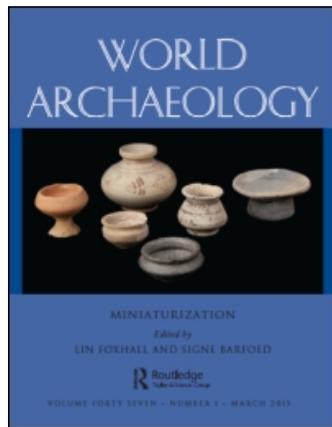


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Miniatures from domestic contexts in Iron Age Iberia

Mireia López-Bertran and Jaime Vives-Ferrándiz

Abstract

This article reviews a set of miniatures from domestic contexts in Iron Age eastern Iberia, and interprets them in terms of their role in forging social personae. After an introduction to the historical case under consideration, the miniatures are described in terms of their typology and their contexts of provenance are outlined. Though not abundant, they tend to occur in central places in the landscape; specifically, they are often found in houses of the powerful. The vast majority are miniatures of pottery and tools, though some miniature weapons are recorded. We contend that these objects were used as a means of enculturation and for the learning of values and norms. It is no coincidence that they emerge in the archaeological record of Iron Age Iberia at the same time as the rise of a social structure based on hereditary power.

Keywords

Iberia; Iron Age; miniatures; enculturation; household archaeology; gender roles.

Introduction

The Iron Age in the western Mediterranean – roughly, the seventh to the first centuries BC – is characterized by complex organizational systems and social hierarchy. Iberia is no exception, and political entities of diverse ranges and degrees of inequality have been identified during these centuries (Ruiz and Molinos 1998; Sanmartí and Belarte 2001; Bonet and Mata 2001). In this article we refer to the Iberians in a restricted sense: organized social groups living in the area stretching from southeast France to the upper Guadalquivir valley in Spain, from the sixth century BC until their incorporation in the Roman Empire. This is where the Spanish archaeological tradition identifies the Iberians, following descriptions dated to the period of the Roman conquest, such as Polybius (3.37–11 and 39.4–5), Pliny (HN 3.19), Ptolemy (Geog. 2.5) and Strabo (3.4.12).

The organized social groups in this area present a notable diversity, and there was little homogeneity in either economic or political terms. Iberian political entities, which were fairly small in comparison with other Mediterranean contexts, were dominated by the *oppidum*, a walled settlement that acted as the centre. In terms of extension, settlement hierarchy, rural strategies and land occupation they varied significantly from one place to another (Rodríguez Díaz and Pavón Soldevilla 2007): for instance, in the territories of El Tossal de Sant Miquel (Llíria, Valencia) and La Serreta (Alcoi, Alicante) and in the northeast (Bonet, Mata and Moreno 2008; Grau 2002; Sanmartí and Belarte 2001), several categories of settlement existed, while in other areas, like the upper Guadalquivir valley, the *oppidum* was home to all the population (Ruiz and Molinos 2013, 367). Although the settlements were never very large (no more than 10–15 hectares) several traits of social hierarchy and inequality stand out: for instance, differences in the access to resources and goods, the existence of writing systems and a certain degree of bureaucratic control, rich burials with monumental architecture and sculpture, a structured organization of production and long-distance exchanges controlled by the elites.

The appearance of miniatures in the archaeological record coincides with the rise and consolidation of a new framework of social relations based on powerful households inhabiting the *oppida*. After introducing some key theoretical concepts for an understanding of miniaturization, we list the types of miniatures from Iberian settlements in the central part of the Iberian territories (Fig. 1). The next section then deals with the historical contextualization of miniatures and puts forward some ideas concerning their social meaning. Finally, we explore the issue of enculturation and learning through miniatures in this society and their implications in terms of social groups and gender.

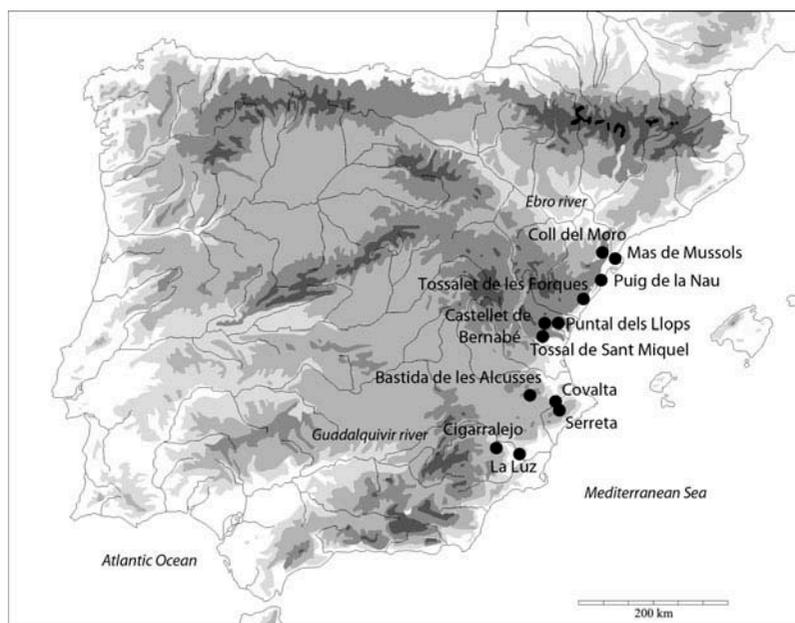


Figure 1 Map showing the main sites mentioned in the text.

