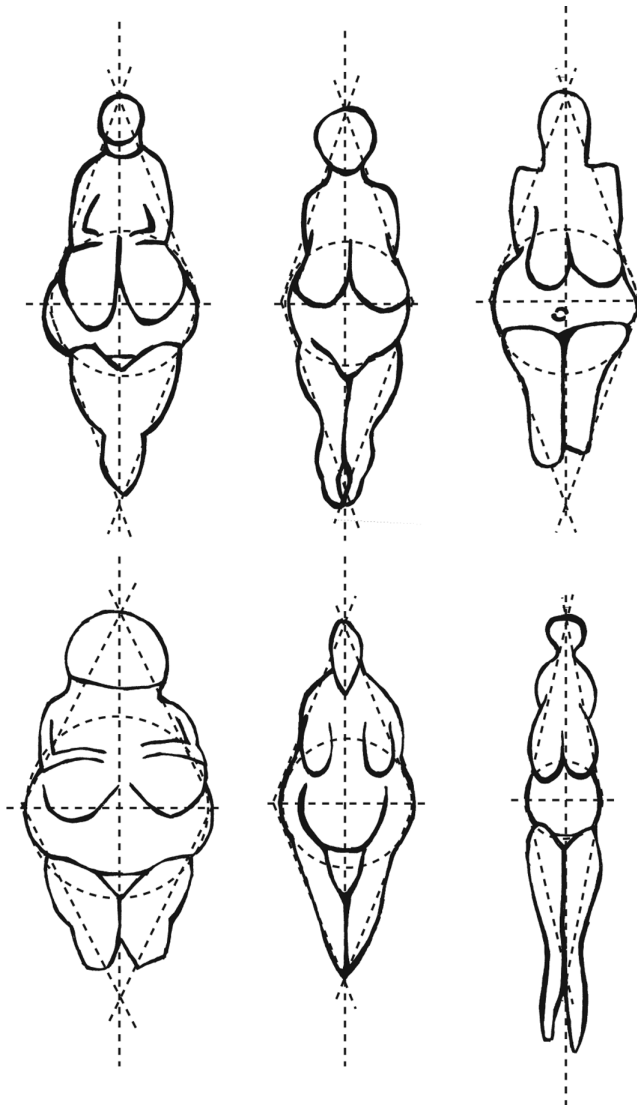
Figure 35. Leroi-Gourhan's analysis of recurring symmetry in the design of Gravettian-era figurines. Top, from left: Lespugue, Kostenki V, Dolní Věstonice. Bottom: Willendorf, Gagarino, Grimaldi. (Drawn by Alana Purcell based on Leroi-Gourhan 1967: diagram on page 92.)

matter, use of different images together, and possible social referents. I first consider dress and ornamentation, followed by bodily features.

Soffer, Adovasio, and Hyland suggest that (1) depictions of woven clothing and ornament entailed as much effort as the carving of any sexual attributes on the figurines; (2) the depicted garments were likely associated with "one category of social females"; and (3) the wearing of such items would have been a mark of prestige.[43] In accompanying commentary, McDermott points out that most figurines are not clothed and that when clothing is present, it is minimal. Contra

Soffer et al., he argues that depictions of clothing were "incidental to the primary purpose for creating the figurines, which may have been to portray the biological topography of the female body."[44]

Was clothing an optional embellishment or central to any messages conveyed by the figurines? Certainly, widely dispersed sites with multiple figurines (Brassempouy, Dolní Věstonice, Kostenki I, Mal'ta) yield variation in dress, including completely nude figures. Were differently clothed figures used together? Anecdotal contextual evidence points toward a middle ground between the positions of Soffer et al. and McDermott. Avdeevo Figurines 1 and 2, discovered in the same pit, are both schematic anthropomorphs (*ébauches*) with no ornament or clothing. Figurines 6, 7, and 8, from another pit at the same site, are naturalistic, and each is ornamented differently.[45] Still, all three are among the most elaborately decorated figurines from the site. Thus, there is little contextual evidence for ornamented versus unornamented as an important theme.

It would be unwise to rule out the possibility that variation in clothing and ornament had social referents; however, it is difficult to argue that such variation was the central subject matter. Indeed, scholarly debate has centered on somatic features rather than ornament. Three innovative approaches in recent decades make the case that differences among female bodies – related to age, obesity, and pregnancy – comprise the main subject of Gravettian figurines. All three conclusions are based on a single pooled sample rather than built up through multiple local contextualizations. Furthermore, all three studies are marred by the naïve view that art is an unproblematic reflection of what it is the artist "saw." As a set, however, the studies suggest recurring themes.

Patricia Rice postulated that age could be inferred from somatic features: pre-reproductive women have firm breasts, flat stomachs, and firm buttocks; reproductive but nonpregnant women have elongated breasts and fleshy stomachs; and old women are "sagging" all over.[46] She then recruited four independent "raters" with no stake in the experiment to classify each Gravettian figurine based on published drawings and photographs. Results suggested that figurines depicted women at different stages in their reproductive life: 23 percent young; 17 percent pregnant; 30 percent mature but not pregnant; and 22 percent old.

Jean-Pierre Duhard's experience as a gynecologist leads him to assert that a woman's physiological history can be "read" based on exactly those traits on which Paleolithic artists lavished their attention: breasts, abdomen, pelvis, and buttocks. Like Rice, he finds that physiological differences among women form the basic subject matter. His readings diverge from hers – 70 versus 17 percent pregnant – but he also pursues them to an implausible level of detail. For example, five Gravettian figures are interpreted as depicting the moment in childbirth when the baby is descending through the perineum.[47]

McDermott observes that the common attributes of Gravettian female figurines – that is, lack of face, thin arms, and especially the relative proportions assigned to all parts of the body – do not add up to an "accurate" image of the human form. This observation is usually accounted for by supposing that certain features were emphasized because they were symbolically important. McDermott proposes instead that all these features become realistic "to the point of scientific exactitude" if the images are understood to depict the foreshortened view of women when they looked down at their own bodies.[48] The figurines, he suggests, were involved in women's efforts to develop and transmit knowledge concerning the functioning of their bodies. Like Rice and Duhard, he views *differences* in physiological state as part of the subject matter.

Would the strategy of multiple local contextualizations reveal support for the broad commonality here – that is, physiological differences among women as central subject? Kostenki I figurines vary

in posture, the positioning of fat deposits on the buttocks, and the degree of prominence of breasts and bellies. In Gvozdover's view, nearly all the figurines depict mature women; age differences therefore would not have been part of variation in subject matter.[49] She argues instead that differences in physiological conditions of mature women, particularly with respect to pregnancy, were most important. At Brassempouy, there are differences in the relative obesity of figures (plausibly related to age or state of pregnancy) as well as variation in the configuration of the hips, belly, and thighs. If we treat figurines from the Grimaldi case as a single sample, there is variation in the form of breasts, the prominence of stomachs and buttocks, and the morphology of pubic regions. Two figures have a strange prominence at the base of the neck, and one may be depicted in the act of giving birth.[50] Still, somatic variation is subtle – White and Bisson think that a late stage of pregnancy was the single dominant theme – and arguably overshadowed by the few instances that hint at more specific subjects (double heads or the pairing of woman and animal).

Pavlov and Dolní Věstonice (in the Czech Republic) yielded various human figurines in burnt clay as well as ivory.[51] The collection in its entirety is diverse and includes pieces that were originally simply parts of bodies (including heads with attention to face) as well as highly schematic figures (see Figure 31). Despite fragmentation, the clay figures are most relevant to this discussion. Sexing is an issue, but figurines range from thin to fat. Stomachs differ in the degree of protrusion, and morphology of the abdomen-buttocks-thigh region also varies. Again, variation is more than simply physiological. There are different postures, including some that seem "dynamic" in that they involve asymmetrical positioning of breasts, buttocks, or legs.[52] Dual male/female symbolism is a distinct possibility with some figurines.[53] As in most of these cases, the contextual case for juxtapositions of images varying in somatic detail is rather weak.

To summarize the Gravettian case, patterning favorable to the window-on-society approach recurs at the scale of the macro-unit, although the low frequency of figurines raises questions about how common opportunities for comparison would have been. In contrast to the Formative case, the mix of social referents was more consistent from site to site. Those involved physiological differences among women but extended also to what women wore and what they did.

PPN

Femaleness figures differently in the PPN than in either the Formative or Gravettian cases. In Mesoamerica, it is common but often of secondary importance; in the Gravettian cases, it is usually a central theme. By contrast, pervasive schematization leaves the PPN irresolvable. Although to the contemporary observer a great many figurines are unsexed, they form the most schematic pole of a gradation of schematization, at the other end of which lie sexed figures redundantly coded as female (see Figures 28 and 30). I have identified the variation encompassed in that gradation as a thematic complex – the Seated Anthropomorph.

One could argue that the *apparently* unsexed (schematic) figures were originally perceived as unsexed in contrast to their more naturalistic, sexed counterparts. Alternatively, based on the systematic formal relationship between schematic and naturalistic images (see Figure 29), figurines without any sexual attributes might have been originally identifiable as female. A middle position would identify femaleness as part of a fan of references prompted by the schematic images even if they themselves were not identifiable as female. I favor the third position but see few prospects for consensus in interpretation. The current issue is specificity of subject matter and the extent to which the materials prompt us toward iconographic analysis or, instead, a window-on-society approach.

Interpreting Ancient Figurines

Some variation in imagery hints at specific subjects, but most is localized in distribution. Figurines with dynamic postures and gestures might have referenced a complex narrative, but they are rare, occurring as isolated examples – for instance, at Cafer Höyük and 'Ain Ghazal.[54] What Lohof calls "Pillar" figurines are more widespread and might depict subject matter shared over part of the macro-unit (see Figure 30, upper left). They have a vertical, pillar-like body on a splayed base, suggestive of a standing posture. Arms reach forward or extend straight out to the sides. Typically, there are no evident sexual attributes on these figurines, although they are often interpreted as male.[55] I concentrate, however, on a more obvious and widespread candidate.

Could the Seated Anthropomorphs reference a specific subject? Perhaps. The Seated Anthropomorph image, particularly in its more schematic manifestations, is quite simple. Still, the structure of the thematic complex, with core traits and generative rules for elaborating on them, meets the criteria for consideration as "attributes" in the art-historical sense. Among Christian crosses and crucifixes, the subject is, in a sense, the same even when the figure of Jesus is absent. Could the Seated Anthropomorph complex be read in that way – as complexly structured, certainly, but basically depicting a single subject? The idea acquires great interest because the implication would be that a single specific subject was shared at the macro-unit scale and would therefore need consideration for explanation alongside femaleness. The issue is highly charged because we would be engaging in the sort of analysis that could potentially lead to identification of goddesses, or even a primordial Goddess.

Let us begin by supposing that the Seated Anthropomorph was *not* a specific subject and see how far we can progress in window-on-society mode. Empirical conditions favoring such an approach are actual differences among the figurines and evidence that distinct images were displayed together. Seated Anthropomorphs sometimes appear with Pillar figurines. Other representations are not as numerous or widespread in the PPN. Figurines with male genitals are rare in any posture[56] – except at Nevalı Çori, where what I view as a local variation on the Pillar theme (i.e., standing, with appliqué penis, arms uncertain or absent, and with items of clothing) dominates the collection.[57] Sometimes there are standing figures with female breasts, either obese or thin. Some may be pregnant and others not. Based on the manner in which the bellies are depicted, Nevalı Çori is one of the best cases for representations of pregnancy, but pregnant figures are rare (2 percent). At 'Ain Ghazal, there are a few busts – that is, figures depicted only from the waist up.[58] Modeled phalli are more common than figurines that are clearly sexed as male, but they comprise a small minority of any collection (e.g., Jarmo, 'Ain Ghazal).[59]

In addition to the presence of multiple images, there is limited anecdotal evidence that those were directly compared (Figure 36). In many collections, then, there is potential for scrutiny of social differences depicted among the figurines. However, highly schematized figures are not amenable to analysis from that standpoint because they provide none of the "social" distinctions that are of interest in window-on-society mode – and such figures can dominate a collection. To apply only a window-on-society approach here would be artificial because it would involve privileging a minority of the images: those that are most naturalistic.

Instead, anthropomorphic figurines vary along at least two dimensions. There are differences in subject matter, but there is also differential schematization. In Figure 37, I illustrate this suggestion for an idealized PPN assemblage of small, molded-clay objects. The boxes represent the different categories that emerge from the table-sorting of figurines, and the sizes of the boxes are intended to be roughly proportional to the frequencies of the corresponding figurines in this "typical" collection – that is, the larger the box, the more figurines. Roman numerals correspond to the gradation of schematization of Seated Anthropomorphs (see Figure 29), whereas all other images are shown as hatched. Exactly what these other images are varies among collections. The
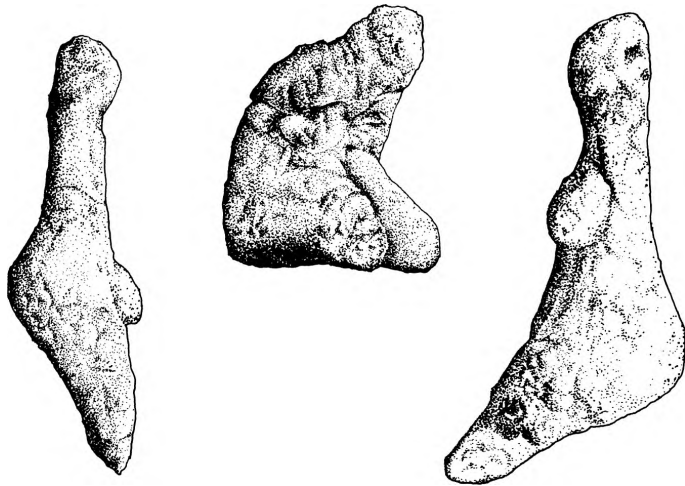
Figure 36. Three of four clay figurines found together in a concavity in a clay floor, Cafer Höyük, Turkey. Left: Standing male (with penis); middle: seated female (with breasts), leaning forward; right: female in V-shaped posture between seated and standing. Figure at left is 4.8 cm. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after Cauvin et al. 1999, Figures 26–28.)

horizontal dimension in Figure 37 constitutes differentiation of "subject matter," whereas the vertical dimension is a gradient of schematization from naturalistic images at the top to purely geometric forms at the bottom. How well this works for an actual assemblage is illustrated by Jarmo in Figure 38 (see also Figure 30); labels are drawn from published categories, and the box sizes are proportional to each category's contribution to the entire collection.

If the window-on-society approach provides only limited insight, and the structure of the Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex meets the criteria for "attributes" that would steer a PPN viewer toward identification of a specific subject, *then what was that subject?*

I do not think that the PPN Seated Anthropomorph represented a goddess, but I postpone the argument for the moment. Here, I offer the following speculative alternative. Let us suppose that the gradation of schematization was referential as a gradation – that it simultaneously represented a set of subjects and posited interconnections among them. Where does that leave us? A distinct possibility in that case would be that the Seated Anthropomorph figurines referenced abstract ideas or values at the schematic end of the spectrum but also, at the naturalistic end, the instantiation of those values in social settings. The (relatively) naturalistic image of a seated, fleshy woman indeed would have had social meaning in contrast to other images (e.g., a man with outstretched arms, a young girl standing). However, she was symbolically richer than those other images because she directly depicted or embodied more abstract values. What might those have been? Perhaps they included a union of opposites. The schematic Seated Anthropomorph was *singular* in the sense that it captured essential humanness extracted from concrete social relations – it expressed a suprasocial human oneness. Yet – unless I am off the mark in what I make of the attention toward freestanding bases, the higher frequencies of schematized as opposed to naturalistic versions, and the linkages between figurines and tokens – the most schematic anthropomorphs were displayed in groups of virtually identical pieces. They may have been singular but they were also *multiple.*
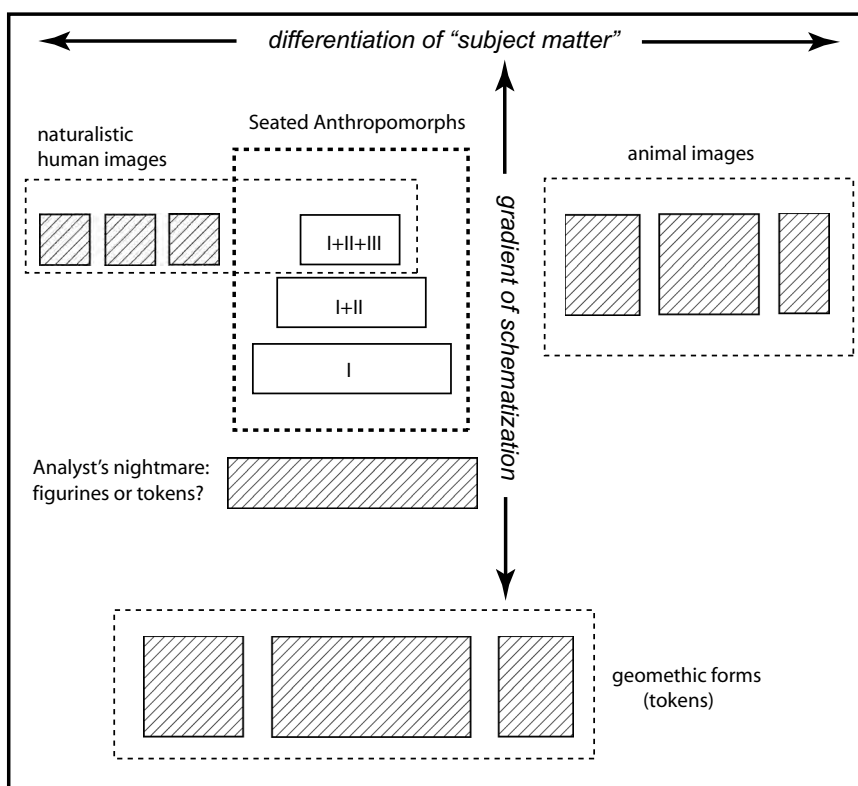
Figure 37. An idealized Later-PPN assemblage of small molded-clay objects, illustrating the proposed Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex.

Magdalenian

I have reserved the second of the Paleolithic cases for last because of all those considered, it veers most markedly from patterns conducive to the window-on-society approach. Most of the headless, footless profile figures are analytically ambiguous as to sex, but as previously noted, both Rosenfeld and Bosinski suggest that even dramatically schematized versions were probably identifiable as female to a Magdalenian audience. If we accept that position, then femaleness in this case was an implied attribute associated with themes that included emphasis on the middle body, prominent buttocks, and radically reductive schematization.

Schematization in this case eliminates those "social" attributes of interest to a window-on-society approach. Rosenfeld finds that anatomical details beyond breasts and arm stumps (shoulder-arm-hand, feet, and differentiated stomach-hip) are uncorrelated either with one another or with any other attributes. The same is true for nonanatomical extraneous lines within the figures. She suggests that these were basically embellishments, not clues to a differentiated subject matter.[60] Bosinski assembles the Gönnersdorf images in a graded series of types with a single dimension of variation: increasing schematization (see Figure 25). His characterization of the subject matter as "showing women or girls represented with half-raised arms and forward-reaching hands, and with bent knees and in consequence buttocks projecting to the rear" seems acceptable.[61]
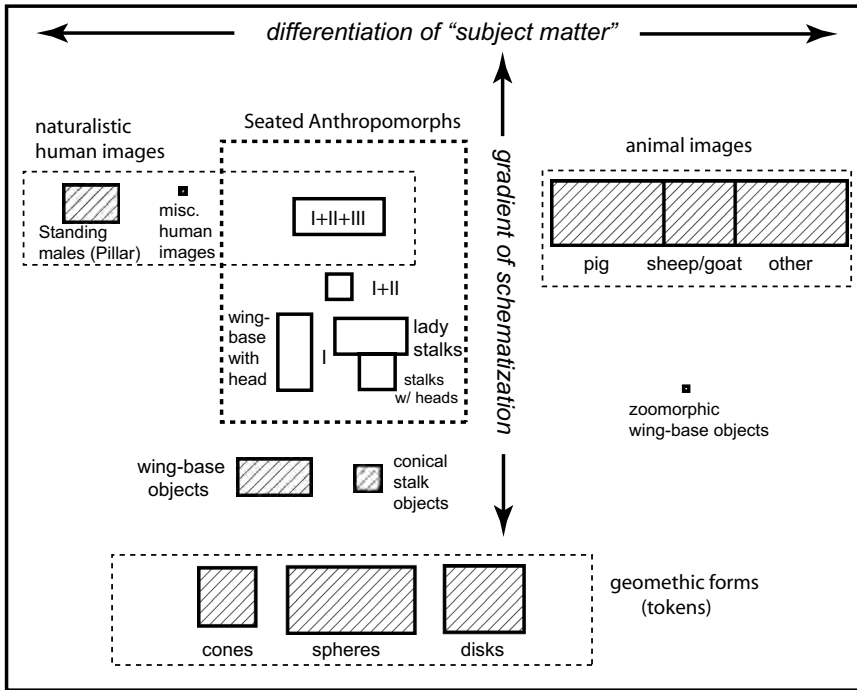
Figure 38. Diagram of the assemblage of small molded–clay objects from Jarmo, Iraq, organized as in Figure 37, based on categories published in original site report (Broman Morales 1983).

The *specific* gesture and *specific* posture are noteworthy. Such features are fatal to any attempt to apply the window–on–society approach. This image *demands* iconographic analysis. The raised forearm, present in one instance at Gönnersdorf – and inferred by Bosinski for the more schematic figures in which the arm is merely a forward-projecting stub – appears on more naturalistic images at Isturitz and La Marche.[62] Iconographic analysis in this case will prove to be a challenge, but the material pushes us toward that mode.

Was the profile figure a specific subject, perhaps even a goddess? If we were to focus only on the figurines, that possibility might be attractive, but the availability of engraved *compositions* of these figures provides important additional clues that steer us away from any such possibility (see Figure 25). The most common composition consists of two or more figures in a line.[63] They are often close to one another, even overlapping; occasionally, there are multiple lines of figures. Other compositions include two figures facing one another or one facing two others in a line. One spectacular case involves four figures in line with a smaller reversed figure between the middle two. The small figure has been interpreted as a baby being carried on the back of one of the "women" in line.[64] In general, what we can take from the compositions is that the profile figure was not a highly individualized entity. "She" was not a goddess in any usual sense of the term. Conversely, these are not depictions of women as social actors; they seem more like repeated inscriptions of a concept like Woman. However, we must remain attentive to the referential possibilities of posture, gesture, and composition. Bosinski suggests that the compositions depicted dances, which is a plausible idea.[65]

Results

The overarching issue here is whether the explanation of female imagery in the different cases is likely to require serious iconographic analysis of subject matter or, alternatively, if conditions for treating the figurines as a window on society are met. If when we follow the principle of multiple local contextualizations, the imagery repeatedly steers us in the same analytical route across an entire macro-unit, then that mode holds great promise for explaining an expression manifested at the macro-unit level, such as femaleness. The importance of scale emerges particularly clearly in the consideration of subject matter. The awkwardness of the term *macro-unit* should remind us that our cases extend vastly across both space and time. Subsidiary scales may be smaller in either spatial or temporal scope. It is possible for the imagery to prompt us to a differing mix of analytical modes, depending on the scale at which we resolve it.

This last point is particularly relevant in the Formative case, in which indications of specific subjects are characteristic of particular horizons or regional traditions. At the scale of the spatiotemporal macro-unit, we are steered toward a window-on-society approach, with possible social referents of the figurines related to age, gender, role, and status. In the Gravettian case, attributes and complex narrative are localized in distribution, and window-on-society analysis appears promising, with referents being more somatic and less purely social. In the Formative there seems to have been considerable variability in the specific mix of social referents from one context to the next, whereas there was greater stability in the Gravettian.

In the PPN, a case can be made for pursuing window-on-society analysis – but, recurringly, only in a subset of any given collection. In contrast to the first two cases, the recurrence of patterned relations among attributes (the Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex) raises the possibility of a specific subject shared across the macro-unit. The (alarming) implication is that iconography is identified as a relevant analytical mode for explanation of femaleness – rendering "Goddess" a potential interpretive outcome. I return to that issue in the next section and again in Chapter 6. Finally, in the Magdalenian case, there is no sound basis for applying the window-on-society approach; despite perhaps insurmountable challenges, we are directed to iconography.

Imagery in Relation to Material Properties

The final pair of analytical modes includes determination of use and symbolic analysis. This is a surprising couple to counterpose in this way: the most concrete of questions ("For what purpose were they used?") against the most subjective ("What symbolism did the images evoke?"). The idea is to consider themes in imagery in relation to material properties of the objects. We expand our attention from figurines to consider images more generally, including size, medium, archaeological context, and use wear. Variation in those criteria indicates that the objects involved were used in different ways. Do themes in imagery crosscut that variation? Or do images used for different purposes draw on distinct thematic repertoires? If we find the former pattern, we might well wonder whether the themes involved had larger symbolic resonance because people referenced them in a variety of social situations. If we find, instead, the latter pattern, then we need to seriously consider explaining the themes with reference to the use or purpose of the objects. I am looking particularly at femaleness, along with any other themes with which it is bundled. Questions include: "How narrowly are these bundles of themes restricted to figurines, as opposed to larger sculpture, paintings, engravings, or decorated tools?" and "How varied were the uses of figurines?"

PPN

I begin with the PPN case because I have already ventured toward symbolism in my claims about a widely shared specific subject. Is the Seated Anthropomorph a recurring theme in other types of imagery in addition to figurines? Given the temporal boundaries I have set (8500–7000 B.C.), the basic answer is no, although I note an exception from Tell Halula (Syria). My boundaries exclude various famous images from the seventh and sixth millennia B.C.; the so-called enthroned goddess from Çatalhöyük (see Figure 83, Chapter 6), for example, dates to ca. 6300/6200 B.C.[66]

Three-dimensional sculpture significantly larger than anything I treat as a "figurine" is known from the PPN of Southern Levant, Central Levant, and Southeastern Anatolia. At least thirty plaster statues were discovered in two caches at 'Ain Ghazal (see Figure 9).[67] The entire collection includes fifteen busts approximately 35 cm in height, two of which were bicephalous. The other fifteen were full-body statues just under 1 m tall. Most had no indication of sexual characteristics, although three of the statues had female breasts and one had a feature possibly depicting female genitals. The refined set of stylistic attributes that makes the statuary so striking is absent on figurines from the same site.[68] The most-promising possible linkages between statuary and figurines involve aspects of the figurines that are unique to this collection.[69] The statues, in other words, do not depict the Seated Anthropomorph.

The same is true for rather different statuary at a smaller scale from Tell Ramad in the Central Levant.[70] The four fragments seem to be from seated, anthropomorphic images about 25 cm high, whereas figurines at the site rarely exceed a height of 5 cm. The single reasonably complete torso has no breasts. At the base of the abdomen where the torso joins the legs, a V is painted in red on a rounded white surface ("difficult to interpret," notes the excavator). With thin thighs and a narrow lower torso, this does not seem like our Anthropomorph, even if it is seated.

Göbekli Tepe and Nevalı Çori in Southeastern Anatolia yielded numerous stone sculptures corresponding to the early PPNB. Divergence from typical figurine themes is particularly clear. Göbekli Tepe is the more spectacular site. Six stone buildings, apparently cultic in purpose, had roofs supported by massive T-shaped stone pillars bearing motifs in low relief.[71] There also are three-dimensional carvings. The highly varied images are mostly naturalistic animals (Figure 39), although humans and human/animal associations also appear. None of those images, not even a unique stone slab carved with a line drawing of a woman (Figure 40), seems related to the Seated Anthropomorph.

Nevalı Çori is a smaller site, but excavations revealed both houses and cult buildings. There also were sculptures, which appeared almost entirely in the cult buildings.[72] Animals, including animal/human associations, predominate. As before, female imagery is not entirely absent, but it does not conform in any way to the Seated Anthropomorph complex. For instance, one badly broken sculpture about 1 m high is interpreted as two crouching women, back-to-back, surmounted by a bird.[73]

In addition, there are numerous figurines, which – as at other sites in Southeastern Anatolia – occur in domestic settings. They were discarded casually, sometimes in pits and areas between houses, but not in special deposits or cult buildings.[74] Furthermore, at Nevalı Çori, the stone and clay figurines appear to involve quite different imagery.[75] The former are diverse and indeed may share themes with the sculpture. The imagery among the clay figurines is distinct from that of other media and seems to include (among other features) a localized transformation on Seated Anthropomorph themes (Figure 28; see also Figure 71, Chapter 6). Here, where different sorts of images were used in different ways, small clay figures are the only ones that incorporate a suite of themes – femaleness associated with seated posture, emphasis on overall bodily form, and fleshy

Figure 39. Zoomorphic imagery on stone pillars from Göbekli Tepe. Each approximately 3.1 m. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after Schmidt 2006, Figures 51 and 46.)

thighs – traceable at the scale of the macro-unit. Furthermore, the clay figurines are restricted to domestic contexts.

Tell Halula, located along the Upper Euphrates, provides the best case of themes from the Seated Anthropomorph in another medium. The medium is painting rather than sculpture, and the context extends the domestic association of the themes. On the floor of a partially preserved
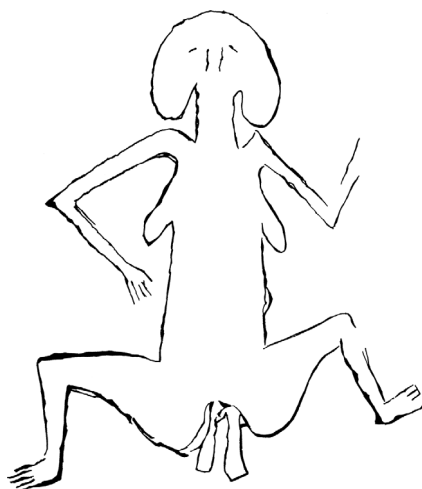
Figure 40. Unique image of woman, 28 cm in length, etched into a stone slab at Göbekli Tepe. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after Hauptmann 1999, Figure 35.)
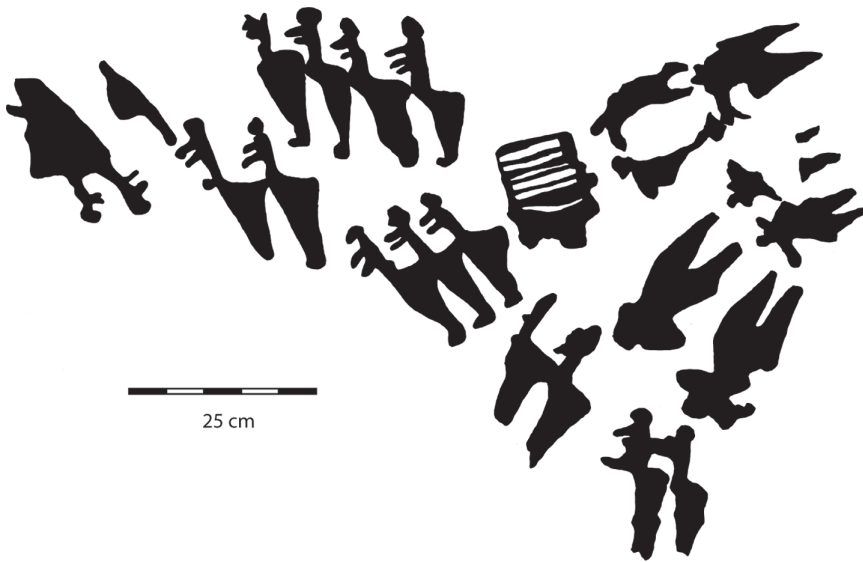
Figure 41. Paintings on floor of PPNB residence, Tell Halula (Syria). Sets of human figures in frontal or side view swirl around central grill. (Interpreted by Lesure, based on Molist 1998: Figure 4.)

house were twenty-three human figures (20 to 25 cm long) in dark red paint.[76] A few were frontal images but most were depicted in profile and in sets of two to four figures (Figure 41). In the center of the swirl of images was a box-like grill. Although the figures stand, they share other traits with the Seated Anthropomorph complex, including schematization and emphasis on overall bodily form, heavy thighs and buttocks, and lack of attention to the head. Arms on the figures shown in profile project straight to the front. The figures are analytically ambiguous as to gender, but the overall form of the body might originally have sexed them as female. In a clever reading, Garfinkel suggests that this is a depiction of people dancing in a circle.[77] It is certainly notable that the best case for Seated Anthropomorph imagery in a medium beyond figurines is a composition containing multiple, similar figures.

Overall, although there may be some scope for symbolic analysis of the Seated Anthropomorph, we are primarily directed to examine the *use* of the figurines as possible grounds for explaining their form.

Formative

Femaleness among Formative Mesoamerican figurines is bundled together with predominantly standing postures and elaborate attention to the face and head; to these features we can now add synchronic stylistic variation and social subject matter. With the exception of elaborate head-dresses – which recur in a variety of media and may constitute something of a cultural theme – this suite of attributes is, as in the PPN case, absent from stone sculpture. (The exception of Olmec art, a temporally restricted horizon within the macro-unit, is considered in Chapter 5.)

Formative Mesoamerican sculpture is full of "attributes" (in the art-historical sense) and hints of complex narrative (Figure 42). Themes generally involve rulership and its relationship to the
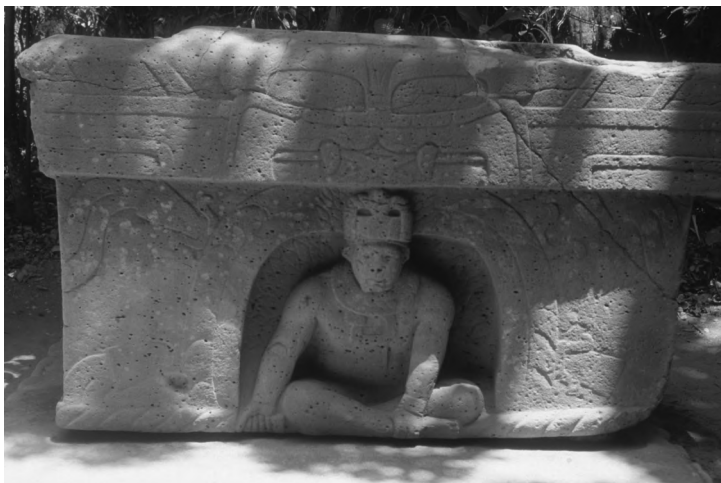
Figure 42. Altar 4, probably actually a throne, from La Venta (Mexico). Person emerging from mouth of supernatural creature. "Rope" at base continues to left to another figure on side of the monument. Basalt. (Parque Museo La Venta, photograph by Lesure.)

supernatural, with depictions of fantastic creatures, rulers, and costumed people engaged in ritual acts. Femaleness seems relatively rare, although Follensbee argues that it is more prevalent than generally believed at Gulf Coast sites such as San Lorenzo and La Venta.[78] There has been debate about whether the form of headdresses identified ruler images among figurines from the site of Chalcatzingo; nonetheless, this constitutes a localized exception to widespread patterns.[79]

Ceramic images with clear functional attributes tend to diverge in imagery from accompanying figurines. For example, effigies on pottery serving vessels from Paso de la Amada are primarily zoomorphic. At Amomoloc, decorations on pottery contemporary with the Cuatlapanga figures are complexly geometric (Figure 43). Ceramic images of Central Mexican deities, sometimes molded in a style similar to figurines, appear during the first millennium B.C., but they are attached to incense burners.

Finally, there are hollow figurines intermediate in scale between the solid figurines and stone sculpture (20 to more than 40 cm in height).[80] The imagery in this case is regularly anthropomorphic and at least sometimes female. Many of the larger figurines seem to be unsexed[81]; however, in some places, female imagery may have predominated on these objects that were larger, more complex, and more elaborate than the small, solid figurines.[82] Perhaps the most spectacular case is mid-second-millennium B.C. Paso de la Amada, where three sizes of sculpted anthropomorphic imagery are recognized: solid figurines of 5 to 15 cm, hollow figurines of probably 20 to 30 cm, and statuettes of approximately 60 cm. The middle set is fragmentary but the imagery seems to diverge from that of the solid figurines. The statuettes are known mainly from tiny fragments, all associated with large buildings interpreted as elite residences.[83] At Mound 32, however, multiple fragments of a large female image, probably originally about 60 cm high, were scattered in a midden at what was probably the back of the platform-top structure (Figure 44). There appears to be some scope here for work on the symbolic resonances of female imagery.
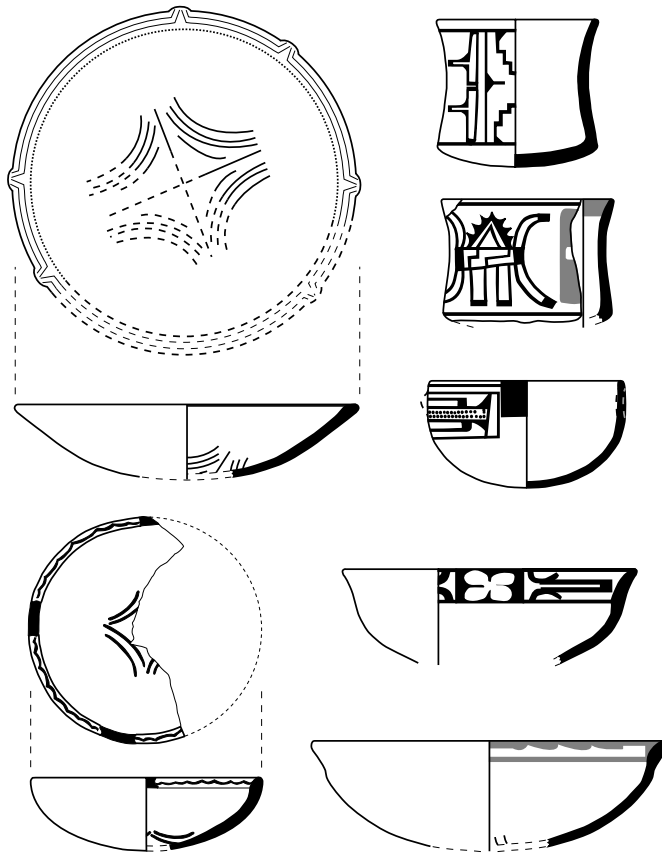
Figure 43. Decorated pottery contemporaneous with Cuatlapanga–type figurines: white-slipped or red-on–white-slipped vessels with incised geometric motifs. The decorative program is unrelated to contemporaneous figurines. Amomoloc and Tetel, Tlaxcala. (Courtesy of Jennifer Carballo.)

The Paso de la Amada pattern is localized in time and space, which seems to be the general pattern across Mesoamerica. At the macro-unit scale, we are recurringly prompted to look into *use* in any attempt to account for the imagery of solid figurines.

Gravettian and Magdalenian

The two Paleolithic cases contrast notably from what we have seen in the PPN and the Formative. In the Gravettian era, the bundle of themes that we are following is repeatedly found on figurines, but it also appears on other objects. The instances are rare, but they extend across the macro-unit.

At Kostenki I and Avdeevo, Gvozdover finds that decorations on bone tools correlated with function: Tools with similar uses were decorated in similar ways.[84] Furthermore, the handle-ends of several classes of tool are shaped as "heads" and decorated with the same sort of ornamental
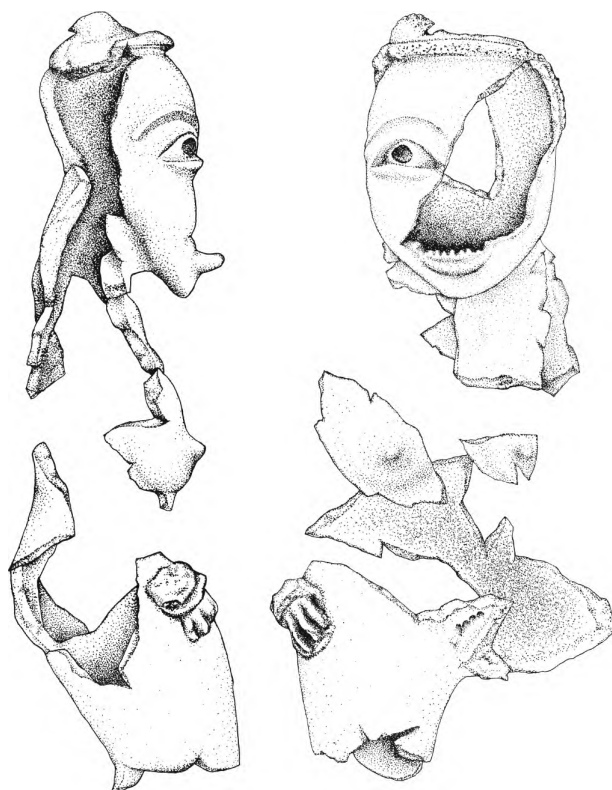
Figure 44. Fragments of ceramic statuette from Paso de la Amada (Mexico). Breasts suggest that the figure was female. Originally 60 to 70 cm tall. (Drawn by Purcell and Lesure.)

features appearing on contemporaneous female figurines. Thus, some traits from the figurines – minus obesity but including, Gvozdover would argue, femaleness – were relevant to activities other than those involving figurines.

In renewed excavations at Kostenki in the 1980s, fragments of statuettes significantly larger than the usual Kostenkian figurine appeared (compare Figure 32 b and c).[85] The imagery of the larger figures is identical to that of the smaller ones, further supporting the idea that the themes involved were significant beyond any single realm of activity.

At Dolní Věstonice and Pavlov (Czech Republic), "figurines" are quite diverse.[86] Still, there are linkages in overall torso form, lack of attention to the head, form of the breasts, and lower-body configuration between female images in baked clay and some in ivory.[87] If we entertain the claim that the clay figurines were placed wet in a hot fire with the intention that they would explode,[88] then their use-contexts were not the same as those of the ivory images. At Dolní Věstonice, the ivories include two sets of pendants that apparently depict female breasts (Figure 31c).[89] Here, figurines were used in multiple ways, and themes from figurine imagery appear on objects used in different settings.

At the cave site of Laussel (France), the discovery of five relief sculptures of human figures 30 to 50 cm tall, all found in a 12 × 6 m area delimited by fallen rock, led the original excavators – with reason – to identify a "sanctuary." The imagery in three cases is closely tied to contemporaneous
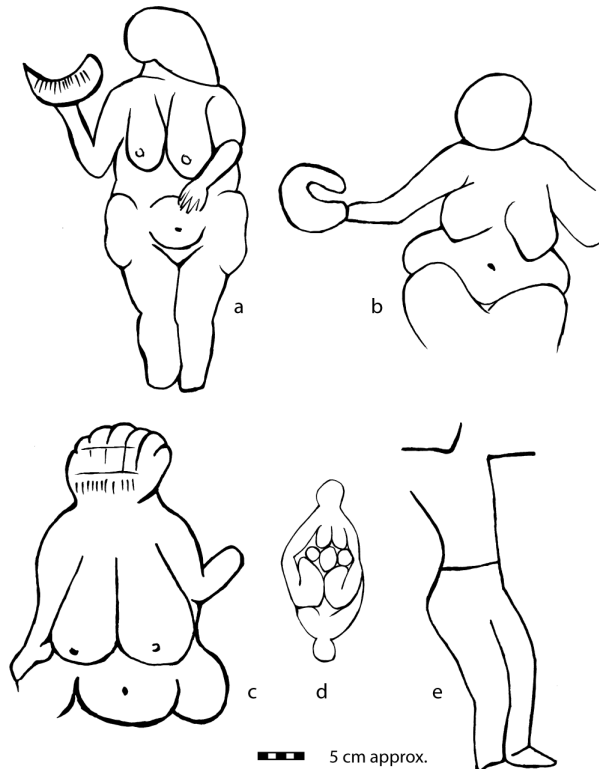
Figure 45. Relief carvings in stone from "sanctuary" at Laussel (France), Gravettian era: (a) "Woman with Horn"; (b) "The Venus of Berlin," destroyed in World War II and now known only from casts; (c) "Woman with the Gridded Head," hips and region below belly broken and uncertain; (d) "The Two People"; and (e) "The Hunter of Laussel," broken at top. (Drawn by Alana Purcell based on Delporte 1993a: Figures 43–46; Leroi-Gourhan 1967: Figures 270–274; and White 2003: Figures 46–49.)

figurines, with the only difference being that the obese females with faceless heads are depicted holding objects (Figure 45). This last feature gives the impression of an "attribute" in the art-historical sense. The fanciful speculation that surrounds the Woman with Horn and her companions is thus warranted to the extent that it is likely that the images had specific referents of *some* sort. The important point is that imagery recognizable from the figurines appears here in a special – probably ritual – setting. There is a strong case for symbolic significance of the imagery involved beyond any single narrow activity.

Two general points can be made about the Gravettian case. First, extension of imagery from the figurines to other sorts of objects is widespread, but it is identified rarely in comparison to the occurrence of figurines. Second, although there are numerous connections among the figurines of different areas, the localized extensions of figurine imagery to other objects are all different from one another.

Extensions of imagery across differences in material properties are echoed in the Magdalenian era. At Gönnersdorf and Andernach, similar imagery appears on both figurines and engraved slate plaquettes. Although figurines and plaquettes appear in similar archaeological contexts, most of

the former represent considerable labor, whereas the latter were made quickly for momentary use. One proposed explanation for the superposition of images on the plaquettes is that the latter functioned somewhat like a chalkboard. Images were easily visible only immediately after they were drawn, when light-colored slate dust clung to the incisions against a dark background.[90]

Figurines and plaquettes thus seem likely to have had distinct uses, but the same imagery was used in both settings. Other sites in Central Europe show a similar pattern in which recognizable profile figures recur on objects that likely were used in different ways. Petersfels is famous for the pendants made of jet with profile-figure imagery, but the site also yielded an unperforated figurine of the same sort as those of Gönnersdorf and a fragment of bone engraved with highly schematized profile images.[91]

In France, the same imagery appears on still other objects and in other contexts. The larger of the two engraved rocks at Lalinde measures 60 × 45 cm and bears ten partly superimposed profile figures. There also are cases of this imagery on cave walls at Fronsac, Combarelles, and Grotte Carriot.[92]

Even more definitively than in the Gravettian, the Magdalenian case is one for which symbolic analysis of figurine imagery is required. It is particularly clear here that the imagery of the figurines was displayed in a variety of use-contexts across a large region. Of course, there are differences from the Gravettian. In the earlier case, the making of small figurines appears to be central to the patterns shared at the macro-unit level; in the Magdalenian case, figurines seem to be a relatively minor vehicle for imagery that more often appears in other media. In the Magdalenian case, it is really the imagery – in the form of a highly recognizable stylistic-iconographic complex – that is shared. Still, in both cases, we are directed toward symbolic analysis.

Results

The question has been whether femaleness and its associated bundle of themes are to be explained with reference to the concrete uses of figurines or to their symbolism. Obviously, it is always relevant to explore the uses of artifacts, and objects with narrow intended purposes can have symbolic resonance – knives, for instance. We are not looking for mutually exclusive alternatives but rather advice, as it were, from the imagery itself concerning allocation of analytical energies. The basic idea is that if the imagery in which we have taken an interest is restricted to objects used for some particular purpose, then that purpose may well explain the imagery. If, instead, the imagery recurs on objects used for different purposes in a variety of settings, we should ask why it was so important – an inquiry that takes us into the realm of symbolic resonance. As always, patterning across scales is important.

In the Near East, imagery from the figurines is absent in larger statuary. Prior to 7000 B.C., we are directed to consider *use* in any effort to explain the imagery. The same is true for Mesoamerica. There is a recurring pattern of figurines in multiple sizes; however, in stone, on pottery vessels, and on masks, imagery is different from what we find among the figurines (the ephemeral exception of Olmec art is considered in Chapter 5).

Both the PPN and Formative, then, contrast with the Paleolithic cases. In the Gravettian and the Magdalenian eras, we find imagery from figurines on other sorts of objects. As previously pointed out, there are differences between those cases. In the Magdalenian, it is the imagery that is shared across the macro-unit; it is employed on various objects in different places including (sometimes) figurines. The prompting toward a serious symbolic analysis of the imagery is particularly strong there. In the Gravettian case, the imagery is shared at the macro-unit scale but so is the practice of

inscribing it on figurines. Other uses of the imagery appear, but they differ among contexts; they seem to be localized extensions of imagery from figurines to other social contexts. The contrast with the Magdalenian prompts two observations. First, it is likely that in the Gravettian, specific symbolic resonances were localized rather than widely shared. Second, the question of the use of figurines retains considerable analytical importance in this case. Use seems like a macro-unit phenomenon; it is even possible that the localized elaborations on the imagery were generated by the symbolic importance of the *uses to which figurines were put*. In this sense, the Gravettian has greater overlap than the Magdalenian with PPN and Formative patterns. Another observer might even read the latter two cases more as I have the Gravettian, although the sanctuary at Laussel has no parallels in those two cases within the spatiotemporal boundaries that I have set.

Prospects for Universalist Explanation

In this, the first of three case studies, my goal has been to enlist contextualist strategies to address some of the recurring problems of universalism. Of course, it is not at all clear what recurring social causes would lead people in different times and places to make female figurines. It is similarities among the figurines that prompt investigators to draw on universalist logic in their localized interpretations or even (occasionally) to propose an explicitly cross-cultural explanation.

I have therefore started with the imagery rather than any preferred theory of causation. By contemplating the material at hand in relation to what it is possible to say about images, we can assess the likelihood that a universalist explanation for similarities across contexts exists. In Chapter 3, I identified six modes of analysis in which characteristic research questions are confronted with evidence according to more or less established procedures. To a significant degree, the modes are independent of the competing theories of archaeologists, yet the information they provide is not equally relevant to every theoretical agenda. It is thus of great interest that characteristic patterns of evidence favor work in one analytical mode while simultaneously hindering work in another. It is particularly those seesaw relations, summarized in my "guide to comparison," that I seek to exploit in weighing the prospects for universalist explanation.

As befits any effort at the cross-cultural explanation, I chose three apparently independent cases of figurine making, although I ultimately split the Paleolithic and treated the two parts as separate instances. These, at the largest scale, are the cases to be compared. Following contextualist strategies, comparison is based on an internally differentiated synthesis of patterning in each case. The methodological ideal is multiple local contextualizations, a bottom-up approach to synthesis.

The question is how prospects for application of the analytical modes vary across each macro-unit. A mode that is consistently favored at the same scale of space and time as the phenomenon to be explained holds promise in the effort to explain that phenomenon. For instance, if patterning favorable to iconography appears in every case in which figurines are predominantly female, then we should examine whether iconographic analysis might yield an explanation for femaleness among the figurines. If, instead, patterns favor iconography only at a smaller scale – for example, the northern fringe of the area or the latter half of the relevant epoch – then it would not be a promising resource for a large-scale explanation of why figurines were female.

When each independent case has been internally synthesized in this manner, then those syntheses can be compared. If patterning in each case directs us to the same mode or combination of modes, then the prospects for a universalist explanation covering multiple, independent cases would be significantly enhanced. Discordant patterns – if we are directed to iconography in the Gravettian but analysis of use in the PPN – would darken considerably any prospects for a common explanation.

Table 3. Summary of Results

	Gravettian	PPNB	Formative	Magdalenian
Relations of form				
synchronic stylistic analysis	+ (schematization)	+ (schematization)	+ (stylistic variation)	+ (schematization)
Specificity of subject				
iconography		+		+
window-on-society analysis	+ (structure and content)	+? (limited to parts of assemblages)	+ (structure)	
Imagery in relation to material properties				
determination of use	+? (Did use of figurines have symbolic resonance?)	+	+	
symbolic analysis	+ (structure)			+ (structure and content)

The cases I considered were to be independent, originating instances of the making of figurines. Both the Gravettian and Formative fit the criteria: They are preceded by eras in which figurines are heterogeneous and exceedingly rare. The Later-PPN case is less clear-cut but still similar; I briefly consider Earlier-PPN imagery in Chapter 6. Some analysts view the Magdalenian as an independent case, although I suspect there are historical connections from the Gravettian. It provides an illuminating contrast with the other cases, but I set it aside during the latter part of the discussion that follows.

"Figurine" and "female" are both potentially problematic categories for comparative analysis. In the cases considered here, I found that the first stands up well to the strategy of synthesis through multiple contextualizations. Femaleness is manifested differently among cases. In the Formative, it seems to vary from central to secondary theme. In the Gravettian, femaleness is more consistently central, whereas in the Magdalenian, it is implicit in a radically reductive schematization of the human form. Finally, there is the enigmatic PPN case, in which female figurines are recurringly associated with more schematic figures without evident sexual attributes. Despite these differences among cases, femaleness is a component of figurine imagery across each macro-unit. It is found bundled together with other themes – themes that differ dramatically between the cases but which are consistent within each case. It seems legitimate to wonder whether there might not be a seat at the interpretive table for universalist explanation.

Results of weighing the analytical modes are summarized in Table 3. Under the topics labeled "relations of form," "specificity of subject," and "imagery in relation to material properties" are grouped those opposing pairs of modes for which I identified a seesaw effect in which patterns

favoring application of one mode discouraged application of the other. (Under "relations of form," I include only synchronic stylistic analysis because I did not systematically examine the diachronic alternative.) Instances of favorable patterning are indicated by a plus sign (+).

I also find it necessary to add brief notations. In two instances (indicated by "+?" in the table), patterning basically favors one analytical mode; however, an argument also can be made for the opposing mode of the pair. In the PPN, iconographic analysis is in order, but a window-on-society approach is plausibly applicable to some subset of many assemblages. In the Gravettian, there is a basis for symbolic analysis, but material properties of the representations that share imagery with figurines vary, raising the question of whether it was the *use* of the figurines (rather than the imagery) that had symbolic significance.

Another distinction introduced in the table is "structure" versus "content." For several analytical modes, similarities among contexts involve sharing of actual content — for instance, the same specific subject or the same social referent. In other instances, content does not appear to be shared, but there is nevertheless structural equivalence among contexts in that patterning prompts us toward the same analytical mode.

Each column of Table 3 synthesizes a spatiotemporal macro-unit of figurine making. Our task now is to compare them: Are patterns among the images likely to steer analysts onto similar paths of interpretation or very different paths? In the table, this assessment is accomplished by moving along each row, looking for similarities of pattern.

All five analytical modes were favored in at least two cases, and I briefly consider the comparative potential of each such correspondence in patterning. My main interest is in similarities that might be accounted for in a common explanation. However, in contextualist usage, similarities at one level can provide an opportunity for scrutiny of difference at another. Several of the similarities among cases are not promising for universalist explanation but comprise a potential source of insight from this contrastive perspective in which comparison enriches the understanding of uniqueness in each case.

The single mode favored in all four cases is synchronic-stylistic analysis. The issue of interest in this mode is how form contributes to the significance of an image by referencing the way in which the object was made. Despite the positive showing, any prospects for universalist explanation are stymied by radical variation among the cases in how form appears to have signified. In Table 3, I have noted the divide between the Formative, where stylistic variation is particularly salient, and the other cases in which schematization is more important. However, each case of schematization also is distinctive. Variable degrees of schematization in the Gravettian seem to reference stages of figurine making. In the Magdalenian, a highly reductive schematization was probably unifying rather than differentiating, creating a sense of independent reality for a subject depicted in diverse media. In the PPN, as in the Gravettian, a gradation from naturalistic to schematized appears. However, the gradient was not about stages of manufacture. I suggested abstract values and their actuation in social circumstances. This is rich material for contrastive-contextualist analysis but it is not promising for universalist explanation.

The two modes favored in only two cases are also candidates for contrastive-contextualist comparison. One is the sharing of the actual content of specific subject matter at the macro-unit scale in the Magdalenian and PPN cases. The iconographic analysis of each case poses many challenges, and comparative scrutiny would probably help analysts understand the individuality of each. The other mode favored only twice is symbolic analysis, in the Gravettian and Magdalenian cases. I began noting contrasts between those as soon as I had linked them as similar, and there seem to be few prospects for universalist explanation. In my opinion, the Magdalenian case should be analyzed as an historical outgrowth of the Gravettian.

The final two analytical modes – determination of use and analysis of figurines as a window on society – seem to have more potential for universalist work. Both are favored or perhaps favored in three cases: Gravettian, PPN, and Formative. The Magdalenian case cautions us to not become too eager – but it is also only debatably "independent" from the Gravettian. Reformulating the Magdalenian case as a development from the Gravettian imagery allows us to set it aside and consider a universalist explanation for the other three. Of course, setting aside an inconvenient Magdalenian would be more convincing if our proposed explanation could account for the directional development from the Gravettian.

Let us suppose that we now have three independent cases with imagery prompting us toward similar interpretive paths. Are there grounds for universalist explanation? Window-on-society mode does not appear promising for a universalist effort. There are significant differences among the cases in "content" of the social referents of the imagery but also, worryingly, in "structure." In the Gravettian case, referents are physiological-social – women's bodies, their variable form, their ornamented enhancement – and there is considerable consistency from one context to another. In the Formative, referents are more purely social – age, gender, status, and role differentiation among people elaborately ornamented for social presentation – but there is considerable variability among contexts. The texture of the referencing of social subjects diverges so much from that of the Gravettian that we must wonder whether wholly different causal processes are at work. I have not characterized the social referents in the PPN case because they seem particularly cryptic.

Investigation of how the figurines were used is the more promising option. Within each case, the spatiotemporal texture of patterns recommending this mode of analysis is reasonably homogeneous. That observation holds for both "structure" and "content," the latter in this case being specific material properties such as size or context of recovery. Localized exceptions tend to be in the form of additions to the predominant pattern – that is, figurines *also* in another size or *also* appearing in other recovery contexts. This consistency makes "use" quite attractive. Because of the texture of patterning, it is conceivable that we might be able to identify common elements applicable to multiple contexts without having to sweep too much local variability under the carpet.

However, what might that common element be? Although my analysis has not been of the sort that would yield a specific suggestion, it is helpful to work with something concrete, however speculative it might be. What if figurines were mainly made by women? Then they might be female because they were by, for, and about women. I do not attempt to justify this suggestion empirically but instead consider its rhetorical attractions.

One attraction is that the idea is compatible with the kind of Gravettian–Magdalenian shift that I am positing. It is easy to imagine that the identity of the makers of figurines might change, especially if figurines came to be used for new purposes. Surely, once a tradition of manufacture is in place, it can become the object of innovation and change that lead far from any original purpose. It thus seems possible to accommodate the trajectory from Gravettian to Magdalenian without undermining the ability of this common "explanation" to cover the three originating cases. For the Gravettian case, we can explain femaleness as related to the *use* of the figurines but then posit that the inscription of femaleness in durable media provided grounds on which femaleness itself could take on significance, leading to very different patterns by the later Magdalenian.

From the perspective of an ambitious universalism, my specific suggestion seems disappointing. The proposed common element among the cases is of little relevance to the explanatory theorizing characteristic of the genre. I suggest simply that in these cases, it just so happened that mainly women made figurines. There was no necessary relationship between femaleness and these objects. I would add that such a limited and contingent relation is the extent of the commonality among the cases. This common element can explain woefully little about any particular case.

Still, we must be content with such a result if we are serious about throwing in our lot with a pragmatic archaeology that would enlist contextualist tools to address the travails of universalism. Because the possibility of universalist explanation was raised by observation of the materials, our aim here has been to avoid privileging a particular theoretical position or set of external causes. We have been trying to let the material direct us where it might. What the material tells us is not easy to decipher, but it appears that the common element among our cases might be simple – such as that women made the figurines.

Given the fate of previous ambitious universalist formulations concerning female figurines, a modest and contingent claim certainly has appeal as something that might plausibly stand up to future empirical scrutiny. Contingency and modesty also seem promising characteristics for a common element, given all the disparities among originating instances of figurine making, in terms of both patterns among the objects and social circumstances among which we might identify external causes. Yet, I suggest that there *is* a commonality. A final appeal of my proposed explanation is that it would address recurring questions concerning truly universalist linkages in a way that places only the most minimal restrictions on specific interpretations of the individual cases. For the cases considered – all still large spatiotemporal units – we are steered away from the generically human in our search for external cause and directed to devote considerable energy to causes unique to each case.

Chapter 5

Mesoamerican Figurines and the
Contextualist Appeal to Universal Truths

An important theme in the effort to grapple with comparison is the interpenetration of contextualism and universalism. In Chapter 2, I suggested that the interaction went both ways, and I have just concluded an effort to use contextualist strategies in addressing some of the chronic problems of universalist (social) explanations inspired by observations of (material) similarities between figurines. I turn now to the other side of the coin – to reliance on universalist claims as crucial links in context-specific arguments. The strategy is a common and probably necessary tool of interpretation, but it raises concerns. Specifically, such localized uses of universalist logic have unexamined expansive implications. The same logic might apply to what are usually numerous related cases of figurine making surrounding the context being studied. My goal here is to develop analytical strategies that allow us to address this characteristic concern.

My case study is the small, solid, fired-clay figurines of Formative Mesoamerica, and I conclude the chapter by considering what kinds of statements might usefully be made about "Formative figurines" as a general phenomenon.

The Problem

Of course, contextualist interpretation may draw on general concepts without using universalist logic.[1] We might ask how "domestic space" was constituted in a particular community or how "female" and "male" were given meaningful content in a specific setting. The general concepts are tools for understanding specificity, but the generalities are subordinated to local specifics. They bring the specifics more clearly into focus. Also, both the general and the specific in such cases are social in content.

My topic in this chapter is a different and characteristically archaeological relationship between general and specific. Often, in context-specific studies of figurines, a generality that is social in content is accorded the status of established fact relative to archaeological specifics that resist interpretation. The universalist phrasing of the information from the social realm justifies its
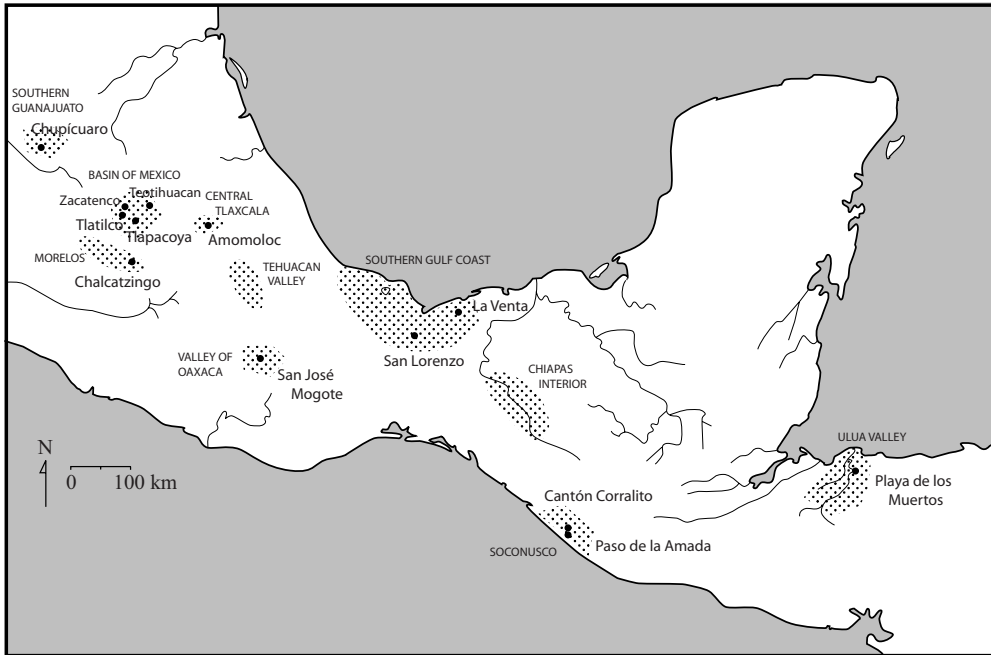
Figure 46. Mesoamerica, showing regions and sites considered in this chapter.

application to the archaeological case. For instance, because the poorly understood archaeological case is a member of a class of societies that, as an aggregate, is better understood than the case under investigation, knowledge of that class allows us to posit the existence of unobservable social features in the archaeological case. Because the universalism is social in content, it contributes to the key rhetorical move of reformulating material patterns in social terms.

I introduced this topic in Chapter 2 with a reflection on my own interpretation of Formative figurines from Paso de la Amada. By identifying the archaeological case as an "equal bridewealth society" (after Jane Collier), I claimed to be able to make sense of the selection of social categories depicted among the figurines, in a version of what I now call window-on-society analysis. A few more examples are in order.

Ann Cyphers finds that the figurines of Chalcatzingo are predominantly female, with pregnancy the most common theme (Figure 46 shows locations of sites and regions). Considering most non-pregnant females to have been adolescents and noting that a few figurines hold a baby, she suggests that figurines depicted the fertile stages of a woman's life. That reading of the imagery prompts the suggestion that figurines were used in life-cycle and curing rites. Indeed, the figurines "document such rituals based on the female life cycle"; thus, they provide a window into this otherwise invisible dimension of Formative social life.[2] The figurines also therefore provide justification for further inferences drawn from the anthropological literature on life-cycle rituals: that the rituals involved reciprocal economic exchanges and that those exchanges were a mechanism for increasing hierarchy.[3] This argument is similar in structure to mine for Paso de la Amada (variability among the figurines prompts the choice of a social generality that then yields a richer understanding of the archaeological case), but Cyphers appeals to a different set of universalist understandings.

Another example is Rosemary Joyce's analysis of Playa de los Muertos figurines from that and other sites in the Ulúa Valley.[4] She interprets four classes of representation (based on differences

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in hairstyles, ornamentation, clothing, and indications of age) as expressions of transitions in age of girls and women. Figurines were "objectifications of turning points in the formation of social personae" that would have "served as models of decorum."[5] That interpretive claim is based on a stable social generalization: Crafted images of humans contribute to the creation of real people as thinking, feeling, acting subjects. That assertion – although broader in scope than those of my study or Cyphers's and thus less detailed in its transfer of social information – is nevertheless universalist, and it plays a key role in reformulating material patterns in a way that make them appropriate for window-on-society analysis. Differences among the figurines, including age, sex, or social role, would have prompted different sorts of actions on the part of actual people and thus would have had a role in creating and perpetuating the very differences they depicted.

Joyce Marcus's interpretation of figurines from San José Mogote and other sites in the Valley of Oaxaca is a variation of the window-on-society approach, with stable generalities having a different role in the argument. The universalist stepping-stone enters the scenario at the beginning. In village cultures around the world, Marcus notes, ancestors are the focus of ritual: Men often engage with distant ancestors in public settings while women propitiate recent ancestors in the domestic sphere.[6] Oaxacan figurines, Marcus suggests, were depictions of ancestors. That interpretation, with its universalist precedents in small-scale societies, then can be used to make sense of specific features of the Formative images, such as the depiction of people in the prime of life and their lack of individualizing traits. It is thus only with the ancestor interpretation established that variation among representations enters the argument. Still, Marcus finds depictions of social personae – including gender, age, marital status, and social rank – in the figurines. Once again, the universalist strands are rhetorically important. And once again, they are different from those in the other studies yet plausibly applicable in those other cases as well.

A much older work – Laurette Sejourné's interpretation of Tlatilco figurines – provides a contrast in its radical departure from the window-on-society approach.[7] Like Marcus, Sejourné appeals to universalist social generalities at the beginning of her argument. From ethnographies of native villages in Oaxaca and the American Southwest, she draws the idea that Formative villagers had a worldview in which natural phenomenan – including crop plants such as maize – were animated by anthropomorphic spirits. Those observations provide a basis for identifying the most common image among the Tlatilco figurines – the young, nude, standing "pretty ladies" (Figure 47a) – as representations of the maize spirits themselves or perhaps representations of the maidens who danced the part of those spirits in public ceremonies. Either way, the argument departs from a window-on-society approach in which identification of subject matter is halted at the pre-iconographic stage. Sejourné claims to have identified specific, conventional subjects in the figurines. This contrast proves useful, but the point here is that a universalist formulation has an indispensable role in the argument, and the specific formulation yet again differs from those chosen by other investigators.

Who is correct? Is there one of these universalist formulations that best illuminates the social import of figurines in all of the cases? Or, could everyone be right? Certainly, as Joyce points out in contemplating "Mesoamerican figurine studies" as a collective project, clay is a versatile medium, the societies we are studying were internally as well as externally diverse, and we should expect variability at all scales.[8] Joyce cautions against the idea of testing an interpretation of one collection with data from another collection.

Yet, strands of universalist logic applied in one context implicate surrounding contexts. We could treat each author's stable generality as applicable across Mesoamerica but relevant to figurines in only one case. That move, however, would beg the question in every case of why each of the other universalisms should be ruled out as causal factors. Any arguments we mustered there would
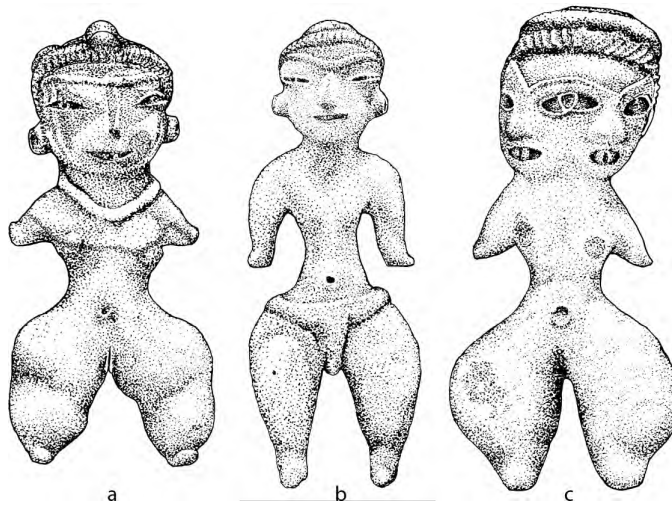
Figure 47. Three figurines from burials at Tlatilco (Mexico), types D1 and D4: (a) young female, "pretty lady," painted white (necklace, eyes, and earspools), yellow (breasts, shoulders, face), and red (designs on face, earspools); (b) probable male with loincloth and red slip or paint; (c) female with two faces and traces of yellow and red paint. Fired clay. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after photographs in García Moll and Salas Cuesta 1998.)

undermine the stability of the generalizations as linking arguments on figurines in any of the contexts, including that for which it was originally proposed.

We thus need grounds for weighing the applicability of universalist claims in different contexts. One approach would be to ask whether the social generalities are valid. Is there really a class of "equal bridewealth societies" to which certain features can be universally ascribed? Such considerations would involve testing with ethnographic data: a project that appears difficult, contentious, and likely to lead us down the problematic path that Joyce cautions against – toward a unitary (and dubious) "explanation" for Formative figurines. Instead of trying to test these claims on the social side, it is more promising to turn to the archaeological side. There, we can engage with their expansive implications. How successfully can a given formulation be applied to those cases to which (according to its own logic) it should apply?

The goal is not to decide which particular universalism is correct; rather, it is to develop a way to assess the relative rhetorical robustness and the domains of applicability of different suggestions.

Selection of Analytical Tools

In efforts to interpret prehistoric figurines, there is nothing wrong with context-specific appeals to what amount to universalist "laws," but they do have expansive implications. If the implications are ignored for too long by researchers studying related figurine traditions, the eventual result will be interpretive chaos. My goal in this chapter is to develop strategies for assessing the interpretive import of expansive implications. A pragmatic approach toward different theoretical orientations is again a key component of the approach. I draw analytical resources from both universalism and contextualism and enlist as well my guide to comparison.

Setting aside the notion that interpretation must be either universalist or contextualist, we free ourselves to see interpretations of figurines as tapestries containing different types of arguments,

each of which deserves to be evaluated in a manner appropriate to its nature. Strands of universalist logic woven into contextualist studies should be singled out for assessment in universalist terms. That point might be taken in different ways – for example, as involving testing in the social domain. I have chosen to focus on the explanatory power of social generalities when we explicitly consider their expansive implications – that is, their applicability to multiple, related contexts. The issue is not whether they are wrong or right but rather whether they are "weak" or "strong." Strong universalist generalities meet at least two conditions: *consistent applicability* and *productivity*.

First, universalist claims have greater rhetorical power if they actually apply in many of the cases in which their conditions of applicability are present. If all societies in Formative Mesoamerica were equal bridewealth societies or ancestor-venerating villages but those universalist formulations only seem to explain figurines in (respectively) Paso de la Amada and San José Mogote, then they would provide weak linking arguments for the interpretation of figurines because the power of the universalist logic is undermined.

Second, powerful universalist claims should be productive of deeper insights. A universalist "law" may be consistently applicable across Formative Mesoamerica but remain a mere platitude that provides little insight into the figurines beyond what we already knew at the outset. The interpretive goal is to posit the existence of unseen conditions in the case being considered based on our identification of that case as a member of a larger class (equal bridewealth societies, ancestor-venerating villages). Ideally, the inference positing the existence of such conditions should help us make sense of further patterns in the evidence beyond those that justified its initial application. In that sense, it would be "productive."

We can use these two principles to weigh the strength of context-specific appeals to universalist truths. Still, we require an approach to comparison not *between* macro-units of figurine making (as in Chapter 4) but rather *within* them. I turn again to contextualism. Bruce Knauft's work on culture-area studies in South Coast New Guinea shows how we might elaborate on the strategies that I introduced in Chapter 4. Knauft builds up a regional synthesis through consideration of variation among constituent subregions (my "multiple local contextualizations"). In Knauft's formulation, ethnographic regions are characterized by regionwide themes and local permutations. The permutations may be divergent elaborations on a basic shared pattern or they may be polarizations in which constituent groups emphasize one end or the other of a continuum. Variations "stem from the spiraling elaboration of local cultural *geists* in interaction with the legacy of their own hard-world actualizations."[9] Symbolic configurations map out strategies for people to pursue, but actions in the real world act back on the symbolic configurations. Knauft traces how differences in belief articulated with the material world to produce, over time, the regional variations encountered by ethnographers in South Coast New Guinea.

Underlying Knauft's analysis is a single model of the relationship over time of cultural similarity and difference: Similarity is early; difference is late. Difference emerges through the divergence of subregional traditions. Archaeologists need a richer analytical repertoire for understanding the temporal relationship between cultural similarity and difference. We may find regionwide *constancy* in the phenomenon under investigation, with local variations being more oscillations than directional change. There may be local *divergence* (after Knauft), but we also should consider its opposite, where diversity is early and interaction leads to *convergence* among local sequences. Finally, we may identify *directional transformation* that crosscuts sequences, not as a result of the shared content (convergence) but instead due to equivalent structural changes in the societies involved.

A further obstacle that was not an issue for Knauft is the perennial archaeological challenge of translating between material pattern and social interpretation. I have argued repeatedly that a crucial step in the comparative analysis of figurines is the reformulation of an archaeological

pattern into the social terms in which interpretations are framed. The question here is: At what point in the analysis, and at what *scale*, do we make the conceptual transition from the material to the social? The precedent in all the works on Mesoamerica described previously is to conduct the conceptual reformulation on a local scale. However, given that these local reformulations rely on social generalities with unexamined expansive implications, a regional synthesis of the individual reformulated outcomes would yield conceptual chaos. Clearly, regional synthesis requires that reformulation from archaeological pattern to social terms be conducted at a larger scale. Knauft and other anthropologists[10] remind us that multiple scales, with links between them, are important and suggest building an understanding of regional patterns by assessing diversity in multiple cases. If we cannot reformulate to social terms until we consider regionwide patterns, but we must build toward a grasp of regionwide patterns through analysis of diversity in individual cases, then we must conduct a multilevel analysis of *patterns* before reformulating into social terms.

That assertion prompts an immediate objection: How do we know in advance which patterns are important? Processual archaeology has made this a familiar question, insisting that theory should dictate which patterns are considered relevant. However, if we allow a specific (social) theory to dictate which patterns are important on a regionwide basis, we have essentially made the translation from pattern to social terms at that large scale and have short-circuited the approach of building to regional synthesis proposed by Knauft. This is where the guide to comparison from Chapter 3 – generated by theorizing about interpretations of images rather than about societies – is useful. That scheme prepares the way for reformulation in social terms by taking note of how material patterns promote or hinder one analytical mode or another. Applying the framework to each subregion and comparing the results allow us to build toward synthesis of diversity as Knauft recommends.

Plan for the Analysis

I have identified two principles for assessing the rhetorical power of a particular universalist formulation as applied to Mesoamerican figurines. The first principle is consistent applicability. If the conditions that are said to justify its application in one case hold true in another case, then it should be capable of accounting for figurine patterns also in that second case. The second principle is productivity. There should be feedback between a universalist postulate and material patterns such that the postulate explains patterns beyond those that originally prompted its adoption.

The goal for the analysis is to synthesize patterning across multiple contexts prior to reformulation in social terms and, therefore, prior to application of any stable social generality. Regional material patterns are synthesized as variation in the prompting toward six analytical modes for the study of images. That synthetic model of patterning then becomes a tool for the assessment of universalist claims. We draw on the model to probe particular candidates, gauging prospects for consistent applicability and productivity.

In the remainder of this chapter, I put this agenda into practice. First, I outline a model of patterning across Formative Mesoamerica. Next, I draw on that model as a tool to assess the rhetorical power of a particular universalist claim. A larger goal is to illustrate analytical activities appropriate to a level of interpretation of Formative figurines that crosses individual contexts. At the end of the chapter, I therefore move beyond the particular universalist postulate to consider what sorts of insights we might ask of interpretation at that level. I illustrate my suggestions with a few trial statements on Formative figurines as a general phenomenon.

In the sections that follow, I examine a generalized universalist formulation inspired by several more specific proposals, including those of my Paso de la Amada paper and Joyce's Playa de los

Muertos study. There are several relevant strands of argument: Figurines were points of reference in the negotiation of social relations; they were models of comportment; their subject matter reflects struggles for power; and their imagery helped to create people as subjects. The common thread is the idea that figurines were "political," in the sense of the politics of daily social interactions. The idea is universalist because the claim is that human images in a household context would necessarily have taken on those roles. It also effects a reformulation of such archaeological patterns in social terms because it provides justification for reading differences among the images as a window on social differentiation. Indeed, it is a specific manifestation of the window-on-society approach. It is this *small-scale–politics postulate*, then, that I examine for rhetorical power with the aid of a synthetic model of figurine patterning.

Synthesis of Figurine Patterns

The first task is to create a synthetic model of patterning. The idea, of course, is not to list all the cases in which figurines are painted red or have coffee-bean eyes but rather to assess the texture of promptings toward one or another of the analytical modes identified in Chapter 3. The actual synthesis of patterning presented in the following paragraphs is condensed and selective, with emphasis on points that prove useful in subsequent discussion. (A more detailed draft version proved infeasible for publication.) I developed the synthesis by examining the figurine records of ten areas spanning much of Mesoamerica from Guanajuato, Mexico, to the Ulúa Valley, Honduras (Figure 46).[11] My consideration began with the initial appearance of fired-clay technology at the beginning of the Formative, at varying times after 1800 B.C. in different sequences, and ended around 200 B.C., a point after which divergence among the sequences increases so dramatically that it seems as if interpretation in one case will have little relation to interpretation in another. From the beginning of the Formative through about 200 B.C., the sequences exhibit significant coherence. This is the spatiotemporal macro-unit of figurine making of Formative Mesoamerica discussed in Chapter 4.

In comparing different areas, I found it helpful to define certain terms in ways that differed from usages in the individual studies considered. As in Chapter 4, I define *figurine* narrowly. Anything with an obvious functional attribute is excluded; therefore, a "figurine" with a hole for suspension becomes an anthropomorphic ceramic pendant. Likewise distinguished as a separate category are large hollow figures taller than 20 cm. I also use the term *type* in a restricted sense. Attributes that seem to reference subject matter are excluded from consideration; types are instead based on distinctive styles or ways of making.

To compile the synthesis, I begin (like Knauft) with assumptions concerning the basic structure that regional diversity takes. Specifically, I envision a set of widely shared themes with individual cases diverging in an intelligible way from – and thus identifiable as transformations of – those patterns. I discuss the synthesis in two steps. First, I review shared themes and catalog the kinds of local transformations that appear. Then, I place the transformations in place and time to yield a spatiotemporal synthesis of the texture of patterning across the Formative macro-unit.

Small, solid human images, hand-modeled in clay – figurines, strictly defined – characteristically appear as broken pieces in domestic debris and not in special contexts (Figure 48, Section I). They seem to have been relatively common objects in daily life, judging from the fact that excavations yield a steady trickle of fragments with few refits. Imagery of the figurines was not (usually) shared with other sorts of representations used in different ways – even with larger, hollow figures, although the latter are often so broken up that the imagery is difficult to assess (Figure 49). The

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Catalog of Patterns and Notable Departures

I. Typical Patterns

Clay figurines:
- are broken up in domestic debris (not in special contexts)
- do not share imagery with other representations
- are predominantly (but not completely) of a single "type" in each phase at any site
- are predominantly standing, nude, and (though not emphatically sexed) female, with emphasis on the face and head
- a few figurines in any collection have "attributes" suggesting specific subjects

Those patterns are particularly favorable to:
- determination of use or purpose
- diachronic stylistic analysis, with prospects also for synchronic analysis
- analysis of the figures as a window on society

II. Notable Departures from Typical Patterns

A. Contextual transformations favoring symbolic analysis:

A1 -- figurines prominent as burial offerings

B. Further transformations favoring symbolic analysis:

B1 -- figurines inscribed with abstract signs
B2 -- figurines sharing imagery with hollow ceramic figures or small stone sculpture
B3 -- figurines sharing imagery with monumental sculpture

C. Transformations favoring more elaborate synchronic stylistic analysis:

C1 -- long-distance sharing of types
C2 -- pan-Mesoamerican sharing of types
C3 -- visual contrasts between local and shared types

D. Transformations particularly favoring iconography:

D1 -- seated figures outnumber standing figures
D2 -- specific subjects not amenable to window-on-society analysis (e.g., two-headed figures, acrobats)

Figure 48. Catalog of typical patterns in Formative figurine collections and some notable departures from those.

exception in which figurine imagery was used on whistles or pendants appearing in the same contexts as figurines seems to be a minor textural "blip"; in any particular context, such instances are rare. The consistent close association of imagery, material properties, and find-contexts directs us to consider explaining imagery in relation to the use or purpose of the figurines (see Figure 22).

A single "type" (as defined here) predominated in any particular place and time, a condition generally favoring diachronic analysis of form. Such dominant types are "local" in character in

Figure 49. Hollow ceramic "figurines" from Paso de la Amada (Mexico). Original figures are 15 to 30 cm tall.

that they grade gradually from one to another through space. As one moves farther from any given location, stylistic differences gradually accrue, until at a certain distance (perhaps 50 to 100 km) it is necessary to define a different type. Virtually always, some images that did not fit the dominant style also were made and used, opening up possibilities for synchronic stylistic analysis. Sometimes there are crude and schematic figures that are not "typeable." Often, multiple types of similar stylistic complexity seem to have been in use at the same time, even if one type predominated. Thus, in terms of relations of form, the most pervasive pattern favors diachronic analysis, but there is scope for synchronic study as well.[12]

Most images provide little basis for moving beyond pre-iconographic analysis, thus generally favoring window-on-society analysis. Artistic emphasis was on the face and hair or headdress. Human images were not usually emphatically sexed (i.e., with multiple, redundant attributes), but a high percentage have modeled or appliqué breasts that suggest femaleness. There is nevertheless considerable variation among collections in the coding of sexual attributes. Sometimes "female-ness" and "maleness" each appear to be marked with one or more positive traits among figurines otherwise similar in that they are nude, have symmetric gestures, and so forth (see Figures 13a,b and 47a,b). Sometimes femaleness is emphatically depicted, but there is no corresponding depiction of maleness (Figure 11). Sometimes sexless figures are common, or coding of sexual differences is best understood as analytically ambiguous.[13] In most collections, a small number of figures (less than 5 percent each, often closer to 1 percent each, and collectively less than 10 percent) hint at specific subjects, although in most cases they do so only minimally. They may wear unusual items

3 cm

Figure 50. Figure holding ball, Tetel site, Tlaxcala, Mexico. (Drawn by Jeremy Bloom.)

of clothing, gesture asymmetrically, or hold an object (a dog, a baby, or a musical instrument), or their hands may be positioned on their shoulders or higher. In one case after another, variation in imagery is promising for window-on-society analysis, although as noted in Chapter 4, it appears that the social distinctions to be revealed by that mode of inquiry will differ among cases.

Notable departures from these "typical" patterns include "transformations" that open up possibilities for symbolic studies, certain additional synchronic analyses of style, and iconography (Figure 48, Section II). At a few sites, especially Tlatilco and Chupícuaro, figurines appear regularly as burial offerings in addition to their standard domestic contexts. Occasionally, figurines are reported from public spaces or buildings.[14] If imagery observed on figurines appears on other sorts of representations, those are usually hollow ceramic figures larger in size than the solid figurines. Such local permutations provide a basis for symbolic analysis, greatly multiplied in the rare instances in which figurines bear abstract signs or share imagery with stone sculpture.

Stylistic departures from typical patterns include cases in which "types" ceased to be local. Patterns that would provide a promising basis for synchronic stylistic analysis include sharing of types at regional scales (50 to 100 km), supraregional scales (>100 km), or a "pan-Mesoamerican" scale (understood to include considerable distances but also multiple simultaneous locations in different parts of Mesoamerica). All provide rich material for synchronic analysis. Of great interest are instances in which types shared with other areas are significant in a collection (>5 percent) and systematically distinguishable from "local" types in use at the same time.

Other transformations enhance the scope for serious iconographic analysis although, except in rare cases, this involves a multiplication of categories of possibly specific subjects that nevertheless in actual numbers remain rare. Some figurines are equipped as ballplayers (Figure 50) or otherwise elaborately clad. In most such cases, iconography can promote the goals of window-on-society analysis – for example, in the identification of costumed figures as elders, shamans, or chiefs. Thus, the masks of the Paso de la Amada elders (Figure 51) deserve iconographic study, but those figures still can be analyzed in terms of social differentiation. Some rare images, such as figurines with two heads or two faces (Figure 47c) and acrobats, do not seem consistent with the premise of the window-on-society perspective and demand consideration as specific subjects. Another pattern that in the overall context of Mesoamerican Formative traditions seems worthy of iconographic consideration is instances in which seated figures outnumber standing figures.[15]

The foregoing discussion is only the first step toward synthesis. The next step involves situating patterns and transformations in time and space to reveal texture. Synthesis of spatial patterns involves the "regional" scale of the cases in Figure 46 and a "pan-Mesoamerican" scale – but also
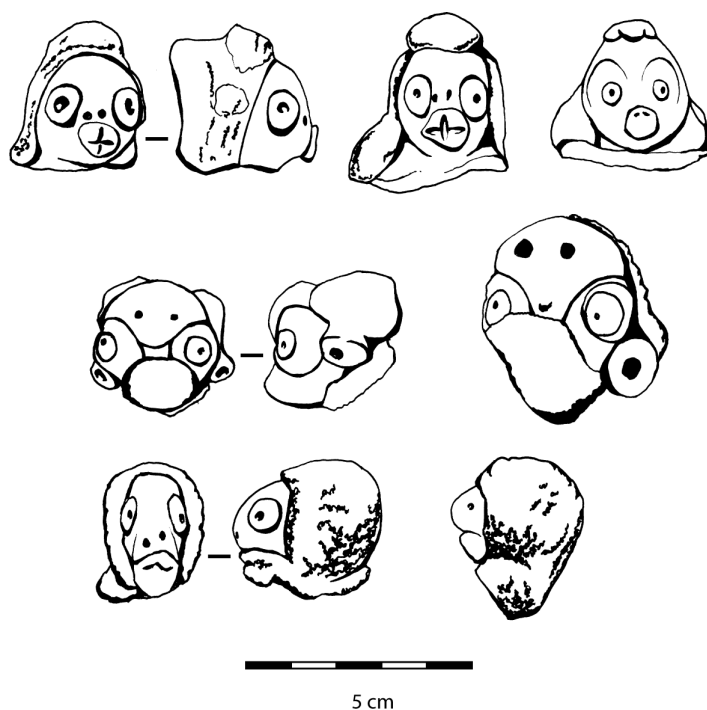
Figure 51. Masks broken off seated, fat figurines from Paso de la Amada and nearby sites display repeated sets of features inviting iconographic analysis. Top: large, round, deeply punched eyes; appliqué mouth with crossed grooves; and conical projection in back of head. Middle: round, cane-impressed eyes and two deep holes in the forehead. Bottom: face flattened from the sides with crinkled hood and rodent-like facial features. For corresponding bodies, see Figure 11e-g. (Drawn by Alana Purcell.)

a "supraregional" scale between those two extremes. Ideally, we also should consider site-to-site variation within each region. To make sense of temporal patterns, we have the four possibilities for temporal form suggested previously: stability, divergence, convergence, and directional transformation.

First, it is worth observing that the "typical" patterns – with their promptings toward investigation of use, diachronic stylistic analysis, and window-on-society approach – do not exhibit equivalent texture (Figure 52, Section I). There is considerable fine-grained homogeneity in the basic pattern that prompts investigation of use: The overwhelming majority of figurines are found broken apart in domestic debris. That pattern characterizes every spatial scale and persists from the initial appearance of figurines through at least the later Formative. Where figurines appear in special contexts (burials, caches, or public spaces), they are in addition rather than alternatives to the core pattern. Patterns subject to diachronic analysis of style – particularly the rate of succession of types through time – also may be homogeneous, but the topic is little studied. Typical rates of stylistic change are around or below the threshold of what can be resolved with radiocarbon dating. In contrast to the fine-grained homogeneity of recovery-contexts, patterns supporting window-on-society analysis are heterogeneous at smaller scales of space and time. There is significant variation among contexts in predominant posture (sitting versus standing), coding of sexual

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Texture of Figurine Patterning in Formative Mesoamerica

I. Texture of patterns inviting "typical" analytical modes:

- use: *homogeneous* (appearance in special contexts is in addition to rather than instead of core contextual pattern)
- diachronic style: *homogeneous?* (hard to resolve with radiocarbon dating)
- window-on-society: *heterogeneous* (varied coding of sex and age)

II. Some notable wrinkles in patterning:

A. **Episode of convergence during the Early Horizon**, 1400–1000 B.C.

Patterns favoring alternative analytical modes:
- synchronic style: transformations C2 and C3 (from Figure 48) are *confined to this particular era*
- symbolism: instances of B1, B2, and B3 (Figure 48) particularly common
- iconography: instances of D1 and D2 (Figure 48) particularly common

B. Localized episodes in which **figurines were important as burial offerings**:

Basin of Mexico and Morelos, 1400–900 B.C.
Southern Guanajuato, 650–100 B.C.

Patterns favoring alternative analytical modes:
- symbolism: A1 (Figure 48); yet figurines still appear in typical contexts
- iconography: proliferation of subject matter beyond the typical seems to characterize these cases

C. **Zone of supraregional interaction**: Central Mexico

Including (of the regions considered here): Basin of Mexico, Morelos, Southern Guanajuato, Central Tlaxcala

Patterns favoring alternative analytical modes:
- symbolism: both instances of A1 are in this region, at different times
- synchronic style: C1 is pervasive, and specific types are shared in some cases across the entire multiregional area
- iconography: some specific subjects may be widely shared

D. **Stability** across Mesoamerica (with local perturbations and a few divergent exceptions) from at least 1700 B.C. until after 500 B.C. Thereafter, increasing divergences between the sequences.

Figure 52. Model of texture of figurine patterning across Formative Mesoamerica.

attributes, and depiction of age differences or somatic states such as pregnancy. Any "attributes" suggestive of specific subjects also vary from context to context.

Plotting the more interesting transformations on typical patterns (Figure 48, Section II) in space and time reveals further large-scale texture. My efforts are shown in detail in Figure 53 and the

cal B.C.	Ulua Valley	Soconusco	Chiapas Interior	Southern Gulf Coast	Valley of Oaxaca	Tehuacan Valley	Central Tlaxcala	Basin of Mexico	Morelos	Southern Guanajuato
1700	possibly no figurines		no occupation				no occupation			no occupation
1400		B1,2 C2,3 D1,2	B2? C2	B1,2,3 C2.3 D1,2	C2.3	D1,2		A1 B1,2 C1,2.3, D 2	A1 B2 C1,2.3 D 2	
1100	D1	D1						A1 B2 C1,2.3 D 2		
900	D1	D1	C1 D1,2	B2 C3 D2	B2?	B1,2 C1,2 D1?	C1	C1 D2	B3? C1,3	
650	D1		C1	B2 C1 D2	C1	C1	C1	C1 D2		A1 B1 D 2
400	D1	no figurines		A1?			figurine making continues	B2 C1 D2	figurine making continues	A1 B1 D 2
200	no figurines		figurine making continues	figurine making continues	figurine making continues	figurines are rare	figurines are rare	figurine making continues		figurine making continues

Figure 53. Spatiotemporal texture of departures from typical patterns. Codes from Figure 48 are shown distributed in time (1700–200 B.C.) in ten regions. For references, see note 11.

larger patterns are summarized in Figure 52 (Section II). One notable textural wrinkle in Figure 53 is the accumulation of "transformations" on typical patterns across Mesoamerica in the Early Horizon of 1400–1000 B.C.[16] This era of numerous structural transformations on typical patterns is accompanied by striking convergence – a long-distance sharing of specific content, apparently both subject matter and style, among regions (Figure 54). I use the term *Olmec* to refer specifically to attributes that were widely shared.

This is the only era in which we have pan-Mesoamerican sharing of content. It is also the era in which interlinkages of imagery between small, solid, ceramic figurines and other representations were the most developed, in the most areas. The use of abstract signs on figurines – although more common on larger, hollow figures (Figure 55) than on solid figurines – was mainly confined to this era. Figurines appear to have incorporated imagery of wide social import. Long-distance sharing of imagery was particularly important, and in many sequences, the number of distinct images arguably requiring serious iconographic analysis was at its height.

Convergence among sequences was never complete, however. Figurines in the shared Olmec style were rarely the predominant type. In some areas, they contrasted with local types whose stylistic attributes behaved in the more familiar way of increasing difference with increasing distance. Furthermore, convergence was not a long-term trend but rather, in archaeological terms, a sudden and relatively brief historical moment. Within any particular sequence, the patterns of this era appear as an oscillation rather than a permanent transformation. In most areas, figurines again more closely approximate "typical" shared patterns after 1000 B.C. (and I suspect after 1200 B.C., although chronologies are usually too coarse to be sure).
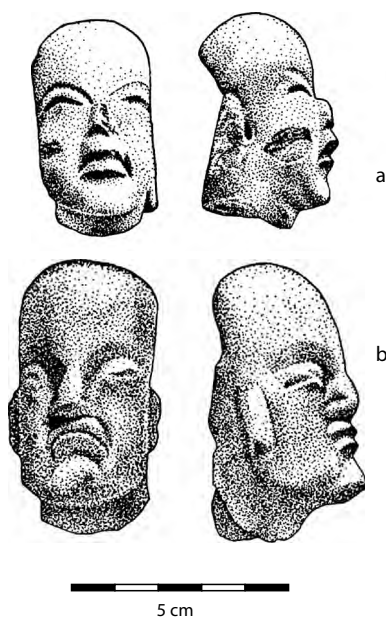
Figure 54. Olmec-style ceramic figurine heads from sites more than 500 km apart: (a) Mazatan region, Soconusco; (b) San José Mogote, Valley of Oaxaca (Mexico). (Drawn by Lesure; (b) after Marcus 1998: Figure 10.8:40.)

If the Early Horizon can be seen as an oscillation – albeit dramatic and of large spatial scale – within a larger pattern of stability, what about the rest of the Formative figurine sequence? Most collections from before 1400 B.C. seem to be characterized by typical patterns, despite considerable variation in details. After 1000 B.C., local divergences can be discerned. The seated postures popular in the Gulf Coast and Southeastern Mesoamerica during the Early Horizon recede to small proportions of most assemblages; however, in the Soconusco region and the Ulúa Valley, they predominate for hundreds of years. The Ulúa Valley diverges from core patterns in other ways as well, such as unusual prominence of hands gesturing to the face or head.[17] However, unlike Knauft's scheme of gradually accumulating divergences, divergent patterns in that case seem to coalesce rapidly and persist for hundreds of years.

Stability subsuming local oscillations of various kinds can be perceived over a variety of durations and spatial scales. In the highlands of Central Mexico, there is what we might call a supraregional interaction zone including Guanajuato, Morelos, the Basin of Mexico, and Central Tlaxcala (as well as other sequences not considered here). Direct interaction beyond the "regional" level is signaled by the recurrent sharing of types across distances of more than 100 km. Another indication of internal continuity is a higher frequency of equivalent coding of sexual differences (see Figures 13a,b and 47a,b) than in other areas (although "females," as usual, outnumber "males"). There is also a high frequency of local permutations involving regular use of figurines as burial offerings, although the cases involved are actually further clustered into units of smaller scale: the Basin of Mexico and Morelos, 1400–900 B.C., and Guanajuato, 650–100 B.C. In the cases in which figurines were placed in burials, there is a noticeable proliferation of different sorts of images suggestive of specific subjects (Figure 47c), albeit all at low frequencies.

Finally, a kind of overall stability among all the sequences can be perceived through perhaps 200 B.C. At a coarse grain, all local permutations before that time can be seen as either ephemeral or, if persisting, relatively minor divergences from the basic core set of shared themes. Thereafter, the sequences began to diverge from one another more definitively. In Eastern Mesoamerica, local traditions of figurines as common domestic objects often came to an end. The integrity of Central Mexico as an internally coherent figurine-making zone was broken, with declines in some areas (Tlaxcala), even as a lively tradition continued at the urban center of Teotihuacan. In Eastern Mesoamerica, scholars tend to tie the disappearance of figurines to directional social transformations associated with the emergence of stratification and institutions of the state.[18]

Consistent Applicability I: Uses of Formative Figurines

The model of patterning summarized in Figures 48 and 52 is intended as a tool for grappling with the expansive implications of universalist truths that facilitate contextualist interpretation. I draw on it selectively as I probe the rhetorical power of the small-scale–politics postulate. The postulate is a version of window-on-society analysis, and I therefore already have noted certain empirical conditions favorable to its application. I draw on two of those to consider the consistent applicability of the postulate. First, *uses* of the figurines should generally have involved domestic activities or rituals in which different images were juxtaposed (and thus made available for comparison) by different sorts of social actors (mothers, sisters, uncles, and so forth). Second, the *subject matter* of the figurines should consist of more or less stereotyped and thus publicly shared representations of ordinary people. I organize consideration of applicability around those issues of use and subject matter.

Scholars of ancient Mesoamerica generally suggest that Formative-era figurines were used in household rituals. Often, the nature of the rituals is left vague, although Marcus favors propitiation of ancestors, while Follensbee suggests that curing and prevention of disease were particularly important.[19] In a recent set of collected papers, there is widely shared support for the idea that uses were multiple, variable, and flexible.[20] I suspect that such sentiments are well founded. The making of small images in clay was an element of habitus (in Bourdieu's sense[21]) across Formative Mesoamerica. It was something people did – a generalizable practice that could be fashioned, adapted, and manipulated to answer a variety of specific purposes.

Attractive as that idea is, its lack of specificity leaves it unsatisfying. Individual figurine makers and users certainly had specific purposes, even if those differed from one day to the next, and we want to be able to characterize those purposes in some way. It would be interesting to know something of local variability in use and the larger spatiotemporal texture of that variability.

The perspective being considered does not require any particular use for figurines, although it is not compatible with any and all uses. Figurines should be dispersed among households, where ordinary people would be able to engage with and manipulate them. Use of figurines for domestic rituals of various sorts – the usual suggestion for Formative Mesoamerica – could well suit the parameters of the small-scale–politics postulate. Questions here include: Can we employ the model of variability to push insight into use any further? To what extent does the texture identified in the model involve localized transformations that would undermine the consistent applicability of the small-scale–politics perspective? Because patterns recommending investigation of use were found to be widespread and homogeneous in my synthesis of patterning – echoing the importance accorded such investigations in Chapter 4 – it is important to characterize use as specifically as possible, even if that is not strictly required to justify applicability of the small-scale–politics postulate.

I first consider two instances from Formative Mesoamerica in which figurines were deposited as burial offerings, thus establishing an observable association (at least in death) between these
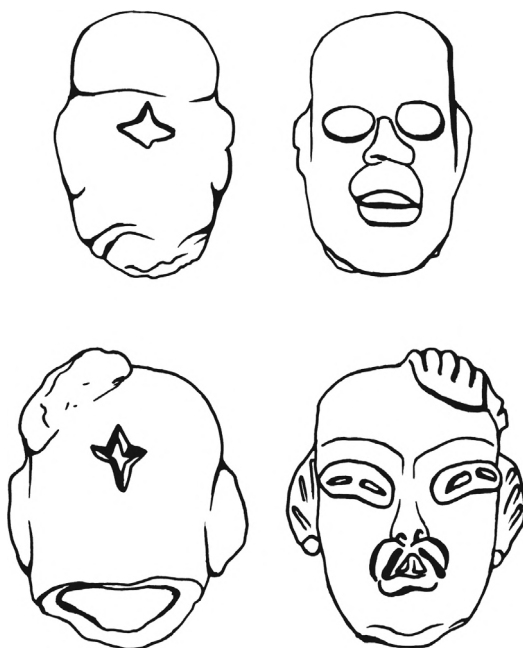
Figure 55. The same abstract star-sign on the backs of two hollow ceramic figures from sites approximately 500 km apart: top, San Lorenzo (Southern Gulf Coast, Mexico); bottom, Tlapa-coya (Basin of Mexico). (Drawn by Alana Purcell after Coe and Diehl 1980: Figure 326; Niederberger 1987: Figure 256.)

objects and different categories of people. I then experiment with an ambitious scheme that draws on comparative ethnographic data to sort figurines into functional classes; it proves useful to counterpose the results of that external perspective with those of one derived through a characteristically Mesoamericanist approach.

Insights from Figurines as Burial Offerings

The association of figurines with graves in the Basin of Mexico and Morelos, 1400–900 B.C., and Guanajuato, 650–100 B.C., provides a particularly attractive source of evidence. What sorts of people were buried with figurines? There are, of course, difficulties. We might want to draw a direct association between burial offerings and the person with whom they appear, but that is the one person who certainly did not place the objects in the grave. Survivors did, and their decisions may have been based more on relationships among themselves than on the identity of the deceased. A second difficulty is posed by the rules I have set myself here. The inclusion of figurines with burials is one of the most striking departures from core patterns among Formative figurines. I have disavowed the practice of taking special sites to stand for entire regions. The argument here needs to be more subtle.

The use of figurines as burial offerings ended in the Basin of Mexico before it began in Guana-juato; therefore, we have two quasi-independent perturbations on core patterns. Commonalities between them may provide a sense of what sorts of people generally used figurines, although it should be remembered that both cases are from the Central Mexican zone of interaction.

The earlier of the two cases is best documented at Tlatilco, where figurines appear in 46 of approximately 220 burials.[22] Although published evidence consists mainly of burials, it is likely that the site was actually a large village, with clusters of graves marking the locations of residences not identified during excavations.[23]

Several causal factors can be perceived behind variation in grave treatment. Tolstoy suggests the presence of two moieties. Joyce instead emphasizes smaller-scale differences among clusters of residences. There also are differences in status. Tolstoy assigned burials to four ranks. Joyce paints a more fluid picture involving competitive relations between internally ranked residential groups.[24] Age of the deceased was one of the most significant factors influencing the variation in offerings. Children, particularly the very young, were likely to receive numerous offerings, as were young adults. Numbers of grave goods declined markedly for individuals older than thirty.

Among the Tlatilco graves, 28 percent of children and 22 percent of adults were accompanied by at least one whole or partial figurine. Among adults, 23 percent of females and 20 percent of males were associated with figurines. Those differences are not statistically significant.[25] Dividing adults by age, however, clarifies matters. Adults fifteen to thirty years old were significantly more likely to be accompanied by figurines than adults older than thirty. Young adults received figurines at the same rate as children. Thus, age was an important factor, with figurines preferentially interred with young women, young men, and children.

Whereas men were just as likely as women to receive some sort of figurine, more figurines appeared with women than with men (55 in 80 female burials versus 20 in 76 male burials). Figurines constitute a greater proportion of the total assemblage of objects associated with women than with men (13 versus 4 percent); for children, the percentage was similar to that of women (12 percent). Furthermore, figurines associated with men were more likely to be fragmentary than those associated with women (60 versus 36 percent). The statistic of 28 percent fragmentary for children again aligns with that for women.

The distribution of figurines across Tolstoy's ranks – heuristically useful even if they do not successfully isolate "rank" from "age" – reinforces and extends this last set of patterns. He defined four ranks based primarily on numbers of associated objects. The lowest rank (4) included graves with none to two objects. Associated objects rose to three to seven at rank 3, eight or more at rank 2, and thirteen or more at rank 1. Special items such as necklaces, greenstone objects, masks, whistles, shells, shell artifacts, rattles, and seals increased in frequency over the ranks, but iron-ore mirrors were confined to rank 1.

Table 4 presents figurines as a percentage of total offerings among the burials at each rank for children, women, and men. The total number of burials in each case is included in parentheses. Adult men and women with few associated objects (ranks 3 and 4) received figurines occasionally, at similar frequencies. Rich graves are different, however. Figurines constitute an important part of the assemblage associated with rich female graves but only a minor part of that associated with the richest male graves.

In summary, figurines at Tlatilco have a particular association with youth, but they were buried equally with children and young adults. Association with figurines was not confined to one sex, but they were included in greater numbers in the graves of women. Furthermore, survivors' claims concerning rank were more likely to involve figurines when the deceased was a woman. Figurines may have been important to women's status but not to men's.

The large sample of burials from Chupícuaro is less well published than the Tlatilco case.[26] Only some of the burial offerings are illustrated. Relatively few adult burials are sexed (12 female, 42 male, and 188 unidentified). Age designations are reduced to a distinction between children and adults. Still, patterns of inclusion of objects in graves seem broadly comparable to those at Tlatilco.

Table 4. Figurines Distributed by Rank and Age/Sex at Tlatilco[a]

Rank of Burial	Child		Adult Female		Adult Male	
1	0	(1)	27.8	(3)	0.9	(6)
2	22.0	(5)	11.8	(15)	3.4	(15)
3	22.6	(11)	5.8	(22)	9.2	(21)
4	8.3	(22)	6.3	(40)	3.2	(34)

[a] Figurines as a percentage of the total assemblage of offerings among burials of each rank, separated by age and sex. In parentheses, the total number of burials. Ranks computed following Tolstoy (1989a: Table 6.4).

Figurines appear in 34 of 387 graves. There was more elaborate mortuary processing than at Tlatilco, with the occurrence of figurines at least partly related to the treatment of the corpse. The two most common burial types were articulated-extended and skull-only. Children were significantly more likely than adults to be represented as skull-only. Furthermore, with moderate significance, those child skull burials were more likely to contain figurines than were articulated-extended child burials.

Overall, figurines were less likely to appear in graves at Chupícuaro than at Tlatilco, represented in 14 percent of children's graves and 7 percent of adults' (compared to 28 and 22 percent, respectively, for the earlier site). The difference between the occurrence of figurines in child and adult burials is statistically significant at Chupícuaro (unlike Tlatilco). The source of that pattern, however, turns out to be the child skull burials. Among articulated-extended burials, there is no difference between children and adults in the inclusion of figurines.

Figurines constitute 13 percent of the total assemblage of objects with articulated-extended adult burials, compared to 12 percent for articulated-extended child burials and 20 percent for child skull burials. They constitute a greater percentage of the assemblage associated with identified females (14 percent) than with identified males (6 percent). Of the female skeletons, three were associated with figurines (25 percent), whereas just one of the male graves contained figurines (2 percent).

For comparison with Tlatilco, I experimented with schemes for dividing the Chupícuaro assemblage into ranks, but the scarcity and chaotic distribution of the kinds of "special" items with which Tolstoy enriched his division based on numbers of objects made results at the second site seem overly contrived. I ultimately divided the assemblage approximately in half based on the median number of objects other than figurines.[27] In contrast to the Tlatilco analysis, the results do not support the idea that figurines were much involved in claims to status. For children, figurines comprise 15 and 18 percent, respectively, of the total offerings from graves richer than and less rich than the median. In the case of adults, the corresponding numbers are 12 and 11 percent, respectively. The limited data on sex do not suggest any distinction between the inclusion of figurines in richer male and female graves such as that at Tlatilco.[28]

In summary, the Chupícuaro case shares various patterns with Tlatilco. Figurines were widely distributed among different sorts of people, including children and adults, females and males. In both cases, figurines are more prominent in offerings with women than with men, either because women received more complete figurines as well as greater total numbers (Tlatilco) or because more women than men received figurines (Chupícuaro). In both cases, figurines as offerings are at least as important in children's graves as they are in those of adults. At Chupícuaro, differing

mortuary treatments are involved and figurines appear more frequently with isolated children's skulls than with any other class of interment. At Tlatilco, figurines are associated with children and young adults in equal frequencies.

The pattern in which figurines seem to be objects of female but not male status is observed only at Tlatilco. At Chupícuaro, figurines were probably of little importance to status. It is tempting to perceive that as a directional trend related to the gradual formation of social classes with new bases for social status, but it is not possible to pursue that idea here.

If we assume that survivors placed figurines in the graves of people most associated with those objects in life, then commonalities between the two cases suggest broad access to and use of figurines across Formative society, with the images most important for or habitually used by children, young women, and (to a lesser extent) young men. Even if we are not willing to make such an assumption, broad access and use seem likely. The association with a range of ages from young children to young adults generally supports the idea of multiple uses: Could figurines have been used as *both* (adult) ritual objects and (children's) toys? If we treat the commonalities between these two "special" sites as providing a sense of more widespread patterns of use, there appears to be support for consistent applicability of the small-scale–politics postulate.

Material Signatures of Figurine Use

Mary Voigt, in a series of contributions to the interpretation of Near Eastern prehistoric figurines, distinguishes four potential functional classes: cult figures, vehicles of magic, initiation figures (or teaching devices more generally), and toys (or aesthetic objects more generally, thus including adults as potential users).[29] These divisions derive ultimately from the path-breaking earlier work of Ucko, who proposed material correlates of these classes (and a few others less clearly defined) based on ethnographic accounts of the uses of small images in Africa, Asia, and the Americas.[30] In Voigt's work, what Ucko treated as a chaos of possibilities becomes more systematic. Voigt is particularly attentive to patterns of wear, damage, and deposition, thereby providing the kind of broad approach to the study of use – beyond the imagery – increasingly advocated by Mesoamericanists.[31]

Although the four classes considered do not exhaust the possible uses of figurines, one wonders where the framework will lead us in the Formative case. Two of the functional classes – teaching devices and aesthetic objects – are particularly compatible with a small-scale–politics approach. Images of both classes are likely to reference schemes of social differentiation and to be subject to manipulation in small-scale relationships. Vehicles of magic might also be compatible, but if their imagery is specific to their intended purpose, then it may diverge from any scheme of social differentiation. Cult figures would be even less appropriate, in terms of both their imagery and the remoteness from everyday access and manipulation.

The "typical" patterns of Mesoamerican figurines described previously are a good match for the expected material correlates of one of Voigt's functional classes: toys or aesthetic objects.[32] They fit in terms of materials used (readily available), morphology (variable, ranging from crude to well made), circumstances of use (singly or in groups, careless handling, domestic settings, variable but sometimes years of use), disposal (with domestic garbage), wear (accumulations of minor wear, no systematic patterns of ruinous damage), and disposition (ordinary contexts, random distribution). There are some matches with expected material patterns of initiation figures (in morphology, wear, and – imperfectly – circumstances of use); however, expectations in that case for careful maintenance and disposal are not met.[33] Divergence from the expectations of vehicles of magic is even greater because those are often used singly, have brief use-lives, exhibit little wear but rather

intentional destruction, and are often carefully disposed. Finally, there is no arguable match with expectations for cult figures.

What about the *texture* revealed in the model of figurine patterns? Did localized transformations (Figures 48 and 52) alter the parameters considered in the Voigt–Ucko framework such that a different interpretation of figurine use would be favored? The answer, basically, is "no." Even in the moment of pan-Mesoamerican convergence of the Early Horizon, aspects of wear, damage, and disposal are relatively constant. Possible exceptions are the cases (previously reviewed) in which figurines were used as burial offerings, although the special uses there are in addition to rather than substitutes for typical practices. Although the use of figurines as burial offerings with adults suggests that they were more than toys, that contextual pattern does not move figurines to another functional class in the Voigt–Ucko framework.

Still, is this framework appropriate for application to Mesoamerica? The proposed classification of Formative figurines as aesthetic objects and toys recalls that "secular" approach to West Mexican funerary art criticized by Peter Furst.[34] As Furst points out, we must look carefully for sacred themes in any Mesoamerican art form – themes that may not be apparent at first glance. To reveal such sacred themes, Furst and other Mesoamericanists often turn to better documented material from later times – including contemporary ethnography – to make sense of earlier imagery. I propose to use that approach heuristically, without positing any direct connection between the cases. Would the Voigt–Ucko framework correctly identify the functional class of more recent figurines from Mesoamerica, cases for which we may have better knowledge of use?

Sandstrom and Sandstrom document the use of paper figurines in contemporary Nahua villages of Northern Veracruz, Mexico.[35] The best match in the Voigt–Ucko framework of material patterns of these figurines is with vehicles of magic, and, indeed, that is an acceptable functional classification of the figurines, as documented by Sandstrom and Sandstrom.

A second case, Aztec figurines of the immediately pre-Conquest (Postclassic) period (ca. 1500 A.D.), is more problematic for the framework. There are some distinct similarities of material patterns between Aztec and Formative cases, including material, size, domestic contexts, state of fragmentation, and numbers recovered.[36] Many depict standing women with nude upper torsos; some are pregnant or holding a child. There are other subjects as well, including men. Although the figurines are often identified as deities of the Aztec state pantheon, Smith compares them favorably with the modern Nahua paper figurines documented by Sandstrom and Sandstrom. He suggests that the Postclassic figures depicted not specific deities but rather more generalized spirits.[37] Klein and Victoria Lona build on Smith's suggestion in an iconographic assessment of Aztec figurines generally, concluding that the figurines were "embodiments of generalized essences of natural phenomena such as wind and water or . . . embodied states of being such as motherhood."[38]

In Voigt's formulation, both cult images and vehicles of magic could depict deities. The important distinction in her view concerns circumstances of use: "the larger and more elaborate cult images are likely to have been used by a group of people in a public context, while the small and usually schematic vehicles of magic could be used by individuals in attempts to maintain the well-being of themselves and their families."[39] Smith's or Klein and Victoria Lona's interpretations of Aztec figurines as household paraphernalia of a folk religion with which people sought to ensure health, reproduction, and nourishment for their families would, in the Voigt–Ucko terminology, represent an instance of vehicles of magic. However, if we were to apply the interpretive scheme of that framework directly to the material patterns in the Aztec case, the best match would be with toys and aesthetic objects rather than vehicles of magic – the same result as for the Formative.

Therefore, whereas modern Nahua paper figurines would be correctly classified in the Voigt–Ucko framework, the Aztec ceramic figurines – at least, according to two recent

interpretations – would not, thus raising concerns about whether the framework might also be inappropriate for interpreting the Formative case.

A Proposal on Use

There is general agreement that Formative figurines were common in domestic settings and that their uses are likely to have been multiple, variable, and flexible. That understanding, based on multiple local contextualizations, is favorable to the application of the small-scale–politics postulate, a point bolstered by consideration of the distribution of figurines among burials at Tlatilco and Chupícuaro. Still, application of my framework for the interpretation of imagery repeatedly points to *use* as a key topic for any general consideration of Mesoamerican figurines. Is it possible to be more specific about variation? How was use multiple, variable, and flexible? At what scales of space and time? The experiment with the Voigt–Ucko framework suggests a way forward. Direct application of the framework indicates that Formative figurines were likely "aesthetic objects," whereas most Mesoamericanists suggest something closer to "vehicles of magic."

To move forward, we might treat these two suggestions as alternative interpretations in tension with one another. That is what I propose here, although I use a more generalized terminology: Were figurines "expressive" (aesthetic objects) or "effective" (vehicles of magic or ritual objects in a folk religion)? I propose that the tension between the two interpretations, considered in particular contexts, may be productive for the investigation of variability.

I suspect that both ideas ultimately will contribute to a functional understanding of Formative figurines. Ucko notes ethnographic cases in which images serve both functions.[40] Furthermore, "expressive" objects, even if they were not intended to have concrete effects, nevertheless can be analyzed for their functionality at a deeper level, as Steen suggests in a study of aesthetics and play.[41]

A significant drawback to the proposal that figurines were effective objects is that we have, at this point, no material expectations with which to assess its prospects for consistent applicability. This is because we are proposing that figurines in the Formative case, like the Aztec case, might have been vehicles of magic despite their poor match with the material expectations of that functional class in the Voigt–Ucko framework. Given the at-least superficial similarities of material patterns between the Aztec and Formative cases, one solution would be to consider the former as a potential source of expectations for the latter, and that is what I attempt in my consideration of subject matter.

Consistent Applicability II: Subject Matter

The small-scale–politics perspective has more stringent requirements concerning subject matter than it does for use. Figurines should be stereotyped representations of people. They should illustrate divisions of people into categories. The content of those categories and how divisions between them were illustrated then become the main topics for investigation. Conditions favorable for interpretations of this sort are thus, in the terminology of Chapter 3, those in which the possibility for iconographic analysis is exhausted in the pre-iconographic stage. Progress toward the recognition of specific conventional subjects would instead complicate or undermine the prospects for reading a set of figurines in terms of small-scale politics.

The analytical scheme, again, is to use the model of variability in figurine patterning (Figure 52) as a tool for assessing the consistent applicability of the small-scale–politics perspective. I have already foreshadowed my results in Chapter 4 and focus here on a selection of points deriving from the consideration of texture. Collectively, the points raise certain doubts about the consistent

applicability of the perspective under consideration. I then turn the question around by asking: Would another approach to subject matter have greater prospects for consistent applicability than the small-scale–politics perspective? That discussion provides a basis for further examination of my alternative suggestions on the basic function of Formative figurines.

Small-Scale Politics and the Texture of Patterning

In Chapter 4, I found patterning across Mesoamerica basically favorable to a window-on-society mode of analysis when that was weighed against iconography. It is not that hints at specific subjects are absent but rather that they tend to be present in a minority of any particular collection and any specific subjects varied across time and space. That assessment applies to what I am now calling typical patterns. Those patterns do appear to be appropriate for consideration from the specific version of the window-on-society perspective being considered – as long as we are prepared for fine-grained heterogeneity in the social categories depicted and are ready to acknowledge iconography as an adjunct tool in our effort to make sense of collections.

These points hardly seem fatal to the small-scale–politics postulate. For example, in the Paso de la Amada case, the costumes and especially the masks of the elaborately garbed "elders" demand iconographic analysis (Figure 51), but there seems to be no contradiction between such an investigation and analysis of the "elders" as a social category contrasting with that of "young females" and reflecting an ideological discourse (see Chapter 2). A legitimate concern is whether there is sufficient variability in subject matter within individual contexts to provide meaningful results in terms of social referents. Sufficient variability is sometimes present, but is it always?

Moving beyond typical patterns, we find that localized transformations – particularly those favoring iconographic analysis – tend to erode the consistent applicability of the postulate without catastrophically undermining it. I examine three specific topics: patterns in the Early Horizon, subject matter versus "type" in Central Mexico, and cases in which figurines appear in burials.

Any satisfactory understanding of figurines during the Early Horizon clearly requires an expanded panoply of analytical modes over those needed for scrutiny of core patterns (see Figures 52 and 53). Of particular concern is the expanded scope for iconographic analysis, including the sharing of actual subjects between distant areas. For instance, Bradley and Joralemon propose reading the elaborate garb of certain figures from Tlapacoya (Figure 56) with reference to costumes observed in stone sculpture from the Southern Gulf Coast.[42] More widely distributed ceramic figurines in the Olmec style often lack any sexual attributes. John Clark considers them male and proposes a political analysis.[43] Furst, discussing rarer stone figurines in Olmec style, suggests that sexlessness was a deliberate signal that the referents were not ordinary humans.[44] That suggestion, however, seems amenable to the small-scale–politics postulate. The window-on-society approach does not require that a figured social world be purely "secular." If some of the social categories depicted were supernatural or wore supernatural regalia, then that could make for a richer political analysis of differentiation among categories. That is essentially what Graham finds in an iconographic analysis of West Mexican funerary art, in which he identifies themes of rulership where Furst found a sacred shamanism.[45]

One notable wrinkle in spatiotemporal texture is supraregional similarities in the Central Mexican highlands, in which sharing of figurine types over distances of 100+ km indicates intensive interaction. Figurine styles changed continuously in this area during the Formative era. Many distinguishable types were purely localized in their distribution; however, recurringly, certain types have widespread distributions – for example, D at 1000 B.C., C1 at 750 B.C., E2 at 500 B.C.,

and H4 at 250 B.C. A recurring pattern is contemporaneous use (at the same site) of multiple, strikingly different types, prompting concerns about consistent applicability of the window-on-society approach. The problem is that although there is differentiation of subject matter – some figurines are seated whereas others are standing; some seem identifiably female or male whereas others are sexless; some gesture or hold objects – there are relatively few systematic associations of iconographic attributes that would have cooperated to prompt identification of social categories. Correlations between attributes that seem stylistic rather than iconographic – eyes, mouths, or legs made in a particular way – are instead strong and form the basis for identifying multiple types, even according to the stringent sense in which I am using the term here (see Figures 12 and 34). If style is the most salient characteristic of these figurines, are we trying to fit them into a preconceived mold when we emphasize subject matter to facilitate a political reading of the collections from this area?

The cases in which figurines appear as burial offerings are again of interest because there are instances in which multiple figurines appear in the same burial. As Marcus shows, preserved groupings of figurines are otherwise quite rare.[46] Do sets among the Chupícuaro and Tlatilco burials support a condition of applicability of the window-on-society approach – that images depicting different subjects were used together, prompting comparisons between them?

A complete inventory of burials and their associated grave goods has not been published in the Chupícuaro case. Still, it is clear that figurines depicting different subjects appeared together in the same burial. For instance, Burial 176 contained one female, one male, and one unsexed figurine, among a total of nine; in Burial 276, there were sixteen females, six unsexed, three males, and one hermaphrodite figurine, among a total of thirty-five.[47]

We are in a better position with Tlatilco because the high-quality publication makes it possible to include as a "set" only figurines that were actually grouped together within the grave.[48] Fifteen burials contain sets of figurines, including one with three sets (Burial 86) and two with two sets (Burials 104 and 130). There is variation in subject matter. A set of three figurines in Burial 104 (an adult female) included one seated unsexed figure with a helmet-like headdress, two standing "males," one standing female, and one standing female with two faces on the same head. A set of two figurines with Burial 121 (an adult male) included one standing female with stubby arms and one seated female with a dynamic gesture. Yet, there also are sets in which stylistic variation appears to overwhelm any differentiation of subjects – for instance, the small, solid D2 figurine placed beside a much larger, hollow, atypical/untyped figure with Burial 130 (an adult female).

Table 5 summarizes the interplay of stylistic and iconographic variation among sets of figurines at Tlatilco. From left to right, the three columns move from not at all appropriate for window-on-society analysis, to minimally appropriate, to fully appropriate. The greater the stylistic homogeneity of a set, the greater is the opportunity for differences in subject matter to emerge as the most striking feature of the set. Thus, from top to bottom, the rows of Table 5 move from most to least promising for window-on-society analysis.

In terms of the prospects for application of the small-scale–politics postulate, the results are mixed. Two thirds of the sets include significant variation in subject matter that would promote that kind of analysis. However, some sets seem essentially identical in terms of subject; half include typological differences that would have distracted attention from any message centered around subject matter; and in a third of the sets, typological differentiation is so great that it would likely have created the most salient visual impact if the members of the set were displayed together.

The results provide some support for a small-scale–politics postulate but also suggest that caution is in order. Overall, there is promise in the prospects for consistent applicability – even in confrontation with notable textual wrinkles (Figure 52) – but there also are reasons for concern. Let

Table 5. Stylistic and Iconographic Characteristics of Sets of Figurines from Tlatilco Burials[a]

Stylistic Variation	Identical Subject Matter[b]	Some Variation in Subject Matter[c]	Significant Variation in Subject Matter[d]
Stylistically identical		1	4
Same type with micro-stylistic variation[e]	1	1	2
Distinct but related types[f]	1		3
Dramatically different types[g]	1	1	4

[a] Based on data in García Moll et al. 1991.
[b] Subject matter identical except for variation in headdresses.
[c] Variation in arm/hand positions and presence of ornaments such as necklaces and earspools.
[d] Variation particularly in sexual attributes or posture; also physical deformities or the holding of an object.
[e] Variation in the details with which attributes characteristic of the type are fashioned; "type" refers to the Vaillant typology with which this material was originally studied.
[f] Related types are those to which Vaillant assigned the same letter but then distinguished by number, for instance D1 versus D2.
[g] Types to which Vaillant assigned different letters, for instance D versus K.

Figure 56. Figurine with elaborate garb, Tlapacoya (Mexico). Fired clay. (Drawn by Alana Purcell from Niederberger 1996: Figure 11.)

us then approach the matter from a different direction and ask: Is there another general perspective on the subject matter of Formative figurines with greater prospects for consistent applicability?

Alternative Approaches to Subject Matter

I consider three alternative possibilities for general approaches to the subject matter of Formative figurines: (1) Marcus's suggestion that figurines depicted ancestors; (2) Sejourné's idea that they were depictions of people impersonating spirits in public ceremonies; and (3) a more generalized iconographic approach inspired by the work of Sejourné and Furst that treats Aztec figurines as a potential analog for those of the Formative. Again, the idea is to determine whether any of these approaches has better prospects for consistent applicability than the small-scale–politics perspective.

Marcus suggests that Early-Middle Formative figurines in the Valley of Oaxaca were made by women to provide "a venue to which the spirits of recent ancestors could return."[49] This idea has considerable intuitive appeal as an explanation for why figurines would have been necessary: They depicted people who were no longer around to represent themselves. It is also productive in the sense of interest here because it might explain why the use of figurines declined in the Valley of Oaxaca: With the emergence of social stratification, the ancestors of ordinary people ceased to have any perceived supernatural effectiveness.[50]

How would figurines-as-ancestors fare as a general model of the subject matter of Formative figurines? Marcus advises us to reject our preconceived idea of ancestors as retaining a personal identity. She cites Kopytoff to the effect that "the behavior of ancestors [in Africa] reflects not their individual personalities but rather a particular legal status in the political-jural domain."[51] Thus, images of ancestors are apt to be generic humans rather than personalized portraits. They become animated by a particular ancestral spirit only during the course of a ritual in which the spirit is referred to by name.[52]

A problem for us here is that the expectation for a generic human quality to ancestor images becomes indistinguishable from that of a basic window-on-society approach, which looks for stereotyped images of social categories. Still, the greater specificity of the ancestor perspective, in which basically all figurines were ancestor images, seems to put it at a disadvantage vis-à-vis a more generalized window-on-society perspective when it comes to variability in subject matter. Figurines that appear pregnant – usually present in only small percentages – could be depictions of women who died in childbirth.[53] Yet, how would we then explain Chalcatzingo, where even if we count only Cyphers's third-trimester figures, a substantial percentage of torsos depicted pregnant women?[54] Our logic in the other cases would seem to require here a catastrophic rate of death during childbirth at this particular site. The window-on-society perspective is more flexible; we can posit a local permutation along the lines of Cyphers's suggestions (an emphasis on differences in state among women) that would nevertheless fit comfortably within the general parameters of the window-on-society approach.

In light of Marcus's cogent arguments concerning the likely importance of ancestors to Formative villagers, I propose assimilating ancestor-as-subject to a more generalized window-on-society approach. Ancestors were elements of the social world depicted in figurines, but elements whose prominence may have varied in time and space and therefore must be justified according to context-specific iconographic criteria.[55]

What about Sejourné's idea of Formative figurines as a kind of doubled representation – that is, depictions of people impersonating spirits in public ceremonies? The basic premise is that the interpretation of subject matter needs to move so seriously beyond the pre-iconographic stage

that any application of the window-on-society approach is necessarily compromised. Sejourné suggests that the "pretty lady" figurines of Tlatilco (Figure 47a) were representations of either maize spirits anthropomorphized as young females or maidens who impersonated maize spirits in the ceremonies of Formative villagers. At much later Aztec festivals in honor of the goddess Cinteotl, for instance, appropriately dressed maidens impersonated the spirits of young maize.[56] Sejourné notes the youth of maize impersonators in various historical and ethnographic cases and then focuses on the colors of paint used at Tlatilco (white and red, but especially yellow), which match those of corn maidens in the Cinteotl ceremonies. Sejourné follows up her iconographic argument by showing how it might be productive – for instance, in explaining two-headed or two-faced female figurines (Figure 47c) as referencing double ears of corn.[57]

However stimulating this interpretation, its prospects for consistent applicability are dim for reasons similar to those that undermine my argument on the absence of young men in the Paso de la Amada assemblage: The attributes justifying a general interpretation are too specific. Painting on Formative figurines is highly variable. In the Formative era of the Basin of Mexico, figurines dating only two hundred years after those on which Sejourné bases her argument are no longer painted with yellow. Indeed, such decorative details were everywhere in a constant state of change. Therefore, the link between Tlatilco and Cinteotl ceremonies appears spurious when we consider intervening cases even within the Basin of Mexico, an observation that strikes to the heart of the iconographic argument identifying female figurines as depictions of spirit impersonators rather than simply young women. As a general approach to the subject matter of Formative figurines, the spirit–impersonator interpretation is rhetorically weak.

What about a more generalized version of the iconographic approach? The overwhelming majority of Formative figurines do not have manifest supernatural content. Are we nevertheless missing something subtle, as Furst suggests for "secular" interpretations of West Mexican art? Perhaps social variation among images means little, as Klein and Victoria Lona suggest for Aztec figurines. For instance, the subject matter of Aztec Group I figures – spirits of women who died in childbirth – is identifiable based on one pervasive but subtle attribute (bare breasts, a departure from Aztec norms of dress), with attention to rare attributes like physical deformities bolstering a claim for supernatural subject matter for the entire set.[58]

Could the variation among Formative figurines be reformulated as clues to a unitary, supernatural subject matter? Joyce argues that the nudity of Formative female figurines was not a neutral reflection of how women dressed but rather had some referent.[59] Although Joyce's proposed referent is "social" (beautification), we could postulate instead something supernatural along the lines of the Aztec case for these figurines, which comprise the majority of many collections. Specific subjects are indeed present as a minority of figurines in any given collection, with the subjects involved apparently differing considerably among contexts. Could we further posit that Formative female figures depicted spirits or anthropomorphized natural forces but that, as suggested by variation among the consistent minority bearing "attributes," the entities depicted varied from one place to another?

Such a move is problematic because it puts us on the brink of explaining a pervasive pattern (predominant femaleness) in local terms (based on whatever peculiar features appear on a minority of figurines in any particular context), thereby again raising concerns about expansive implications. There are other problems as well. Sometimes there is suggestive variation among the standing females, such as the bicephalous figurines of Tlatilco. Sejourné's interpretation in that case is similar in form to that of Klein and Victoria Lona's for the Aztec Group I figures; however, as we have seen, Sejourné's iconographic argument does not survive examination of its expansive implications. Other cases pose even greater challenges to the entire strategy of finding a unified

Table 6. Distribution of Arm Positions (Percentages by Column) in Two Figurine Assemblages from Central Mexico, 900–600 B.C.

Arm Positions	West Basin of Mexico		Central Tlaxcala	
	Standing (N = 69)	Seated (N = 13)	Standing (N = 88)	Seated (N = 17)
Symmetric				
Standard[a]	75.4	7.7	90.9	23.5
At sides			3.4	
Reaching forward	2.9			
On stomach	13.0	23.1	2.3	17.6
On knees	1.4	23.1		41.2
On chest	1.4		1.1	
Folded over chest		15.4		
Over crotch		15.4		
Asymmetric				
Holding ball	1.4		1.1	
Holding baby	1.4			
Holding unidentified object		7.7	1.1	5.9
Dynamic				
Not identifiable (broken)				5.9
On chest (R) and crotch (L)	1.4			
On chin (R) and standard (L)	1.4			
On chin (R) and stomach (L)		7.7		
On crotch (R) and knee (L)				5.9

[a] Small arms, projecting straight out to sides, away from body, as in Figure 13a-d.

supernatural subject because the figurines most suggestive of specific subjects are those that are not female.

Perhaps this approach to the issue is too coarse in grain. Let us examine figurines from two regions – the Western Basin of Mexico and Central Tlaxcala –during the first half of the first millennium B.C. Figurines in the two areas (approximately 80 km apart) share numerous stylistic attributes. During this period, images of two recognizable Central Mexican deities, the Old Fire God and the Storm God, appeared in both areas. Are there clues among the figurines to a more broadly shared supernatural subject matter? Possible loci for supernatural attributes are body paint (after Sejourné), gestures (after Furst), and headdresses (after Klein and Victoria Lona).

There are striking similarities in the use of body paint between the areas at around 800–700 B.C. (Figure 57); thereafter, however, complex body painting largely disappears. As noted in the discussion of Sejourné's work, body painting seems too volatile to form part of any argument on shared supernatural subject matter.

Table 6 compares arm positions from assemblages of the two areas dating around 900–600 B.C. Dynamic gestures that might clearly point to an elaborate meaning such as those Furst elicited
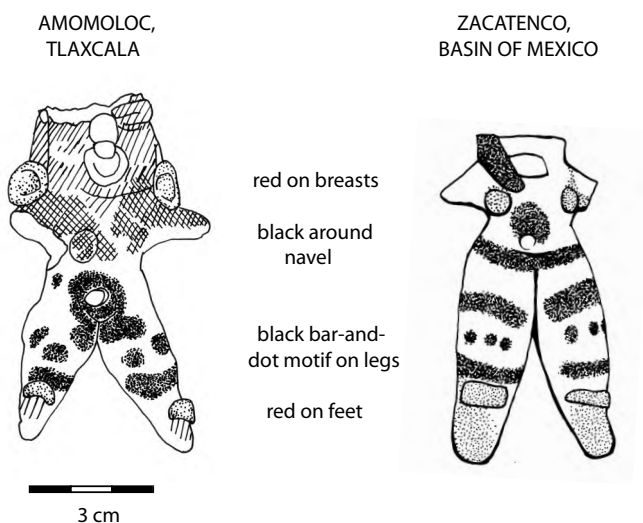
Figure 57. Similarities in painted designs between contemporaneous figurines at sites 80 km apart, Central Mexico, ca. 800 B.C. (Drawn by Laura Baker [left] and Alana Purcell [right]). Right: Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, Catalog Number 30.0/6965.

from Huichol consultants and applied to West Mexican figurines – hands extended with palms upward read as the receiving of supernatural powers; left hand to back of head, right arm extended with palm forward read as a petition to female fertility deities[60] – are exceedingly rare. At least in these collections, dynamic gestures do not seem to be repeated with any regularity, although the two instances of right-hand-on-chin at Zacatenco are intriguing. In both cases, seated figures gesture in more varied ways than standing figures, and, overall, the Basin of Mexico assemblage is more varied than that of Central Tlaxcala. Although some supernatural referent to, for example, hands-on-stomach would be difficult to rule out, the gestures do not reach a level of weirdness that would cast serious doubt on the alternative claim of basically social content.

Headdresses comprise a logical locus for attributes with supernatural referents; indeed, in both assemblages, at least one figurine is depicted as wearing a headdress with the face of an animal in it (see Figure 12a). However, the real question is whether more common headdress attributes might have had supernatural referents. Looking for repeated basic design patterns shared between the two areas, we find an emphasis on hair before 800 B.C. and headdresses thereafter; sharing of headdresses based on crossed strips of clay or a single horizontal strip of clay across the forehead between 800 and 600 B.C.; and, after 600 B.C., popularity in both areas of a trefoil design to the headdress. The sharing of headdress patterns is certainly of interest, but the deterrent to any effort to identify them as having supernatural content is that they change so rapidly. They change, indeed, at a rate that is easier to imagine as that of changing social fashions than changing choices between supernaturals.

To summarize this last set of examples, whereas the idea that Formative figurines had supernatural referents beyond their manifest social content probably holds true for at least some figurines, its prospects for consistent applicability are not as good as a claim of basically social content such as

the small-scale–politics postulate. The postulate certainly leaves loose ends (What are we to do with those bicephalous figures?), but no other current claim concerning the basic subject of the figurines has better prospects for consistent applicability to case after case through space and time in Formative Mesoamerica.

Expressive or Effective?

In my review of use, I identified alternative characterizations of the uses of Formative figurines. One possibility is to interpret them as *expressive* because they meet expectations derived from comparative ethnography for aesthetic objects as a functional class. Still, when the Voigt–Ucko scheme is applied to the Aztec case, it mistakenly identifies as aesthetic devices figurines regarded by specialists as vehicles of magic. The alternative currently favored by most scholars writing on Formative figurines is that those objects also were *effective* – they were intended to create concrete effects when deployed in ritual.

At the end of my discussion of use, I lacked systematic criteria to assess whether the patterning of Formative figurines might be consistent with objects intended to create concrete effects. My proposal was to treat the Aztec case as a source for developing such criteria. Having assessed Formative figurines for subtle iconographic clues to a supernatural subject matter, we are now in a position to return to the issue of function. I propose treating success in the search for specific subject matter as a material indicator of when figurines may have served as vehicles of magic. As material expectations, those would work for the Aztec case (as it is interpreted by Smith as well as Klein and Victoria Lona).

Applying that approach to the Formative case suggests that interpretation of figurines as effective holds most promise for inquiry framed at scales smaller than that of the Formative macro-unit as a whole. When I turn to a general statement on Formative figurines in the conclusions to this chapter, I suggest that these objects were both expressive and effective but that the former is better as an overarching characterization of the phenomenon, whereas the latter is more promising for efforts to make sense of patterning at smaller scales.

Conclusions

I have been examining the small-scale–politics postulate for its consistency of applicability to collections of figurines from Formative Mesoamerica. Applicability requires that uses fall into a certain range (dispersed and decentralized with different sorts of people engaging with the figurines) and that the subject matter be broadly social in content (illustrating categories of people rather than specific subjects, with different images appearing together and thus inviting comparisons between them but also between their respective social referents). This perspective fares reasonably well when it is confronted with variability in patterning. Certainly, it cannot make sense of all the variability in imagery. The strength of stylistic patterning relative to subject matter can be a concern. Buried sets of figurines at Tlatilco often include multiple subjects, but not always. For more typical collections, one wonders whether there is enough differentiation of subject matter to support our efforts to read that as a deliberate reference to differences between people. Despite these concerns, the prospects for consistent applicability of the small-scale–politics perspective to variation in subject matter seem better than those of its current competitors. There are grounds to move to the next step in the examination of its rhetorical power.

Productivity of the Small-Scale–Politics Postulate

The small-scale–politics postulate for the interpretation of figurines evokes themes of wide interest in the social sciences. People's ordinary interactions with others are seen as political in both an overt and a covert sense. They are overtly political in that participants operate strategically, drawing on an array of powers and resources to navigate webs of obligations and rights with respect to others. However, social relationships are covertly political in that strategic manipulations range within bounds habitually recognized as natural and unchangeable. Everyday practice tends to reproduce such bounds on what is doable or even thinkable, and the reproduction of those bounds in turn perpetuates social hierarchies and systems of subordination. Material objects have a role in the perpetuation of everyday practices and, among objects, the case of images is of particular interest. Human images may constitute ideological assertions concerning social relations even to the extent of giving those assertions an aura of unalterable necessity. However, they also can provide resources for the manipulation or even subversion of the status quo.

The hope is that these theoretical strands, brought into confrontation with a set of figurines, will yield novel insights. Do they? I am not referring to platitudes that merely repeat what we knew in advance. The approach should be proven in a real dialogue with the material remains. In a weaker sense, we might simply try to account for variability; in a stronger sense, we could ask that the perspective make successful predictions concerning as-yet-unexamined patterning. I consider two specific examples – the long-distance sharing of figurine styles in the Early Horizon and the localized use of multiple types in Central Mexico – holding the first case to the weak standard for productivity but in the second case giving the stronger standard a try. More distinctly than for consistent applicability, the results highlight the limits of the small-scale–politics postulate as an interpretive framework for Formative figurines.

Olmec-Style Figurines as Elements of an Idiom of Power

Probably the most dramatic wrinkle in the texture of figurine patterning across the spatiotemporal macro-unit of Formative Mesoamerica is that of the Early Horizon, 1400–1000 B.C. A striking feature of figurines from this era is the pan-Mesoamerican convergence of stylistic and iconographic details, indicating direct contacts between different regions (see Figure 54). The suite of traits constituting Olmec style, specifically as manifested in ceramic figurines, includes the following[61]:

- burnished white slip, ranging in color from gray to cream
- naturalistic depictions of body and head
- heads of a characteristic shape: oblong in frontal view and, in side view, bending slightly to the back toward the top of the head (a shape often interpreted as depicting a form of head deformation actually practiced in Formative Mesoamerica, tabular erect)
- eyes typically formed with narrow slits tapering to points with no indication of pupils; sometimes instead a puffy protrusion or a slit superimposed on such a protrusion
- eyebrows indicated by incisions or modeling of the face
- a characteristic mouth, trapezoidal in overall form, sharply down-turned at either side, with well-defined upper and lower lips and upper lip more prominent than lower
- heads often nearly or completely bald

Interpreting Ancient Figurines

Although the suite can be identified in many collections, it never characterizes all figurines in Early Horizon deposits.[62] Figurines in the shared (Olmec) style coexisted with types that had more localized distributions. In some sequences, there was an outpouring of iconographic complexity of small, solid figurines at this time (Figure 53). A more common pattern was sharing of imagery between small solid and larger hollow figurines,[63] along with (rarely) the appearance on figurines of signs drawn from a widely shared symbol set (Figure 55). Figurines in serpentine, jadeite, and other stones are rare objects but diverge in subject matter from their ceramic counterparts and often demand full iconographic analysis.[64] Finally, on the Southern Gulf Coast – particularly at the colossal site of San Lorenzo – imagery recognizable from the figurines appears sculpted in stone (Figure 58). Stone sculptures at San Lorenzo include a great variety of images, but recurring themes seem to be linkages between rulership and the supernatural.[65] Themes appearing on small ceramic figurines of Olmec style had larger symbolic resonance, including the manifestly political.

Still, the ceramic figurines, despite the unusual thematic linkages to monumental media, appeared in typical domestic contexts, both at San Lorenzo and in other areas where there was as yet little or no sculpture. Can the small-scale–politics postulate make sense of this spatiotemporal permutation of figurine patterns? I focus particularly on one issue: the juxtaposition of shared versus local styles. This is something of a challenge to our postulate because at this time in which political associations of figurines are established in sculpture, we find variation in subject matter – the main focus in our perspective – to be entangled with striking differences of style. Can the idea that figurines were material points of reference in ideological claims concerning social relationships make sense of these patterns? At a basic level it can, as I suggest for two areas: the Valley of Oaxaca and the Soconusco region.

The Early Horizon was characterized by increasing sociopolitical differentiation within regions and increased interaction among them.[66] Interaction involved the exchange of preciosities (iron-ore mirrors, jade) but also the wide dissemination of an expressive idiom – the Olmec art style. There is strong evidence that elements of that shared idiom referenced power, authority, community, and the supernatural. The associations at the huge site of San Lorenzo are particularly strong because of the large corpus of sculpture. Although the exact nature of political organization is the subject of debate, it was clearly hierarchical, focused on the person of the ruler, and sanctified with a complex ideology linking rulership to deities or supernatural forces.[67]

Olmec-style figurines incorporated elements from these expressions of social and supernatural power. For example, the trapezoidal mouth of the figurines seems to be an anthropomorphized version of a supernatural mouth that includes bared fangs.[68] Elements of the shared (Olmec) style are readily identifiable in Early Horizon collections across Mesoamerica but with different emphases, different uses, and quite likely varying symbolic resonances.[69] In many instances, shared motifs and other traits were probably a medium of power in which elites sought to bolster their local claims to status.[70]

Given this general understanding, the small-scale–politics perspective prompts us to suspect that the Olmec style in figurines had direct political referents. Does that premise make sense of the details of individual cases?

In the Valley of Oaxaca, early figurines of the Tierras Largas phase (1700–1400 B.C.) are diverse in stylistic detail. Images of standing females predominate, often with elaborate hairstyles; the few possible male images also are standing and are similar in style to the females.[71] The subsequent San José phase (1400–1000 B.C.) corresponds to the Early Horizon. Hundreds of figurines recovered at the large village site of San José Mogote are described and richly illustrated by Marcus.[72] Subject matter is more diverse at this time than at any other in Formative Oaxaca. Standing
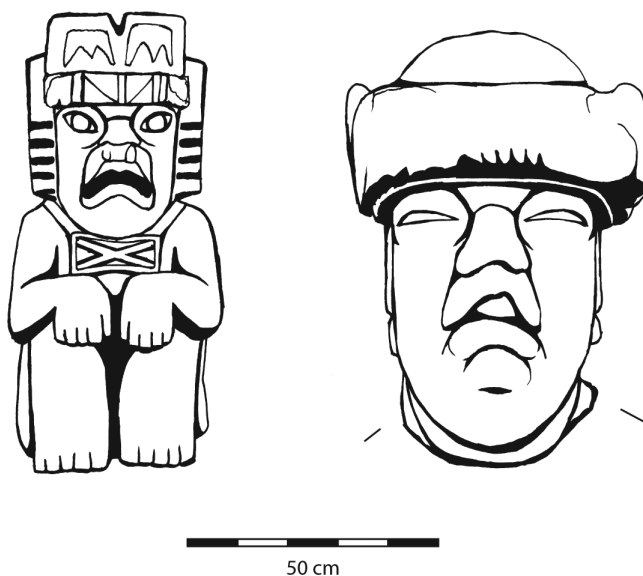
Figure 58. Basalt sculptures from San Lorenzo (Mexico) with facial features in Olmec style. Left: supernatural creature with snarling mouth and flaring upper lip. Right: fragment of a large anthropomorphic sculpture (eroded). (Drawn by Alana Purcell based on Cyphers 2004: Figures 62 and 173.)

females predominate; others are seated and some appear to be pregnant. Hairstyles are given considerable attention. Most of these images are in a local type with well-smoothed but unslipped surfaces (Figure 59a-d). Beyond the variety of female images, there is a series of elaborately garbed figures usually not clearly sexed. Some of them may be equipped as ballplayers but variability in accoutrements suggests diversity of subjects.

Finally, there is a set of head and body fragments that Marcus groups on the basis of an association between white slip, seated posture, and head bald or wearing a helmet. Bodies in this group are flat-chested (Figure 59e-f). Marcus identifies them as male, with their seated stance depicting a position of authority – they are "tonsored *caciques*." Although the collection is fragmentary, Marcus's case for this as a category of subject matter is strong. In stylistic detail, the set is diverse (Figure 59g-i), with some heads in Olmec style according to my criteria, whereas others bear only some Olmec traits. Even the white slip of this category helps to differentiate tonsored *caciques* from the standing females; other than an occasional trapezoidal mouth, the latter rarely bore traits linked to the Olmec style.

Although Marcus disavows the term *Olmec*, her assessment of the subject matter of San José–phase figurines emphasizes small-scale politics: The diversity of subjects is related to social tensions associated with the emergence of hereditary rank, with certain bodily postures particularly symbolic of rank and authority.[73] It was also probably important, as Blomster notes, that the reformulation of social authority in Early Horizon Oaxaca drew symbolic elements from a widely shared nexus of symbols related to status, authority, and the supernatural but deployed in a purely local setting.[74] Stylistic diversity among tonsored *caciques* might signal contests over the legitimacy of that idiom, or it might indicate that claims of rank drew on multiple ideological sources not confined to those associated with the Olmec style. Still, that style – in this interpretation – evoked claims
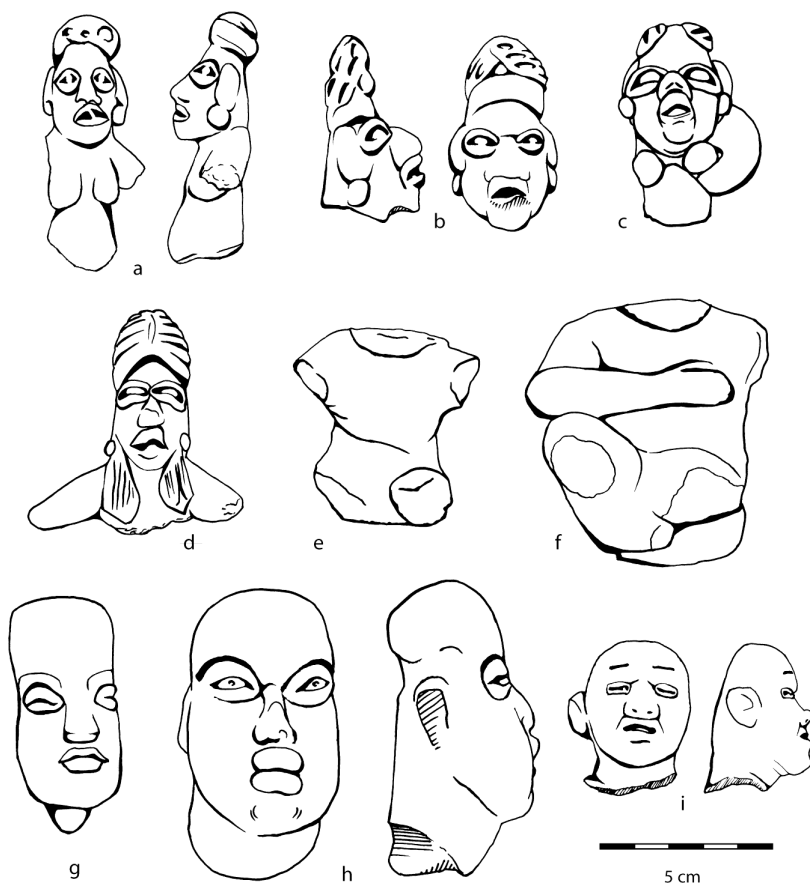
Figure 59. Ceramic figurines from San José Mogote and Tierras Largas (Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico): (a–d) unslipped figures with heads in the "local" style of the San José phase, mostly standing females; (e–f) white-slipped seated torsos with flat chests; (g–i) white-slipped heads varying in stylistic detail, with only (g and h) strongly Olmec. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after Marcus 1998: Figures 10.15:55, 11.9, 11.28:12, 11.36, 11.37:21, 12.18:6, 12.26:1, 13.6:1, and 14.12:40.)

concerning truth and authority, the social world, and the relative positions of people within it. The shared-versus-local patterns prove amenable to deeper analysis from the small-scale–politics perspective.

Similar arguments work for the Soconusco region. The complex from this area that I have already described – with its subject matter of costumed "elders" and nude young women – developed during three phases from 1900 B.C. through 1400 B.C. Elements of the Early Horizon appear in two steps: the Cherla phase (1400–1300 B.C.) and the Cuadros phase (1300–1200 B.C.). Clark and Blake suggested that the first involved emulation of San Lorenzo by local elites, whereas the second was characterized by more direct control of the area near Paso de la Amada (itself abandoned by 1300 B.C.) by people from the Gulf Coast.[75] Clark subsequently elaborated the idea that a group of people from the Gulf Coast actually settled at the site of Cantón Corralito, and Cheetham's dissertation work greatly bolsters the plausibility of that suggestion.[76]
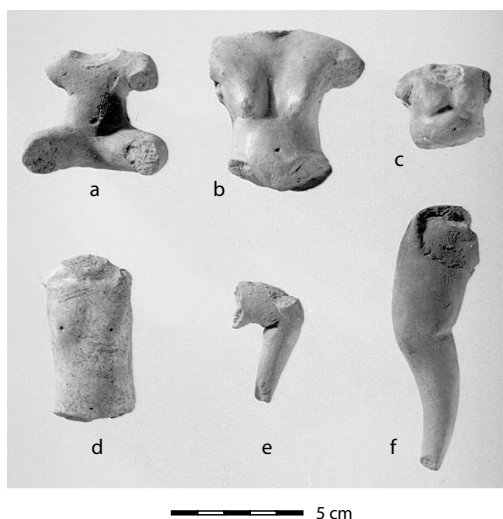
Figure 60. Ceramic figurines of the Early Olmec Horizon, Paso de la Amada (Mexico): (a) unslipped, flat-chested figure; (b-d) white-slipped torsos, seated; (e-f) white-slipped legs of seated figures.

During the Cherla phase, figurines of standing young women (see Figure 11a-d) continued in use, in a local style inherited from previous phases and characterized by unslipped surfaces. Alongside these appeared white-slipped figurines in Olmec style as well as unslipped figures that seem to be cruder versions of the same thing (Figures 60 and 61). The subject in both cases includes a seated, flat-chested individual analytically ambiguous as to sex but plausibly male (Figure 60a,d). The resemblance to San José Mogote is striking: shared subject matter including the seated "position of authority," a similar suite of Olmec stylistic traits, and variation in how well individual pieces actually match that full suite (compare Figure 54a to 54b and Figure 59e,f to Figure 60a,d). Many of these figurines are what Marcus would call tonsored *caciques*. They occur in juxtaposition with figurines in local style with divergent subject matter, and they again appear amenable to interpretation as evocations of an idiom of power propounded in a turbulent era.[77]
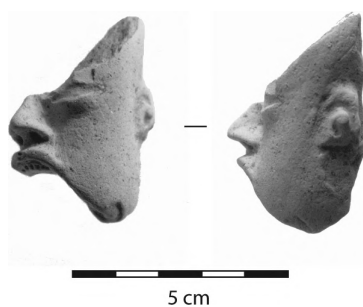
Figure 61. Hollow ceramic face fragment in Olmec style from Paso de la Amada (Mexico). Complete original 15 to 30 cm.

It is unnecessary to multiply these examples. The perspective under consideration is productive such that, applied in particular contexts, it can make sense of patterns characteristic of one of the more dramatic wrinkles in the texture of figurine patterns in Formative Mesoamerica. That said, however, let me immediately sound a note of caution.

If Olmec attributes were co-opted by the makers of figurines for their ideological evocativeness, then why were they so ephemeral on these objects? Elements of that style (particularly the combination of head shape, eye form, and trapezoidal mouth with flaring lip) continued in use after 1000 B.C., in portable objects made of exotic stone as well as sculpture, at La Venta on the Southern Gulf Coast and several sites in other regions (Figure 62). The materials and the contexts of the objects suggest continued associations, after 1000 B.C., of facial features in Olmec style with rulership and the supernatural.[78] Yet, among ceramic figurines, the Olmec style rapidly went the way of any other style, its special evocative power quickly irrelevant in this domain even as it was remembered in others. This was true on the Gulf Coast – where figurines at La Venta were no longer Olmec in the sense defined here – as well as in other regions. If traits of the Olmec style continued to evoke power and authority and if figurines were points of reference in the political give and take of social relations, then why did not people continue to find the style relevant in this material domain?[79]

That question poses a significant challenge to the small-scale–politics perspective. The answer, I suspect, is that figurines were ideological only in a limited sense. Significant other factors were involved in the adoption and discard of figurine styles – even one so vested with political potential as the Olmec style.

Coexisting Types: Divergent Views of Social Reality?

The contemporaneous use of two or more strikingly different styles at the same site recurs among figurines in Central Mexico. Certainly, the primary component of variability in style was temporal. However, multiple types often were in use together in a single community. The styles involved may be variations on a common theme or wholly different in conception. Typically, one style appears in distinctly higher frequencies than the others. Occasionally, a single era is characterized by the use of several types that together give way to others; more often, periods of overlap are ended as one type replaces the other. Coexisting types are regularly rich enough in distinctive attributes that they arguably constituted alternative conceptions of humanness.

That observation is of considerable interest. Were these, in fact, alternative versions of social reality? If a predominant type inscribed a set of social stereotypes, then could a minority type have presented an alternative vision? New types might have provided opportunities to contest, however incrementally, the status quo of gender or rank inscribed in figurines. Cases of contemporaneous use of multiple types are thus a potential record of negotiation, contestation, and struggle in social relations.

I propose a stronger version: Given the social theory on which the small-scale–politics postulate is based, we would *expect* people to have been active participants in social life, especially in the turbulent 1,500 years in which Mesoamerican peoples made the transition from acephalous villages to urban centers. Here, indeed, is an opportunity to hold the small-scale–politics approach to a more challenging standard of productivity. If our postulate's basic (universalist) claims concerning figurines are valid, then the contemporaneous use of multiple types should have presented people with opportunities to contest or redefine the social status quo – opportunities that should have been taken by people we axiomatically consider "active."[80] Evidence showing that contemporaneous
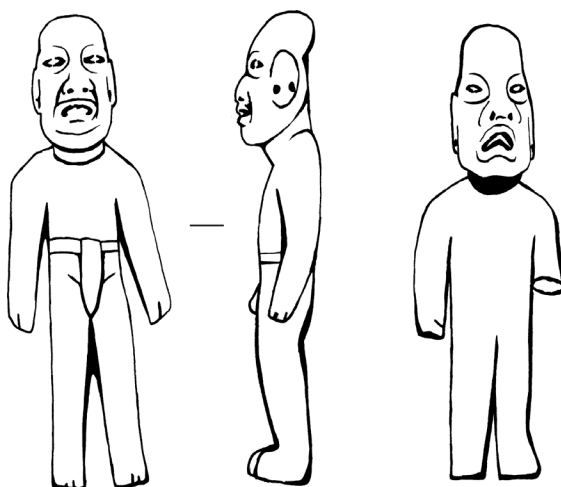
Figure 62. Greenstone figurines from a buried set at La Venta (Mexico), approximately 1000–700 B.C. The faces and heads are in familiar Olmec style at a time when ceramic figurines had diverged from that style. Right: serpentine, 18.4 cm; left: jade, 18 cm. (Drawing by Alana Purcell based on Drucker, Heizer, and Squier 1959: Plates 33:9, 35:16.)

types constituted contested versions of social reality would provide striking support for the small-scale–politics postulate; unfortunately, such evidence is not forthcoming. Sometimes juxtapositions of different types do suggest a contest – but not over subject matter.

My cases are the Western Basin of Mexico and Central Tlaxcala from 900 B.C. through 400 B.C.[81] The two areas, separated by approximately 80 km, are related in both subject matter and style without being identical. In some epochs, they even share the same "type," in my stringent sense. Examination of two areas together helps us sort widespread patterns from idiosyncratic ones.

One trend shared between the two regions is a loosening of rules for coding sexual attributes, leading toward greater ambiguity and variety. In Central Tlaxcala from around 800 through 650 B.C., "female" and "male" seem to be distinguished as essentially binary categories, by two lentil-shaped appliqués suggesting female breasts or a single appliqué of similar shape at the crotch suggesting stylized male genitals or a loincloth (see Figure 13). Modeled breasts, more ambiguous for sexual attribution, become the norm after 650 B.C. Male figurines (with an appliqué at the crotch) decrease in frequency, while sexless figures increase. Female sexual attributes thus far have been confined to breasts; however, by 500 B.C., some figures with or without breasts have a mark on the crotch or lower abdomen that is suggestive of female genitals: a simple vertical incision, a single round punctation, an incised or sculpted pubic triangle, or incisions forming a T-shape (Figure 63). Increasing variety in the modeling of female sexual attributes also characterizes figurines in the Western Basin of Mexico, although not as dramatically as in Tlaxcala.

The general loosening of rules, observed in both areas, is intriguing. Can we postulate a change in gender discourse deriving from incremental contestation of models of social stereotypes inscribed in figurines? There are two problems with that idea. First, at a broad scale, changes in the marking of sexual attributes were not "emphatic"; there was no cooperation between redundant attributes that would render social distinctions impossible for a viewer to miss. Indeed, during the period in question, there are few other changes in subject matter. Figurines with "experimental" sexual attributes have headdresses and gestures similar to those of other figurines.

Figure 63. Ceramic figurines of the Huehuetitla type, Tlaxcala (Mexico), 500–400 B.C.: (a) "male" with lentil-shaped pubic appliqué; (b) sexless; (c) sexless torso with ventral groove; (d) flat-chested torso with T-shaped lower-belly incisions; torso with female breasts and T-shaped lower-belly incisions; (e-l) torsos with breasts of variable prominence. (Photograph by Lesure.)

The second problem with perceiving the changes in figurines to be the result of "active" manipulation of gender concepts is that there is little supporting evidence to be found at a smaller scale, in instances of types used at the same time. I review three examples. My first case is the overlap between types B and C at Zacatenco, where together they constitute more than 60 percent of the collection (see Figure 34). Vaillant felt that B and C1–2 were not fully overlapping, with B tending to replace C1–2; that seems likely. The period of overlap was approximately 800–700 B.C.

There is little suggestion of contested portrayals of the social subjects of these figurines. Female-ness is suggested in both types by modeled breasts, which vary in prominence. Unsexed figures in both types probably include some figurines intended to depict males; in neither case is maleness positively marked. Unsexed figures, with moderate significance, are more common in C than in B.[82] The types are similar in posture, gesture, and ornamentation. In summary, there is no satisfying evidence of differences in how the types portray their social subject matter.

Frustrations on that front contrast sharply with the ease of division into the categories B and C. Typical paste color and overall formal conception as well as specific form of the eyes, nose, mouth, earspools, and chest ornaments reinforce one another to encourage recognition of these categories by the viewer. Furthermore, in a pattern we see again in the next example, the stylistic differences between the two types go beyond variation in attribute states to include underlying stylistic rules. C is more diverse, a polythetic mix of attributes correlating with one another in complex ways (and leading the splitter in Vaillant to continual tinkering with never-satisfactory subdivisions); B tends instead toward the redundancy of a monothetic type.

That first example recalls my analysis in Chapter 2 of Tlatempa-phase (800–650 B.C.) figurines from Central Tlaxcala in which I found that the collection split readily into stylistic categories but proved difficult to divide into categories of social subjects. During the last half of that phase,
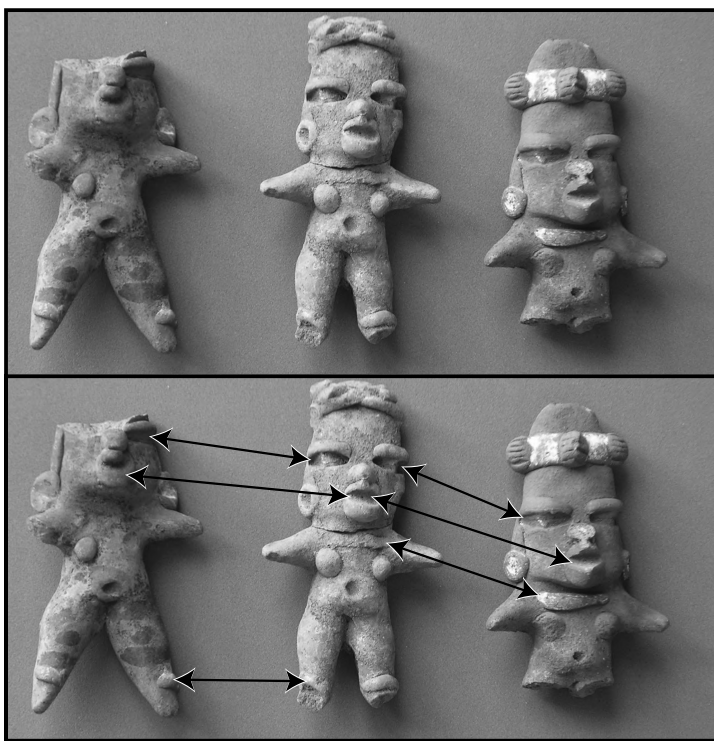
Figure 64. Ceramic figurines of the Cuatlapanga type, Central Tlaxcala, Mexico. Top: three figurines; bottom: the same image with some of the strong redundancies in features indicated. See also Figure 13.

the Cuatlapanga type predominated, along with several alternatives. Most common among the minority types is Coaxomulco (C10[83]), a variation on the same basic tradition as Cuatlapanga. My sample of Coaxomulco is not large, but there are no evident differences in subject matter with Cuatlapanga.

One pattern, however, is striking even in the available sample: These two types are based on radically different generative rules. The monothetic Cuatlapanga type is characterized by a rigidly stereotyped conceptualization of the human form (Figure 64; see also Figure 13). Coaxomulco is polythetic in that any two figurines match one another in some traits but not in others, and it drew individual traits from a variety of contemporaneous types (Figure 65). Cuatlapanga was rigid, redundant, and inward-looking; Coaxomulco, in contrast, was fluid and omnivorous – an eclectic combination of borrowed attributes.

The juxtaposition of these two sorts of figurines looks like a contest but not a contest over subject matter and, therefore, not a contest over competing versions of a social referent. The contest instead appears to have been over how figurines should be made. The people who made figurines in Tlaxcala around 700 B.C. pursued their stylistic contest emphatically, with verve and gusto. Their stylistic claims would have been impossible to miss. When we abandon the frustrating effort with subject matter and shift our attention to style, the logic that I am attempting to apply clicks suddenly into place.

My final case, also from Central Tlaxcala, is the overlap of the Ehco type with a related pair of types around 600–500 B.C. Ehco, a local version of E2, appeared in a soft, light-colored paste around 650 B.C., with a stereotyped rigidity approaching Cuatlapanga (Figure 65g). However, soon thereafter, minor stylistic innovations began to accumulate, yielding numerous varieties. At some time in the sixth century B.C., burnished brown surfaces and other new attributes appeared, the local equivalents of types G, I, and L in the Western Basin. In Central Tlaxcala, two burnished types, Huehuetitla and Huiolac, overlapped with Ehco for fifty to one hundred years (Figure 63).

Comparison yields the two differences in the marking of sexual characteristics noted previously as part of a general trend for the area: It is from Ehco to the burnished types that the lentil appliqué for male genitals declines in frequency and a variety of marks plausibly suggesting female genitals appears. These changes are not related to variation in posture or gesture. Still, there are these two changes, each contributing to greater ambiguity of sexual reference, and it might seem possible to argue that these changes were prompted by small-scale negotiations of gender concepts, perhaps efforts to subvert figurines as models of comportment.

Such an argument would be fun to make, but its empirical support is weak. A less exciting alternative appears to be a stronger candidate. The greater diversity in depictions of female sexual attributes among the burnished types in comparison to Ehco mirrors the pattern of increased diversity of more evidently stylistic attributes. For example, eye forms for the burnished types include more categories and a more even spread of instances among categories. The most common eye form appears on 34 percent of Huehuetitla–Huiolac heads, whereas the most common Ehco eye form appears on 66 percent of heads of that type. The variation in sexual attributes that we are initially inclined to treat as indicative of changing gender concepts may have been essentially stylistic, comprising alternative ways of representing the same subject.

Yet, the juxtaposition of Ehco and Huehuetitla/Huiolac cannot be understood as a stylistic "contest" in the sense of Cuatlapanga versus Coaxomulco. We seem to have similar generative rules that encouraged small stylistic innovations. The burnished figurines simply carry further stylistic processes already evident in Ehco; they do not challenge or subvert them. Because of the hiatus at La Laguna, my collection from Tlaxcala may miss another stylistic "contest" evidenced at Ticomán (in the Western Basin) in the coherence and redundancy of the set H2-H5, which replaces the burnished types G, I, and L. That point should discourage us from perceiving a simple directional trend in the implications of style.

The small-scale–politics perspective, applied to juxtapositions of figurines in different styles, proves disappointingly unproductive. Theory yields expectations that are not met, at least in the cases I have examined. What went wrong? It could be that the theoretical understandings of small-scale social relations are flawed, but it is more likely that the postulate linking figurines to that theory is less sweeping in scope than we might hope. The small-scale–politics perspective holds promise in the interpretation of Formative figurines, but when we start testing the limits of its productivity, we encounter them rather quickly. The perspective rates highly in terms of potential applicability – higher than its obvious competitors – but its limited productivity suggests that it will have only modest rhetorical power as a source for interpreting Formative figurines.

Conclusions

Figurine analysts are concerned primarily with explicating a set of finds from a particular context. Still, to construct their interpretations, they regularly draw on strands of universalist logic, and

Figure 65. Coaxomulco type (b-f) compared to Cuatlapanga (a) and Ehco (g) types, illustrating the borrowing of attributes as well as the polythetic composition of Coaxomulco. Borrowing from Cuatlapanga: note mouth, chest ornament, and arms in (a) compared to (b). Borrowing from Ehco: note mouth/nose formed by single indentation in pinched-out face in (g) compared to (c-d). Polythetic composition of Coaxomulco: (c) and (d) have the same mouth/nose form, but (c) lacks the flattened, folded-back tip of the leg ("foot") present in (d) and common in the type (see f); (c) also has eyebrows, a rare trait; (e) has a distinctly more naturalistic nose than any of the others.

those strands often play the key rhetorical role of reformulating material patterns in social terms. We tend to lose sight of the expansive implications of these rhetorical maneuvers – that is, until we place one study beside another and realize that each relies on a different universalist claim, but one that could easily apply in the other cases as well. After all, we are examining figurines from a single spatiotemporal macro-unit and therefore have grounds for suspecting historical connections and ongoing interactions. In short, it would not be surprising if the social implications of figurines in one context were similar to those of figurines in another.

The universalist logic in these cases does not appear in the form of unstable hypotheses to be tested against the stable evidence of figurines. Instead, it is the figurines that are unstable because we are at a loss as to how we might reformulate material patterns in social terms. We call on a stable social generality to help solve the dilemma. Its applicability to an entire class of societies justifies its relevance to the case at hand. Yet, when each contextualist study across the macro-unit calls on a different universalist formulation, the arguments justifying applicability are collectively undermined. We therefore need a category of inquiry beyond the local contextualization, into figurines as a general phenomenon *at the scale of the macro-unit*. High on the agenda would be the task with which I have been concerned here, but that need not be the only goal. I first summarize my results on the small-scale–politics postulate, then turn more generally to the kinds of insights we might ask of inquiry at the cross-contextual level. I conclude with a few suggestions on "Formative figurines" as a cultural phenomenon.

Evaluating Contextualist Appeals to Universal Truths

To address the expansive implications of context-specific appeals to stable social generalities, I proposed weighing their rhetorical power in the archaeological domain by comparing cases from across the macro-unit. A major dilemma facing such an endeavor is the decision of when to reformulate material patterns in social terms: too early and we risk giving undue privilege to one or another of our competing universalisms; too late and we have no guidance on which material patterns are relevant. My strategy was to postpone reformulation, enlisting my framework for analysis of images and especially the associated guide to comparison to make decisions on relevance. The result was a model of figurine patterning across the Formative macro-unit as a textured set of promptings toward modes of analysis (Figures 48 and 52). The idea was to use this model of texture to probe the rhetorical power of a specific universalist formulation. First, how consistently applicable would it be, given the wrinkles and bumps of observed texture? Second, would it be productive of deeper insight?

I put that strategy into practice by examining the small-scale–politics postulate, a generalized version of a relatively common argument in the interpretation of Formative figurines. The idea is that figurines were objects made for or caught up in small-scale politics – that is, the negotiation of power and obligations in daily social interactions. The claim is universalist because the idea is that stereotyped images of people deployed in domestic settings would necessarily have taken on such a role. It reformulates material patterns in social terms by prompting us to examine differences in subject matter among the images and interpret those as constituting claims concerning the content of social categories.

My scrutiny of this version of the window-on-society approach yields mixed results. Its prospects for consistent applicability across Formative Mesoamerica are good, although it is clear that the postulate cannot account for all variability in imagery. To assess productivity of the perspective, I focused on two particular wrinkles in figurine patterning, both involving instances in which style overshadows subject matter. I rapidly encountered limits to its productivity.

Although I did not systematically assess competing universalist formulations, on the topic of subject matter I briefly compared the prospects for consistent applicability of small-scale politics to those of a few competitors. Small-scale politics was certainly no worse than the others. A mixed rating on rhetorical power will likely be a recurring result when we assess other formulations. Still, there will certainly be relative differences in rhetorical power, and I suspect that some formulations will prove so weak that it will be necessary to set them aside altogether. Conversely, it is conceivable that more than one stable social generality might be both widely applicable and productive and that, used conjointly, those might yield richer interpretations of individual collections.

"Formative Figurines" as a Cultural Phenomenon

Although context-specific interpretation is fundamental in the study of Formative figurines, the expansive implications of contextualist appeals to universal truths remind us that such work cannot stand alone. We also need to contemplate "Formative figurines" as a general phenomenon. How can we ensure that such work promotes and enhances (rather than stifles) context-specific research? What kinds of insights should we derive from cross-contextual studies?

The contextualist strategy of building toward synthetic insight from the bottom up – through consideration of regional diversity – is promising. Any general insight into Formative figurines would then be founded on and ultimately answerable to multiple local contextualizations. From

such insights, we might particularly hope to gain support for context-specific efforts to reformulate archaeological patterns into the social terms from which a (social) interpretation can be constructed. From the perspective of the interpretive problems of individual collections, we would be less interested in easy answers than in well-chosen questions.

Any synthetic insights can be envisioned as distributed by scales of space and time, ranging from the largest of scales (the spatiotemporal macro-unit of figurine making) to the smallest (figurines of an individual phase at an individual site). We might pose questions for small-scale inquiry while at the same time proposing trial "answers" to figurines as a general phenomenon. Any reformulation to social terms effected in those larger scale "answers" should be stable across all the variability of the Formative macro-unit and sufficiently abstract that it can aid investigators in assessing the expansive implications of their interpretive moves without stifling potentially promising ideas.

Of the typical material patterns of small, solid, clay figurines from Formative Mesoamerica, the most homogeneous across multiple scales (phase-to-phase, site-to-site, region-to-region) are related to recovery-contexts – figurines are recurringly found as fragments in household refuse. We are prompted to investigate use. The homogeneity is such that the uses of figurines should be a key consideration for cross-contextual synthesis. Still, a single answer is not necessarily the goal. We might instead frame investigations in terms of an unresolved tension between whether figurines were expressive (aesthetic objects) or effective (vehicles of magic).

Both of these functional categories appear in the Voigt–Ucko framework, which takes as its point of departure ethnographic accounts from across the globe concerning how people use small human images. Direct application of that interpretive framework would indicate that Formative figurines were expressive. By contrast, most analysts working with Formative figurines consider them effective. I have only begun to identify material expectations for these possibilities. If we take the Aztec case as a source of expectations for effective images, then this alternative proves to be unsatisfying as an interpretation of Formative figurines generally (at the scale of the macro-unit) because the patterns that support it exhibit considerable variability among contexts.

I therefore propose that we provisionally take expressiveness to have been the most general functional role of Formative figurines. We can then place the question of whether they were activated as effective objects at smaller scales of analysis. Broadly, then, Formative figurines would have been elements of a domestic aesthetic – objects that people kept around the home as a matter of course. In many cases, they were probably made of clay left over from the making of pots; they were something extra, a source of pleasure. Still, as aesthetic objects, they materialized elements of a meaning-laden worldview in which their iconicity – their resemblance to something else – would have had the latent capacity to create effects. So, although no single effect (curing, protection during pregnancy, propitiation of ancestors, appeals to spirits of maize) motivated figurine making across the macro-unit, figurines comprised a widely available medium that could have been recruited in concrete instances to serve such effective ends.

Were they so used? To achieve what effects? At what spatial and temporal scales can traditions of figurines-as-effective be identified? These are questions to be pursued at scales smaller than the macro-unit itself, and there may have been significant variation across time and space. The tension between expressiveness and effectiveness therefore provides an open-ended program of investigation for particular collections.

Typical patterns of subject matter are more complexly textured than those associated with the investigation of use. There are certain widely recurring patterns – including femaleness, nudity, and an emphasis on the face and head – but there is greater small-scale heterogeneity in the occurrence of those patterns, ranging from full-blown exceptions to, for instance, diversity in how

sexual attributes are coded. By relegating figurines-as-effective to smaller scales, we give up the possibility of explaining femaleness as resulting from any specific intended effect.

To account for predominant femaleness at the worldwide scale, I suggested in Chapter 4 that figurine makers in several macro-units – including Formative Mesoamerica – were predominantly women. With our attention now focused on the Mesoamerican case and its internal structure, that still seems an attractive way to account for recurring (but not emphatic) femaleness of subjects.[84] Is there any empirical support for it? Fingerprint analysis holds out the possibility of direct evidence on the makers of figurines, although it presents all sorts of challenges in practice, and few have seriously attempted it. A study of Hohokam figurines from Snaketown, Arizona (first millennium A.D.) – a case beyond the scope of this study but arguably an extreme northern extension of the Mesoamerican macro-unit (see Chapter 1) – would support manufacture mainly by women but also by some men.[85]

What about the users of figurines? The burial data from Tlatilco and Chupícuaro indicate that figurines cannot be imagined as a domain solely of women. Figurines appeared in the burials of children, women, and men. The association with female graves was stronger than that with male graves, but there also was an association of figurines with youth, including both children and younger adults. I propose treating these patterns as indicating broad access to figurines but as nevertheless potentially consistent with the idea that women were the primary makers and (along with children) users.

One core pattern (femaleness) may be largely accounted for by positing women as the typical makers of figurines, perhaps often alongside pots or even from the clay left over from the manufacture of pots. Their reasons for molding the small figures were fundamentally aesthetic; it was always a pleasure to have a few figurines around. In no way were these objects used exclusively by women; all household members had ready access to them, and children often appropriated them as toys.

What about nudity (particularly of the upper torso) and an emphasis on the face and head? Joyce's claim (concerning Tlatilco) that "these figurines represent a record of practices of beautification linked intimately with the expression of emerging sexuality at the transition from childhood to adulthood" might account for core patterns more generally. It is certainly consistent with my interpretation of other core patterns – an aesthetically pleasing home was one populated by beautiful young bodies.

That point draws a link between *depictions* of social categories and *actual* social categories – and therefore brings us to the window-on-society approach and the particular variant examined in this chapter: the small-scale–politics postulate. In this variant, figurines are seen as instruments of social interaction and subject matter is a record of what was and was not discussed in everyday discourse. This perspective has promise as widely relevant to the interpretation of Formative figurines, but its rhetorical power is limited. A distinct possibility is that figurines were not ideological in any strong sense of the term. Certainly, their stylistic content registered larger political vicissitudes (always fleetingly), but there was little to be gained in social relations by manipulating the content of figurines.

The relevance and productivity of the small-scale–politics postulate vary with context, thus providing another program for investigation into individual collections. Contextualist work might treat the window-on-society approach to subject matter as in tension with a contrasting approach that would regard figurines as having subjects that – despite initial appearances – were not generically social. Analysis in the second mode would involve iconographic study – efforts to identify attributes and complex narrative. To the extent that specific subjects increase in a collection, any

window-on-society approach becomes less relevant until at some point that approach can be discarded altogether in favor of an effort to characterize the specific subjects and their implications – in favor, that is, of iconography and iconology.

The remaining typical patterns are those favorable to diachronic stylistic analysis: the tendency toward a single dominant type and to a relatively rapid succession of such types over time. Currently, diachronic style remains the domain of the traditionalist, but it deserves greater interpretive scrutiny. The conformity of figurines in the Olmec style to the usual pattern of rapid obsolescence is of great interest. Why did this style behave like any other among ceramic figurines, even while it was retained in sculpture and figurines made of precious materials such as jade? One possibility mentioned previously is that figurines were ideological in only a weak sense. Figurine makers readily adopted the styles of politically powerful centers, but the move did not convey much in the way of ideological advantage and could be discarded easily when something new appeared. We should consider a process generating change, a force powerful enough to propel stylistic instability even when ideological factors would have favored retention. I have recently proposed that Blumer's sociology of fashion might point toward such a process.[86]

In summary, as a contingent, question-generating (rather than question-stifling) synthesis of Formative figurines, I offer the following. The most basic and consistent function of figurines was probably as aesthetic objects, but a central topic for contextualist inquiry is to what extent figurines in particular cases diverged from the expressive to become effective. Figurines may have been generally made by women, although more fingerprint studies and any other relevant source of evidence would be helpful. Whoever made the figurines, the objects were readily accessible to anyone, including children, who probably played with them as toys in addition to any other uses they had. Another issue for context-specific work is to what extent variation in patterns (Figure 48: II) implies variation in the identities of makers and users. The small-scale–politics perspective holds promise as a mode of analysis for the study of particular collections, but the insights it provides are limited and probably vary by collection. I have proposed criteria (involving characterization of subject matter) to determine when that perspective needs to be abandoned for the alternative mode of iconography. Finally, style – which currently is rarely the subject of interpretive scrutiny – deserves more attention. To begin, we could assess rates of stylistic change in figurines. Were they constant or varied? If they were varied, does the variation correlate with the relative salience of synchronic stylistic differentiation?

Chapter 6

Figurines, Goddesses, and the Texture of Long-Term Structures in the Near East

With my extended attention to universalist logic, I have been ignoring the outcome of an initial encounter with universalism, the testing of Morss's agriculture-pottery-gynecomorph hypothesis in Chapter 1. That effort took us out from among the "trees" of prehistoric figurine making to give us a glimpse of the "forests." Those proved large in spatiotemporal extension (macro-units) but few in number, with perhaps little in common – a possibility endorsed again in Chapter 4 in an assessment of the prospects for cross-cultural explanation of femaleness in figurines. Most of what there is to explain about figurines must be addressed at a scale no larger than the macro-unit. Although universalist logic still has a role (see Chapter 5), the comparative problem that emerges most clearly is the possibility that – vast spatial and temporal scales notwithstanding – the clustering of figurine-making traditions was the result of direct transmission of ideas between contexts. It is time, then, to consider comparison as a historicist problem.

In historicist explanations, an important analytical goal is to reveal how conditions in one context emerged understandably from antecedent conditions in another context separated from the first in time or space. One possibility for consideration is that continuities in figurine making are the result of the perpetuation of symbolic structures over many centuries, a truly *longue durée*. However, we face a challenge identified in Chapter 2: analytical essentialism. Simply put, once we begin to recognize continuities across contexts as manifestations of a shared structure, how do we get ourselves to stop? Having devised a claim concerning structure, are we doomed to simply equate it with the macro-unit of material similarities that originally stimulated our train of thought? In other words, are we doomed to repeat the errors of the Goddess theorists – to produce interpretive constructs that are impervious to falsification?

More sophisticated theories of long-term structures improve the matter without fully solving the problems, as I argued in Chapter 2 with a comparison of Hodder's *The Domestication of Europe* and Gimbutas's Old Europe. By identifying a macro-unit of figurine making in the Near East and its halo, I already may have bracketed all intermediary instances, setting myself up to privilege similarity over difference and "find" evidence of continuity in structure. My overarching but tentative proposal concerning long-term structures – whatever its details – will tend to acquire

exaggerated stability in relation to archaeological evidence that is chronically inconclusive. Is there any way to shore up the ability of evidence to resist such impositions of theory?

This is the type of problem that my guide for comparison of imagery is intended to address. The idea would be to explore the inner texture of a forest of figurine making. That texture would consist of material patterns, but patterns synthesized according to their promptings toward one or another mode of analysis. The goal is to strengthen the ability of patterning to resist theories concerning ancient societies by enlisting another sort of theory – that is, an assessment of the possibilities for extracting significance from images. Because our intuitions on ancient symbolic structures seduce us into privileging similarity, it is *differences* that need support in bringing themselves to our attention.

Differences that invite shifts among analytical modes are particularly important. Applying different analytical modes to a given set of objects produces different interpretive outcomes. Indeed, the outcomes will be different not simply in substance (Aphrodite rather than Athena) but also in kind because the questions posed and answered differ by analytical mode ("What does this image depict?" versus "What was the intended purpose of this object?"). Shifts in the way the material prompts us toward one interpretive path or another are thus important as texture. We can use them to rein in our enthusiastic pursuit of long-term structure. When a change in iconic patterning prompts shifts in the relative importance of our analytical modes, we need to posit a "transformation" in our hypothesized symbolic structure – or even, perhaps, its end.

As before, the benefits of focusing on the ability of patterns to resist theory come at the expense of specific answers. The guide to interpretation delineates fields for interpretive debate rather than a single interpretation. Furthermore, any "history" based on a small portion of the archaeological record (figurines) is by definition incomplete. Strictly speaking, I am only preparing figurines to play a more empirically robust role in the investigation of long-term structure; I am not producing a full history of any particular structure. It therefore seems possible to set aside other chronic problems, such as how to ensure that people and what they do are not lost in an account framed at vast scales. I am thus addressing only one of the challenges of grand history. Those challenges may be daunting, but we cannot discard structural history as a category of inquiry; the evidence appears to have coherence at such scales.

My case study here is the Neolithic of the Near East, perhaps the most challenging case for grand-historical work due to a century of scholarly flights of fancy, self-perpetuating metanarratives, and contentious debate. Should a grand history of prehistoric figurine making in this case involve goddesses? Before beginning, it is necessary to specify more clearly what I mean by this question and how I will answer it.

The Deep Prehistory of "Goddesses"

My case study is the deep prehistory of "goddesses" in the Near East. Do figurines in these regions record the genealogies of (female) deities? If so, did that history take the form envisioned in the *Goddess thesis*? That is, did historically attested goddesses (Ishtar, Inanna, Astarte, Cybele, Aphrodite) diverge over the millennia from a prehistoric singularity – a primordial Neolithic Goddess?

At the end of this section, I return to the quotation marks in which I have cloaked the term "goddesses" in stating my topic; a more pressing initial issue is that this topic itself requires justification. After all, the Goddess thesis is hardly a current theme in the interpretation of prehistoric figurines. Hutton traces the notion of divergence from a primordial Goddess to scholarship of the

mid-nineteenth century. The idea reached a peak of popularity among European archaeologists between 1951 and 1963 before falling out of favor – although it was perpetuated by Jacquetta Hawkes and resurrected by Marija Gimbutas.[1]

The thesis is of interest here because it remains the most prominent available grand-historical scenario applicable to Neolithic figurines, but what are the alternatives? Studies of deities in texts and imagery of the third millennium B.C. (or later) generally do not offer much help with grand history. The tendency is to treat the textual record as providing the outer frame within which explanations should be conceived. As a result, relatively short histories are conceived even for basic elements of ritual, such as the worship of cult statues.[2]

Scholars of historic eras who look back to prehistory often do so anecdotally, treating "special" sites (e.g., Çatalhöyük) as if they stood for the entire Neolithic. More helpful are those who focus on clusters of associated elements or themes and attempt to trace their continuity over, potentially, millennia. Ippolitoni Strika examines associations of divine females with leopards, lions, doves, and vultures from the Later Pre-Pottery Neolithic to the Early Dynastic period. Schmandt-Bessarat traces creation myths emphasizing sexuality and reproduction – shared in historical epochs from Mesopotamia to Egypt – to the early Neolithic at 'Ain Ghazal.[3] The idea of *long-term continuity* in signification is a useful complement to the scenario of divergence emphasized in the Goddess thesis.

Recent prehistoric scholarship often extends disavowal of the Goddess thesis to a rejection of *any* explanation at that scale. As a result, Hodder's *Domestication of Europe* (discussed in Chapter 2) remains one of the few grand-historical competitors for the Goddess thesis. Our area of interest is different, but a helpful theme from that work is the idea of *femaleness as metaphor or symbol*. It is certainly conceivable that Neolithic societies across the Near East found metaphoric resonance in femaleness and, as a result, produced female images that did not necessarily reference deities or, indeed, any entity that would have been readily identifiable by name.

Prehistorians have expended more effort in tracing changes in imagery, symbolism, and deities over smaller scales of time and space. Cauvin argues a version of the Goddess thesis but adds early Neolithic nuance.[4] Voigt reanalyzes Mellaart's materials from Çatalhöyük and finds evidence of a "religious revolution" between Levels VI and V, with femaleness, obesity, and pregnancy emerging as dominant themes only in Level V.[5] Gopher and Orrelle and, more recently, Kuijt and Chesson trace fluctuating patterns in imagery in the Southern Levant from the PPNA through the Ceramic Neolithic.[6] One theme is that *social conditions determine themes in imagery* – for instance, sexual ambiguity and deemphasis of individuality in images were important in the Middle PPNB when people lived in larger communities.[7] That approach constitutes another alternative to the Goddess thesis: A grand history of figurine making could be a history of social conditions.

Therefore, we have three themes to complement or contrast with the scenario postulating divergence from a primordial Goddess. First, there is long-term continuity of signification. Second, there is the possibility of metaphoric significance with a lack of specific referents. Finally, changes in imagery might reflect changing social conditions.[8] In the discussion that follows, it proves convenient to occasionally refer to these as possible "scenarios" for making sense of the figurines – although strictly speaking, only the Goddess thesis is a scenario.

What about the quotation marks in which I embed "goddesses"? In terms of archaeology's divide between material evidence and social interpretation, the history of deities is a topic firmly on the social side, whereas my particular interest here is the process of translation between material residues and social interpretations starting from the material side. I am thus interested in asking whether starting with figurines, we should end up with deities. By asking that question of collections

in a temporal series, I hope to explore the grand-historical texture of patterns favorable to the identification of deities.

Deity is a potential interpretive outcome of certain analytical modes but not others. I therefore ask: Does patterning prompt us toward the relevant modes early, or late, or both? Do favorable patterns coalesce at small spatial scales or large scales? If the latter, is there any basis for suggesting that a single Goddess was widely shared? Therefore, the quotation marks around "goddess" serve as a reminder that I am less interested in goddesses per se – or even deities more generally – than I am in figurines and whether their history should be told as a history of deities.

Concepts and Methods

The form that my history takes is strongly conditioned by concepts and methods assumed at the outset. First, the entire analysis proceeds from my framework expounded in Chapter 3. My four "scenarios" – the Goddess thesis, symbolic continuity, metaphor-not-goddess, and social conditions as determinants of imagery – would require analytical work in partially overlapping, partially distinct modes. Goddess arguments emerge from iconographic and symbolic analysis. Iconography would also be important to any claim of continuity in signification, whereas imagery in relation to material properties generally and, in addition iconography, is relevant to any metaphor-not-goddess argument. The window-on-society perspective is founded on a claim that social conditions determine imagery, although it is not the only mode of analysis in which such a claim can be pursued. There is no one-to-one correspondence; however, our history will be partly shaped by how patterning prompts us to one or another analytical mode.

Second, to make sense of comparisons between figurines of different epochs, I draw on the simple temporal schemes introduced in Chapter 5. Of great interest to the Goddess thesis are *divergence from an original unity* (evidenced by differences between sequences accumulating over time) and *continuity* (evidenced by perpetuation of motifs or themes, even as the styles in which they are rendered change). Also of interest is *convergence through interaction* (evidenced by increasing similarity between sequences over time). To those schemes from Chapter 5, I add one new scheme, *borrowing,* as a variation on convergence (evidenced by sudden, close similarities between sequences). We can certainly imagine other schemes (e.g., archaism) but I have not found any use for them here.

Third, any history requires a central subject. As a result, abstract analysis in my framework for comparison of images must unfold alongside substantive work tracing elements of subject. In broad social terms, my topic is the prehistory of goddesses. However, as central subject, I choose a particular set of traits and interrelations between traits observed among Neolithic images: the Seated Anthropomorph complex, introduced in Chapter 4. I justify that choice in the next section; the point here is that my "history" is to involve, on the one hand, the tracing of a specific configuration of traits through time and space and, on the other hand, an abstract assessment of how successive manifestations of those traits prompt the analyst to one sort of interpretation or another. Because my interest is in large-scale wrinkles in long-term structures, I keep substantive analysis broad in scope and permissive in the identification of links between contexts. It helps considerably that the Seated Anthropomorph complex comprises multiple traits and relations among them, diminishing the likelihood of independent invention. Thus, I am looking for femaleness or seated postures as part of a complex rather than as isolated traits. Still, the complex does not last forever and as transformations accrue, it becomes increasingly difficult to assess whether there is a legitimate continuity of Seated Anthropomorph themes.

The final methodological issue is imagery as evidence of deity. I consider deities to be imagined supernatural entities, recognized collectively by a group of people as important to human affairs. In the terminology of Chapter 3, they have significant "surface" manifestations. For instance, they have names, and their images are readily recognizable to minimally knowledgeable cultural actors. Therefore, they are "specific subjects." I assume that the specificity of deities can be further delimited, at least in a rough sense, through a contrast with mythological characters. The specificity of the latter is embedded in a narrative in which they take different actions and interact with other characters. Deities, by contrast, may stand alone; they can be specific subjects in and of themselves.

I am not interested in definitively establishing whether one or another figurine actually depicted a deity. I focus instead on comparative judgments between cases. Would an argument identifying the referents of figurines as deities be more promising in one case than it would be in another?

In my guide to comparison (Figure 22), I identified six constellations of idealized material patterns, each promoting a particular analytical mode. Two of the modes are of great relevance for any research concerning deities: iconography and symbolic analysis. Any researcher studying a deity must ask: What is its name? What are its characteristics? How is it distinguished from other deities? What role do people assign it in human affairs? These are questions about beliefs founded in surface manifestations (names, obvious characteristics) and ranging to the nondiscursive or structural (more abstract or symbolic implications). The former are investigated through iconography, the latter through symbolic analysis. Patterning favorable for iconographic analysis is anything conducive to the identification of conventional subject matter (complex narrative or attributes deployed as visual clues). Patterning favoring symbolic analysis includes instances in which the same imagery appears on objects used in different ways, suggesting that the ideas it referenced were symbolically productive cultural themes. Each of those idealized constellations of patterns also has its opposite, a set of patterns that discourages either iconography or symbolic analysis and that can therefore be taken as unpromising for efforts to identify a deity.

How reliable is such logic for identifying images of deities? Because I am tracing a grand-historical trajectory that ultimately would be aimed at historic eras in the Near East – the third millennium B.C., or later – we might ask: Applied to imagery of historic times, how would these procedures fare in signaling depictions of deities? The answer is: Reasonably well. Certainly, there were multiple strategies for representing divinity in the ancient Near East: as an anthropomorphic being, a zoomorphic being, a being with combined animal and human traits, an inanimate symbol, or simply by "materially emphasized empty space."[9] The anthropomorphic form was common for deity representations – although, of course, not all anthropomorphs represented deities. Other important categories included human rulers and worshipers.[10]

The iconic strategies I identified as indications of the presence of specific subjects or as favoring symbolic analysis were indeed common in depictions of historical deities. Sumerian gods, for instance, "were marked by traditional identification signs that could be recognized by the illiterate majority."[11] What I term *attributes in the art-historical sense* were frequently used to identify deities – an anthropomorph might wear a horned crown, hold a lotus plant or other object, or stand atop an animal as if on a pedestal.[12] Some of the more sophisticated iconographic analyses of later Near Eastern deities explore what I have been calling *complex narrative*. A deity may be shown venerated by or otherwise interacting with humans or else engaged in some activity. Of interest are paradigmatic scenes – termed *types* or *constellations* by iconographers – that may recur with different deities or become detached from a narrative sequence to take on independent symbolic value.[13] For example, Cornelius identifies the "menacing God" as a motif particularly common in mid- to late-second millennium B.C. Palestine: A deity is depicted holding a weapon or with

a raised fist.[14] The gesture is not unique to a particular deity and does not illustrate a theme from a particular myth. Instead, it was a symbol of power and may have been of interest to devotees as an aid in warding off sickness.

In assessing imagery in relation to material properties, I am searching for instances in which the same imagery appears on objects that would have been used in different ways or in different contexts, thus indicating the social and symbolic importance of the imagery. The pattern appears among historic deity images in the Near East. The same deity may be depicted on such diverse objects as statues, amulets, seals, pendants, and clay plaques.[15] With our focus now on deities, certain further patterns in material properties take on importance: *Cult images* of deities may be made of expensive materials, associated with temples, and, within temples themselves, positioned in dramatic or attention-focusing arrangements.[16] All of those patterns are attested in historic epochs in the Near East, although mainly in documentary descriptions because relatively few cult statues – regularly made of wood overlain by precious metals – have survived.[17]

The Seated Anthropomorph Complex as Subject

My general topic is the prehistory of goddesses in the Neolithic of the Near East – or, more accurately, the prehistory of material patterns favorable to analyses that would yield "deity" as an interpretation of figurines. For example, I am looking for evidence of the use (by Neolithic figurine makers) of the sorts of visual clues that in later eras identified an image as the depiction of a deity. I locate my history in space and time by taking a particular set of themes – the Seated Anthropomorph complex – as central subject. My discussion of the complex in Chapter 4 focused on the period 8500–7000 B.C., and I look here in greater detail at the variable manifestation of themes in that period. I also glance back to 9500 B.C. to consider the origins of the complex and follow the fate of its constituent traits through 5300 B.C.[18]

The narrowing of focus is appropriate to my larger agenda. Images bearing themes of the Seated Anthropomorph complex traditionally have been referred to as "mother-goddess figurines." Femaleness is among the themes that comprise the complex, although, as I argue in Chapter 4, its relation to others is more complex than traditional labels imply. Of interest here is that the Seated Anthropomorph of the Later PPN is a macro-unit–sized phenomenon. It is thus of appropriate scale to be the expression, in imagery, of a primordial Neolithic Goddess. Indeed, we can go further: It is the *only* plausible contender as the material expression of such a Goddess for the Pre-Pottery Neolithic. If we find no evidence of Her here, then She was either present but invisible archaeologically (an interpretive option that I rule out a priori) or there was no primordial Goddess, and a grand history of Neolithic image making must take a form other than divergence of goddesses from an original singularity.

The themes that constitute the Seated Anthropomorph complex are summarized in Figure 66. The recurrent cluster of traits is manifested in images that vary in schematization. Traits are added in a more or less predictable order and are thus thematically interrelated. Schematized humanness and seated posture are core themes, embellished on occasion first by obese thighs, then by female breasts, and finally by additional anthropomorphic attributes that remain sufficiently subtle to not distract attention from the fundamental themes. Beyond its human subject matter (however specific, generic, or abstract that may have been), each Seated Anthropomorph image referenced a choice on the part of the maker among a graded series of possibilities for schematization of the human form. This point is illustrated in the vertical dimension of Figure 66, in which Seated Anthropomorphs vary in schematization and even sometimes grade into purely geometric tokens.
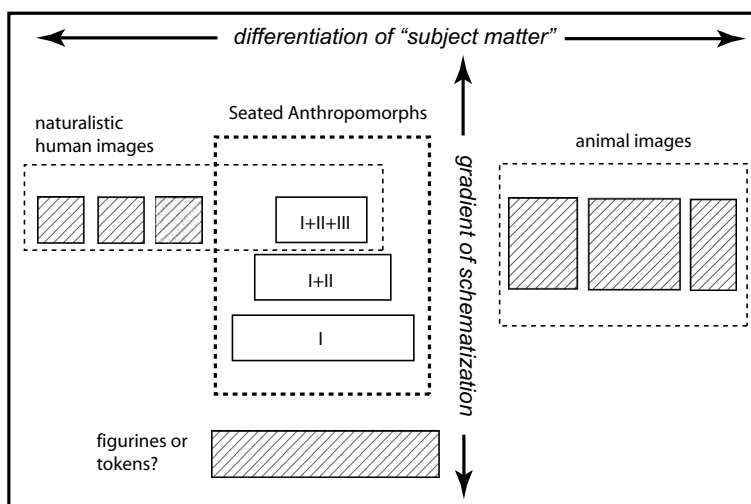
Figure 66. The Seated Anthropomorph complex: an idealized PPNB assemblage of small, molded clay objects, reprised from Chapter 4.

Where this sort of gradation is present, schematic Anthropomorphs tend to outnumber naturalistic versions.

Although I consider numerous and quite different images to be Seated Anthropomorphs, I am not suggesting that all PPN figurines depicted the same thing, a point made in the horizontal dimension of Figure 66. The more naturalistic Seated Anthropomorphs contrast with other images at a similar level of schematization. At some sites, animals greatly outnumber human images, but the Seated Anthropomorph is still present. Other images characteristically present include upright, apparently standing figures, cylindrical or phi-shaped (Φ) – Lohof's "Pillar figurines"[19] – usually sexless or male. There are also sometimes divergent female images – rare in relation to simple seated figures – including different postures and perhaps different ages or states of pregnancy. Thus, Seated Anthropomorphs differ among themselves in schematization, but they also contrast with a characteristic range of other images.

The Seated Anthropomorph complex is a set of archaeological patterns. What were its social causes? I have made initial suggestions in Chapter 4, but a more generalized working hypothesis will prove helpful here. Let us posit that the Seated Anthropomorph and its associations illustrated in Figure 66 were the material outcomes of a schema or logic for giving tangible iconic form to some set of ideas. Iconicity in this schema has two dimensions: differentiation of subjects and a gradation of schematization of the human body. Thus, each image referenced a subject, but its form also referenced the forms of other images. This last point implies that figurines were used often enough to encourage awareness and reflection on choices of form.

A Shared Complex during the Later PPN?

Before launching a grand history of the Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex, it is important to ask: Can the suggested complex be taken so seriously? In some areas (Central Anatolia, Middle–Upper Tigris), the complex is absent early in the period 8500–7000 B.C. but seems to appear later.
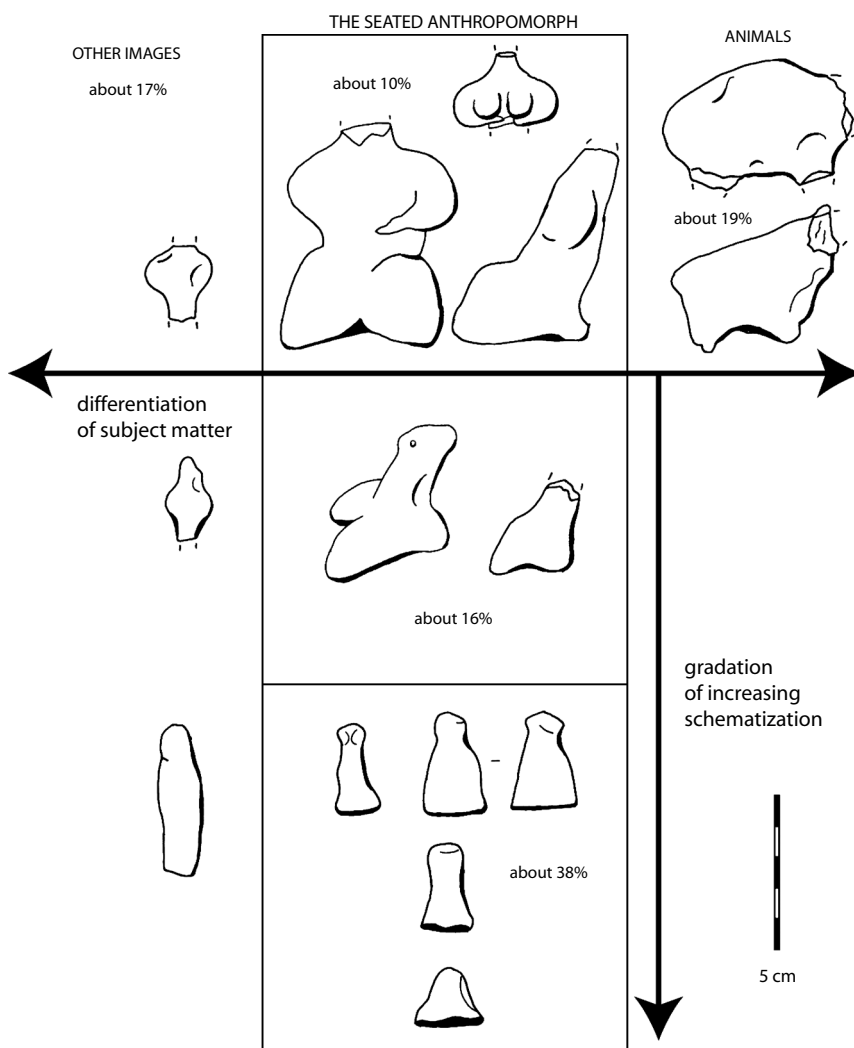
Figure 67. Clay figurines from Tell Aswad (Syria) interpreted as an expression of the Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex. There is plausibly some differentiation of subjects at multiple levels of schematization. (Images by Lesure based on Contenson 1995: Figures 125:2,6; 126:12,17,20,22; 128:1,4,9,10; 127:2,5,15; and Contenson 1978: Figure 7.)

That hardly seems to be a fatal observation because any sharing of the complex need not have been instantaneous.

The complex is well attested in figurine collections from three widely separated sites: Aswad near Damascus (Figure 67), Çayönü in the foothills of the Taurus Mountains (Figure 68), and Jarmo in the Zagros foothills (see Figures 30 and 38; Figure 69 provides site locations).[20] In these collections, there is a gradation from minimally human to more naturalistic, with features emerging in roughly the order of traits shown in Figure 29. Images along the gradient also cohere in a larger material unity – they are of similar materials and sizes, are made in similar ways, and are recovered

in similar contexts. Although differences in schematization make for radical formal differences, there is an overall coherence of style – for instance, there is not great stylistic redundancy at one end of the gradation and chaotic variety at the other. Finally, variation in subject matter falls within the characteristically limited range.

Figurines from Ghoraifé and Ramad, near Aswad, are consistent with the complex, although in the collection from Ramad Level I, subject matter is arguably more salient than the modest gradation of schematization, based on differences in form among (schematic) torsos.[21] The anthropomorphic figurines of Ganj Dareh (Iran), although greatly outnumbered by animal images, seem to represent something of a variation on Seated Anthropomorph themes (Figure 70). There is the suggestion that figurines stand rather than sit (although posture remains debatable), clothing is more common than it is at other sites with such highly schematic figures, and the abbreviated anthropomorphic–zoomorphic cones are outnumbered by slightly more naturalistic anthropomorphic figurines.[22]

Three other sites with large collections are 'Ain Ghazal (Jordan); Nevalı Çori (Turkey); and, straddling the 7000 B.C. boundary, Çatalhöyük (Turkey). Elements of the Seated Anthropomorph complex are present among clay figurines (1 to 10 cm) in each case, but our question is: Do those appear merely as disarticulated traits or are the ordered relations among traits of the Seated Anthropomorph complex present? For instance, are schematized and more naturalistic figures linked along a continuum of schematization?

At Nevalı Çori, most of the individual traits of the Seated Anthropomorph are present, including the simple differences in subject matter (Figure 71).[23] However, more naturalistic figurines greatly outnumber highly schematized versions, and Morsch's illustrations do not include much gradation between the two categories. Schematized and naturalistic figurines are similar in size, and the highly schematized versions appear seated, like the more naturalistic females. Patterns here suggest a greater emphasis on the dimension of differentiated subject matter than that of schematization, but distinctions among the subjects fall well within the usual scope of the Seated Anthropomorph complex. This assemblage is understandable as a rearrangement of widely shared themes that nevertheless fails to "think outside of the Seated Anthropomorph box."

At 'Ain Ghazal (MPPNB), there is diversity of subject matter among the more naturalistic figures. Female figurines appear in a variety of postures, with a simple seated form present but not numerically prominent.[24] McAdam notes linkages in form between a naturalistic seated figure and "stylized female stalk figurines,"[25] supporting the presence of a gradation. The schema that produced the Seated Anthropomorph seems to have been present, but so were alternative schemes for giving iconic form to ideas. For instance, several "busts" with particular attention to the face are unrelated to the Seated Anthropomorph or its fan of references.[26] In this case, the thematic interrelations of the Seated Anthropomorph are intact, but the local practice was to place those in juxtaposition with quite different themes.

Çatalhöyük has yielded a large collection of small, sculpted images, although the collection from before 7000 B.C. (Levels XI and earlier) consists almost entirely of animals.[27] In the collection as a whole, there is great diversity in subject matter as well as a likelihood of multiple schemas. I postpone the issue of proliferation in subject matter for my discussion of patterns in the seventh millennium B.C. Another pattern here is attention to heads and faces that yields repeated violations of the ordered appearance of Seated Anthropomorph traits. However, among the most schematic figures, heads are indeed reduced to mere folds or pinches in the clay. Such abbreviated figurines dominate the collection, and Meskell and her colleagues find persistence in a basic assemblage of forms despite considerable variation – from building to building – in the selection of forms actually present.[28] A key question is whether there is a gradation of schematization with images
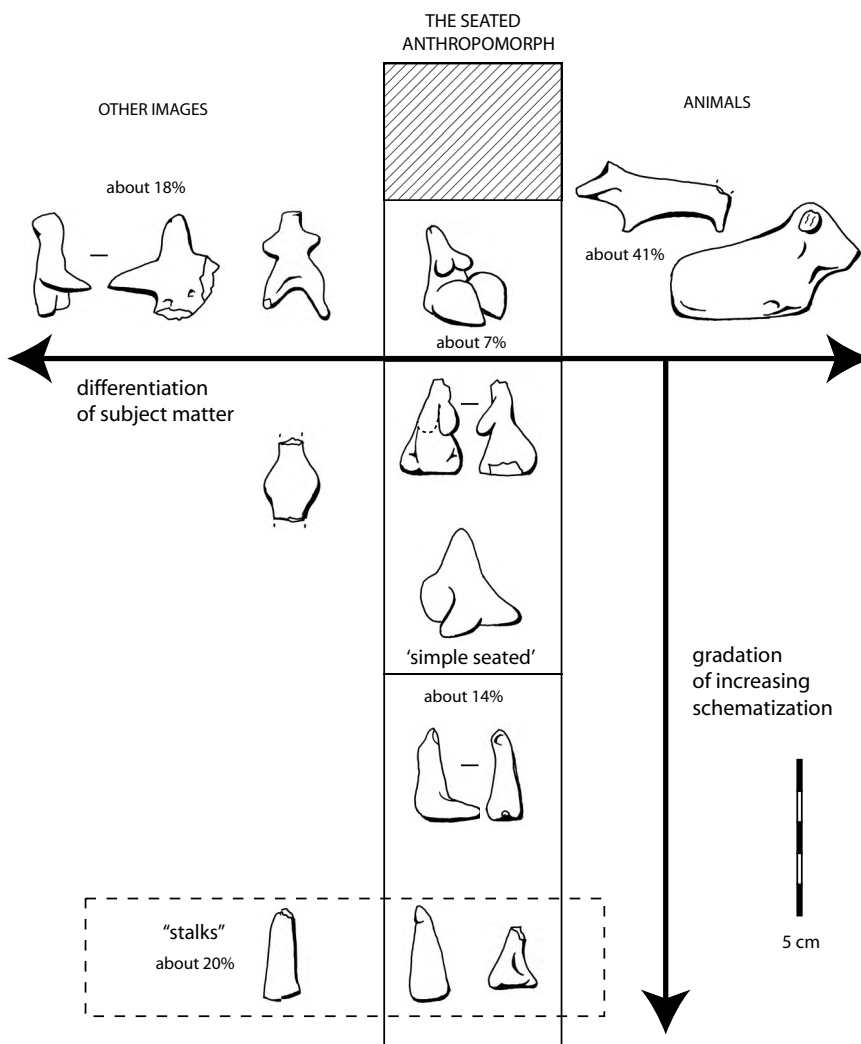
Figure 68. Clay figurines from Çayönü (Turkey) interpreted as an expression of the Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex. The most naturalistic end of the gradation of schematization appears to be missing, and there is plausibly some differentiation of subjects at multiple levels of schematization. (Images by Lesure based on Broman Morales 1990: Plates 19a; 21f; 22d; 23c,d; 24a,f,j; 25d,g,i.)

at different points along the gradation unified by similarities in fabrication and use – or whether schematic figurines form a category of object distinct from naturalistic figurines. Hamilton notes that "the distinction between human and schematic figures is extremely difficult to make." Meskell and colleagues were inclined at first to see a divide between abstract and naturalistic figures, but in a recent article, they emphasize the similar treatment accorded all figurines.[29] Inspection of the photographs of more than one hundred "abbreviated" and "anthropomorphic" figurines from recent Çatalhöyük excavations posted by the project online[30] suggests that the more schematic

Figure 69. The Near East with Pre-Pottery Neolithic sites mentioned in the text.

"anthropomorphic" figures grade into the more numerous "abbreviated" forms. Both traits and interrelations between traits characteristic of the Seated Anthropomorph complex appear to be recurring themes – as long as one acknowledges the particular importance of heads and faces and, in addition, considerable variety of subject matter including themes unrelated to the Seated Anthropomorph.

Given the complexity of my portrait of the Seated Anthropomorph, it is impressive how well it applies to at least portions of large Later-PPN figurine collections. The corresponding sites are scattered across the PPNB interaction sphere (see Figure 69), suggesting extensive sharing of a schema for giving iconic form to ideas.

Smaller collections are more of a challenge. The corresponding sites are again widely distributed. Examples for 8500–7000 B.C. include Beidha, Munhata, Suberde, Halula, Sabi Abyad II, Cafer

Figure 69 (continued)

Höyük, Gritille, and Maghzaliyah.[31] Of these, Munhata is the only collection in which the complex of interrelated traits that comprise the Seated Anthropomorph seems to be absent.[32] Figurines from the other sites are generally consistent with Seated Anthropomorph themes, but it is impossible to determine if the systematic relationships between traits were present. This inconclusive status is a concern because it raises the danger of analytical essentialism. Once I have bracketed the smaller assemblages by linking 'Ain Ghazal, Aswad, Çayönü, Jarmo, and Ganj Dareh, the inconclusive cases tend to fall into line as "positive" instances.

If form was evocative to the extent that I suggest for the Seated Anthropomorph complex, figurines should have been used often enough that people had occasion to directly compare images schematized to different degrees. Is the Seated Anthropomorph complex simply an inappropriate
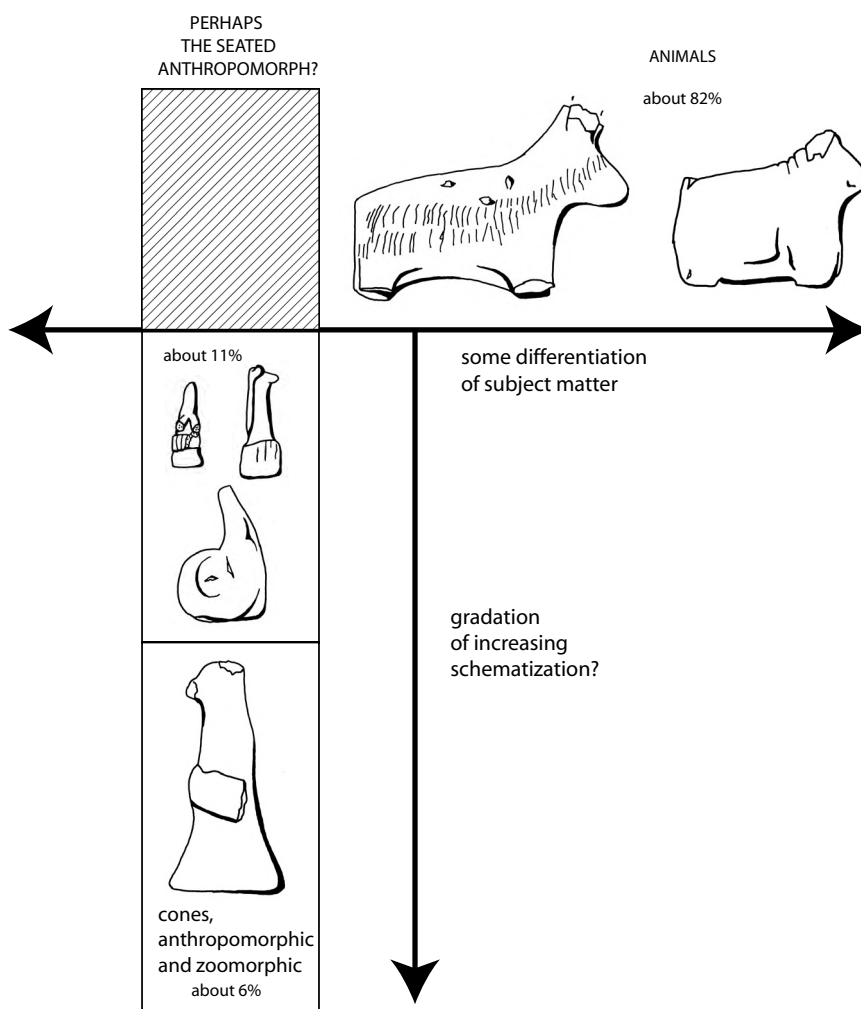
Figure 70. Clay figurines from Ganj Dareh (Iran) interpreted as incorporating some themes from the Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex. The naturalistic end of the gradation of schematization appears to be missing, there is an unusual attention to clothing despite only a minimal gradation of schematization, highly schematic "cones" may be both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, and animals predominate. (Images by Lesure based on Eygun 1992: Figure 2a,b,d,e,g,h.)

construct for sites with small numbers of figurines? Caution is in order because local variation in manufacture (sun-dried versus fired clay), conditions of preservation, and archaeologists' choices of where to dig all affect the size of the figurine collections recovered.[33] Still, it seems likely that there is a relationship between recovery frequency and the original frequency of use of figurines. Furthermore, there are indications of differences in composition among small collections. Some (e.g., Gritille) have hints of a gradation of schematization. In others, the handful of figurines recovered all display a similar degree of schematization, whether relatively naturalistic (Cafer
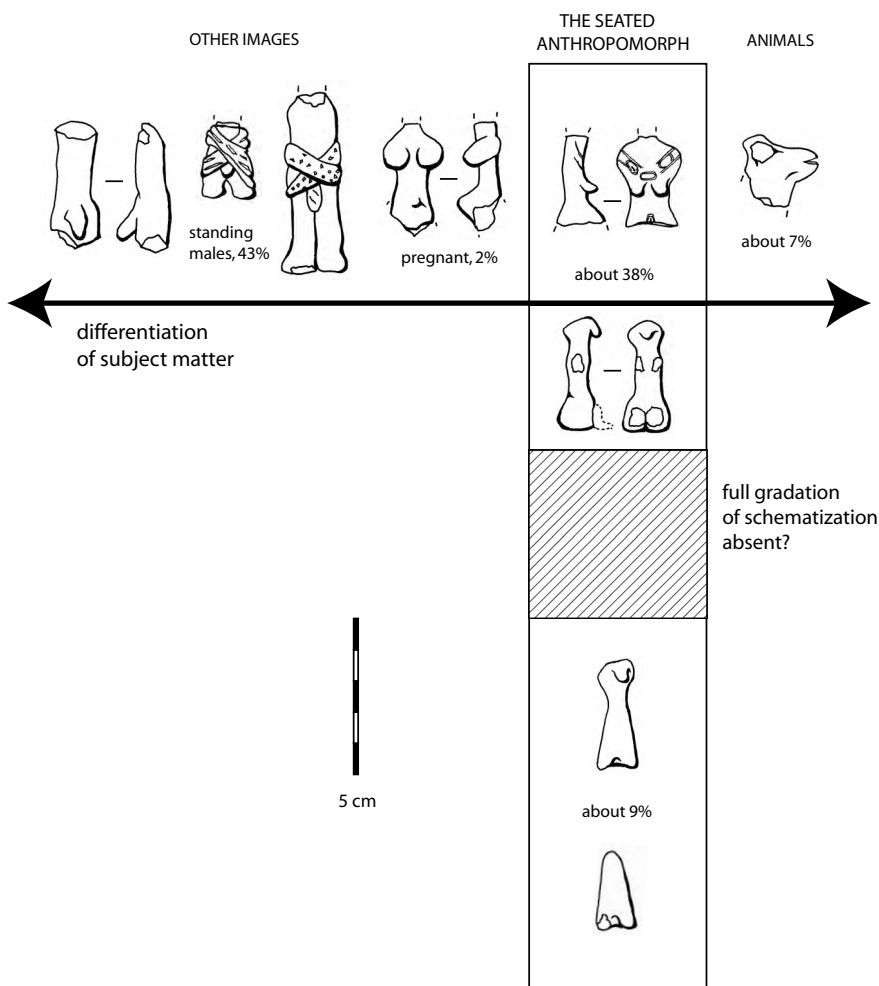
Figure 71. Clay figurines from Nevalı Çori (Turkey) interpreted as incorporating some themes from the Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex. The naturalistic end of the gradation of schematization predominates, ornamentation and clothing appear to be common, standing "male" figures outnumber naturalistic Seated Anthropomorphs, and there may be a gap in the middle portion of the gradation of schematization. (Images by Lesure based on Morsch 2002: Plates 1:6; 2:2; 3:1,4,6; 4:1,2,4.)

Höyük, Beidha) or highly schematized (Halula). Those last two patterns at the very least may constitute significant localized transformations in which a narrow set of themes from the Seated Anthropomorph was borrowed and applied in novel ways, perhaps with far lower use frequencies than at Aswad, Çayönü, or Jarmo. Still, the numbers of figurines do not resolve the matter. One approach to the challenge of small collections is to consider whether differences between large and small collections are structural in the sense of prompting the analyst toward different analytical modes.

Analytical Modes Appropriate for Later-PPN Figurines

Do manifestations of Seated Anthropomorph themes among small collections invite application of a different balance of analytical modes from those used in large collections? In Chapter 4, I found the Later PPN to be a case in which analysts were prompted to examine use rather than symbolism. In most cases, figurines were not accorded any special treatment when discarded. Archaeologists recover them in fragmentary condition, either randomly distributed across a site or else clustered as if they were made and used episodically. Distribution patterns are often unclear for small collections.

Rare examples of special treatment occur for both large and small collections. In neither case do they provide much of a basis for symbolic analysis. Animal figurines were buried together in pits at 'Ain Ghazal and human figures at Cafer Höyük (see Figure 36). Investigators working with both large collections ('Ain Ghazal, Nevalı Çori) and small collections (Gritille, Sabi Abyad II) suggest the possibility of intentional destruction of figurines, ranging from the snapping off of heads to burning.[34]

A point favoring investigation of use is the lack of shared imagery between clay figurines and other iconic objects: stone figurines and statuary at Nevalı Çori and Göbekli, plaster statues and plastered skulls at 'Ain Ghazal and PPNB Jericho, and earthen statuettes at Ramad (best attested from Level II, post-7000 B.C., but with a torso fragment also in Level I[35]). Of those sites, Göbekli yielded no clay figurines; PPNB Jericho yielded a small collection; and 'Ain Ghazal, Nevalı Çori, and Ramad II yielded large collections. The floor paintings from Halula (see Figure 41) reinforce the point that hints of complex narrative or attributes in the art-historical sense are rare among figurines from 8500 B.C. through 7000 B.C., in collections both large and small.

In Chapter 4, I suggested that an analysis of figurines as a window on society would apply to only a limited portion of each Later-PPN assemblage, in particular those figures naturalistic enough to encode social differences. Furthermore, whereas the image of a Seated Anthropomorph was shared, the social subjects with which it was contrasted were locally variable. Window-on-society analysis will not be helpful in the explication of large-scale patterns.

What about specific subject matter and synchronic analysis of style? In Chapter 4, I raised the issue of whether the Seated Anthropomorph could have referenced a specific subject, not because of attributes or complex narrative but rather because of its striking two-dimensional iconicity involving variable schematizations of the human form. What about other indications of specific subjects, whether attributes in the art-historical sense or complex narrative? Before 7000 B.C., such indications are rare. The pervasive lack – in figurine collections large and small – of the visual strategies associated with the depiction of deities combines with the disjunction of imagery between figurines and statuary to strike a double blow against the Goddess thesis. Patterning before 7000 B.C. does not invite analyses that would yield "deity" as the product of interpretation – a point that is valid for both small and large collections.

To summarize, a set of traits and systematic interrelations between traits, referred to here as the Seated Anthropomorph thematic complex, recurs in whole or in part in Later-PPN figurine collections from across the Fertile Crescent and Central Anatolia. Manifestations of the themes vary. There are also other themes, although such alternatives were less extensive in distribution than those of the Seated Anthropomorph. Differences in frequencies and in contexts suggest varying usages of figurines. Still, patterns repeatedly favor application of the same analytical modes, particularly determination of use and stylistic analysis of differential schematization, with some potential for iconography. Overall, the Seated Anthropomorph appears to be a legitimate central subject for grand history.
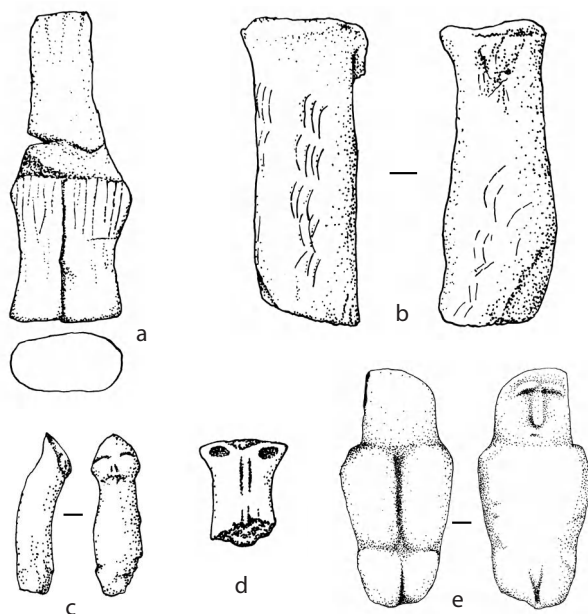
Figure 72. Figurines from Gilgal I (Israel), PPNA period. They do not form a coherent stylistic or iconographic set. Stone (a, e) and clay (b–d). (Redrawn by Alana Purcell based on Noy 1989: Figure 5; Bar-Yosef 1980: Figure 4:1; Rollefson 2008: Figure 4.)

Origins, 9500–8500 B.C.

The Seated Anthropomorph is not present as a complex before 8500 B.C., although during the PPNA or Earlier PPN, its constituent themes are identifiable in inchoate form at widely dispersed sites from the Southern Levant to the Taurus Mountains. Figurines of limestone, clay, or bone are rare, greatly impeding any effort to identify gradients of schematization. However, existing evidence indicates that although principles of differential schematization are present, there is in no case a graded series understandable as the same basic subject expressed with varying rules of form.

Several sites in the Southern Levant have yielded a few figurines. At Netiv Hagdud, archaeologists recovered one nearly complete piece as well as a head fragment of a second, stylistically similar one.[36] The complete figure fits the parameters of the Seated Anthropomorph in its emphasis on overall bodily form, seated posture, visual importance of hips, female breasts (subtly modeled), and minimal attention to the head. A figure from Dhra' is vaguely reminiscent, although with a posture between seated and standing.[37] Sites with more finds, however, have distressingly heterogeneous collections. For example, Gilgal I yielded five human figures, each of which is unique (Figure 72). One highly schematic figure appears to stand, and columnar verticality is a theme in two others, one of which has detailed incising indicating the face.[38] Radical schematization is a feature of limestone figurines from Salibiya IX and Nahal Oren and is generally consistent with the Seated Anthropomorph; however, in an otherwise similar find from Gilgal (Figure 72e), the face is a focus of visual attention. Generally for the Southern Levant, traits of the Seated Anthropomorph are present in the PPNA without the systematic interrelations that crystallize after 8500 B.C.

Farther north, several larger collections are known. Özdoğan mentions schematic and apparently seated figurines from Earlier-PPN contexts at Çayönü, but in her full report, Broman Morales does not distinguish finds from different levels.[39] Twenty-four schematic figurines made from modified equid phalanges were identified at Dja'de on the Middle Euphrates.[40] The resemblance to Seated Anthropomorphs in clay and stone is striking, and there is a minimal gradation of schematization.

Six figurines from Mureybet on the Middle Euphrates include both highly schematic and naturalistic figures, although the subject matter seems divergent and it is possible that the two constituted distinct categories of object.[41] The schematic figurines are seated and otherwise consistent with Seated Anthropomorph themes; however, two naturalistic figures, although fleshy with female breasts, diverge distinctly from Seated Anthropomorph patterns (Figure 73). They stand, and their torsos are marked by rolls of fat. In both cases, incisions suggest female genitalia (rare on Seated Anthropomorphs), and they gesture in the same way. Such features – particularly the last – raise the possibility of attributes identifying a specific subject. This collection formed a point of departure for Cauvin's version of the Goddess thesis, but a concern here is that what most appear like identifying attributes at Mureybet *disappear* with the crystallization of the Seated Anthropomorph after 8500 B.C. (I return to the gesture of hands to breasts toward the end of this chapter.)

It is noteworthy that any proto–Seated Anthropomorph themes in the Earlier PPN were confined to small figurines as they were after 8500 B.C. The female image incised on a slab from Göbekli Tepe is not the Seated Anthropomorph, and much of the other imagery at the site is zoomorphic (see Figures 39 and 40). Possible communal buildings at 'Abr 3 and Jerf el Ahmar on the Middle Euphrates were decorated with engraved stone slabs bearing animal imagery or geometric designs.[42]

The period 9500–8500 B.C. appears to predate the Seated Anthropomorph as a complex of interrelated themes, although most of the constituent traits can be identified at one or more sites from the Southern Levant to the Taurus Mountains. Earlier-PPN patterns indicate that the origins of the Seated Anthropomorph should be explored with a set of analytical modes similar to those appropriate to the investigation of the complex in the Later PPN: determination of use, stylistic analysis of differential schematization, and iconography. The earlier figurines may have had different uses from those of the Later PPN.[43] Still, similarities of patterning are such that even independently conducted interpretations of the two cases are not likely to diverge greatly in structure.

The Seated Anthropomorph in the Seventh Millennium B.C.

The as-yet-unconnected themes of the Seated Anthropomorph complex are observable on figurines from the Earlier Pre-Pottery Neolithic (9500–8500 B.C.). These themes coalesce in collections of the Later Pre-Pottery Neolithic from across the Near East, suggesting a widely shared schema for putting some set of ideas in tangible iconic form. The iconic strategy differentiated images in two dimensions: a gradation of schematization (from naturalistic to minimally human) and distinctions between social subjects (including the figure of a seated woman and a characteristic range of other subjects). Between 8500 and 7000 B.C., figurine makers across much of the Near East drew on, responded to, or manipulated this schema. Its influence is perceptible in most large collections of that era, although there were certainly alternative iconic strategies (all less widely disseminated). Small collections are inherently difficult to decipher. It is possible that the vagaries of preservation and recovery are major factors in determining the numbers of figurines recovered, and that iconic strategies and figurine use at these sites were not that different from those cases
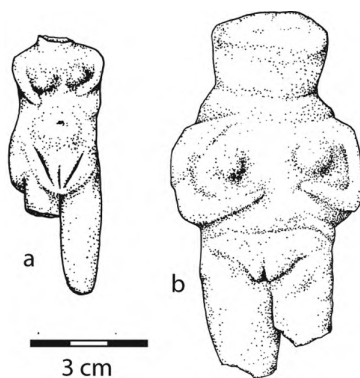
Figure 73. Two figurines from Mureybet (Syria), PPNA period. Clay (a) and stone (b). (Redrawn by Alana Purcell based on Cauvin 2000: Figures 7 and 8.)

in which the full Seated Anthropomorph complex is observed. Alternatively, it is possible that figurine makers at these other sites drew selectively on the themes of the complex for limited uses or even purposes that diverged from those at sites yielding large collections. Still, collections large and small invite application of a similar set of analytical modes.

I now turn to the fate of the Seated Anthropomorph complex after 7000 B.C., looking for changes in the themes themselves or in the modes of analysis favored by particular expressions of those themes.

Seated Anthropomorph themes persist in the first half of the seventh millennium B.C. At some sites, such as Sarab in the Zagros Mountains, continuity from the eighth millennium is strong (Figure 74). The Level II figurines from Ramad in Southwestern Syria fit, although the stylistic variability among heads from the site is not a Seated Anthropomorph trait. As noted in Chapter 4, the larger earthen statuettes at Ramad, despite their seated posture, seem not to bear legitimate Anthropomorph traits. Contenson now rejects his earlier idea that the skulls might have been set atop the statuettes and suggests instead that these were depictions of divinities in a funerary cult, perhaps protectors of the dead.[44] The idea seems plausible, with the important point here being that any such divinity was not our Anthropomorph.

As before, sites often yield only a handful of figurines. At Es-Sifiya (Jordan), the twenty-three human figurines were highly schematic, unsexed except for a possible phallus-shaped object, and – in a departure from Seated Anthropomorph themes – had protruding arms. Their occurrence together in one locus along with hundreds of animal figurines and dozens of geometric tokens (cones and spheres), although unusual, fits within the expected network of thematic associations of the Seated Anthropomorph.[45]

Umm Dabaghiyah (Iraq) and Bouqras (Syria) both yielded a handful of figurines. Those at Umm Dabaghiyah depict moderately schematic seated women with fleshy thighs – clearly within the orbit of the Seated Anthropomorph complex even though there is no gradation of schematization (see Figure 5).[46] The Bouqras collection is heterogeneous, including seated female figurines with themes from our complex, but also with others that fit less well.[47] A flat-chested torso ornamented with numerous appliqués has some completely different inspiration. In continuity with eighth-millennium B.C. patterns, imagery other than small figurines – wall paintings, carved bone, and low-relief stone sculpture – is unrelated thematically to the Seated Anthropomorph. (Ippolitoni Strika argues for symbolic linkages between the animals depicted in the wall paintings and female

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THE SEATED ANTHROPOMORPH

OTHER IMAGES

about 18%

ANIMALS

about 44%

about 2%

about 7%

5 cm

about 29%
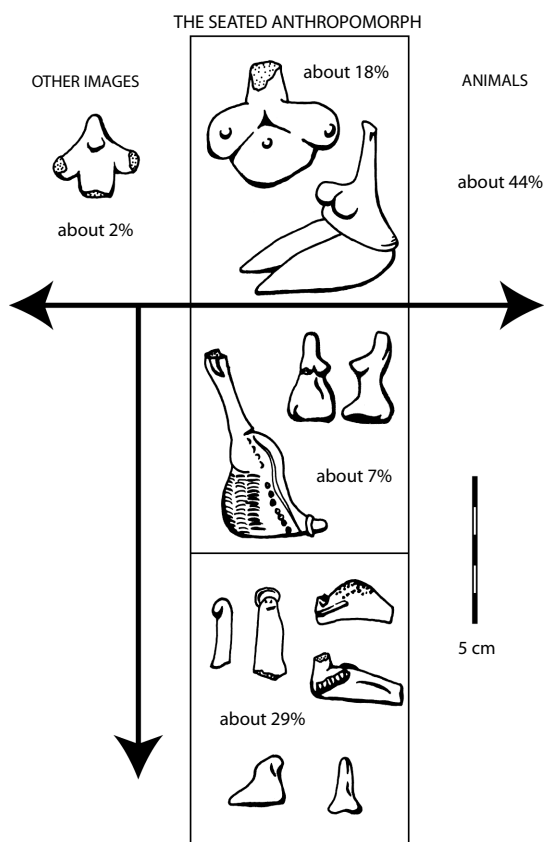
Figure 74. Clay figurines from Sarab (Iran) suggesting continuance of the Seated Anthropomorph complex. (Redrawn by Lesure from Broman Morales 1990: Plates 6d, 7i, 9a, 11k,q 12i, 14a,h,i, 15e,o.)

imagery, pointing out that at Umm Dabaghiyah, painted spots appear on one of the figurines as well as on the walls.[48] I do not find the proposed connections convincing.)

Whereas the preceding examples reflect basic continuity of the Seated Anthropomorph as a thematic complex, three other cases constitute iconic innovations of a different sort. The PPNC levels at 'Ain Ghazal yielded only a few clay figurines in contrast to the much larger MPPNB collection.[49] There was, however, a stone figure, slightly larger than contemporaneous or older clay figurines, with suggestive traits (Figure 75). Seated Anthropomorph elements include an emphasis on overall bodily form; obesity centered on thighs, hips, and belly; female breasts; a gesture directing attention to the middle region of the body; and an apparently simple head, now broken. Two divergent elements are an unusual posture closer to standing than seated and distinct rolls of fat between abdomen and thighs (particularly visible in side view). The latter deserves consideration as an attribute in the art-historical sense.

Schmandt-Besserat considers this figure a special cult object (in contrast to the more prosaic clay figurines) based on its material, size, sophisticated aesthetic principles, and special context (it was cached away from the main habitation area at the end of a short stone-paved path).[50] Although all these points are relevant, the case for this as a cult image of a deity is not overwhelming. Its
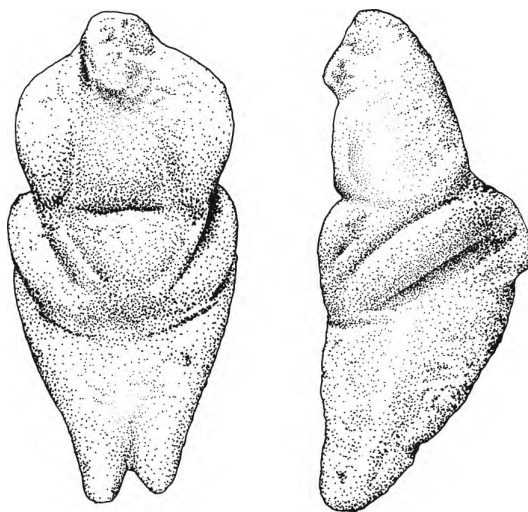
Figure 75. Limestone figurine from PPNC level at 'Ain Ghazal, 14 cm tall. (Drawn by Alana
Purcell after Schmandt-Besserat 1998b:110.)

size does not exceed the range of what I call "figurines," and the significance of its iconographic features is difficult to evaluate with only a single example. The suggestive but inconclusive traits of this find will assume further significance when we reach the early Ceramic Neolithic of the Southern Levant.

At Çatalhöyük, Mellaart saw three forms of "goddess" imagery in wall art: painted images of obese and possibly female figures, modeled "breasts," and monumentally modeled figures with splayed limbs.[51] The first does indeed appear to constitute an instance of imagery shared with figurines, but because the paintings occur no earlier than Level VI (after 6600/6500 B.C.), I discuss them in a subsequent section. The other two forms of "goddess" imagery are more common and their appearance extends back to the earlier seventh millennium B.C. However, Mellaart's readings of these images are doubtful and they do not appear to legitimately constitute instances of Seated Anthropomorphic imagery in a different medium or at a different scale than figurines.[52] In this sense, Çatalhöyük displays continuity with eighth-millennium B.C. patterns through at least the mid-sixth millennium B.C. The new feature here is a vast expansion in the variety of imagery.

Below Level V – before 6500/6400 B.C. – the more iconographically complex figures are often in stone, whereas thereafter they are typically in clay.[53] Patterns on stone figurines – a stylistically heterogeneous collection – include, first, a proliferation of social subjects. There are obese anthropomorphs, who sit or stand and sometimes wear elaborate clothing; there are also male, female, and unsexed figures.[54] A few are highly schematic[55] but most appear to be naturalistic enough for the encoding of social differences. Second, and more important, there is an intriguing proliferation of iconic hints at attributes (in the art-historical sense) or complex narrative. There are contrived postures suggestive of complex narrative; Seated Anthropomorphs that are phallic in overall shape; figures seated on or otherwise in association with animals; adults holding children; and two or more figures attached to one another.[56] The basic pattern is a proliferation of differentiated subjects significantly beyond the purview of the Seated Anthropomorph complex, including both simple social differences and more complicated hints at specific subjects or narrative. These patterns

anticipated future developments in Central Anatolia, much as the 'Ain Ghazal figurine anticipated what was to come in the Yarmukian.

A third perturbation on Seated Anthropomorph themes appears among the limestone figurines of Mezraa Teleilat along the Upper Euphrates in Southeastern Anatolia.[57] Most of the 125 figurines recovered are understandable as expressions of Seated Anthropomorph themes – but with a dramatic inversion of signification (Figure 76). We have the same gradation of schematization of a seated, anthropomorphic form and the familiar frequency distribution favoring the schematic versions. However, a pattern observed occasionally in other collections – the Seated Anthropomorph image assuming an overall phallic form – is here a central focus. The more schematic figures become phalluses even as they retain the abstract shape of a seated human figure. The more naturalistic figures retain vaguely the overall phallic form, but the largest and most naturalistic are depicted as a person with a phallic protrusion in the lower belly area.

From Özdoğan's descriptions and illustrations of the collection, these attributes seem to combine in a graded series following rules similar to those of the Seated Anthropomorph. At the naturalistic end of the gradation, there is little basis for identifying social differences among the images. What on some figurines may appear to be female breasts, Özdoğan considers arms projecting to the front in a highly stereotyped gesture. Some figures may have had hands resting on the stomach, or the traits involved could depict the arms of a chair; either way, the gesture(s) is highly stereotyped.

The coherence of stylistic and iconographic traits at Mezraa Teleilat had a regional manifestation extending to other sites along the Upper Euphrates and Balikh Rivers. The traits include limestone as a medium; a planar face at an angle to the vertical; deep round holes for eyes; and, sometimes, a long straight ridge for a nose. Such readily identifiable clusters of attributes expressed at multiple sites in a small region for a relatively short period are rare before the beginning of the seventh millennium B.C.

There is still much to learn about what Klaus Schmidt calls "Assouad-type" figurines. Cases other than Mezraa Teleilat (Assouad, Gritille, Gürcütepe, and Sabi Abyad II) involve a few pieces that stand out in collections that are otherwise mostly in clay.[58] There is also a certain chronological unevenness. Most cases seem concentrated in their occurrence around or just after 7000 B.C., but one Assouad-style head appeared in Level 6 at Sabi Abyad I (Ceramic Neolithic), hundreds of years too late. The excavators suggest that it was an heirloom or a stray find of the original inhabitants.[59]

It is possible that Assouad-type figurines reached Assouad, Gritille, Gürcütepe, and Sabi Abyad II through exchange – they may even have moved as broken heads. Even if they were locally manufactured, they would have stood out among contemporaneous figurines. Numerous points here – the distinctiveness of these figurines; their appearance in only a limited region; the hints of special treatment; the possible attributes; and (at Mezraa Teleilat) the stylistic–iconographic coherence that simultaneously engages with and rejects the more widespread themes of the Seated Anthropomorph – raise the possibility of specificity of subject matter. Özdoğan suggests "a male deity or a person of dignity"[60]; the former seems more likely. The important point is that this is the sort of patterning for which we have been looking and until now found scarce.

To summarize, during the first half of the seventh millennium B.C., there was considerable continuity in the complex of interrelated themes of the Seated Anthropomorph. The beginnings of significant change – in both the themes and the iconic strategies through which those themes were presented – nevertheless appear in several places. Changes were specific to particular locales. Some were relatively brief in duration; others established new regional patterns that would continue in the later seventh millennium ('Ain Ghazal) and even beyond (Çatalhöyük). By about 6500 B.C. and certainly by 6200 B.C., the Seated Anthropomorph had unraveled as an internally organized thematic complex, suggesting a distinct wrinkle in long-term structure. Yet, individual elements
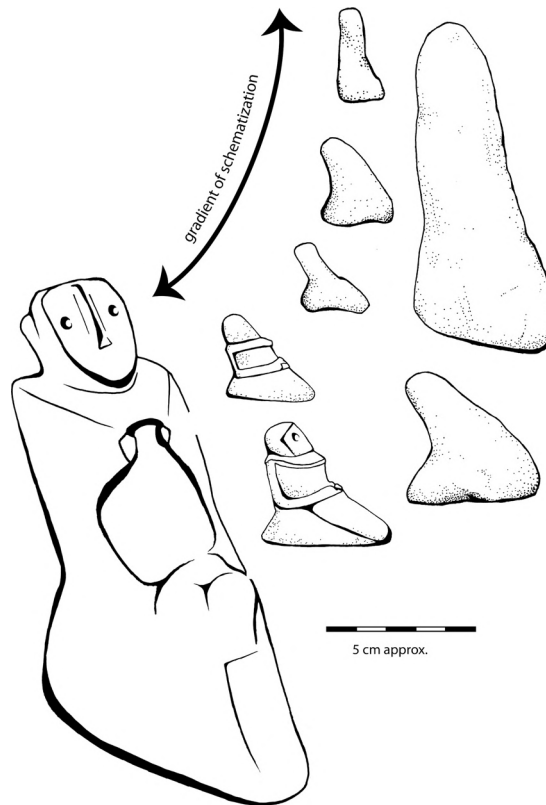
Figure 76. Limestone figurines from Mezraa Teleilat (Turkey) showing gradient of schematization. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after Özdoğan 2003: Figures 1a, 3a, 4; Özdoğan 2007: Figures 23, 27.)

and themes likely derived from the complex persisted, to be reworked into iconic strategies of increasing interest for understanding the prehistory of Near Eastern goddesses.

The End of the Seated Anthropomorph as a Complex

In figurine collections from approximately 6500 B.C., the Seated Anthropomorph ceases to be identifiable as a complex of ordered relations among traits. Yet, numerous individual images from the Ceramic Neolithic bear traits plausibly derived from the Anthropomorph, including schematization, emphasis on overall bodily form, seated posture, fullness of figure centering on thighs and hips, and female breasts. Of course, there are also significant new traits.

An analytical dilemma that arises repeatedly with the breakup of the complex is whether among "figurines" from one site there are objects of fundamentally different sorts, each potentially drawing a different set of traits from the Seated Anthropomorph legacy. For instance, in the absence of systematic interrelations between contemporaneous naturalistic and schematized images, it can be difficult to justify treating the two as constituting a single category. Linkages to Seated Anthropomorph themes thus need to be assessed separately for each distinct type of image.

Results for the period 6500–5300 B.C. suggest that figurine makers adopted suites of traits corresponding to different positions along the original Seated Anthropomorph gradient. Although those were added to and transformed in various ways, derivation from the Seated Anthropomorph in many cases is arguable. Four variants are discernible. In the first pattern, radically schematized figurines are only minimally human in form.[61] A second pattern preserves some gradation of schematization, ranging to minimally human but also encompassing an emphasis on overall bodily form, seated posture, and fullness of figure centered on thighs and hips (see Figure 91).[62] A third pattern lacks any gradation of schematization but seems to preserve the Anthropomorph's emphasis on bodily form. The human figure as a whole – often but not always with attributes suggesting femaleness – seems to be emphasized.[63] The final pattern takes the characteristic subject of the more naturalistic Seated Anthropomorph – a fleshy woman, often but not always still seated – and dispenses with differential schematization or emphasis on the totality of the body. Sometimes the resulting images are all virtually the same, such as certain naturalistic figures from Halaf sites (see Figure 92). In other cases, there appears to be variety among the social referents (see Figure 86).

Derivation of traits from the legacy of the Seated Anthropomorph is dubious in some instances, particularly in the case of the minimal first pattern. Although it is useful to trace the different directions that figurine makers of the later Neolithic took in reworking Seated Anthropomorph themes and to note that more than one pattern may appear at the same site, the more important insights for the later Neolithic are derived by applying my guide to comparison.

Divergent Manifestations in the Ceramic Neolithic

Let us therefore turn from the Seated Anthropomorph themes themselves to the more abstract question of whether those manifestations promoted or discouraged modes of analysis that could yield "goddess" as interpretive outcome. When we are looking for deities, certain patterns of evidence are of particular interest. Specificity of subject matter is a crucial concern, particularly hints of complex narrative or attributes in the art-historical sense. In evaluating such patterns, it is necessary to consider the possibility of social referents susceptible to analysis from the window-on-society perspective. Of course, the portrayal of social differences among images is not necessarily incompatible with specificity of subject. For example, the referent may be a narrative in which different characters interact.

Weighing of imagery in relation to material properties is also an important task because the appearance of the same imagery on objects used in different ways would lend support to claims for its symbolic importance. Although any such patterning is important, of particular interest are objects that could have been cult images – a possibility to be judged based on material, size, context of installation, and special treatment in disposal.

The overall pattern for the Near East in the second half of the seventh into the sixth millennium B.C. is extension and elaboration of developments first seen in the earlier seventh millennium B.C. Anthropomorph-derived themes – now mere elements disarticulated from the integrated Later-PPN complex – appear with material patterns that more insistently than before favor consideration of specific subjects and even deities. Another development is regional divergence. Three distinctive regional patterns are discernible for the period 6500/6200 to 5300 B.C. The first – the most restricted in time and space – corresponds to the Early Ceramic Neolithic Yarmukian culture of the Southern Levant. I refer to it as the "Yarmukian pattern." The other two are of longer duration (at least through 5300 B.C.), and it is convenient to give them regional designations – a "Central Anatolian" and a "Mesopotamian" pattern. I consider each pattern in turn.

The Yarmukian Pattern

The Yarmukian culture, defined on the basis of similarities in flint tools, pottery, and figurines, is known from sites in the Mediterranean zone of the Southern Levant (Figure 77). Although figurines are characteristic of Yarmukian culture, there are disparities in their distribution. Two sites, Sha'ar Hagolan and Munhata, yielded substantial collections (261 and 55, respectively), whereas sites such as 'Ain Ghazal, Abu Thawwab, and Byblos each produced fewer than 20, mostly fragmentary.[64] The density of imagery may relate in part to the differential size and importance of sites. Recent excavations at Sha'ar Hagolan reveal organizational sophistication (roads, houses built around courtyards) and a substantial population.[65] Still, the round structures of Munhata (with numerous figurines) are more modest than Yarmukian architecture at 'Ain Ghazal (with few figurines). It appears that there were differences in the usage of figurines not fully explained by differences in settlement size or importance.

A diverse array of imagery and decorated objects has been recovered from Yarmukian sites. The two principal categories, comprising 86 percent of the collection from Sha'ar Hagolan,[66] are "naturalistic" coffee-bean–eyed figurines in clay (Figure 78) and "pebble figurines" incised to suggest a highly schematized human form (Figure 79). Other imagery includes grooved pebbles (Figure 80a-c) that are sometimes interpreted as depictions of vulvae[67]; phallus effigies in stone or clay (Figure 80d); a heterogeneous set of carved stone figurines (Figure 80e); and animals in clay, which constitute more than 50 percent at Munhata but only 6 percent at Sha'ar Hagolan.[68] I concentrate on the two most common categories as well as a unique "statue" version of the naturalistic clay figurines.

A striking feature of the naturalistic figurines is their visual coherence. Features include a smooth, elongated head; sharply slanting coffee-bean eyes; a projecting, downward-pointing nose; ears and/or ear ornaments; and sometimes puffy cheeks. The mouth is typically absent. At the back of the head is a bulbous form that descends over the nape of the neck, visible in Figure 78a.[69] Although there is variation in details, the basic suite of traits recurs across the Yarmukian sphere. It also crosscuts differences in subject matter, appearing on "male" figurines as well as "female."[70] Strong stylistic coherence is also present in torso attributes, although it is complicated by issues of subject matter. An important initial observation is that the formal qualities of Yarmukian clay figurines had significance as an integrated set.

The majority of the naturalistic figurines depict a seated, fleshy human, plausibly descended from the Seated Anthropomorph, with numerous novel traits that seem to elaborate on and enhance rather than crowd out the PPN legacy. Much of the variability among the figurines is understandable as depictions by different artists of a single, specific subject, shown with stereotyped clothing, gesture, posture, and somatic qualities. The figures are seated, with legs together in front. The right hand rests on the right side and the left is placed under or supporting one of the small but apparently female breasts (Figure 78b). Surface masses of the torso are delineated by grooves or breaks between plate-like appliqués of clay. The result is what appear to be rolls of fat on thighs and hips. Above the waist, however, these masses seem to delineate a strange garment that crosses the chest above the exposed breasts, descends in two strands down the back, and wraps around under the arms without covering the navel.[71] The breasts and distribution of body fat suggest femaleness, but Gopher and Orrelle interpret these figurines as phallic in overall form (and, indeed, referencing both male and female genitals) – a claim disputed by Miller and Garfinkel.[72] The important point is that multiple features have the appearance of identifying attributes for a specific subject, thus constituting a particularly rich array of the kinds of traits we expect in images of deities.

Figure 77. The Near East with Ceramic Neolithic sites mentioned in the text.

Still, there is differentiation of subjects, most notably male figurines depicted with a penis and testicles. Such images are rare at Sha'ar Hagolan, distinctly more common at Munhata, and present at Byblos.[73] All are fragmentary, but at least two have the characteristic head form. Bodies are thin and cylindrical, lacking plate-like appliqués, and at least some seem to be standing. Other variations in the collections include differential painting, incising, and clothing elements on the seated females and a unique (broken) piece depicting a seated human with a plate-like body composition, leaning over with the face between the knees.[74]

Detailed information on the contexts of clay figurines from the recent excavations at Sha'ar Hagolan suggests that these objects were in use in domestic contexts throughout the site, although some residential groups may have had more than others.[75] In terms of imagery in relation to material properties, one significant find is several fragments of a "statue" sharing imagery with the figurines. The original would have been 30 to 40 cm tall, compared to less than 15 cm for the figurines (Figure 81). Three attributes – the seated posture, the vertical groove on the upper chest, and a suggestion of rolls of fat and plate-like body masses – indicate that Garfinkel is correct

Figure 77 (continued)

in reconstructing this as a large version of one of the seated females – although there are certain divergences in style from the smaller figures.[76] Greater care in choice of clay and surface finish is consistent with a cult statue, as is the deposition of multiple fragments together in a courtyard pit.[77]

The other common category of image at Yarmukian sites is the incised pebble figurine, again most frequent at Sha'ar Hagolan (115) compared to Munhata (13), Byblos (11), and 'Ain Ghazal (1).[78] Those recovered in the recent Sha'ar Hagolan excavations appear to have been used in domestic compounds, like the clay figurines. The pebbles range from 5 to 32 cm in length and weigh from 30 to 6,000 g. The images are simple: A few incised lines on limestone pebbles suggest the human form (Figure 79). There is a gradation of schematization from only eyes, to a face, to a more detailed version with torso grooves that recall the plate-like body masses of the seated clay figurines. Some of the detailed incised pebbles from Sha'ar Hagolan have the essential iconographic features of the clay figurines, establishing a link between the imagery in the two cases (Figure 82).[79] It seems impossible to prove that all pebble figurines were abbreviated versions of the primary
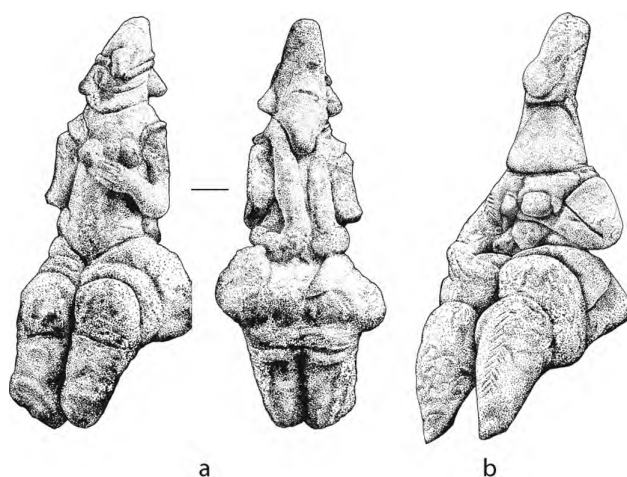
Figure 78. Two coffee-bean–eyed figurines from Sha'ar Hagolan: (a) front and rear view of nearly complete figure. Note characteristic head form, plate-like construction of body surface, characteristic gesture, and (in rear view) garment; (b) front view of another figure, with hand cradling breast. Figure at right is 14.2 cm tall. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after photographs in Garfinkel 2004a.)

image among the clay figurines, but such a claim is plausible – a point that further strengthens the case for a specific subject.

Indeed, patterns among the Yarmukian figurines provide one of the two best cases for depictions of a deity among figurines prior to 5300 B.C. Multiple attributes (in the art-historical sense) point toward a specific subject, and the great redundancy of posture, gesture, clothing, and certain body features is consistent with a deity – as is the sharing of imagery between objects used in different ways, including on a likely cult statue. Any "goddess" argument for this material must account for the variation in subject, but that hardly seems an insurmountable task, particularly in comparison to the more challenging case we will face in Anatolia. Miller's cautious designation of the primary image as a "deified matron" – perhaps the Matron of the Yarmukian people – is warranted by the evidence, and I henceforth adopt those terms.[80]

The temporal trajectory of the Yarmukian matron is of interest. I trace her descent from the Seated Anthropomorphic complex (not itself a deity) through the PPNC stone figurine from 'Ain Ghazal (Figure 75). The latter plausibly bears certain traits of the matron in incipient form, including the V-shaped body form (recalling that of certain stone and clay figures from Sha'ar Hagolan; compare with Figure 80e[81]) and the rolls of fat on the thighs. Still, although certain themes of the Yarmukian matron had a deep ancestry, once formulated as (arguably) a deity, she was relatively short-lived. By the Later Levantine Ceramic Neolithic, she was gone. Figurines are virtually absent at sites of the Lodian and Wadi Raba cultures.[82]

The Central Anatolian Pattern

Despite certain spectacular assemblages, figurine making appears less centered in Central Anatolia than in the Levantine case. Özdoğan envisions the Ceramic Neolithic, particularly in the Lakes District, as characterized by a rapid proliferation of agricultural villages.[83] The making of images in
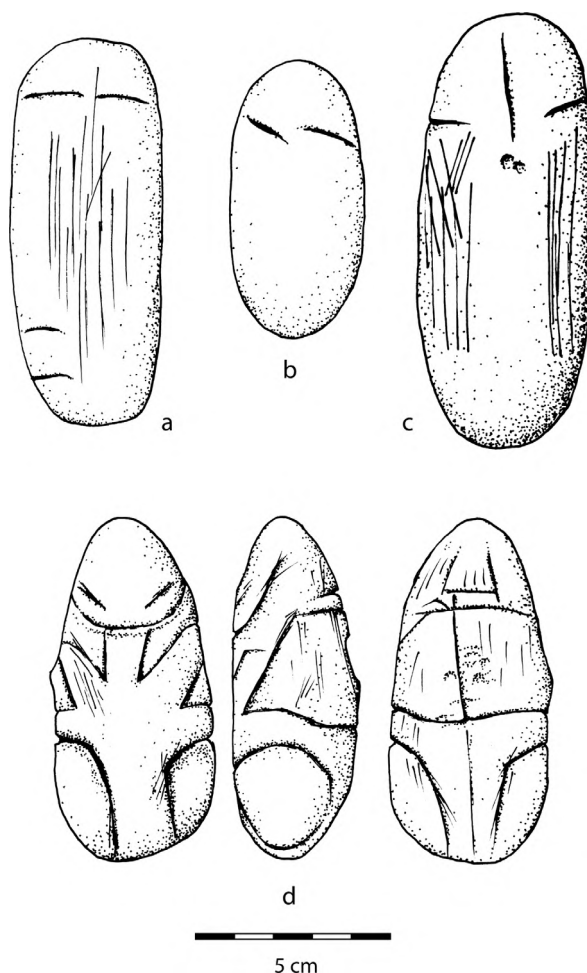
Figure 79. Yarmukian pebble figurines from Sha'ar Hagolan. Top: schematic figures with facial features. Bottom: three views of an unusually elaborate pebble figurine. All in limestone. (Redrawn by Alana Purcell from Stekelis 1972: Plates 46:2–3, 47:3, 52:1.)

clay (or, less often, stone) characterized even these small communities. Of course, there is variation, including dramatic differences in frequency between levels at individual sites. Still, the differences are not coordinated and have the character of fluctuating local engagements with a persistent larger tradition.

The tradition is perceptible at a level that transcends several successive horizons, including a Çatal style in the Konya Plain in the mid-seventh millennium B.C., a Hacılar style in the Lakes District at the end of the seventh millennium, and an early-to-mid sixth-millennium phenomenon involving visual emphasis on the pubic triangle. That last is more extensive than the first two, linking imagery from Central Anatolia with that of Mesopotamia. In the Central Anatolian tradition, two persistent strands are discernible in clay figurines less than 25 cm in height. Each strand may be descended from the Seated Anthropomorph, but each deploys femaleness as theme in a distinctive way. The two strands may be manifested together at a particular site, usually as distinct categories
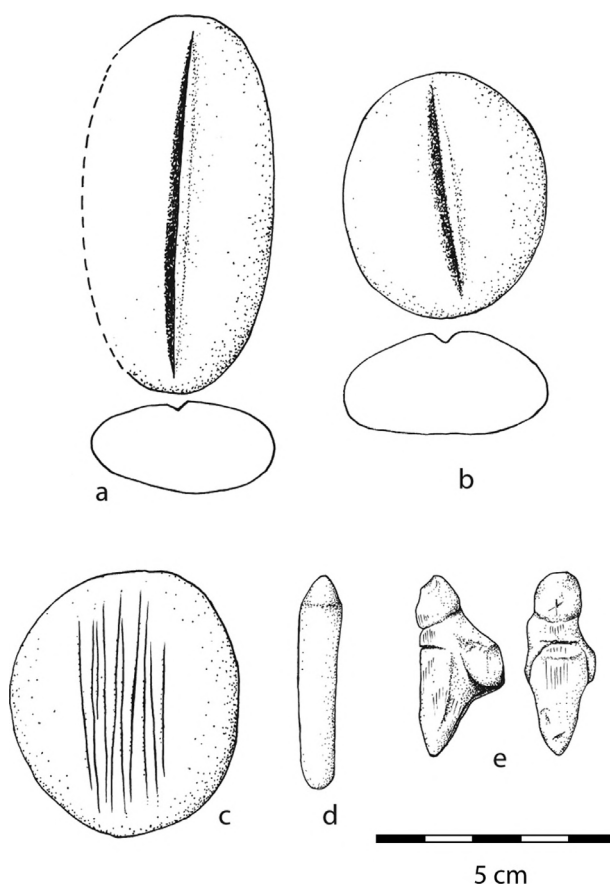
Figure 80. Yarmukian incised pebbles and stone figurines from Sha'ar Hagolan: (a-c) grooved basalt pebbles; (d) stone phallus (basalt); (e) schematic anthropomorphic figurine (limestone). (Redrawn by Alana Purcell from Stekelis 1972: Plates 50, 56, 57, 59.)

of object. Occasionally, a principle of differential schematization appears to blur the boundary between schematic and naturalistic, but it is never as important an iconic strategy as it was in the PPN.

Examples of the naturalistic strand are the clay "statuettes" from Çatalhöyük and Hacılar and some clay "figurines" from Höyüçek. Certain similarities with Yarmukian patterns are perceptible. The stereotyped gesture from Sha'ar Hagolan – one hand on thigh, other on breast – appears on at least two clay figures from the upper levels at Çatalhöyük (although left and right are reversed).[84] Still, that link points to a divergence between Yarmukian and Central Anatolian naturalistic clay figurines: the great variety of subject matter in the Anatolian case. The stereotyped gesture for seated women at Sha'ar Hagolan is, at Çatalhöyük, merely one among a variety of gestures.

Both the Çatalhöyük and Hacılar collections are particularly rich in attributes hinting at specific subjects. There are recurring stereotyped gestures (hands-on-belly more common at Çatalhöyük, hands-on-breasts at Hacılar). Contrived postures and, at Hacılar, cases in which a child is held by or climbs about on an adult all suggest complex narrative.[85] Particularly convincing as attribute or reference to complex narrative is the association of a seated woman with one or more animals,
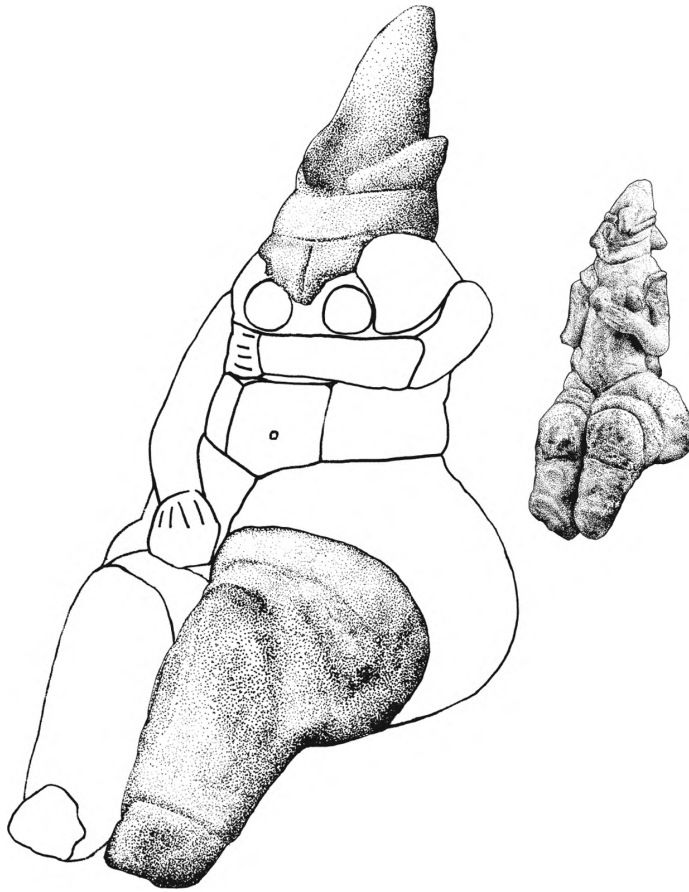
Figure 81. Statue-sized Yarmukian figure (originally 30–40 cm tall), shown relative to the scale of a typical coffee-bean–eyed figurine. On statute, stippled parts show the main surviving fragments and heavy lines are excavators' reconstruction. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after photographs in Garfinkel 2004a.)

a theme observed at both Çatal and Hacılar (Figures 83 and 84). The former case is particularly dramatic. A seated, fabulously obese woman is flanked by felines whose long tails ascend her back to rest one on each shoulder. Her hands are on the heads of the animals, and a bulbous form, perhaps a human head, emerges from between her lower legs. The last feature is usually understood to indicate that the woman is depicted as giving birth. Mellaart's musings on this as an Enthroned Goddess or Mistress of Animals, although characteristically fanciful, draw attention to the potential implications of this image.[86]

A recent find from Çatalhöyük is perhaps even more emphatic in pointing to a specific subject (Figure 85). Observed from the front, it seems to be a typical seated, fleshy woman, her hands on her breasts – yet, turning the figure around reveals that the rear of the image is completely skeletal with the body reduced to ribs, shoulder blades, backbone, and pelvis.[87]

Still, all of these images are rare. At Çatalhöyük, associations of women and animals are outnumbered by what seem to be men and animals.[88] Furthermore, each image of people interacting
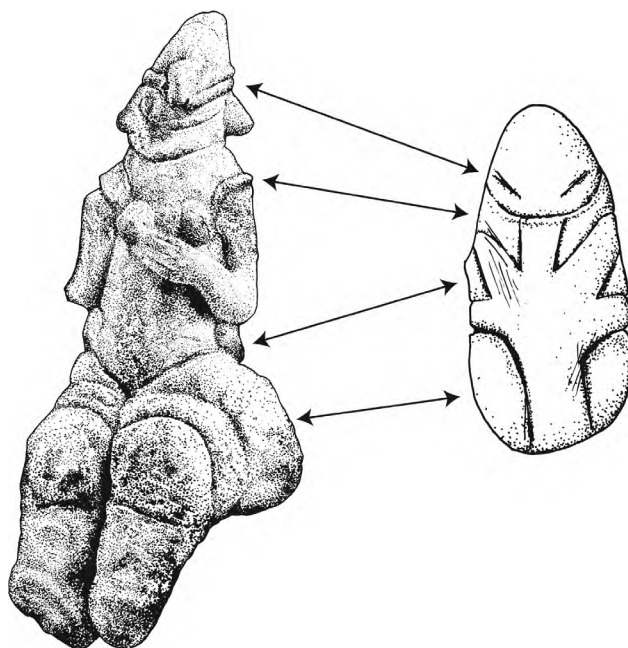
Figure 82. Correspondence in imagery between an unusually elaborate pebble figurine and a typical naturalistic clay figurine, both from Sha'ar Hagolan. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after images in Garfinkel 2004a and Stekelis 1972.)
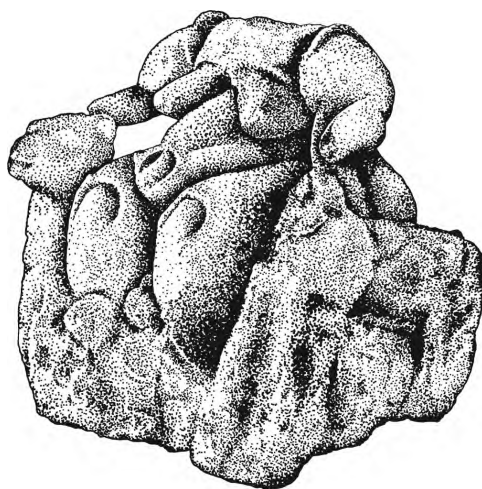
Figure 83. Clay figure from Çatalhöyük (Turkey) showing an obese, seated woman flanked by two felines, with her hands resting on their heads. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after Mellaart 1967: Plate 67.)
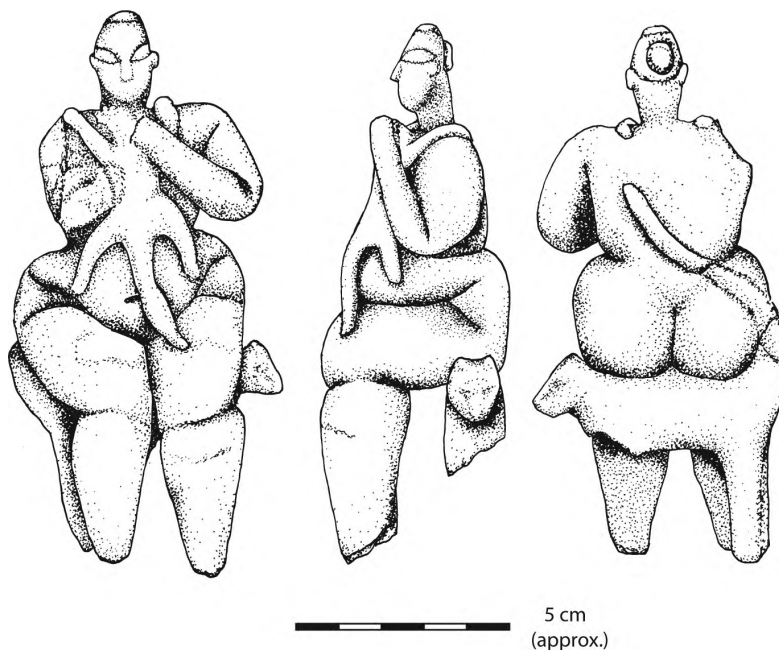
Figure 84. Clay figurine from Hacilar showing woman seated on a feline, holding a feline cub or other animal against her chest. (Drawn by Alana Purcell, based on Mellaart 1970: Plates 55, 56, 57(a), Figure 228.)

with animals is distinct, a point that should give pause to those who casually accept this as the "attribute" of a deity. Indeed, variation among the human-with-animal images falls in with the general diversity of subject matter in the naturalistic strand of the Anatolian pattern.

Much of the diversity corresponds to what are arguably "social" distinctions. Women sit, stand, squat, and assume more contrived poses. Those who have analyzed the Hacılar collection find females depicted at various ages; the figurines also are fat to different degrees and some may be pregnant (Figure 86).[89] Evidence from other sites suggests that such thematic diversity was neither exceptional nor the rule. A set of ten figurines in Hacılar style from Sanctuary 3 at Höyüçek
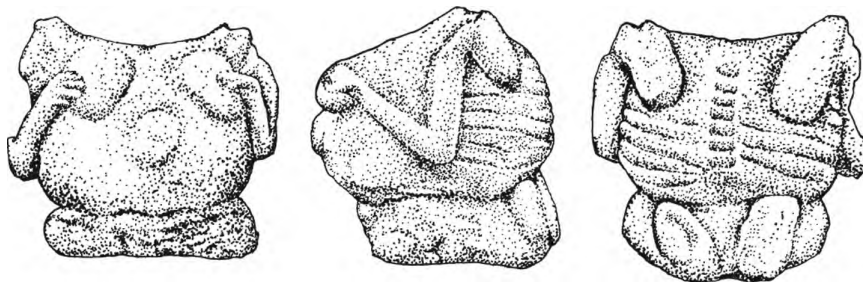
Figure 85. Three views of a single clay figurine from Çatalhöyük (Turkey) that appears fleshy and female in front but skeletal in back. (Drawn by Alana Purcell based on Badischen Landesmuseum 2007, Catalog #238 and Meskell and Nakamura 2005: Figure 83.)
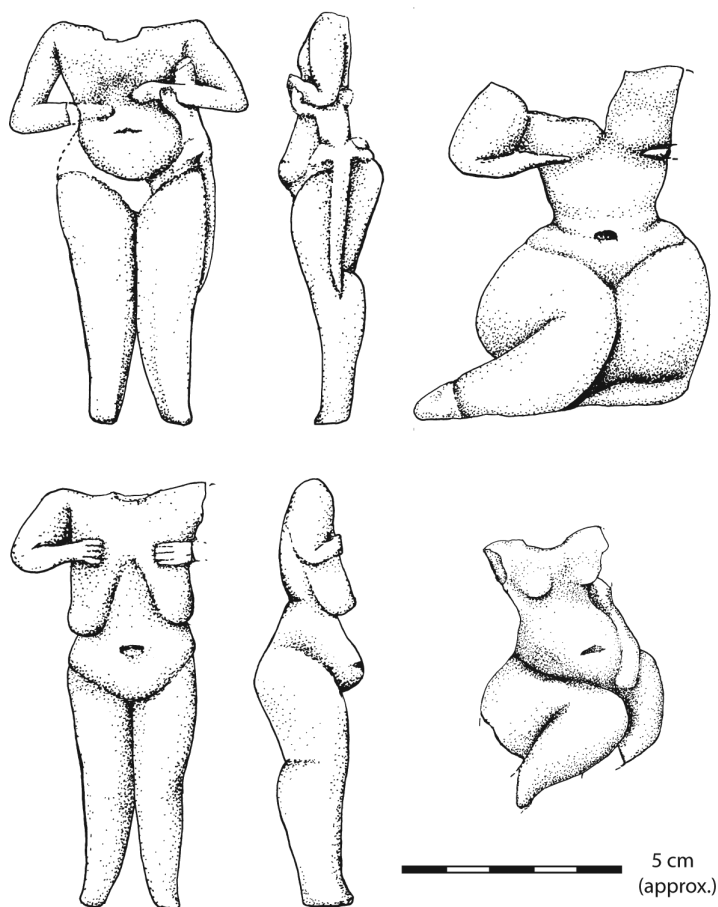
Figure 86. Clay figurines from Hacilar showing differences in posture, gesture, and physical attributes. (Drawn by Alana Purcell, based on Mellaart 1970: Plates 127, 139, 141, 145, and Figures 196, 211, 214, and 220.)

includes standing, seated, and reclining women; a reclining woman holding a child; and two flat-chested figurines, men or perhaps girls.[90] In contrast, a larger but more fragmentary collection from Kuruçay (also in Hacilar style) appears to include little in the way of postural or thematic variability beyond a standing woman with hands on her breasts.[91] Finds from Koşk Höyük include seated women with obese thighs and dramatic hairstyles but also standing figures in elaborate garb.[92] In this last collection, Öztan identifies both male and female images, the latter encompassing greater variety and including younger and older women.[93]

A recurring pattern in Central Anatolia that again contrasts with the Yarmukian case is the discovery of *sets* of diverse images. The Sanctuary 3 group from Höyücek is one example. For Hacilar, Voigt assembles the inventories of figurines from each burned house in Level VI.[94] In her reconstruction, most of the Hacilar "statuettes" were in usable condition and stored on the second floor of the houses when the village burned. If we assume that the finds within each Level VI house constituted a set that would have been used together,[95] then such groupings were both internally diverse and diverse with respect to each other. There was no single template for the
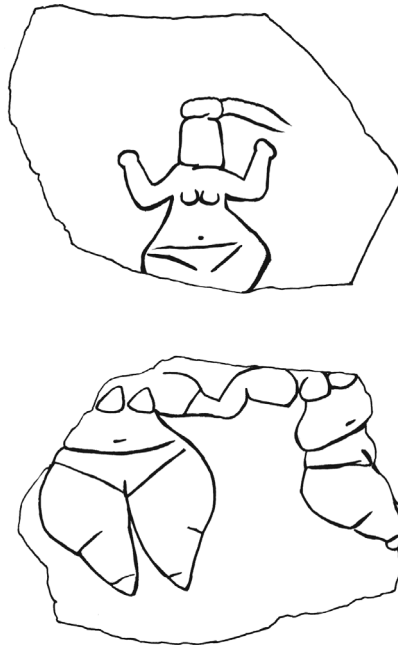
Figure 87. Potsherds from Koşk Höyük (Turkey) with modeled anthropomorphic representations. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after Badischen Landesmuseum 2007, Catalog #321, 322.)

composition of sets such as we would find, for instance, house to house among Christmas Nativity scenes. Meskell and her colleagues find similar variation building to building at Çatalhöyük.[96]

The imagery extends to objects used in different ways. There is a range of sizes among the naturalistic figurines (7 to 24 cm at Hacılar), and larger and smaller images might have had different purposes.[97] An obese standing anthropomorph makes a rare appearance as one figure among others in Çatalhöyük wall paintings.[98] Images of people and animals molded in relief on the upper surfaces of ceramic vessels are known from several sixth-millennium B.C. sites. At Kuruçay Höyük, the imagery involved seems unrelated to themes from the figurines, but from Koşk Höyük, there are several cases of obese women depicted singly or holding hands in a line of two or three figures (Figure 87).[99] These last pieces bolster the case for the image of a fleshy woman as symbolically important. However, the appearance of sets of such figures holding hands resonates with the differentiated subject matter to challenge any easy identification of this image as a deity. An alternative interpretation that would see fleshy femaleness as metaphorically important is more promising.

After 6200 B.C., schematic figurines are no longer linked to naturalistic ones through a systematic gradation of schematization. They instead constitute a second strand of the Anatolian pattern. It is unclear whether we can push this development back to ca. 6500 B.C. at Çatalhöyük.[100] In the Sanctuaries Phase at Höyücek (early to mid-sixth millennium B.C.), almost one hundred figurines appeared in three clusters identified as "sanctuaries."[101] Duru divides the collection into "figurines" (naturalistic) and "idols" (schematic). One cluster (Sanctuary 3) included figurines in a naturalistic style similar to Hacılar Level VI, whereas most of the pieces in the other two cases were schematic "idols." The Sanctuary 1 and 2 groups are stylistically diverse, a point consistent with
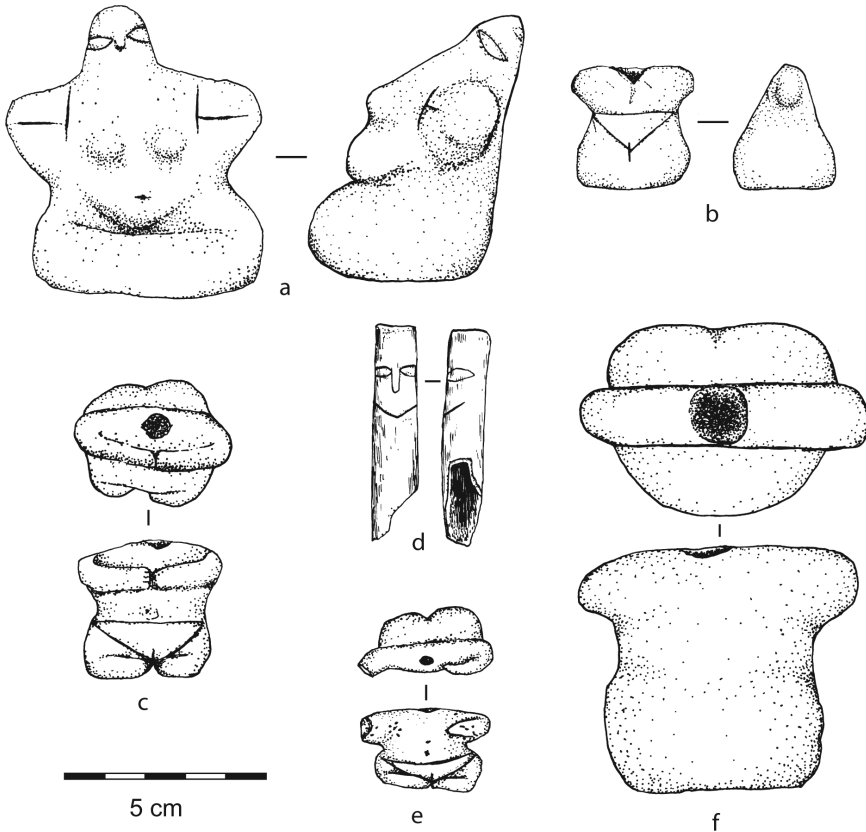
Figure 88. Clay figurines from Höyüçek (Turkey), ranging from relatively naturalistic (a, c, e) to schematic (b, f); some had a separate, schematic face of bone (d) or other material. (Redrawn by Alana Purcell from Duru 1994b: Figures 25, 26:2–3, 28:2, 41:2.)

Duru's idea that these are collections of votive offerings brought to the "sanctuaries" in episodic visits by different people.[102]

The few "figurines" from Sanctuaries 1 and 2 are seated and have obese buttocks and thighs (Figure 88a). Some have female breasts; others are analytically ambiguous as to sex.[103] The typical gesture is similar to one that prevails at Hacılar: arms bent, elbows out to the sides, with forearms against and blending into the breast area. There is little thematic variation. Instead, we can trace a gradient of schematization between these and the more numerous "idols" (Figure 88b-c, e-f). Many of the idols have a hole at the top of the torso for the insertion of a head – of stone or bone – with simple incised features (Figure 88d,f). Some also have attributes that seem to indicate femaleness, either breasts or an incised pubic triangle. The pubic triangle can appear on otherwise featureless torsos (Figure 88b). Among the schematic figures, femaleness as theme is extracted from the social; these are Woman, not women.

Höyüçek is the best case for similar uses, at the same site, for figurines of both naturalistic and schematic strands. At Hacılar, tiny, schematic, mainly sexless figurines with inserted heads probably had different uses from the naturalistic "statuettes."[104] Koşk Höyük yielded both naturalistic
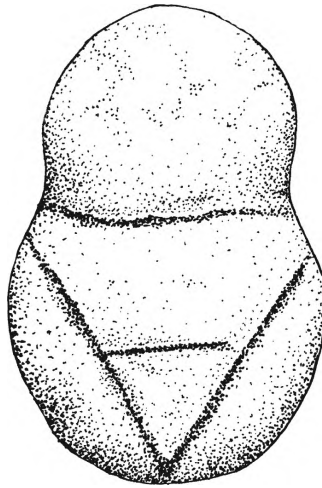
Figure 89. Highly schematized anthropomorphic image, reduced to a pubic triangle and the suggestion of hips, from Koşk Höyük (Turkey). Stone, 4.5 cm. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after Badischen Landesmuseum 2007, Catalog #251.)

figurines and a highly schematic stone of a vaguely human form, reduced to little beyond a pubic triangle, the suggestion of hips, and some red paint (Figure 89).

I have already discussed figures modeled in relief on the upper part of vessels at Kuruçay and Koşk Höyük, but another class of object altogether is jars modeled into the form of a rotund woman (Figure 90). Those of Hacılar I are 10 to 30 cm tall and display a stereotyped gesture of hands to breasts.[105] Elaborate painting on the vessels suggests rich clothing rather than the nudity of figurines. The facial features of some are inlaid with obsidian – a highly unusual feature that raises the possibility that these were special items, perhaps cult equipment. Similar vessels appear at
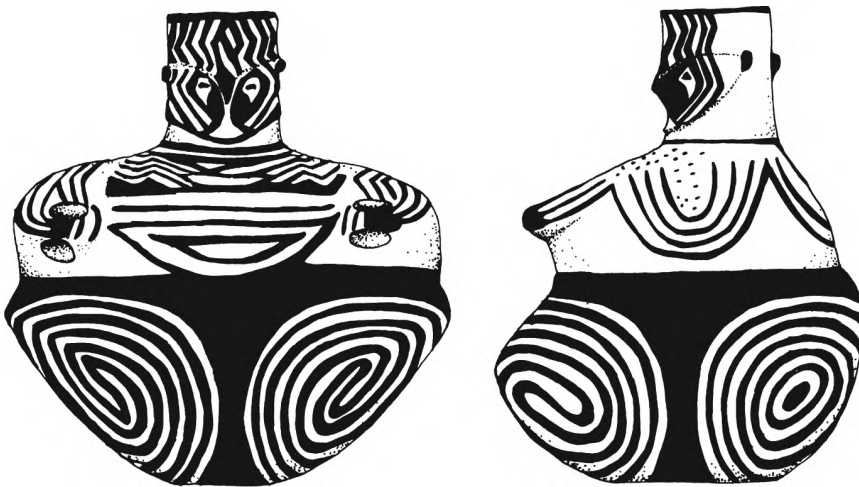
Figure 90. Elaborately painted anthropomorphic ceramic vessel from Hacilar, Level I. (Redrawn by Alana Purcell from Mellaart 1970: Figure 249[2].)

Koşk Höyük with the same characteristic gesture, and indeed, pots with these themes are widely spread across Anatolia in the sixth millennium.[106] The woman here is far from the dynamic social creature of the naturalistic figurines. Further, although the hands-to-breasts gesture is common on figurines, its stereotyped consistency on the pots – in conjunction with elaborate decoration and occasional extraordinary inlays – again raises the possibility of a deity.

In summary, the evidence from Central Anatolia does not all point in the same direction. From 6500 B.C. through 5300 B.C., fleshy femaleness (with a lingering tendency to seated posture) repeatedly is a prominent theme in modeled human images. The occurrence of this set of traits on objects used for different purposes invites symbolic analysis, yet its expression varies. In a schematic strand among figurines, fleshy, seated females are extracted from any social context. Elaborately decorated pots may depict deities. Naturalistic figurines, however, are thematically diverse. Differences in indications of age, somatic state, posture, and gesture all open up possibilities for analysis of the figures as a window on society.[107]

All of this does not point to "a" goddess. Fleshy-femaleness-as-metaphor is more promising. We could posit a durable structure that accorded symbolic significance to this theme, applying it (in association with other themes) in various circumstances where in each case it took on a distinct fan of associations. "Goddesses" are likely involved in this tradition, but the conjunctions of evidence that invite us to consider the depiction of deities are manifested at smaller scales than the tradition as a whole. Individual goddesses were localized and ephemeral; they were outgrowths of a larger tradition of fleshy femaleness as symbolically productive – not themselves part of that tradition.

The Mesopotamian Pattern

The third pattern is perceptible in Mesopotamia, primarily along the Middle to Upper Tigris in Iraq and the tributaries of the Khabur River in Northeastern Syria. The cultures involved are Hassuna and Samarra in the late seventh to early sixth millennium B.C. and Halaf in the sixth millennium. The epoch as a whole is characterized by a persistence of small villages, although a few significantly larger sites appeared during the Halaf period. The extent to which the latter served an organizational role as centers of regional integration is a topic of debate.[108] Still, the occurrence of figurines appears to be unrelated to the size or regional importance of a site.

Mesopotamian figurine collections of the later Neolithic are heterogeneous. Many of the figurines can be grouped into "types" that are internally coherent – sometimes to the point of stereotyped rigidity – but unrelated to one another. At the Hassuna site of Yarim Tepe I, the recurring image is a standing woman (with breasts) wearing a full-length dress decorated with horizontal incised lines.[109] The face is simple but a tall, conical headdress flares dramatically to the rear. That same combination of features is repeated in each piece, giving no impression that differences among images were important. This cohesive cluster of traits is localized in its distribution. It is also ephemeral.

Another example of stereotyped repetition of themes appears in the Early–Middle Halaf levels at Yarim Tepe II (Figure 91). The "stylized" figurines are flat, schematic, and fiddle- or teardrop-shaped with prominent incised pubic triangles. This type is more extensive in distribution than the Yarim I figurines, appearing at Tepe Gawra, Arpachiyah, and significantly farther away at Girikihaciyan (Turkey).[110]

The third and most spectacular example of this sort of internal coherence is a type sometimes considered typical of the Halaf culture (Figure 92). The figurines are naturalistic in overall form, although the heads are often diminutive. Designs painted on some of the torsos suggest body
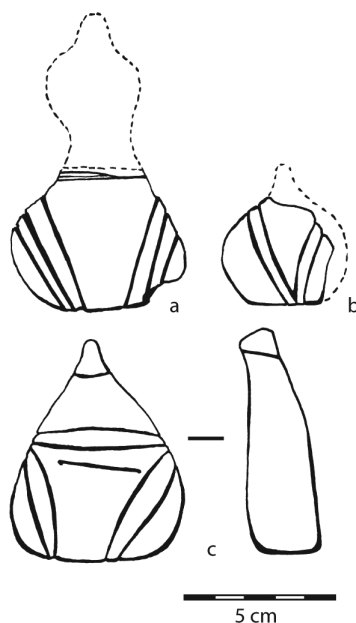
Figure 91. "Stylized" clay figures from Yarim Tepe II (Iraq), Halaf period. (Drawn by Alana Purcell after Munchaev and Merpert 1981: Figure 64.)

ornamentation or clothing. Posture and gesture are rigidly stereotyped. The figures sit with their knees drawn up in front. Arms are folded across the body with their tips – hands are not indicated – resting between the breasts. Figurines with this stereotyped gesture and posture appear at Tell Hassan, Arpachiyah, Tepe Gawra, Yarim Tepe III, Chagar Bazar, Kashkashuk, and Tell Halaf.[111] The reduced heads and the rigidity with which the same posture–gesture combination is repeated tend to outweigh variation in painted designs to suggest a quite specific subject. This form, although widely distributed in space, is confined temporally to the later Halaf.[112]

These three types are different in thematic content, yet each is characterized by features that suggest "attributes" in the art-historical sense. The lack of significant variation between individual pieces further reinforces the idea that they each depicted the same specific subject.

Internal coherence of a different sort characterizes two other Mesopotamian figurine types. The alabaster "statuettes" from the Tell es-Sawwan burials have stereotyped gestures (note the plural) and sometimes strikingly decorated heads. There are also differences in posture and in the prominence of breasts and bellies. Ippolitoni Strika distinguishes between males and females and raises the possibility of other social differences, even if those are subtle and the resulting categories elastic.[113] Rather like the Yarim Tepe I figurines, the statuettes are confined to a single site and period. Another case is more extensive in distribution: decorated Samarran ceramic figurines from Tell es-Sawwan, Songor A, and Choga Mami.[114] There is significant diversity in the category, much of it plausibly involving differentiation of social content. Heads are usually of natural size relative to the body, with detailed faces. Facial features, headdresses, and ornamentation on the head and body are built up with small appliqués and finished with paint. Posture and gesture vary. A hands-to-breasts gesture predominates only at Songor A, and at no site is it the only gesture present among the figurines of this type. Representations seemingly include a few males although, based on chest form, female images predominate. Here, as among the alabaster figurines, differentiation

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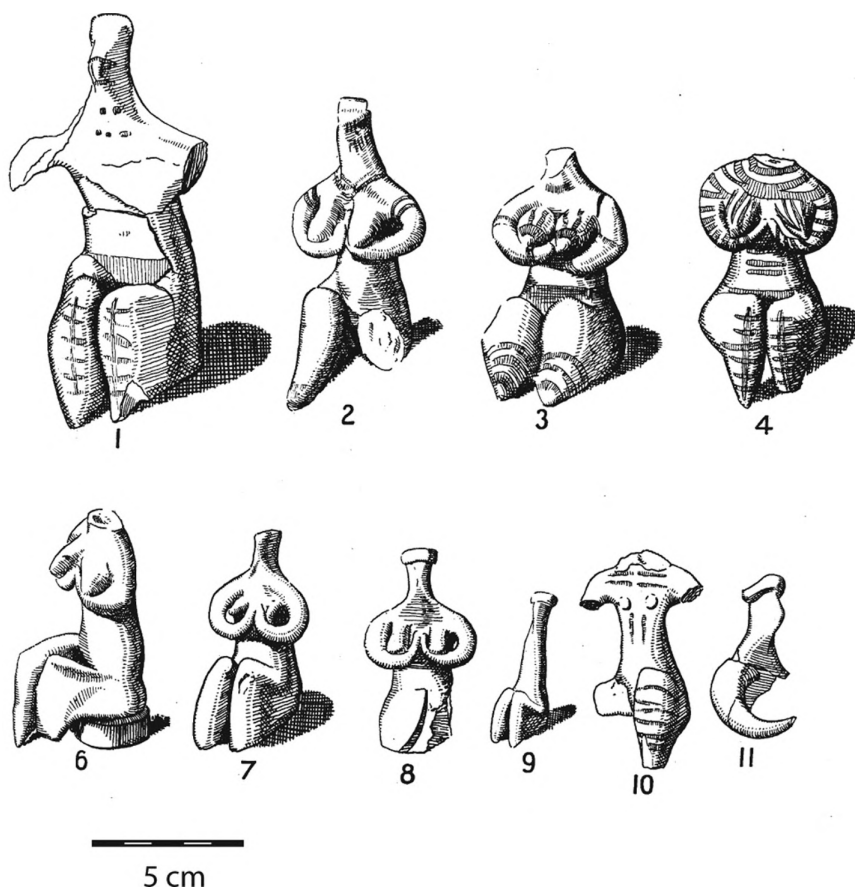
Figure 92. Clay figurines from Chagar Bazar (Iraq). The posture (seated with knees drawn up in front) and gesture (hands between breasts) are characteristic of "typical" Halaf figurines. From Mallowan 1936: Figure 5. Republished by permission of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (Gertrude Bell Memorial), previously known as the British School of Archaeology in Iraq.

among images invites application of the window-on-society approach. There appears to be little chance in either case for the depiction of a specific subject – deity or otherwise.

To summarize, then, I am proposing as a Mesopotamian pattern the appearance of multiple, distinct, internally coherent categories. The categories involved vary greatly in the extent of their distribution (from a single site to numerous sites across hundreds of kilometers) but all are ephemeral. Although derivation of traits from the Seated Anthropomorph can be argued for at least some of the categories, and female sexual attributes – breasts and pubic triangle – are common whereas male sexual attributes are rare, in each case, thematic differences among the categories outweigh similarities.

Although the categories are internally coherent, they are coherent in different ways. The alabaster and decorated Samarran figurines are coherent in style, with variable subject matter. In other cases, coherence extends to subject matter: Repetition of a limited set of themes suggests in each case a single specific subject. Because themes vary, we could suspect that each type had a different specific

subject and, therefore, if those subjects were deities, in each case a *different* deity. Shortly, however, I revisit that issue for two of the types.

Two issues complicate the foregoing synthesis. The first serves mainly to recommend caution. Several Halaf-era figurine collections pose puzzles. Whereas the categories mentioned so far are sufficient to account for virtually the entire figurine collection at numerous sites (Songor A, Tell es-Sawwan, Yarim II, Chagar Bazar, and Tell Halaf), they account for only a small portion of the diverse Arpachiyah collection (Figure 93) and even of the less-diverse corpus from Yarim Tepe III. Part of the problem seems to be that whereas the internal coherence of the categories mentioned thus far was real, it was also ephemeral. As a category went into obsolescence, figurine makers borrowed and reworked its traits. In some cases, they may have created a new category that was the functional equivalent of an old one. The "stylized," vaguely conical figurines from Yarim Tepe III – seated torsos, often with a prominent pubic triangle but otherwise featureless – are likely a later Halaf equivalent of the "stylized" figures from Yarim II (see Figure 91).[115]

At Arpachiyah, a series of armless seated figures with breasts may be the successors of the "typical" Halaf figurines.[116] In other cases, we probably have new categories that draw eclectically on existing themes. At Arpachiyah, there are fiddle-shaped figurines without incised pubic triangles but with instead other extraneous features (painted designs, breasts). Previous observers grouped these with what I consider a distinct category: fiddle- or teardrop-shaped with prominent pubic triangles (compare Figure 93q to Figure 91a). Another surprise in the Arpachiyah collection is the presence of a series of abbreviated, vaguely anthropomorphic, but clearly seated figures that recall the differential schematization of the Seated Anthropomorph (Figure 93f-m). I am inclined to see this as another distinctive category, with its own rules of formal variation. The category was important at Arpachiyah, represented as well at Tepe Gawra, and perhaps present in small numbers at other sites.[117]

A second complication has more profound implications. Because I have been arguing that Mesopotamian figurines from 6200 through 5300 B.C. are divisible into distinct categories with few shared themes, one might infer that there would be few cases in which the same image recurred on objects used in different ways, a finding that would prompt us to consider explaining the imagery of the figurines in relation to their uses (rather than through symbolic analysis). For the Hassuna and Samarran cases, such a characterization is acceptable.

Halaf, however, is a different story, even though the collection of other objects sharing imagery with figurines is relatively small. The central piece is an anthropomorphic vessel, approximately 22 cm tall, from Yarim Tepe II (Figure 94). It was discovered in a small pit along with a broken alabaster plate and other objects, and it apparently had been intentionally broken.[118] The vessel is formed as the body of a woman without a head, her neck corresponding to the mouth of the vessel. The woman is slender and, in overall form, she appears to be standing, although no legs are depicted. Instead, from the waist down, there is a vastly exaggerated pubic triangle outlined with double parallel lines that recall those incised on contemporaneous schematic figurines from the same site (see Figure 91). A line at the base of the triangle indicates the vaginal slit and painted dots throughout the rest of the triangle suggest pubic hair. The figure's hands support her breasts in a gesture resembling that of the naturalistic "typical" Halaf figurines (see Figures 92 and 93a-b). The body is painted with bands around the neck and upper arms and a quatrefoil for the navel. Bands of dots form an X-motif on the upper torso, and wavy lines down the back suggest tresses – except, of course, that there is no head and the lines start at the base of the neck. Arm bands and an X-design on the upper torso appear on some of the "typical" Halaf figurines (Figures 92b and 93c). The negative quatrefoil design on the figure's navel recalls similar elements in ceramic decoration of the
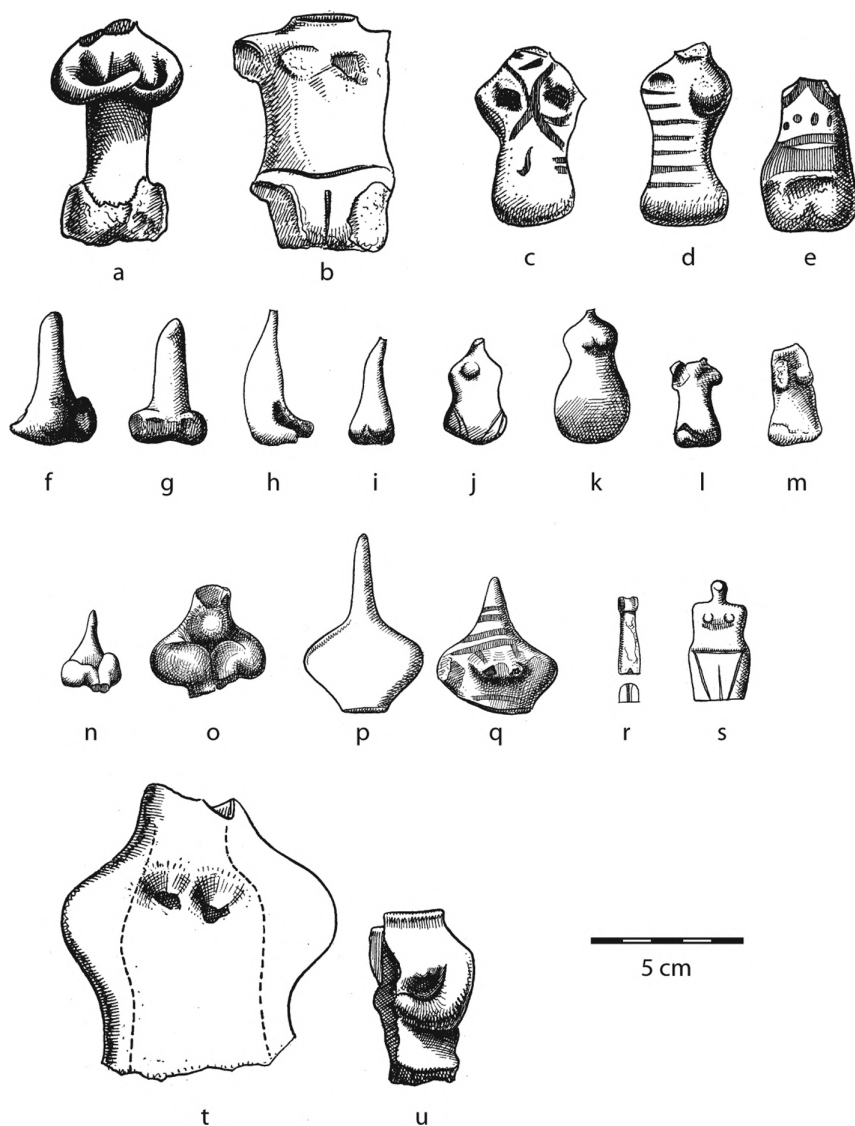
Figure 93. Clay figurines and limestone objects from Arpachiyah (Iraq): (a–b) "typical" Halaf figurines; (c–e) possible late versions of typical figurines, without arms; (f–o) seated figurines of varying degrees of schematization; (j) best match for "stylized" figurines from Yarim Tepe II; (p–q) fiddle-shaped figurines; (r) imitation human finger bone, carved in limestone; (s) small figurine carved in limestone; (t–u) fragments of hollow figures, probably originally small vessels. All of clay unless otherwise specified. From Mallowan and Cruikshank Rose 1935: Figures 45, 46, 47, and 52, adjusted to same scale. Republished by permission of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (Gertrude Bell Memorial), previously known as the British School of Archaeology in Iraq.
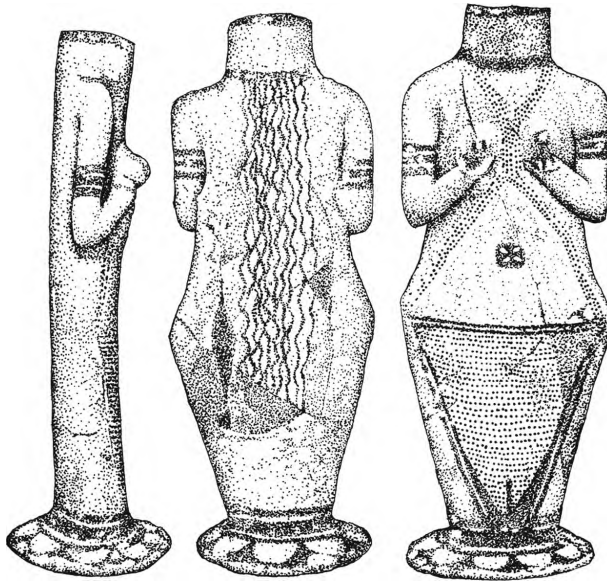
Figure 94. Anthropomorphic ceramic vessel from Yarim Tepe II (Iraq), Halaf period. Approximately 22 cm tall. (Drawn by Alana Purcell from Munchaev and Merpert 1981: Figure 70.)

Halaf era, further expanding the potential fan of referents.[119] The original investigators interpreted this as a cult object, and their argument is a strong one.

Although other complete figures like this are unknown, several likely fragments are reported from Arpachiyah (Figure 93t–u).[120] From the same site, there also is a small, flat limestone figurine with an incised pubic triangle of a similar proportion relative to the body as that on the Yarim anthropomorphic pot (Figure 93s). The little stone figurine was found on the floor of a burned house among a group of other objects: a minute alabaster figurine, a miniature steatite receptacle, a human finger bone, and five more imitation finger bones carved in stone (Figure 93r).[121] This appears to be a ritual kit of some kind, with a specific purpose distinct from that of the Yarim cult vessel. It therefore constitutes another case of imagery shared between objects used in different ways.

The Yarim II anthropomorphic vessel thus provides a basis for identifying linkages among several different categories of object, two of which are types of ceramic figurine that initially appeared to be thematically unrelated (Figure 95). Although it still seems likely that the figurines had distinct purposes and the four categories illustrated in the figure may never have existed contemporaneously, the linkages are sufficient to raise the possibility that each category emphasized different aspects of a specific, symbolically important subject – potentially a goddess. For my purposes here, it is sufficient to show that the case for a Halaf "goddess" – differentially manifested in several distinct categories of image – appears promising. Let us accept that there is a case to be made and see where such an interpretation would lead us.

First, in terms of the Mesopotamian case, Figure 95 complicates my initial claim for the figurines as comprising multiple, distinct categories with distinct referents because the suggestion now is that two of those categories are actually related. Traditional interpretations basically pushed such an argument further, to label all of these "mother-goddess figurines"; however, that is not a move

to be followed in the absence of pieces like the Yarim II anthropomorphic pot that provide specific linkages.

Let us instead characterize the Mesopotamian pattern as follows. Small human images, in a basic sense, are heterogeneous in that they fall into distinct types, even if they are often female with at least some traits derived from the Seated Anthropomorph. The types vary in their distribution across space, but all are ephemeral. The types also differ from one another thematically, a point that generally favors heterogeneity of subject matter. However, there is evidence from one spectacular anthropomorphic vessel that the divergent imagery of some Halaf figurine types may have been integrated at another level of meaning. For instance, maybe they each took as their subject some different aspect of a multifaceted deity. The two types involved, although widely distributed, were as ephemeral as other Mesopotamian types, raising the possibility that any aspects of divinity being portrayed – and perhaps the deity herself – were themselves ephemeral.

Regional Patterns Compared

How does the Mesopotamian pattern, as just characterized, compare with the Yarmukian and Central Anatolian patterns? The Halaf "goddess" appears similar in various ways to the Yarmukian matron. In both cases, we have imagery that invites contemplation of a specific subject, potentially a deity. In both cases, different sorts of images may be depictions of the deity (see Figures 82 and 95), suggesting that she had multiple aspects, only some of which were relevant in any given set of social circumstances. Finally, because the types – as internally coherent constellations of themes – were ephemeral, we are led to wonder whether in each case the deity may have been considerably more ephemeral than envisioned in the Goddess thesis, with a duration of no more than six hundred years.

There are also notable differences between regional traditions. The constellations of themes used in the depictions of these two (putative) deities suggest that they were not the same deity. We can push this contrast further. If the Yarmukian matron was a deity, then in household settings we have both naturalistic figurines that depict her fully invested with her entire range of attributes and pebble figurines that are (arguably) highly schematized reductions of those attributes. By contrast, the Halaf "goddess" was given her full panoply of attributes only in cult objects (the Yarim II anthropomorphic pot). In the different figurine types more widely used in domestic contexts, her images instead were invested with a selection of attributes – a different selection for each type. The implication, I suggest, is that not only do we have different divinities in these cases but also divinities that were different in nature and with whom worshipers interacted in distinct ways.

In contrast to the Southern Levant, small female images persist in the later Neolithic of both Mesopotamia and Central Anatolia. Does that point indicate similarities of long-term structure? Overall, my answer is "no," and in the following discussion, I justify my claim of a subtle but important difference between these cases. Refocusing, however, on the sixth millennium (particularly 5900–5300 B.C.) reveals a dramatic thematic convergence – one so striking as to suggest the emergence at this time of a new shared, large-scale structure to succeed the Seated Anthropomorph. I address that issue of convergence in the next section.

The basic difference between the cases is a thematic integration to the entire corpus of small, modeled human imagery in the Ceramic Neolithic of Central Anatolia. In Mesopotamia, by contrast – despite the wide dissemination of specific images in individual horizons – there is no larger, long-term integration. In Central Anatolia, as figurines become more naturalistic, they become "women," sometimes probably characters in a complex narrative. In Mesopotamia, more
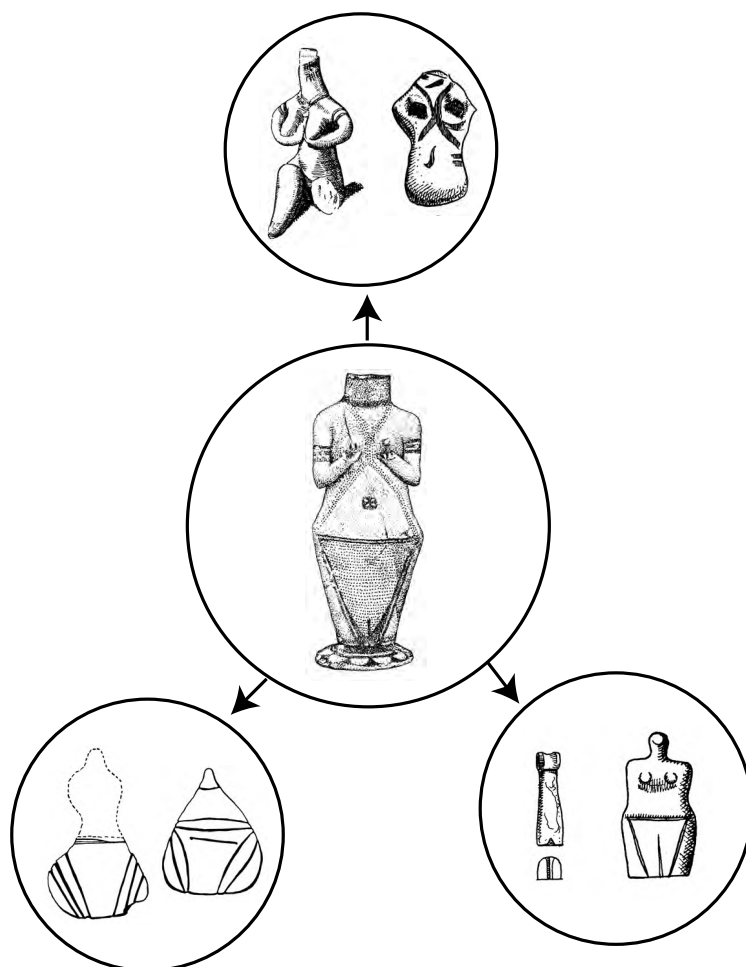
Figure 95. Distinct Halaf figurine "types" plausibly related as different manifestations of a single subject – potentially a goddess – based on the Yarim Tepe II anthropomorphic vessel. Top and right: from Mallowan and Cruikshank Rose 1935, republished by permission of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (Gertrude Bell Memorial), previously known as the British School of Archaeology in Iraq. Center and left: drawn by Alana Purcell from Munchaev and Merpert 1981: Figures 64 and 70.

naturalistic figurines display discordant iconic strategies: They may be highly stereotyped depictions of a specific subject or their subject matter may be differentiated and "social" in content. Schematic figures in each case are more cryptic. In Anatolia, such figurines are not differentiated "women." Still, they share a loose set of themes with more naturalistic figurines, including femaleness, fleshiness, specific gestures, and a tendency toward seated posture (compare Figures 86–89). This is not the case among Mesopotamian figurine types, even when those types seem potentially integrated as depicting different aspects of a single subject (compare Figures 91 and 92).

To account for this subtle divergence between the cases, I propose that in Central Anatolia a suite of themes derived ultimately from the Seated Anthropomorph had entered long-term structure as

a set, with rich but also malleable metaphoric significance. In Mesopotamia, any such inheritances from the Seated Anthropomorph were multiple and disparate, no longer related as a set.

Yet, during the sixth millennium B.C., there were two points of specific thematic content shared between Mesopotamia and Anatolia: the prominent pubic triangle and the hands-to-breasts gesture. In the following section, I conclude my analysis of the Seated Anthropomorph with that development.

Pubic Triangles, Hands on Breasts, and the Topography of Long-Term Structure

The picture that emerged in the preceding discussion is one of widespread sharing of the Seated Anthropomorph complex through 7000 B.C., with, thereafter, increasing regional differentiation in transformations on its constituent themes. I will pull that together into a history of patterning among Neolithic figurines as differentially promoting the various modes of analysis for prehistoric imagery. However, it is first necessary to ponder thematic convergence between Mesopotamia and Anatolia in the sixth millennium B.C. as a reversal of that trend toward differentiation or even as a symptom of primordial unity. The second idea is a position argued by Schmandt-Besserat for the hands-to-breasts gesture.[122]

Indeed, particularly if we ignore the specific details of whether hands (or tips of arms) are on breasts, under breasts, under and supporting breasts, or between breasts, the gesture in question is traceable to some of the earliest female imagery of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (Mureybet; see Figure 73). Schmandt-Besserat's point of departure is one of the PPNB plaster statues of 'Ain Ghazal (Figure 9a). We can add various Later-PPN figurines and certain Çatalhöyük "statuettes" as plausible precedents to the greatly expanded prominence of this gesture in Hacılar Level VI. During the sixth millennium, the gesture was repeated with stereotyped regularity in the Lakes Region in Anatolia (upper levels at Hacılar, Höyücek Sanctuaries 1 and 2) and in Mesopotamia (see Figures 88, 90, and 95).

These recurrences are certainly intriguing; nevertheless, I find them unconvincing as a continuity of content in long-term structure. There is, of course, the potential for reinvention of the gesture – something similar characterizes Valdivia figurines of Ecuador around 2500 B.C. (see Figure 14a,b,d,h), not a case anyone would link historically to those being considered here. However, there also are significant changes in the manifestation of the gesture during the more than three millennia between Mureybet and Arpachiyah. Through 6200 B.C., its "history" can be traced only by plucking positive instances from among masses of negative ones. By contrast, after 5900 B.C., the gesture in some cases dominates entire collections (Chagar Bazar, Tell Halaf, Höyücek, Hacılar upper levels). Expressions of this gesture underwent a transformation in the late seventh to early sixth millennium B.C. It is only at that point that the gesture becomes predominant in any collection – and, shortly thereafter, it dominates multiple collections at great distances from one another. That sort of patterning suggests *borrowing* as the important process and, therefore, shallow rather than deep derivation.

The pubic triangle is still more clear-cut in this respect. It is not among the themes that constitute the Seated Anthropomorph, and occurrences before the sixth millennium – for example, on a single, schematic, Later PPNB figurine from Sabi Abyad II – are exceedingly rare. Its widespread popularity was sudden. For instance, it is not particularly prominent in the large collection from Hacılar Level VI but it becomes common in upper layers at that site. Again, these patterns

have the character of borrowing and suggest a shallow (early sixth millennium B.C.) rather than deep–historical derivation. Noting the temporal coincidences in the spread of these traits, I suggest that what we have here is a substantive change in structure, something like the spread of the Seated Anthropomorph complex more than two thousand years earlier. The new "complex" of themes may be understood as incorporating attenuated traits of the Anthropomorph, but it is better understood as something fundamentally new, an important wrinkle in long-term structure and an appropriate place to end a history of the Seated Anthropomorph.

Toward a Prehistory of "Goddesses"

The methodological challenge under consideration is the problem of analytical essentialism in the archaeology of long-term structures. Once we recognize evidence of such structures in ancient expressive culture, how do we know when to stop? Attention to the way that patterning among the images promotes or hinders each potentially applicable analytical mode once again is instructive.

The particular case I have chosen is one that has long occasioned interest, controversy, and even passion: the deep prehistory of goddesses in the ancient Near East. Of course, ancient deities are interpretive social constructs, whereas the basic analytical problem here concerns the movement *from* archaeological evidence *to* social interpretation. Therefore, the basic question becomes: If we start with figurines, should our analytical journey take a route that ends with "goddess" as interpretive outcome?

That question is asked sequentially across a temporal series to create a history of the invitations to analysis embedded in material patterns – and a history needs to have a central subject. I have chosen as subject that cluster of themes dubbed the Seated Anthropomorph complex in Chapter 4, a choice that draws in most of the early imagery in which traditional interpretations find evidence of a primordial Neolithic Goddess. I have traced themes of the Seated Anthropomorph over the course of the Neolithic era, applying at each step my guide to comparison of imagery as a means of identifying likely points of structural transformation. Additional tools at hand for composing all of this into a history include four temporal schemes (continuity, divergence from an original unity, convergence through interaction, and borrowing) and four "scenarios" (the Goddess thesis, continuity of signification, metaphor-not-goddess, and imagery as a reflection of social conditions).

The Seated Anthropomorph complex consists of a cluster of interrelated themes observable on small clay or stone figurines of the Later PPN. Femaleness, signaled by breasts and perhaps also the form of fleshy buttocks and thighs, is one of those themes, but it is hardly universal among images that I identify as Seated Anthropomorphs. It is important here because at the *intersection* of two dimensions of iconicity that constitute the thematic complex, there resides a seated, fleshy woman with a simple head and a gesture that directs visual attention to thighs, stomach, or breasts. Along one dimension, she is contrasted with a range of other subjects. Along the other dimension, there is a progressive schematization of the seated, anthropomorphic form, which loses naturalism of the face, differentiated arms, female breasts, and, finally, obesity to become a bit of clay with a minimally human shape that nevertheless still hints at a seated posture. The seated females seem to be related to the minimally human "blobs" in that they collectively reference choices on the part of figurine makers between a graded series of possibilities for schematic reduction of the human form. In other words, this second dimension involves significance that emerges from the objects rather than from the subject matter they depict. Although all artworks signify in this way, this dimension is particularly strong among Later-PPN figurines.

Interpreting Ancient Figurines

The Seated Anthropomorph took shape as a complex around 8500 B.C. In the previous millennium, figurines were rare. Still, in collections from the Southern Levant to the Taurus Mountains, we can identify many of the individual traits that would comprise the Anthropomorph, only not as yet organized into the complex. Patterning among figurines of this time generally invites application of the same analytical modes that are appropriate to the investigation of the Seated Anthropomorph after 8500 B.C. The most prominent exception is at Mureybet, where two figurines plausibly bear "attributes" pointing to a specific subject; however, two of the traits involved did not thereafter form part of the Seated Anthropomorph.

The recurrence of traits in systematic relationships to one another suggests that the Seated Anthropomorph complex from 8500 B.C. was the product of a richly developed schema for converting some set of ideas into tangible iconic form. It seems possible to view the schema as lodged in a structure with substantial spatiotemporal continuity. Any such structure was more a source of creative inspiration than a rigid determinant of practice. Certainly, it generated plenty of localized variation and experiment. Yet, in terms of how each case promotes or discourages analytical modes, the experiments have a similar character. The lack of sharing of imagery between clay figurines and other iconic objects (e.g., large stone sculptures) directs the analyst to investigate the *use* of the figurines. Analysis of the figurines as a window on society, in contrast, has only a limited applicability to these materials, and the results of any successful applications will likely vary from one collection to another.

Aside from the Seated Anthropomorph, there are few hints of attributes or complex narrative suggesting specificity of subject matter – a point that, combined with the lack of similar imagery on statuary, steers us firmly away from the notion of deities. What about the Seated Anthropomorph itself? In Chapter 4, I suggested that the thematic complex as a whole – particularly the gradation of schematization – could have had referential specificity. One possibility is that differential schematization simultaneously represented a set of subjects and posited interconnections between them. My specific suggestions were that the integrated series linked ideas and values (at the schematic end of the continuum) to the instantiation of those ideas in social settings (at the naturalistic end). Something along these lines would account for those aspects of the Seated Anthropomorph that hint at specificity of subject without providing a case for those subjects having been deities. In terms of my scenarios, the PPN Seated Anthropomorph would have referenced values and metaphors rather than a specific, named subject – but metaphors with a relatively narrow applicability, delimited by the purposes for which the figurines were made and used.

Whatever those uses, the generative schema of the Seated Anthropomorph – and perhaps a particular set of motivating practices – spread widely through borrowing after 8500 B.C. and was reproduced as structure with considerable continuity through at least 7000 B.C. The continued integrity of the complex in some collections (e.g., Sarab) until as late as 6200 B.C. suggests perpetuation of the structure in some areas. Other collections from the first half of the seventh millennium appear to capture the interwoven themes in the process of unraveling.

It is specifically in these collections, where Seated Anthropomorph themes themselves are somehow altered or rearranged, that for the first time we find patterning pointing to specificity of subject, symbolic resonance, and potentially deities. The stone figure from 'Ain Ghazal, with rolls of fat on its flanks and a special disposal context, is merely suggestive as a potential deity, but it could mark an intermediary stage in the development of the Yarmukian matron. At Çatalhöyük, by contrast, we find a profusion of subjects extending beyond anything we would expect associated with the Anthropomorph of the eighth millennium. Patterns point to complex narrative – a particularly rich mythology more than simple deity images. A third case is Mezraa Teleilat, where there is a symbolic inversion of Anthropomorph themes involving a gradation between schematic

phallus effigies and seated males. The case for these as depictions of a deity is better than that at contemporary Çatalhöyük or 'Ain Ghazal. Lest I be accused of reversing Renaud's pronouncement (Chapter 1) to suggest that "The first goddess was a god!," let me hasten to emphasize that the impact of any such deity was localized and transitory. That observation raises a more general question: Could it be that prehistoric Near Eastern deities were products of long-term structure but not structural in and of themselves?

After approximately 6500 B.C., the Seated Anthropomorph disappeared as a recognizable complex. Its constituent themes lived on, sometimes in clusters traceable to some portion of the iconic range of the original complex, but often with primary visual emphasis accorded to novel traits. Figurine makers of this era seem to have selected from and then reworked elements of the complex. It is in the resulting collections that, for the first time, application of my guide to comparison everywhere reveals hints of specific subjects and, in some cases, quite likely deities.

An important factor here in the Ceramic Neolithic is divergence, manifested as regional differences in the reworking of Seated Anthropomorph elements. Even if people in the Southern Levant, Central Anatolia, and Mesopotamia drew on a shared legacy of the Seated Anthropomorph as they developed novel iconic strategies, they produced divergent results: a "matron" festooned with redundant attributes in the Yarmukian case, an outpouring of differentiated subjects in Central Anatolia, and a diversification of Anthropomorph–descended figurines into incomparable categories in Mesopotamia.

Although there were these larger regional proclivities, the figurine sequences in each region are studded with horizons: the widespread adoption of highly recognizable artifact forms for a relatively brief period. Sometimes there is continuity in subject matter across successive horizons that appears stylistic in character (e.g., Çatalhöyük and Hacılar). In other cases, subject matter seems integral to the horizon. Among the latter are the two best cases for depictions of a deity: the Yarmukian matron and the Halaf "goddess." (The first label I adopt from Michele Miller, whereas the second is my own term of convenience, which should be understood as referring to only a subset of those Mesopotamian figures traditionally labeled "mother-goddess figurines.") Each complex is restricted in distribution across space but, perhaps more interesting, each is restricted in *time*. The Yarmukian matron, despite what seems to be a gradual emergence from Seated Anthropomorph themes, is gone from the archaeological record of the later Ceramic Neolithic in the Southern Levant. The Halaf "goddess" coalesced only in the sixth millennium (I have not attempted to assess any legacy in the 'Ubaid period).

Assuming that these were deities, we have the same pattern noted for Mezraa Teleilat: the best evidence for deities appearing in localized complexes, coherent in style and iconography, with distributions at scales smaller than any overarching structures. Of course, even after 6500 B.C., femaleness in imagery is not solely or even primarily about deities. In Central Anatolia, deities – probably localized in time and space – may be involved, but the diversity of subject matter in the naturalistic strand is a cause for concern. Are we mainly dealing with female characters in a rich mythology? One possibility is that both goddesses and myths were the outcomes of structuring principles that took a set of themes derived ultimately from the PPN Seated Anthropomorph as symbolically productive for explaining, motivating, and governing social interactions.

I have conducted two sorts of analyses in this chapter, tracing substantive themes in Neolithic imagery and conducting a more abstract assessment of how manifestations of those themes prompt choices among analytical modes. In terms of substance, the evidence suggests one structure from the mid-ninth through the end of the eighth millennium, sporadic persistence and reworking of its themes in the seventh millennium, and sharing of a new structure during the sixth millennium

B.C. Application of the guide to comparison indicates that the unraveling of thematic unity after 7000 B.C. corresponded to fundamental structural transformation. Although individual themes may have continued, they were manifested in new ways, with patterns increasingly favorable to the application of iconographic and symbolic analysis.

In the history I infer from these two strands of investigation, later Neolithic goddesses – and perhaps in one case a god – can be traced as divergences from the shared singularity of the Seated Anthropomorph complex. That pattern of divergence bears some resemblances to the scenario I termed the Goddess thesis, but there are two crucial points of departure. First is the rapid tempo of emergence and disappearance that characterizes the better cases for deities. It appears most promising to regard deities as localized perturbations of long-term structure rather than as themselves composing structure. Second, although goddesses seem to be part of diverging patterns of image making in the seventh and sixth millennium B.C., the structural unity from which they diverge was not itself a deity. Metaphor-not-goddess is a promising path toward characterization of the subject matter of the Seated Anthropomorph – my somewhat more specific suggestion involved values and their instantiation in social settings. Goddesses are thus best understood as an *emergent phenomenon* of the seventh and sixth millennia B.C. During that time, people devised deities from symbolic substance that originally had not been divine.

Plausible deities (or, in other cases, complex mythological narratives) emerged in something of a cascade after 7000 B.C., inviting an attempt at explanation. Could an appeal to changing social conditions – developments of societal complexity, inequality, or the like – account for these developments? Serious consideration of that issue is beyond the scope of what I have set out to accomplish here, but it seems worth highlighting reasons for caution. There is the considerable temporal dispersion of the cases, but there also are serious concerns about the appropriate scale – or scales – at which an account of changing social conditions should be framed for making sense of deities manifested as localized complexes.

Grand History as a Category of Inquiry

Grand-historicist work returns us to a common component of traditional interpretations of figurines. Today, the entire category of grand-historicist interpretation can appear hopelessly compromised along with the specific version crafted by traditional scholarship. If we are to resuscitate grand history, it will be necessary to address two strands of essentialism – theoretical and analytical – that have bedeviled the Goddess. Recent historicist archaeology, moving from contextualism toward grand history, provides the means to address theoretical essentialism (Chapter 2). However, analytical essentialism – in which efforts to trace continuities in structure through vast reaches of space and time become self-fulfilling and unfalsifiable – remains an obstacle. It would be an exaggeration to claim that my guide to comparison solves all the problems of analytical essentialism – indeed, I found myself again on difficult ground in grappling with large versus small figurine collections of the Later PPN – but the framework has been distinctly useful in signaling likely wrinkles or ruptures in figurine making as a clue to structure in the Neolithic of the Near East from 9500 through 5300 B.C.

Because recent scholarship avoids this entire category of work, existing grand-historical proposals relevant to Neolithic figurines involve goddesses in some way. The most prominent is the Goddess thesis, the idea that historical goddesses of the third millennium B.C. or later diverged over many thousands of years from a single, shared Neolithic Goddess. I examined imagery from a period of 4,200 years, considering both actual themes represented and the degree to which their

manifestation in any particular case might suggest depiction of deities. The result was a grand-historical proposal to counter the Goddess thesis: a widely shared structure between 8500 and 7000 B.C. that involved a theme of femaleness but not a Goddess or even goddesses; disintegration of that structural unity through regional divergence after 7000 B.C.; an enhanced role for specific subjects including deities beginning only with the period of regional divergence; goddesses of the seventh and sixth millennia localized and ephemeral permutations on long-term structure rather than themselves lodged in structure; and, despite such strong fine-grained texture and divergent regional proclivities, a new sharing of themes in the sixth millennium, suggesting renewed structural unity. Although I have ended my scrutiny of the evidence in the later sixth millennium, observed diversity among Neolithic deities raises the possibility that correspondences between goddesses in the much later historical era might be the product of convergence through interaction rather than the persistent trace of primordial unity.

All that remains for consideration is the larger relevance of the formulation I am proposing: How does it relate to other scholarship on Neolithic imagery and belief? I restrict the discussion to four brief points.

First, figural evidence in the ancient Near East exhibits coherence at vast scales of space and time. As a result, the category of inquiry in which the Goddess thesis is framed should not be discarded along with the Goddess herself. The evidence demands consideration at that scale. Indeed, it is likely that the infuriating persistence of the Goddess actually has an empirical basis: She will not cede the field until a viable replacement – at an appropriate spatiotemporal scale – is proffered.

Second, the structural history proposed here takes a step toward replacement of the Goddess thesis. Still, my efforts hardly resolve the matter. By carving out an era of focus rather smaller than that of the Goddess (four thousand as opposed to eight thousand years) and then finding such strong texture in that epoch that my central subject is declared gone by the middle of the sixth millennium B.C., I have proposed a history that although more ambitious in scope than recent (anti-Goddess) histories of Neolithic figurine making[123] is nevertheless framed at a smaller spatiotemporal scale than the Goddess thesis. Even if my specific proposals on structural history survive critical scrutiny, it remains unclear whether they are of a scale large enough to fully account for the empirical coherences that perpetuate the Goddess.

Third, if my proposals are more modest in spatiotemporal scale than the Goddess thesis, they are still of larger scale than most scholarship on Neolithic figurines, even of most synthetic efforts concerning such imagery. What is the chance that they constitute the seeds of a new metanarrative? Certainly, I hope not, but more relevant than such sentiments is my effort to devise an analytical framework constituted so as to resist a transition to metanarrative – to resist, in other words, imposition of a preconceived storyline on small-scale inquiry to yield interpretations that remain impervious to falsification. My most obvious defense against any drift to metanarrative is an irreducible lack of specificity to the insights that my analytical procedures generate. Frustrating as that may be, the lack of specificity signals incompleteness, an advantageous quality if we are concerned with combating the false sense of self-sufficiency that animates metanarrative. Analytical procedures that yield only incomplete interpretations clearly require the complement of other procedures. The basic idea for grand history would be similar to the case of generic understanding of figurines considered in Chapter 5. If there is patterning at grand spatiotemporal scales, then histories constructed at smaller scales must acknowledge some outer boundaries to their potential interpretive range. At the same time, a grand-historicist interpretation should be sensitive to the richness and nuance of smaller-scale work. In other words, efforts at these different scales should be neither completely autonomous nor fully independent. A grand-historical synthesis framed abstractly as a history of changing invitations to the pursuit of available

analytical modes would provide a mild, salutary governance to interpretive creativity at smaller scales.

A fourth and final question is the relationship between understandings developed here of the specific phenomena under investigation and those proposed by other scholars. It is important to emphasize that my insights on structure – derived solely from a scrutiny of figurines with more limited attention to other sorts of images – in no way constitute a total picture of Neolithic symbolic structures such as is attempted, for instance, by Verhoeven in his 2002 *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* article. My efforts can be regarded as preparing figurines to play a more productive role in the sort of analysis he conducts.

All of the various themes of the Seated Anthropomorph, including differential schematization, have been previously described in reports on Later-PPN figurines (Broman Morales on Jarmo is a good example), but my proposal that the iconicity of the figurines be viewed as fundamentally two-dimensional constitutes a new way of thinking about the material. My proposal is that signification resided as much in subtle relations of form (referencing the making of the objects) as it did in contrasting relations between different subjects.

Application of my guide to comparison points strongly toward the investigation of *use* as central to any explanation of PPN figurines, yet I have not attempted to characterize use. There is a notable convergence among observers favoring the idea that the objects were vehicles of magic.[124] Because the act itself is so often central in magic or apotropaic efforts, such uses would be compatible with my claim that figurines referenced their own making (and the making of other figurines) as much as their manifest subject matter. Still, the recurrence of such similar conclusions on use indicates that this interpretation has acquired a universalist status as a general understanding of PPN figurines. An analysis of its consistent applicability and productivity, modeled on that conducted here in Chapter 5 for Formative figurines, appears to be in order.

My findings suggesting structural change after 7000 B.C. – with the structures involved understood to include only those fragments of the totality of Neolithic symbolic structures on which figurines might inform us – are compatible with Voigt's work on the functional interpretation of both earlier and later Neolithic figurines.[125] Compatibility with Kuijt and Chesson's history of Levantine image making during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPNA–PPNC) is less clear. Their work is one of the best available syntheses of Near Eastern Neolithic figurines at a regional scale (larger than the individual site but smaller than the Fertile Crescent as a whole), and it encompasses all the richness and nuance appropriate to such efforts. Kuijt and Chesson convincingly argue for a change between PPNA and PPNB figurines, although I consider the changes in imagery involved as less profound than those of the seventh millennium. I am more skeptical concerning the robustness of the social interpretations they proffer for changes in the imagery. I am concerned about both confounding factors such as the vagaries of preservation and problems of expansive implications of what are often strands of universalist logic. What Kuijt and Chesson do particularly effectively is provide an inspiring model for this scale of synthetic work.

Chapter 7

On Figurines, Femaleness, and Comparison

When we ponder what to say about prehistoric figurines, our path toward interpretation starts with observable characteristics of the objects. The question I have been pursuing is: When characteristics in one context resemble characteristics in another, should that comparative observation play a role in our interpretation and, if so, what role?

Because our interpretation is to be social in content, at some point we need to shift any perceptions of *material* similarity to the *social* terms in which our conclusions will be framed. Figurine analysts tend to reformulate quickly from the material to the social. At an early stage in the analysis, they choose basic postulates concerning the social implications of figurines. That move sharply delimits the field of possible final social interpretations. Although narrowing the field of interpretations is the entire point of analysis, it proves difficult – based on material observations – to justify one set of social terms over another. With the figurines providing no clear guidance, evidence tends to be overwhelmed by theory. These kinds of problems are pervasive in archaeology,[1] but they are particularly tenacious when the topic of study is expressive material culture.

One result can be interpretations so impervious to falsification that material patterns simply do not matter. It is easy, in retrospect, to chortle over a traditional analytical framework that took "an emphasis on sexual characteristics and disregard for appendages" to be evidence that figurines belonged "to the Mother-goddess cult" but that blithely assigned figurines with arms and no sexual characteristics to the same cult.[2] However, when the problem at hand is the explanation of resemblances between figurines from different contexts, reformulation to social terms risks the same problems, no matter how sophisticated our (social) theory.

The challenges of comparison in the study of prehistoric figurines thus center on the development of convincing linking arguments in the movement from material observations to inferential conclusions. I have treated both of the sometimes antagonistic traditions of universalism and contextualism as valuable sources of conceptual tools and attempted to look more closely at the evidence for guidance on which of multiple potential interpretive paths to take. Putting those goals into practice proves far from easy. Still, this sort of analytical work should be high on the agenda of a pluralist archaeology. Pluralism in various guises is now pervasive, but emphasis tends

to be on its theoretical dimensions. Here, instead, my attention has been focused on the analytical challenges it brings – as those are manifested in the study of one particular class of artifact.

Universalism and Contextualism

I have treated universalism and contextualism as rhetorical forms rather than paradigms. They provide concepts, strategies, and formats – that is, resources – that we may draw on as we attempt to interpret prehistoric figurines. It is true that universalism and contextualism are often opposed to one another, but that is not a tension we should expect to resolve decisively by (for instance) choosing one over the other. The opposition is more an ongoing dialectic, perhaps even a "motor of disciplinary debate."[3]

Universalist and contextualist analyses draw on different logic, and the interpretations they generate are different in form. Because the claims made in each case require divergent strategies of empirical scrutiny, different analytical tools have been the focus of attention within each tradition. By viewing those as resources, we free ourselves to deploy them strategically at different points in an analysis.

Thus, analysis is not to be conceived of as only hypothesis testing or only contextualization. We can divide up the explanatory problem into domains that are promising for work from one per-spective or the other. For instance, recourse to hypothesis testing at the end of Chapter 1 indicated (unexpectedly) that historicism at grand spatiotemporal scales deserved serious consideration. We also can allow an interpenetration of the two. In Chapter 4, I used a contextualist strategy of com-parison to address the universalist question of whether there might be a cross-cultural explanation for femaleness as theme in prehistoric figurines. In Chapter 5, I argued that contextualist appeals to universalist logic create the need for a category of comparative inquiry beyond the individual context.

Reformulation into Social Terms

Even with the resources of universalism and contextualism in hand, our fundamental rhetorical dilemma – that is, translation from material observation to the social terms from which explanations may be developed – remains. I do not believe it is solvable by recourse to general-purpose analytical procedures, and, in Chapter 3, I proposed a framework particularly tailored to the analysis of imagery. The thread of insight I followed to that framework was that analysts with different theoretical outlooks ask the same questions of images (e.g., "What do they depict?"). The questions themselves, along with certain empirical criteria according to which they might be answered, are at least partly independent of archaeologists' competing theoretical orientations.

That is an important observation, given the present challenge. Our problem is the tendency for theory to so overwhelm evidence in the reformulation of material patterns into social terms that any resulting interpretation is impervious to falsification. However, if there are characteristic questions that all analysts ask of images and those can be associated with established procedures for engaging question and evidence – in other words, if there are analytical modes for interpreting images that begin to meet some of Wylie's criteria for stability in linking arguments[4] – then we might be able to reinforce the ability of evidence to resist the arbitrary impositions of theory. The idea would be to postpone reformulation into social terms and to conduct a preliminary synthesis of patterning. With such a synthesis in hand, we could delimit promising and unpromising directions

for interpretation of the imagery. We would then have achieved our goal of enlisting the evidence in our choice among interpretive perspectives.

That goal would seem to require identification of all possible analytical modes for the study of imagery – a daunting prospect indeed, especially given the evident diversity of interpretations in art history. That discipline as a source of stable linking arguments is further undermined when we realize that if we seek "security" (in Wylie's terms) by borrowing the most recent theoretical currents, we jeopardize "independence" because the theories we would borrow have themselves been imported to art history and are actually the same theories currently popular in the social interpretation of prehistoric figurines. My solution was to turn for inspiration to an older generation of art historians: George Kubler, Erwin Panofsky, and T. J. Clark. I combined their suggestions concerning important analytical domains with my own previous rhetorical analyses of works on prehistoric figurines to produce a simple map of the ways that the significance of images can be conceptualized.[5]

My classification of approaches begins by imagining analysts as confronting two basic decisions. First, is significance to be treated as a surface or structural phenomenon? Second, should significance be regarded as residing in subject matter, form, or social context? The intersection of these questions produces a matrix of six possible ways in which significance of imagery may be constituted analytically. Each cell of the matrix can be associated with characteristic orienting questions such as "What do the images depict?" and "For what purpose were they used?" (see Figure 17). Those questions, in turn, can be linked to analytical modes that provide established strategies for answering the questions through an engagement with evidence.

The framework is certainly only moderately stable as a source of linking arguments, but some stability is preferable to none at all. Independence is exemplified by cases in which analysts working from different theoretical perspectives nevertheless converge in posing the same questions of figurines. My argument for security was rather more abstract. On inspiration from Kubler, I looked for it in chronic sources of debate rather than specific methodological prescriptions. Art historians are exasperated by divisions such as subject matter, form, and social context because they have been wrangling over them forever. That history of wrangling, I suggested, provided a degree of security, even if no single synthetic scheme could ever satisfactorily capture the divisions.

Art historians routinely seek to address all of the questions identified in my map of analytical modes (and more). Making such progress on prehistoric works can be frustrating. Still, ideally, a study of any particular collection of figurines progresses as far as possible in all of the modes.

Our concern here, however, is the interpretation of resemblances between figurines from different contexts. In this case, not all analytical modes are equally relevant. If images from two contexts resemble one another because the same subject is depicted in each case (e.g., St. Sebastian; see Figure 1), then we need to ask what the images depict. That question would prompt us to select iconography as an analytical mode.

The problem, of course, is that the sharing of subject matter is unknown at the outset of the analysis. To reach that point, we need somehow to decide during the course of the analysis to emphasize (in this case) iconography. I concluded Chapter 3 by suggesting that certain characteristic empirical patterns invite application of one analytical mode while discouraging or even hindering application of another. Indeed, those seesaw relations can be organized, on inspiration from Kubler's scheme, into a "triadic pairing" (see Figure 22).

Because it is really the seesaw relations noted in Figure 22 that make the scheme of Figure 17 concretely useful in addressing the challenges of comparison, it is important to ask again the question of security of these relations. It is worth noting that Nanette Salomon, at the outset of a study on Dutch genre painting, echoes observations that I have previously made concerning

window-on-society analysis of prehistoric figurines – specifically, that particular traditions of imagery can be more or less "propitious" for one type of analysis or another based on characteristics of the imagery.[6] Still, traditions of imagery are highly variable and any security here is modest. I noted certain exceptions and challenges in my review of analytical modes in Chapter 3. I also found, for instance, that certain figurines (e.g., the costumed, masked images from Paso de la Amada; see Figures 51 and 11e-g) demanded iconographic analysis but still remained suitable for window-on-society analysis in terms of social categories.

The seesaw relations between analytical modes were at the heart of my proposal for addressing the problem of reformulation into social terms. The idea was to apply the scheme (my guide to comparison) to the material patterns prior to reformulation. Application would yield an assessment of which analytical modes seem propitious or unpropitious in each case being compared. If we are prompted to choose different modes in each case, then prospects for a common explanation would be considerably diminished. If patterning prompts us onto the same analytical path in each case, then prospects for a shared explanation would be enhanced. Furthermore, because the available analytical modes are not equally relevant to all theoretical perspectives, by choosing modes based on a synthesis of patterning, we narrow the range of potential social interpretations that might ultimately be derived from the imagery. That narrowing, however, would have been done through a closer scrutiny of the imagery, without privileging any particular social theory. We would thus have bolstered the ability of the evidence to resist the imposition of theory and protected our eventual conclusions – at least, to some extent – against the problem of imperviousness to falsification.

Comparing Incomparable Objects

Prehistoric figurines were expressive creations that meant different things in different contexts. In that sense, they cannot be compared. Yet, these diminutive objects often resemble one another (e.g., Figures 6 and 35) or appear in similar archaeological contexts. As a result, analysts do not always suppress the urge to compare. A glance at figurines here is sufficient to remind us of figurines there. Of course, when we get serious about interpretation, we banish that thought and contextualize. Still, comparisons creep back in; indeed, when one considers interpretation as a rhetorical process leading toward the textual exposition of arguments designed to convince, it rapidly becomes clear that comparison across contexts is unavoidable. Even if the original contexts were each unique, our contextualizations mutually implicate one another.

The perception of resemblance, the banishment of the thought, and the unbidden return of comparison have larger resonances. Comparison has been a flashpoint in theoretical conflicts. On the one hand is universalism, in which comparisons are cross-cultural and the focus is on similarities. On the other hand is contextualism, which rejects any explanatory import to cross-cultural similarity and treats comparison as a heuristic tool for the explication of difference. My approach to the potential impasse is to keep open the categories of cross-*contextual* and even cross-*cultural* analysis but to pursue that work using contextualist strategies of comparison. There should be identifiable empirical conditions in which analysis would yield a verdict of "no common explanation." Furthermore, we do not directly compare figurines across contexts; instead, we compare contextualizations.

Thus, in Chapter 4, I never placed a Mesoamerican figurine next to a Gravettian figurine. Instead, I built toward syntheses of patterning within each unit to be compared by following the

principle of multiple local contextualizations, moving from smaller to larger scales. For each case, I ended up with patterns that recurred at the scale of the macro-unit. I then compared those results to the results from other macro-units.

The illustrations in this volume adhere to these contextualist principles. Most include multiple objects, thus inviting comparisons among them. However, in no case do I place figurines from different macro-units side by side in the same figure, and in most instances (except in Figures 6, 28, 35, and 95), the objects shown are all from one region or a single site.

When we move beyond the dichotomous idea that comparison should serve either universalism or contextualism, it becomes possible to recognize comparative challenges as always concrete and situational. Observed similarities between figurines of different contexts may lead us in various directions (or nowhere at all) depending on the nature of the observations and the analytical situation at hand. I briefly consider four such situations. The first provides a kind of central anchor for the study of prehistoric figurines: the analyst faced with the task of interpreting a particular collection. This is the most common analytical situation. It is also the most fundamental because such analyses are rarely repeated and the information produced becomes "evidence" for differently situated analyses.

The situation of the analyst confronted by a collection, although common and fundamental, does not occur in a vacuum. Prehistoric contexts with figurines are aggregated into the large spatiotemporal clusters that I have been calling macro-units. Analysts confronted with a set of figurines may note resemblances between their own collections and others at various distances in space or time, ranging in some cases across an entire macro-unit or even beyond. Even if analysts direct their attention resolutely on objects from a single context, their efforts raise issues of comparison. I have sought to establish the legitimacy – indeed, the importance – of three domains of cross-contextual interpretation, three additional analytical situations.

If analysis of a particular collection constitutes the first situation, a second involves relations between the interpretations of different collections within a macro-unit. Typically, there are numerous resemblances between the figurines in such cases (e.g., Figure 28) and yet each case is also unique. It seems reasonable to expect different contextualizations to resemble one another without being identical, but there has been little work on the mutual implications involved. For example, to make a localized translation between material observations and the social terms from which an interpretation can be constructed, figurine analysts often employ universalist logic. The expansive implications of that rhetorical move are left unexplored. Analysts might appeal to different universalist truths or all choose the same one, but these local moves have a large-scale import that cannot be assessed solely in the course of engagement with individual collections. It is necessary to identify another analytical situation, with its own goals, strategies, and standards of evaluation.

In Chapter 5, I proposed that to address expansive implications of contextualist appeals to universal truths, we could compare patterns across contexts before those patterns were reformulated in social terms. The goal would be to create a model of spatiotemporal texture not irrevocably formulated in social terms: It might provide well-chosen questions but no easy answers. At the end of Chapter 5, I offered a few trial statements on "Formative figurines" as a general phenomenon. The substance of those statements is perhaps less important at this point than the effort to work out the form cross-contextual insights of this type should take if they are to encourage, support, and improve local contextualizations rather than stifle them.

The basic reason for generic similarities among adjacent traditions is surely that they are historically related. A third analytical situation involves tracing those historical connections. Explanation

takes a different form here, with the focus on establishing networks of linkages between contexts. Currently, efforts of this sort are modest in scale. Rejection of the narrative of Old Europe or of the Mediterranean Great Goddess has been extended to include the entire category of grand-historical analysis. I argued in Chapters 1 and 6 that we need to retain grand history as a category of inquiry because patterning among figurines exhibits coherence at large spatiotemporal scales (my macro-units). Still, if we are to return to grand history, we must combat essentialism in at least two guises. I have focused on what I term analytical essentialism, in which the analyst's search for direct linkages between contexts generates *sameness* as a default postulate. The effort to identify a perpetuation of structures across spatiotemporal macro-units becomes self-fulfilling and thus impervious to falsification.

Again, we have an analytical situation with its own distinct set of challenges. The strategy I proposed in Chapter 6 postpones the shift from observed resemblance to postulate on long-term structure by exploring the texture of figurine patterns across the spatiotemporal unit being studied. Again, patterns are synthesized according to how they promote or hinder the various analytical modes available for the investigation of imagery. Textural wrinkles correspond to shifts among applicable analytical modes. Such shifts signal likely changes in interpretive outcomes of localized contextualizations. Shifts in the texture of patterning therefore signal likely points of structural rupture or transformation; they can be enlisted in the effort to forestall analytical essentialism.

A fourth analytical situation is work on the possibility that similarities between figurines from distant, independent contexts might deserve common cross-cultural explanation. The very idea is shunned by most recent interpreters of prehistoric figurines, but my results in Chapter 4 suggest that there is nothing to fear from entertaining the option, as long as we insist that "no common explanation" must be a possible outcome of analysis. The strong likelihood is that any such explanatory strands will contribute relatively little to the interpretation of figurines, but they may well contribute something, and negative results at the large scale should encourage greater discipline in the appeal to universalist logic at small scales.

In summary, the rise of contextualism puts the interpretation of prehistoric figurines on much firmer ground. The problems with prior cross-contextual work have been revealed, contextualist strategies of analysis have been worked out, and the importance of internal variability is firmly established.[7] Nevertheless, we cannot discard the entire category of cross-contextual analysis along with the discredited specific suggestions of our predecessors. Cross-contextual work of various sorts remains essential to any holistic understanding of prehistoric figurines.

I have argued for three specific domains of cross-contextual work. Those should not simply be subsumed into a unitary contextualist program because they each require different sorts of interpretive moves. They differ in the relations of relative stability that they posit between the general and the specific. They require different criteria of evaluation for assessing characteristic interpretive statements. The statements they generate have different ramifying implications. These conditions hold even if the statements produced by these differently situated analyses are ultimately woven together into a single interpretive text. A universalist passage within a context-specific interpretive work remains susceptible to scrutiny on universalist grounds, *especially* if the overall argument relies on the cross-contextual stability of the passage. The contextualist strategy of assessing the overall fit between an interpretation and the data from a particular context, valuable as it is, simply cannot address the critical implications of such universalist statements. In other words, analysis – even of a single artifact type – is a pluralistic process in the sense that an individual investigator must draw on multiple frameworks for the creation and evaluation of knowledge.

Femaleness and Figurines

Analysts who compare prehistoric figurines from different contexts have repeatedly, in widely distributed parts of the world, perceived "femaleness" to be among shared themes. Indeed, claims of recurrent femaleness provide the basis for the most ambitious cross-contextual interpretations of prehistoric figurines – such as Etienne Renaud's breathless proclamation that "The first god was a goddess!"

With claims of femaleness, however, linkages across contexts that at first may seem modest and unthreatening – "this figurine looks like that figurine" – take on larger implications. A perception of femaleness among figurines is already an interpretation with "social" content, even if it does not contain the full set of social terms necessary to craft an explanation. Furthermore, the linking of two contexts based on perceptions of femaleness as theme is a contentious move. To take "femaleness" out of its context-specific interrelations with all other dimensions of social differentiation is to risk returning to the essentialist position in which "woman" is a natural symbol, everywhere and always the same.

Given this cascade of problematic associations, it is not surprising that most investigators currently treat the perception of femaleness as an issue solely for context-specific work. However, I have been arguing that context-specific interpretation, although fundamental, cannot stand alone. I conclude by considering how my efforts in this volume could contribute toward a stance on femaleness and figurines, the most famous (or infamous?) of claims concerning cross-contextual linkages.

A preliminary point is that we must start with contextualism as a source of orienting principles. The initial perception of "femaleness" as a possible link between contexts is, in a sense, preanalytical. Analysis proper involves contextualizing those themes and comparing the contextualizations. I sketched an example in Chapter 2 with a comparison of three Formative collections from Mexico and Ecuador. The comparison emphasized the point (from Chapter 1) that any common thread of explanation for predominant femaleness would explain very little about each case. Yet, certain similarities in the themes associated with femaleness in those cases held out the possibility that there might be some cross-contextual insight to be gained there.

A second preliminary point is that the issue is as much or more one of rhetoric as it is one of (social) theory. The identification of femaleness as a recurring theme at large scales traditionally has been inextricably tangled in some version of Morss's "easy assumption" that the implications of femaleness were transparent and recurrent. Now we tend to discard that entire tangled mess on the grounds that to link contexts with a claim of recurring femaleness jeopardizes the effort to reveal contextual meanings by artificially extracting "femaleness" from among multiple, localized dimensions of social differentiation.

The verdict on traditional scholarship is well founded, but a central rhetorical point becomes lost in the commotion. Many current studies manage to avoid the easy assumption. They account for femaleness in the course of a context-specific synthesis, but they do so with logic that is implicitly universalist. For instance, they suggest that people in the case being studied made female figurines to express esteem for women, or to relieve the stress of threats to women's health, or as ideological tools in struggles for power over women. As I have repeatedly pointed out, the evidence that justifies such interpretation turns out to be so overburdened with theory that the interpretations are difficult to evaluate and even may be impervious to falsification.

Basically, all the theoretical moves and countermoves around issues of sex and gender make the rhetorical issues at play – the conditions of possibility for convincing arguments – appear to be fundamentally social. Lost in the shuffle is the fact that we are beginning not with a social

topic (gender across contexts) but rather with observations on objects (this figurine reminds us of that figurine). A significant rhetorical challenge is the reformulation of those observations in social terms. Disposing of the easy assumption is important, but that does not address a more basic interpretive issue.

It is thus necessary to peel back the various layers of theoretical debate and begin again with the original material observations. That was the starting point for each of my case studies. There we paused, delaying reformulation into social terms, and contemplated, on the one hand, potential interpretive paths and, on the other, observable patterns among the figurines. The idea was to use the latter as a guide to selection among the former, enlisting various analytical resources at appropriate junctures along the way.

My experiment with hypothesis testing in Chapter 1 directed attention to large-scale patterning in the occurrence of prehistoric figurines. If the presence of these objects in one context was unrelated to their presence in another, we would have expected random appearances and disappearances. Instead, prehistoric figurine making was clustered into macro-units of space that also persisted through time. This pattern raises the likelihood of widespread interlinkages between contexts and favors historicist explanation, even at grand scales.

Still, there are multiple macro-units of figurine making in which femaleness is a widely reported theme, including Paleolithic Eurasia, Jomon-period Japan, Mesoamerica, and the Neolithic of the Near East. The last case is surrounded by what I consider to be a huge "halo" of figurine traditions, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean and Southeastern Europe, with temporal extensions into the Bronze Age. It is far from obvious what sort of external factors the macro-units might share that could cause the making of female figurines. Furthermore, a link to "early stages" of agriculture was falsified by an accumulation of negative cases – a finding that called into question strands of universalist logic that are still to be found woven into contextualist studies.

The identification of distinct patterns, at very large scales, in simply the *occurrence* of figurines suggests a basic strategy for further inquiry. The large-scale clusters of figurine traditions become important units of analysis. We synthesize figurine patterns across a macro-unit, using the principle of multiple local contextualizations to build (from the bottom up) an understanding of material patterns as a textured set of promptings toward potential modes for the analysis of imagery. Work at grand history would then concentrate on a single macro-unit, whereas universalist efforts would begin by comparing the models of texture created for each macro-unit.

I pursued the latter goal in Chapter 4. By choosing as cases independent, originating, macro-unit–sized instances of figurine making (rather than cases of early villages, early agriculture, or the like) I was admittedly subjecting universalism to a particularly severe test. The question was whether there might be some recurring, external, universalist cause to the making of female figurines, but I was not choosing cases so as to favor a particular social cause. I was striving to take seriously the original source of the idea that there might be something here to explain: observations of the figurines. My goal was to assess the prospects for social explanation by enriching the initial observations.

I first considered to what extent "figurine" and "femaleness" would emerge through multiple contextualizations as valid categories across each macro-unit. I then applied my guide to comparison to the syntheses of patterning within each unit. These internal syntheses revealed considerable integrity to patterning across each unit, despite plenty of localized perturbations (fired clay at Dolní Věstonice; diversification of subjects and burials as context at Tlatilco) and sometimes significant transformations after the temporal boundaries I had set (the Near East after 7000 B.C.). Objects against which *figurine* can be contextually defined are consistent across individual units but differ significantly between units. There is a similar pattern within each macro-unit for the thematic

salience of femaleness and the other themes with which it is associated. Femaleness is salient and emphatically coded among Gravettian figurines, although there is variety in the subject matter as well as differences in schematization. Magdalenian figurines include the widely distributed profile figures among which femaleness is implicit but pervasive and associated with radical schematization. For Formative Mesoamerica, femaleness recurs but varies in salience and is often secondary to themes of social display suggested by attention to faces and elaborate headdresses. For the Later Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Near East, femaleness was among a cluster of traits (including obesity, seated posture, and emphasis on overall bodily form) distributed across a gradation of schematization with sufficient regularity to suggest conceptual relations between seated obese women and minimally human lumps of clay. Exceptions and complications in each of the four cases are localized in space or, if widespread, ephemeral in time; thus, they are "exceptions" to larger patterns. The integrity of the larger patterns is sufficient to suggest relations of dependence between cases at the scale of the macro-unit – once again directing us to consider grand-historical analysis.

The most immediate goal in Chapter 4 was an assessment of the prospects for a common, cross-cultural explanation for female figurines, a topic I addressed by applying my guide to comparison to each macro-unit. The result was that consideration of the *use* of figurines appeared the only plausible domain for work that would yield a common thread of explanation. I suggested that if indeed there was something common here, it was likely to be disappointing in universalist terms. Perhaps originally in each case, figurines were made by women and for women, resulting in subject matter that was about women. This idea has various attractions and it would not necessarily be contradicted if we were to find that, once established, the traditions had complicated histories that included changes in the identities of figurine makers. Fingerprint analysis eventually may prove helpful in the empirical scrutiny of this suggestion.[8]

Overall, the end result is not promising for universalist theorizing on "female figurines." That outcome is important. It implies that an analyst accounting for femaleness as theme, for example, among Gravettian figurines, can basically ignore any superficially similar theme among Mesoamerican figurines. However, the result implies more than that. We need to be suspicious of any explanation of femaleness that is so generic that it could apply to another macro-unit. In other words, our freedom to pursue different interpretations in these cases is also a responsibility. We must ensure that any interpretation for the Gravettian case is sufficiently distinctive that it *cannot* be applied in Mesoamerica. The evidence demands that.

In multiple ways, figurine patterns invite historicist work within macro-units. Because I have emphasized very small-scale work and very large-scale work, it is important to point out that there is considerable scope for regional research in an historicist vein. My focus, however, is on the more charged topic of grand history, with its whiff of metanarrative and associations with a putative primordial Goddess. Historical connections at grand scales of space and time were suggested by the nature of patterning in each macro-unit. It is clear that specific grand histories of figurine making will be quite different in each case. I tried to produce a narrative at this scale only for the Near East in a unit expanded from that considered in Chapter 4 to include the entire Neolithic era, expansively defined, from 9500 through 5300 B.C.

The question I posed was: If we start out with Neolithic figurines, is our analytical journey likely to take a route ending with goddesses as an interpretive outcome? If (plausibly) there were deities, then the follow-up question would be: What is the spatiotemporal texture of patterning favorable to the identification of such specific subjects? My analysis supports the plausibility of historical linkages between contexts across very large scales of space (the Fertile Crescent as a whole) and time (four thousand years), but the texture of patterning also suggests significant structural transformation. On the issue of goddesses, I conclude that the theme of femaleness likely

had metaphoric qualities in societies across the Near East during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic, but figurines did not depict deities. Nevertheless, Later-PPN figurine imagery probably provided the symbolic material from which certain goddesses (and perhaps, in one case, a god) were created – but only after 7000 B.C. Goddesses of the seventh and sixth millennia B.C. were *localized elaborations* on shared structures rather than structural entities in grand-historicist terms.

The general implication of this effort is that femaleness as a theme in claims for interconnections between contexts is indeed relevant to investigations at large spatiotemporal scales – investigations that could (for instance) yield accounts of symbolic structures in the *longue durée*. Still, it is clear that expressions of femaleness at such scales – including interconnections with other themes and implications for choices among analytical modes – have histories involving significant transformations. It appears that femaleness as theme can be engaged with at such scales, but the results will be less a static explanation ("Goddess") than a narrative of structural change.

The most fundamental analytical situation is the interpretation of a particular collection. I have argued that analysis at that level must be supported or complemented by cross-contextual work of various sorts, not least because of expansive implications of statements made in context-specific arguments. What are the larger implications of a perception of "femaleness" among figurines from a particular context?

Obviously, a major agenda at that scale is a full-blown contextualist scrutiny, in which femaleness would emerge only as one theme among others. We can look for redundant patterning that might support the identification of categories. We could then ask whether those categories have clear social content (might they instead be stylistic?) and whether we can read claims concerning social difference from them.

Another concern, however, is the rhetorical challenge of constructing context-specific arguments. Again, universalist truths deployed at this level implicate other cases with similar figurines. Sometimes such universalist formulations explicitly bring in femaleness (e.g., women propitiated recent ancestors in domestic settings) but typically they are more general: Figurines were the product of a magical worldview, they were used in initiation rites, they were points of reference in the negotiation of social relations, or they shaped people's subjectivities. Either way, a choice from among these strands of universalist logic limits the range of possible context-specific explanations for femaleness. Thus, where femaleness emerges as an important theme across a macro-unit, contextualist efforts to account for it cannot remain completely autonomous. Any strand of argument on femaleness that seems attractive for contextualist application should be subjected to scrutiny for rhetorical power (Is it consistently applicable? Is it productive?) beyond the context under consideration (see Chapter 5).

Another implication of larger-scale comparative work for the interpretation of figurines in particular contexts is the need for great care in reliance on generic universalist arguments in the attempt to account for femaleness as theme. The results of Chapter 1 suggest that any appeal to "early agriculture" is particularly dubious. At the very least, explanations for femaleness in a particular context should strive to rely on certain elements unique to the larger macro-unit in which that case occurs.

Still, the four suggestions on femaleness that I extracted from recent writings on figurines remain attractive. In a discarded version of Chapter 4, I tried to find a way to test the four against one another with the aid of my guide to comparison. The idea was that the mix of prompts toward analytical modes observed in the patterns of a particular case might favor one explanation or another. Ultimately, I decided that the promptings were not sufficiently robust to undergird a general effort at explanation. Yet, there may be some differential viability to the four suggestions based on results from the application of my guide to comparison. A claim that figurines were

produced to ward off threats to women's health would be more plausible where application of the Voigt–Ucko framework (see Chapter 5) suggests use of figurines as magical devices. The suggestion that people made female figurines when the bodies, labor, or offspring of women were the subject of ideological struggle would be most compatible with patterns favorable to application of window-on-society analysis.

In summary, the perception of resemblances between prehistoric artworks from different contexts is indeed a reaction of the naïve layperson, the province of an under-theorized traditionalism – a question of the first glance. However, such perceptions should not be banished, because they will creep back in uninvited. Their very naïveté – the fact that they are prompted by a first glance that then needs to be self-consciously suppressed – can lead to deeper insight into the possibilities for the interpretation of prehistoric imagery. Moving from similarities and differences between objects to similarities and differences between interpretations produces insights that can support and enrich the interpretation of specific instances.

Notes

Introduction

1. Binford and Sabloff 1982; Hodder 1991:15–18; Wylie 2002: chapter 12.
2. See Trigger 2006: chapter 8; Johnson 1999: chapters 3, 4, 7.
3. Johnson 1999: chapter 12.
4. Kosso 1991; VanPool and VanPool 1999; Pauketat 2001.
5. Hegmon 2003:233.
6. Wylie 2002: chapter 12.
7. Trigger 2006:516–528.
8. Trigger 2006:519.
9. Trigger 2006:521–523.
10. Hegmon 2003:216–218; VanPool and VanPool 2003:1.
11. Wylie 2002: chapters 7, 12.
12. On independence, see Wylie 2002:176–177; on security, Wylie 2002:175–176, 192, 195–96.
13. Wylie 2002:175.
14. Wylie 2002:195–196.
15. Elkins 2004:373.
16. Carrier 2008.
17. Freedberg 1989:436. For an interesting recent volume, see Turner 2006.
18. Bailey 2005.
19. Recent Mesoamerican works find Bailey's discussion of miniaturism particularly productive (Faust and Halperin 2009:3–5; Joyce 2009:411–414).
20. See Lesure 2007a.
21. Summers 2003:15.
22. Summers 2003: chapter 4.

Chapter 1: Universalist Explanation and Prehistoric Figurines

1. Renaud 1929, quotations from pp. 507, 509, 512.
2. On the early history of figurine studies, see Ucko 1962, 1968; Talalay 1994.
3. Engels 1986 [1884]:71–72 and 85–87; Frazer 1990 [1913]:201–218.
4. Frazer 1990 [1913]:211.
5. Hackett 1989.
6. Talalay 1994:167–168.
7. Crawford 1957:24; James 1959; Levy 1948.

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8. See Eliade 1978:44–52; El-Wailly and Abu Es-Soof 1965; James 1959; Levy 1948:78; Lloyd and Safar 1945; Mellaart 1967. For further examples, see Talalay 1994:168.

9. Goldman 1963:8–9; see also James 1959, chapter 1.

10. Ucko 1968; see also Ucko 1962. For further discussion, see Talalay 1994:169; Hamilton 1996:283.

11. Frazer 1990 [1913]:211.

12. Legrain 1930:4–5.

13. Clark 2007:227–231.

14. Coe 1965:26; Estrada 1956:8–9.

15. Estrada 1958; Sejourné 1952. Skepticism concerning fertility as a theme appeared early: see Coe 1965:25; Covarrubias 1957:30.

16. Morss 1954:61.

17. Coe 1965:45, continued on p. 54.

18. Cyphers (1989, 1993) makes this point.

19. Morss 1954:55.

20. Gimbutas 1956, 1982, 1991.

21. Baring and Cashford 1991; Gadon 1989; Sjöö and Mor 1975. Eller (2000) subjects this literature to a sensitive but unsparing critique.

22. Conkey and Tringham 1995; Meskell 1995; Tringham and Conkey 1998.

23. Conkey and Tringham 1995; Hamilton 1996; Knapp and Meskell 1997; Meskell 1995, 1998; Talalay 1993; Tringham and Conkey 1998.

24. See McNay 1992:2–3 and 18–21.

25. Neumann 1963.

26. Neumann 1963:26.

27. Beauvoir 1953:597 (italics mine).

28. Renfrew 1982:20–22.

29. For example, Bolger 2003:122; Soffer, Adovasio, and Hyland 2000:524; Voigt 2000:288.

30. For example, Roosevelt 1988; Di Capua 1994:241. Voigt (2000) applies a valued-labor argument to later levels at Çatalhöyük (p. 288) and a response-to-stress argument to Gritille Höyük (p. 269).

31. For example, Gopher and Orrelle 1996; Joyce 2003; Kokkinidou and Nikolaidou 1997; Lesure 1997; Marcos and García de Manrique 1988.

32. McDermott 1996 is a particularly strong version of such an argument raised more tentatively by various others.

33. Bolger 1996, 2003:122; Voigt 2000:288.

34. Marcus 1998; McDermott 1996.

35. Hodder (1992: chapter 17) makes this point.

36. Renfrew 1982:14–15.

37. For a discussion of testing even after evidence is recognized as theory-laden, see Wylie 2002:166–167.

38. For an expanded version of this section with additional references, see Lesure 2007b.

39. For instance: artistic emphasis on genitals, rounded bellies plausibly interpretable as pregnant, depictions of the act of birth, or depictions of adults holding children.

40. Cases that I have not considered but that are not known for abundant clay figurines include Eastern North America and Highland New Guinea.

41. Ikawa-Smith 2002; Mitsukazu 1986.

42. Cauvin 2000; Kuijt and Chesson 2005; Mabry 2003.

43. See Jarrige 1991; Chataigner 1995:185–187; Gimbutas 1982; Talalay 1993; Midant-Reynes 2000:155–158; and Tristant 2004:63.

44. Ford 1969:81. On Hohokam figurines, see Haury 1976; Thomas and King 1985. On the possibility of an invisible Mesoamerican Archaic tradition, see Joyce 2009:409–411.

45. Masayuki and Imamura 1998 : Figure 1:16, 24–26, 31–32; Yang 1988: Plates 8–11.

Chapter 2: Comparison and Context

1.   Meskell 1995:84.
2.   Conkey and Tringham 1995:221.
3.   Dilley 1999:9.
4.   Holy 1987:7.
5.   Strathern 1987.
6.   Dilley 1999:34.
7.   Chodorow 1974; Ortner 1974.
8.   Rosaldo 1980:397.
9.   Rosaldo 1980:399.
10. Ortner 1996 [1983].
11. For instance, Butler 1990:6.
12. Jacobs and Cromwell 1992; Lang 1996.
13. See Foucault 1978:145–157 and elaborations by Butler (1990), McNay (1992), and Moore (1994).
14. Marcus 1996, 2009.
15. Hodder 1991, 1999.
16. Hodder 1999:70.
17. Hodder 1991:150.
18. Hodder 1999:47–48; see also Hodder 1991:128–129.
19. Hodder 1991:143.
20. Compare, for instance, Cyphers 1993; Di Capua 1994; Gopher and Orrelle 1996; Joyce 1998, 2000; Knapp and Meskell 1997; Kokkinidou and Nikolaidou 1997; Lesure 1997; Marcos and García de Manrique 1988; Marcus 1996, 1998, 1999; Meskell 1995; Conkey and Tringham 1995; Tringham and Conkey 1998.
21. Knapp and Meskell (1997) provide important theoretical discussion; Joyce (1998, 2000, 2003), in particular, has honed the associated analytical procedures to greater sophistication.
22. Joyce 2003:256.
23. Kuijt and Chesson 2005:175.
24. Schmandt-Besserat 1998a; Tubb and Grissom 1995.
25. Lesure 1997. See also Lesure 1999.
26. This reading is largely based on an assessment of recurring iconographic patterns in Central Mexico. Other interpretations are possible.
27. The suite of iconographic features of interest here appeared during Valdivia IIa (3300–3000 B.C.) and persisted through Valdivia V (2250–2100 B.C.) (Di Capua 1994; Marcos 1988, 1998). It is most clearly evident in figurines of the Valdivia type described by Meggers, Evans, and Estrada (1965), including refinements described by Lubensky (1991). I restricted my analysis to that type, which was predominant during the period in question.
28. See Lathrap (1975); García (1989); Meggers, Evans, and Estrada (1965:97); Lubensky (1991:27–28).
29. The Banco Central (Quito and Guayaquil), the Banco del Pacífico, and the Nahim Isaías Museum.
30. For previous interpretations of the Real Alto figurines, see Marcos and García (1988) and García (1989). On the problem of fakes in the Museum collections, see Bruhns and Hammond (1983).

31. Joyce 1998, 2000, 2003.
32. Gimbutas 1989b:63.
33. Lehmann 1992:71.
34. Gimbutas 1958:124.
35. Elster 2007; Meskell 1995.
36. Hodder 1990. Hodder has published extensively on related issues since then (e.g., 2006) but with a focus on smaller scales of space or time. *Domestication* remains relevant as one of the most ambitious archaeological efforts at contextualist grand history.
37. The article is Hodder 1984. On the history of discussion of similarities of form, see Hodder 1990:145–153.
38. See especially Hodder 1990:153.
39. Collier 1988:71–141.
40. See Collier 1988:230–236.

Chapter 3: The Questions We Ask of Images

1. The quotations that follow are from, respectively, Rice 1981:412; Gopher and Orrelle 1996:267; Di Capua 1994:229; Joyce 2003:256; Cyphers 1993:213.
2. The arguments are not equally strong. Gopher and Orrelle's interpretations have only a slender iconographic foundation, and I have already noted my skepticism of Di Capua's conclusions. On Rice, see Gvozdover 1989a:53, 92 n.12.
3. Schapiro 1953; Ackerman 1963; Gombrich 1968; Wollheim 1979; Kubler 1985; Summers 1989.
4. See, for instance, Bal and Bryson 1991.
5. See Kubler 1985:420–422.
6. Panofsky 1955:28–31.
7. T. J. Clark 1973:11–12.
8. Lesure 2002.
9. Schapiro 1953:287.
10. Wollheim 1979:136.
11. Sackett 1990; Wiessner 1990; Winter 1998.
12. Wylie 2002: chapter 12.
13. On theoretical imports in art history, see Summers (2003:15). The point is evident in the topical organization of recent theoretical/methodological surveys: Hatt and Klonk 2006; Preziosi 2009.
14. See, for instance, Hatt and Klonk 2006: chapters 5, 6, 7.
15. Holly 1984:184.
16. Kubler 1985:422.
17. Summers 2003:15–36.
18. Elkins 2004:375–376.
19. For discussion of these modes with more detailed rhetorical analysis of the existing figurine literature, see Lesure 2002, 2005.
20. Panofsky 1955:28–30; van Straten 1994:6–12.
21. Colton 1959:91–141. The examples that follow are from Table 6:96.
22. For the general point, see van Straten 1994:51–53. For an archaeological example, see Westenholtz 1998.
23. Tanner and Tanner 1980:80.
24. Biebuyck 1973:220, 161–162.
25. This claim is based on discussion in Biebuyck 1973:157–181, 214–221.

26. Catalog Entry 93 in Watkins (1984:288–289).
27. See brief reviews by Franits 2004:4–6; Salomon 2004:1–2.
28. Panofsky 1955:31.
29. Geertz 1973; for an extended argument championing Peirce's relevance to archaeology, see Preucel 2006.
30. See, for instance, Haaland and Haaland 1995, 1996.
31. Hodder 1990:68.
32. See, for instance, Jongh 2000.
33. See Whiteley 1988:57–61, 199–201, 273–274. I thank Greg Schachner for pointing this out to me.
34. Goody 1997:56.
35. Gell 1998:162–163.
36. Gell 1998:232–242.
37. Hawthorn 1967:380–381.
38. Jongh 2000:13–14, Figures 3 and 4.
39. Di Salvo 2006, Chojnacki 2006:17–35.
40. The pioneering work of Ucko (1962, 1968) was followed by Talalay (1993) and Voigt (1983, 2000).
41. Broman Morales 1983, Lesure 1999, and Voigt 1983 all use such an argument, among many others that could be cited.
42. See, for instance, Cyphers 1993; Di Capua 1994; Gopher and Orrelle 1996; Hodder 1990; Joyce 2003; Kokkinidou and Nikolaidou 1997; Lesure 1997; Marcos and García de Manrique 1988.
43. Lesure 1997:243–244.
44. Franits 2004:1; see also Salomon 2004:1–2.
45. Salomon 2004:102.
46. Salomon 2004:1.

Chapter 4: A Cross-Cultural Explanation for Female Figurines?

1. Periods 3–4 of Aurenche et al. (2001).
2. Including the Pavlov-Willendorf-Kostenki-Avdeevo cultural entity (Soffer et al. 2000).
3. Bahn and Vertut (1997:99–103); Delporte (1993b:243); Duhard (1990); Gamble (1982); Soffer (1987:335–336).
4. See Marshack 1991 for support, but compare with McDermott 1996 and Duhard 1990.
5. See Barth 1987:38–45 and Goody 1997:62–63; for my commentary, see Lesure 2002:597.
6. Rosenfeld 1977; Bosinski 1991. The assemblage was excavated and published by Bosinski and Fischer (1974).
7. Delporte 1993a: Figures 21 and 27.
8. Leroi-Gourhan 1967:89; Soffer et al. 1993; Abramova 1967: Plates 52–53.
9. Broman Morales 1983: Figure 164:7–11.
10. For example, White and Bisson 1998:119; however, see their note 3, same page.
11. Soffer et al. 1993:271–272.
12. Abramova 1967; Gvozdover 1989a, 1995.
13. Gvozdover 1995.
14. White 1997, 2006; White and Bisson 1998.
15. Dobres 1992; McDermott 1996; Rice 1981; Soffer et al. 2000.
16. Delporte 1993a:247–251.
17. Delporte 1993a:249; Ladier 1992:354.

18. Compare, for instance, Kuijt and Chesson 2005 to Cauvin 2000.
19. Delporte 1993b.
20. Siberia (Mal'ta): Abramova 1967: Plates 48.2, 48.5; Russian Plain (Kostenki I, Avdeevo): Abramova 1967: Plates 5, 7.1, Gvozdover 1995: Figures 87–95; Central Europe (Pavlov, Dolní Věstonice): Delporte 1993a: Figures 148, 152–154, 158; Western Europe (Brassempouy): Delporte 1993a: Figures 11, 13.
21. Delporte 1993a: Figure 194.
22. Gvozdover 1989a; Dobres 1992. Dobres (1992: Table 2) exaggerates the number of *ébauches* by lumping the two sorts of schematizations and apparently including other unidentifieds as well.
23. White 2006:288–293.
24. Kozlowski and Aurenche 2005; see also Bar-Yosef and Mayer 2002.
25. Compare Contenson 2000: Figures 101:10 and 102:1.
26. Wengrow (1998) argues along these lines, although his specific interpretations of figurines seem not well supported by his evidence.
27. Jarmo is a good example (Broman Morales 1983).
28. Schmandt-Besserat 1992.
29. Dessel 1996; Englund 1993; Runnels 1993.
30. Marcus (1998:47) suggests that crude figurines were made by children.
31. Vaillant 1930, 1931, 1935.
32. Bradley and Joralemon (1993).
33. Cyphers 1987: Table 25, 1993:213.
34. Marcus 1998; Joyce 2003.
35. Marcus 1996; 1998: chapter 13; 2009.
36. Cyphers 1993; Joyce 2003; Marcus 1998.
37. For exceptions (usually busts rather than complete figures), see Delporte 1993a: Figures 143, 144.
38. For instance, two of the Grimaldi figurines each have two heads and a third involves a human female and an animal joined back-to-back (White and Bisson 1998).
39. A figure from Gagarino gestures (Abramova 1967: Plates 25.2). Asymmetrical leg positions are known from Dolní Věstonice (Klima 1983: Figure 55.4), Tursac, and Sireuil (Delporte 1993a: Figures 39, 40). There is more dynamism in media such as engravings, particularly in the Late Upper Paleolithic.
40. Marshack 1991:21, Figures 5, 9.
41. Klima 1983: Figures 54.1, 54.2.
42. Abramova 1967: Plate 44:2, 3; Plate 48:4, 8; Plate 57:1.
43. Soffer et al. 2000:517, 523, 524.
44. McDermott 2000:527.
45. Gvozdover 1995; White 2003:141–142.
46. Rice 1981.
47. Duhard 1990:250.
48. McDermott 1996:245.
49. Gvozdover 1989a:53. See also her note 12 on Rice (1981).
50. White and Bisson 1998. The possible birth-giving figurine is *l'Hermaphrodite*, the interpretation being that of Duhard.
51. Klima 1983; Delporte 1993a:137–148; Marshack 1991; Svoboda 2007.
52. Klima 1983: Figures 54–4, 55–4.
53. Svoboda 2007:63.
54. Cauvin et al. 1999: Figure 27; McAdam 1997: Figure 9 and p. 142.
55. Lohof 1989; Broman Morales 1983.

56. Cauvin 2000: Figure 37, 4.
57. Morsch 2002.
58. McAdam 1997, Figure 8.
59. Broman Morales 1983:383; McAdam 1997: Figure 6.
60. Rosenfeld 1977:95–97.
61. Bosinski 1991:51–54.
62. Delporte 1993a:249–250, Figure 231.
63. Bosinski 1991:54–56; Rosenfeld 1977:97–98.
64. Rosenfeld 1977:97.
65. Bosinski 1991:55.
66. Goddess 11 (Mellaart 1967: Plate IX), from Level II; age estimate for level after Cessford 2005.
67. Rollefson 1998, 2000; Schmandt-Besserat 1998a; Tubb and Grisson 1995.
68. McAdam (1997:138, Figure 8) sees one of forty-three figurines as stylistically similar to the statues.
69. There are similarities in the representation of human breasts (compare Schmandt-Besserat (1998a: Figure 1) to McAdam (1997: Figure 2:3076 129a), but breasts on the figurines are full whereas those on the statues are diminutive. The busts among the figurines (McAdam 1997: Figure 8) recall the busts among the statuary, but no two-headed figurines were identified; at any rate, this is a localized trait among figurines.
70. Contenson 2000:217–218.
71. Hauptmann 1999:78–80; Schmidt 2006; Verhoeven 2002:240–241.
72. Hauptmann 1999:75–78; Verhoeven 2002:238–239.
73. Hauptmann (1999:76) notes that the crouching figures have "rounded bellies and articulated sexual organs."
74. Hauptmann 1999:77; Morsch 2002:159; on Çayönü, see Özdoğan 1999:59. Figurines are rare at Göbekli Tepe (Verhoeven 2002:243), where excavated buildings seem cultic.
75. Hauptmann 1999:77; Morsch 2002; Schmidt 1988; Verhoeven 2002:239.
76. Molist 1998.
77. Garfinkel 2003:114–116.
78. Follensbee 2009.
79. Grove and Gillespie 1984; Cyphers 1988.
80. Blomster 1998, 2002.
81. Blomster 1998:311; Marcus 1998:29.
82. Coe 1965: Figures 176–179.
83. Clark 1994; Lesure and Blake 2002.
84. Gvozdover 1989b.
85. White 2003:140; Delporte 1993a:167, Figure 176.
86. Delporte's (1993a) Dolní Věstonice Venuses I through XVI include various pieces that cannot be thought of as sharing imagery.
87. Compare the following. In clay: Dolní Věstonice, Delporte 1993a: Figures 131–133, 135–136, 146–147; Pavlov: Delporte 1993a: Figures 151, 155. In ivory: Dolní Věstonice, Delporte 1993a: Figures 134, 140, 141; Pavlov: Delporte 1993a: Figure 150.
88. Soffer et al. 1993:272.
89. Venus XII in Delporte 1993a:141.
90. Bosinski 1991:56–57.
91. Bosinski 1991: Plates 17a and 13d.
92. Delporte 1993a: Figures 70, 67, 32d-f.

Chapter 5: Mesoamerican Figurines and the Contextualist Appeal to Universal Truths

1. Holy 1987; Hodder 1999:70–71.
2. Cyphers 1993:218.
3. Cyphers 1993:218–219.
4. Joyce 2003, with background argumentation in Joyce 1998 and 2000.
5. Joyce 2003:257, 258.
6. Marcus 1998:1, 17–23.
7. Séjourné 1952.
8. Joyce 2009:421–422.
9. Knauft 1993:135.
10. Gregor and Tuzin (2001) are also helpful.
11. My sources for Figures 48, 53, and 54 are *Ulua Valley*: Joyce 2003 and personal communication 2008; Stone 1972. The sequence (Figure 54) is Chotepe, Playa, and Late Formative (Joyce 2003; Joyce and Henderson 2001). *Soconusco*: Arroyo 2002; Cheetham 2009, in press; Clark 1990, 1994; Lesure 1997, 1999. The sequence is Locona/Ocós, Cherla/Cuadros, Jocotal, Conchas. On disappearance of figurine traditions at 600 B.C., see Love (1999:148; 2007:295). *Chiapas Interior*: Lee (1969) and Agrinier (1984, 2000). The sequence is Pac/Cotorra, Dilli/Vistahermosa, Quequepac/Escalera (Agrinier 2000: Figure 37). *Southern Gulf Coast:* Inspection of La Venta figurines at the Smithsonian and Cheetham 2009; Coe and Diehl 1980; Drucker 1943; Follensbee 2009; and Weiant 1943. The sequence is the San Lorenzo phase, followed by hypothetical division of the La Venta and Tes Zapotes assemblages based on Pool 2007 and Lowe 1989. *Valley of Oaxaca*: Blomster 2009 and personal communication 2009; Marcus 1996, 1998, and 1999. The sequence is Tierras Largas, San José, Guadalupe, Rosario, and Monte Albán I. *Tehuacan Valley*: MacNeish, Peterson, and Flannery 1970. The sequence is Early Ajalpán, Late Ajalpán, Early Santa María, Late Santa María, Early Palo Blanco. *Central Tlaxcala*: Based on my own work in progress. *Basin of Mexico*: Inspection of Vaillant's collections at the American Museum of Natural History (New York) and Niederberger 1976, 1987; Reyna Robles 1971; Tolstoy 1989a; Vaillant 1930, 1931, 1935. The sequence is Nevada, Ayotla, Manantial, Zacatenco, Ticomán, based particularly on Niederberger (2000: Table 1) but also Tolstoy (1978, 1989b). *Morelos*: Cyphers 1988, 1989, 1993; Grove 1974; Grove and Gillespie 1984; and Vaillant and Vaillant 1934. The simplified sequence is D1/D2 horizon at Gualupita, Nexpa, and San Pablo followed by the Barranca/Cantera phases at Chalcatzingo. *Southern Guanajuato*: Findley 1997; Flores 1992; Frierman (editor) 1969. The sequence is Chupícuaro Temprano, Chupícuaro (Braniff 1996). For several of the sequences in Figure 54, I estimated calendar-year equivalents of phases originally published in radiocarbon years.
12. This reading of relations of form differs in emphasis from that of Chapter 4 because there I did not consider diachronic analysis. In that analysis, I did note likely heterogeneity in the results of application of synchronic analysis. When diachronic analysis is brought into the picture and we focus only on Mesoamerica, the variability in the salience of synchronic stylistic variation is highlighted in contrast to a greater consistency in the promptings toward diachronic analysis of style.
13. Chest morphology is often not a satisfying basis for ascriptions of sex. Cheetham (2009) finds 63 percent of San Lorenzo figurines to be male based on the form of the chests. Follensbee (2009) considers 89 percent of the same collection to be female; her case is iconographically more sophisticated than Cheetham's because it is built from observations of numerous attributes, including garments.
14. Blomster 2009:123–124; Joyce 2003:249–250.
15. For instance, at San Lorenzo and Canton Corralito during the Early Horizon (Cheetham 2009: Table 6.2) and, persistently, in the Ulúa Valley (Joyce 2003: Table 1).

16. I use the label proposed by Flannery and Marcus (1994:397) and adopted recently by Pool (2007:181).
17. Joyce 2003: Figures 9–10.
18. Marcus 1998:21; Love 1999:148.
19. Marcus 1996, 1998, 1999; Follensbee 2009.
20. Faust and Halperin 2009:8–9; Blomster 2009:120; Joyce 2009:420–421.
21. Bourdieu 1977.
22. Temporada IV (García Moll et al. 1991). Tolstoy's (1989a) paper is based on partial data from the then-still-unpublished Temporada IV and apparently more detailed data from Temporada II (still otherwise unpublished). Joyce's (1999) paper is based on the García Moll catalog.
23. Tolstoy and Joyce agree on that point.
24. Tolstoy 1989a:109–112; Joyce 1999:21–22, 36–30.
25. Statistics are based on data in García Moll et al. 1991. Significance tests were conducted as 2×2 chi-square tables. Where $p < 0.05$, I refer to the results as "significant." Where $0.10 > p \geq 0.05$, I refer to the results as "moderately significant."
26. Porter 1956; Frierman 1969; Flores 1992.
27. The division was between burials with two or fewer objects in addition to figurines and those with three or more.
28. The pattern of Table 4 recurs in an analysis of the Tlatilco burials analogous to that described here for Chupícuaro. The Tlatilco assemblage also splits in half between two and three objects other than figurines. For females above the median, figurines constitute 13 percent of total offerings as opposed to 9 percent below. For males, figurines constitute 3 percent above and 13 percent below.
29. Voigt 1983, 2000, 2007.
30. Ucko 1962, 1968.
31. Marcus 2009:26–28; Joyce 2009:420–421.
32. I am drawing here on Voigt 2000: Tables 2–4.
33. The comparative ethnography on these last points is somewhat chaotic, and Voigt (2007) has revised her expectation for lack of association of initiation figures with houses. Still, such figures are observed to be "often destroyed by burning" and "disposed of in inaccessible areas such as caves, bodies of water" (Voigt 2000: Tables 3–4). Formative figurines are clearly a better match for the expectations of aesthetic objects.
34. Furst 1973, 1974; for updates specifically on West Mexico, see Townsend 1998; Furst 1998; Graham 1998.
35. Sandstrom and Sandstrom 1986.
36. Smith 2002:102–107; Klein and Lona 2009.
37. Smith 2002:105–107, 112.
38. Klein and Lona 2009:355.
39. Voigt 2007:156.
40. Ucko 1962:47; 1968:422.
41. Steen 2006.
42. Bradley and Joralemon 1993.
43. Clark 1994:424–429.
44. Furst 1974:136; 1995:69.
45. Graham 1998.
46. Marcus 1996, 2009.
47. Findley 1997: Table F.
48. García Moll et al. 1990.

49. Marcus 1998:3.
50. Marcus 1998:313.
51. Kopytoff 1971:129.
52. Marcus 1998:17–23.
53. Marcus 1998:3.
54. Cyphers argued for depictions of women at all stages of pregnancy. That case seems difficult to make, but even if we were to dismiss both her first-trimester identifications (dubious) and her second-trimester identifications (more plausible), upward of 10 percent of torsos in most excavation locales were definitively depicted as pregnant (see Cyphers 1987:346, Table 25).
55. Smith (2002:112–113) suggests that the importance of ancestor veneration in domestic ritual varied across Mesoamerica at the time of the Conquest and was unimportant in Central Mexico.
56. Sejourné 1952:55, 61.
57. Sejourné 1952:61–62. She notes the use of double ears as fetishes in the American Southwest and Oaxaca.
58. Klein and Lona 2009:330–338.
59. Joyce 2000:28–30.
60. Furst 1974:142.
61. Blomster 2002:175–176; Blomster 2009:134–135; Cheetham 2009:158–168; Coe and Diehl 1980:264–273.
62. Even in the extreme cases of San Lorenzo and Canton Corralito, only 73 to 74 percent of heads are strictly Olmec (Cheetham 2009: Figure 6.8).
63. Blomster 1998, 2002.
64. Tate 1995; Furst 1995.
65. Coe and Diehl 1980; Cyphers 2004.
66. Pool 2007:212–219.
67. Coe and Diehl 1980; Cyphers 1999, 2004; Cyphers and Di Castro 2009; Di Castro and Cyphers 2006.
68. Blomster 2002:175. Compare, for example, the mouths on human figures holding supernatural infants, Princeton University Art Museum 1995, Catalog Entries 33–35.
69. See Pool 2007:216–219 for a recent summary.
70. Flannery's (1968) characterization still seems viable, although he has modified his position (Flannery and Marcus 2000).
71. Marcus (1998:45–47) considers males "much less frequent" than females. Blomster (2009) suggests that male images were essentially absent.
72. Marcus 1998:47–50 and chapters 10–15.
73. Marcus 1998:47–48, 313.
74. Blomster 2009:143–144.
75. Clark and Blake 1989.
76. Clark 1997; Cheetham 2009, in press.
77. Clark 1990, 1994:420–429; Lesure 1999:218–219.
78. Benson and de la Fuente 1996: Catalog Entries 42–43 and 54–60; Thomson 1987: Figure 17.1; Taube 2004:67–121.
79. There is not space here to review an interesting debate concerning La Venta–style figurines and Chalcatzingo. Grove and Gillespie (1984) interpret the C8 figurines of Chalcatzingo as individualized portraits of rulers. They see other contemporaneous types at the site as generic depictions of people. Cyphers's (1988, 1993) analysis of the same collection casts doubt on Grove and Gillespie's interpretation.
80. Brumfiel and Overholtzer (2009) argue in a similar vein concerning Postclassic figurines from Central Mexico.

81. Conclusions on the Western Basin are based on 534 figurine fragments excavated or collected by Vaillant at Zacatenco, now at the American Museum of Natural History (including 53 head and body fragments, 121 heads, 151 bodies, and 209 limbs). Those for Central Tlaxcala are based on a study of 1,231 figurine fragments (158 head and body fragments, 240 heads, 371 bodies, and 462 limbs) from four sites: Amomoloc, Tetel, Las Mesitas, and La Laguna.

82. On moderate significance, see note 25, this chapter.

83. Reyna Robles 1971:49–52.

84. Another option is that figurines were made by children who, after the Navajo children observed by Fewkes (1923), depicted a social world in which women were particularly important. That idea is less attractive than that which I propose here. Crude figurines tend to drop out over time, many figurines are spectacularly intricate, and a minority of any particular collection is iconographically complex.

85. Stinson 2004.

86. Lesure 2009; see also Blumer 1995.

Chapter 6: Figurines, Goddesses, and the Texture of Long-Term Structures in the Near East

1. Hutton 1997; Hawkes 1968; Gimbutas 1989a, 1989b.

2. Dick 2005:48–49.

3. Ippolitoni Strika 1983; Schmandt-Bessarat 1998b.

4. Cauvin 2000.

5. Voigt 2000; see also Hodder 2006:254–255.

6. Gopher and Orrelle 1996; Kuijt and Chesson 2005, 2007.

7. Kuijt and Chesson 2007:222.

8. The themes are not necessarily mutually exclusive. See, for instance, Byrne 2004 on Judean Pillar figurines.

9. Cornelius 1997:41–42.

10. Lewis 2005:77–79; Collins 2005:18–22; Postgate 1994:178–179.

11. Lambert 1997:2.

12. Dick 2005:46–48; Cornelius 2004:5; Hadley 2000:191–192.

13. Assmann 1995:38–42, 66; Keel and Uehlinger 1998:12–13; Cornelius 1994, 2004.

14. Cornelius 1994:255–259.

15. For example, Cornelius 2004:59–68.

16. Renfrew 1994:51–54.

17. Collins 2005; Dick 2005.

18. For chronology, I have relied particularly on Akkermans and Schwartz 2003, Aurenche et al. 2001, Cruells and Nieuwenhuyse 2004, and Thissen 2002.

19. Lohof 1989.

20. Contenson 1995; Broman Morales 1983, 1990. My assessments are based on published sources and, for Jarmo, an inspection of the originals housed at the Oriental Institute in Chicago.

21. Contenson 2000.

22. Eygun 1992.

23. Morsch 2002.

24. Rollefson's (2008) suggestion that what McAdam (1997) identified as male genitalia may actually have been pregnant females improves the fit of the collection to Seated Anthropomorph themes.

25. McAdam 1997:129.

26. McAdam 1997:123, 126, Figure 8.

27. Meskell et al. 2008: Table 6. For dating of levels, I rely on Cessford (2005: Figure 4.3).
28. Meskell et al. 2008:151, 157.
29. Hamilton 2005:189; Meskell and Nakamura 2005:184; Meskell et al. 2008:143–144, 157.
30. Available at http://figurines-test.Stanford.edu/repository; consulted November 2008.
31. Bader 1993; Bordaz 1968; Cauvin et al. 1999; Garfinkel 1995; Kirkbride 1966; Molist 1996, 1998; Molist el at. 1996; Verhoeven 2000; Voigt 1985, 2000.
32. Garfinkel 1995. The human figurines seem mainly female, but their widest point is at the chest or shoulders, and they appear to stand rather than sit. This may be an alternative complex. Compare with Jericho: Holland 1982: Figure 224:1–2.
33. See Özdoğan (1999:58) on variable preservation.
34. McAdam 1997:138; Morsch 2002:159; Verhoeven 2000; Voigt 2000:265.
35. Contenson 2000:218.
36. Bar-Yosef and Gopher 1997.
37. Kuijt and Chesson 2005: Figure 8.2e.
38. Noy 1989:13–17.
39. Özdoğan 1999:59 and Figure 74; Broman Morales 1990.
40. Christidou, Coqueugnoit, and Gourichon 2009.
41. Cauvin 2000: Figures 7, 8.
42. Stordeur and Jammous 1995; Stordeur et al. 2000; Yartah 2004.
43. Kuijt and Chesson (2005:174) suggest change in uses of figurines between PPNA and PPNB.
44. Contenson 2000:217.
45. Mahasneh and Biernert 1999, 2000.
46. Kirkbride 1972, 1973.
47. Akkermans et al. 1983; Contenson 1985.
48. Ippolitoni Strika 1983:11–15.
49. Rollefson 2000:187; Schmandt-Besserat 1998b.
50. Schmandt-Besserat 1998b.
51. Mellaart 1962, 1963, 1964, 1967.
52. On the "breasts," see Russell and Meece (2005:220) and Hodder (2006:30, Figure 12); on splayed figures, see Russell and Meece (2005:215), Hodder (2006:201), and Garfinkel (2003:291–295).
53. My division of the more iconographically complex materials between stone (7000–6500 B.C.) and clay (6500–6200 B.C.) is based on Voigt (2000). The pattern is far from perfect. See Nakamura and Meskell (2006:178) for counterexamples.
54. Mellaart 1967: Plates 77, 80, 82, 84, 85; Meskell and Nakamura 2005: Figure 82.
55. Mellaart 1967: Plates 65, 69, 71, 72; Meskell and Nakamura 2005: Figure 81).
56. Mellaart 1967: Plates 70, 73–76, 83, 86, 88; Meskell and Nakamura 2005: Figure 80; Nakamura and Meskell 2004: Figure 84.
57. Özdoğan 2003.
58. Cauvin 1972: Figure 6; Voigt 2000: Figure 4a; Schmidt 1998; Verhoeven 2000: Figures 4–9:2–3.
59. Collet 1996:405; Verhoeven 2000:100.
60. Özdoğan 2003:516.
61. For instance, at Sabi Abyad I Level 3 (Akkermans 1993: Figures 3.23:7, 8, 11–16; Collet 1996: Figures 6.3:9–15), Sha'ar Hagolan (Garfinkel 1999a:64–65; 2004a:190; Garfinkel, Korn, and Miller 2002:201–202).
62. For instance, "stylized" figures from Yarim Tepe II (Merpert and Munchaev 1993b); "idols" of the Höyücek Sanctuary Phase (Duru 1994b, 1999); and Mellaart's "figurine" category from Hacılar Level VI (Mellaart 1970; Voigt 2007).

63. Yarim Tepe I (Merpert and Munchaev 1993a: Figure 6.10:1–10), Tell es-Sawwan (El Wailly and Es-Soof 1965; Ippolitoni Strika 1976), Hacılar Level I (Mellaart 1970: Figures 245, 246, 247:1, Plates CLXVIIIa, CLXIX, XLXX).
64. Dunand 1973; Garfinkel 2004a, 2004b; Kafafi 1988; Rollefson 2008.
65. Garfinkel 2002:258.
66. Garfinkel 2004a:138.
67. Gopher and Orrelle 1996:267–271; see also subsequent debate in Garfinkel 1999b and Gopher and Orrelle 1999.
68. For overviews of the corpus, see Garfinkel 2004a; Gopher and Orrelle 1996; Stekelis 1972.
69. For stylistic description, see Garfinkel 2004a:160–163; Garfinkel, Korn, and Miller 2002:193–196.
70. The bulbous form at the back of the head appears on a figurine with a broken penis from Sha'ar Hagolan (Gopher and Orrelle 1996: Figure 7:2).
71. For description, see Garfinkel 2004a:161; Garfinkel, Korn, and Miller 2002:195.
72. Gopher and Orrelle 1996:273; Garfinkel 1999b; Miller 2002:227–228.
73. Garfinkel 2004a:188–189, 191; Gopher and Orrelle 1996:261.
74. Garfinkel 2004a:169.
75. Ben-Shlomo and Garfinkel 2002; Miller 2002:224.
76. Garfinkel, Korn, and Miller 2002:190–193; Garfinkel 2004a:166–168.
77. Miller 2002:225; Garfinkel, Korn, and Miller 2002:190–191.
78. Garfinkel 2004a:171–183. See also Gopher and Orrelle 1996:257–261.
79. Garfinkel 2004a:172, 177.
80. Miller 2002:232.
81. See also Garfinkel 2004a:184–186.
82. Orrelle and Gopher 2000:300–301; Gopher 1995:211–212, 218–219.
83. Özdoğan 2002:255–258.
84. Personal observation, Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara.
85. Mellaart 1970: Figures 201, 218, 219, 220, 225, 226, 227.
86. Mellaart 1967: Plate IX, caption.
87. For discussion, see Hodder 2006:213–214; Meskell and Nakamura 2005:168.
88. Mellaart 1967:186–187; Voigt 2000:287 and Table 6.
89. Mellaart 1970:167–168; Voigt 2007:165–166.
90. Duru 1995:485.
91. Duru 1994a: Plates 185–193.
92. Badischen Landesmuseum 2007: Catalog #247–250; Silistreli 1989a: Plates 1–5.
93. Öztan 2003:76.
94. Voigt 2007.
95. Voigt 2007: Figures 12.1, 12.2, 12.5, 12.6, 12.7, and (one set) 12.8–12.10.
96. Meskell et al. 2008:145–151.
97. Meskell and Nakamura 2005:184. Voigt's (2007) illustrations of household sets from Hacılar showcase the unusual size of the 24-cm figure (Mellaart #520). That figure was apparently part of a set that contained also smaller figures, diverse in position, gesture, and so forth.
98. Mellaart 1963: Plate VIIIb; Mellaart 1962: Plate XIII; Hodder 2006: Figure 13, Plates 15–16.
99. See Duru 1994a: Plates 35:2, 42:4–12, 57:5, 96:1–10; Silistreli 1989b: Plates 1–12.
100. Hamilton's (2005:205) statement that among the Çatalhöyük figurines, "humans [as opposed to humanoids] became more common in level VI and dominate in level V, after which humanoids seem to cease" accords with a break in the sequence at that point perceived also by Voigt (2000:287–288). Meskell and Nakamura (2005:182) are skeptical.

101. Duru 1994b, 1995, 1999.
102. Duru 1999:179.
103. One figure has a lower-body protuberance that might be a penis, except that it emerges from what should be the foot (Duru 1994b: Figure 23).
104. Voigt 2007.
105. Mellaart 1970:180–182, Figures 248, 249.
106. Badischen Landesmuseum 2007: Catalog #325; Silistreli 1989b: Figure 13:3.
107. For example, see Voigt 2007.
108. Akkermans and Schwartz 2003:149–153; Matthews 2000:108–111, 81–82.
109. Merpert and Munchaev 1993a:91, Figure 6.10:1–10.
110. Merpert and Munchaev 1993b: Figure 8.32:1–8; Tobler 1950: Plate 153:2; Mallowan and Cruikshank Rose 1935: Figure 47:19; Watson and LeBlanc 1990: Figure 6.21:6.
111. Fiorina 1984: Figure 24; Mallowan and Cruikshank Rose 1935: Figure 45:6–7; Tobler 1950: Plate CLIII:1,2; Merpert and Munchaev 1993a: Figure 6–10:12; Merpert and Munchaev 1993c: Figure 9:38; Mallowan 1936: Figure 5:1–8,10; Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: Figure 4.26; Oppenheim 1943: Plate CV:1–8, 10–18.
112. Hijjara 1997:75.
113. Ippolitoni Strika 1976.
114. Ippolitoni Strika 1998; Kamada and Ohtsu 1995; Oates 1966, 1969. At Sawwan, some clay figures fall in stylistically with the alabaster statuettes, but others are completely distinct.
115. For Yarim III, see Merpert and Munchaev 1993c: Figures 9.39 and 9.40.
116. Tobler 1950:164.
117. Tobler 1950: Plate LXXXId5 and Figure 5; Mallowan 1936: Figure 5:9; Oppenheim 1943: Plate 105:9.
118. Merpert and Munchaev 1993b:144–145.
119. Mallowan and Cruikshank Rose 1935: Plates 16a, Figure 60:3; Hijjara 1997: Figure 67: Motif 116, 68; Motif 141, and 82:5.
120. Mallowan and Cruikshank Rose 1935: Figure 45:10–12; Hijjara 1997: Figure 20.
121. Mallowan and Cruikshank Rose 1935:99–100, Plate X:a and Figure 52:1–3.
122. Schmandt-Besserat 1998a:12–13.
123. Voigt 2000; Kuijt and Chesson 2005, 2007.
124. Compare Broman Morales 1983; Hodder 2006; Morsch 2002; and Voigt 2000.
125. Voigt 1983, 2000, 2007.

Chapter 7: On Figurines, Femaleness, and Comparison

1. See, for instance, Wylie 2002.
2. Goldman 1963:8–9.
3. Dilley 1999:9.
4. See Wylie 2002: chapter 12, and discussion in my introduction and Chapter 3.
5. Kubler 1985; Panofsky 1955; Clark 1973; Lesure 2002, 2005. For discussion, see Chapter 3.
6. Salomon 2004:1; Lesure 2002:596.
7. Conkey and Tringham 1995; Joyce 1998, 2003, 2009; Knapp and Meskell 1997; Lesure 2005; Marcus 1996, 1998, 2009; Meskell 1995, 1998; Talalay 1993, 1994; Tringham and Conkey 1998.
8. Králík, Novotný, and Oliva 2002; Stinson 2004.

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