Miniatures and miniaturization

Miniatures have aesthetic properties and evocative effects that promote enchantment and awe. They are steeped in symbolism and are treated with special consideration. An obvious place to start an appraisal of the concept of miniaturization is to say that miniatures are relational, in so far as they are small-scale imitations of their object of reference. A miniature is defined as a ‘copy on a much reduced scale’ and ‘something small of its kind’ (Merriam-Webster dictionary). Accordingly, in this article we deal with items that have been scaled down, although of course it is always difficult to draw boundaries between miniatures and small objects, especially in pottery. Bailey (2005) differentiates between miniatures and models in prehistoric figurines, seeing the latter as replications that seek exactitude and completion and the former as abstractions or alterations that do not need to be precise or exact.

It is our intention to focus on the contextualization of miniatures in their social settings. In doing so, we consciously leave aside theoretical and methodological discussions from semiotics about the nature of a miniature (see Knappett 2012). Miniatures are not isolated objective entities, but are connected to an array of artefacts, locations, social institutions, values and even humans. As such, they are able to shed light on the economic, social and political context of the Iberian Iron Age.

Bailey’s (2008, 10–11) notion of stereotyping in relation to figurines is very useful. Stereotyping allows people to make sense of the world around them and to define the proper way to do things. It is a strategy for constructing social groups and identity, for forming social personae. Also interesting is the point that miniatures entail and promote specific bodily movements, social norms and intimate engagements (Kohring 2011, 36), in contrast to full-sized objects. Because the house is the setting in which most of these engagements take place, it will be the focus of our attention in this article.

Miniatures in Iron Age Iberia

The deposition of miniatures representing humans (and, to a lesser extent, animals and objects) in sanctuaries and caves is a feature of much of Iberia during the Iron Age (Rueda 2011). Miniatures in domestic contexts have so far received less attention. Initially we focus on artefacts; later, in the discussion section we will consider animals and humans. Among miniature artefacts, three categories can be identified: pottery, tools and weapons.

Pottery

Miniature pottery vessels have been identified for many years as part of the Iberian pottery typology. All the miniature vessels are wheel-thrown pottery, made of well levigated clay and fired at a high temperature. It is very likely that they were produced by the same workshops that made normal full-sized pottery because they share similar technological choices, such as clays and pigments for decoration, although bodily practices in miniature manufacturing are different from those used to make full-sized objects (Kohring 2011, 41).

In terms of typology, one group of miniature vessels faithfully reproduced Iberian pottery assemblages, like the distinctive Iberian amphorae or the outer-rimmed S-shaped cups. Others, however, were new creations, like the cups and plates featuring an enlarged high foot from La



Figure 2 Miniatures of pottery from La Bastida de les Alcusses (Museum of Prehistory, Valencia).

Bastida de les Alcusses (Moixent, Valencia), perhaps designed in this way for functional reasons, as they could be held more easily (Fig. 2). Overall, they present a limited typological range. We find tableware such as cups, bowls and plates, and even a miniature copy of a krater is recorded at El Puntal dels Llops (Olocau, Valencia) (Bonet and Mata 2002, 97), as well as closed shapes such as bottles, jars, jugs and other medium-sized containers (Bonet and Vives-Ferrándiz 2011, 241). Some of them were burnished and decorated with simple painted motifs, but decoration of miniatures is uncommon, even though some full-sized examples featuring rich patterns of geometric, florid and even figured painted decorations were used for ritual ceremonies – for example, the assemblages from El Tossal de Sant Miquel and La Serreta (Bonet 1995; Grau 2002). Cooking pottery, made of coarse ware using a variety of manufacturing techniques and firing processes, is totally absent from the miniaturized repertoires.

Tools

The miniature tools recorded in the area represent farming equipment. They are all made in metalwork, and bronze, lead and iron are used without any particular pattern or association. Miniatures of tools include an ard plough made in iron from the *oppidum* of Covalta (Albaida, Valencia) and dated between the fifth and third centuries BC (Fig. 3) (Pla 1968). Except for the yoke, every part of the plough is perfectly recognizable in this miniature and a great deal of care



Figure 3 Miniature ard plough made in iron from Covalta (12.6cm long) (Museum of Prehistory, Valencia).



Figure 4 Bronze figurine of a yoked ox with a draft-pole from La Bastida de les Alcusses (6.5cm long) (Museum of Prehistory, Valencia).

has been put into it to show these details – the draft-pole, the stilt and the share are all neatly represented. Full-sized single-handled ploughs must have been made entirely of wood at the time, except for the ploughshare which was made of iron.

The miniature plough from Covalta is the only one of its kind found so far but it is not entirely unfamiliar in the area. Another bronze figurine featuring a yoked ox with a draft-pole comes from La Bastida de les Alcusses and is dated to between the end of the fifth century and the first half of the fourth century BC (Bonet and Vives-Ferrándiz 2011, 167) (Fig. 4). Although there are differences between these two objects, a preliminary conclusion is that representations of ploughs were meaningful in these social contexts.

Aside from ploughs, other miniature tools include picks and pickaxes in lead and bronze, all faithful copies of full-sized iron tools already in use in Iberia during the Iron Age (Pla 1968; Barril 2002). One pick made of lead comes from La Bastida de les Alcusses, and it is dated to the fourth century BC. A bronze pickaxe has been recorded in a domestic context in the rural settlement of El Castellet de Bernabé (Llíria, Valencia) (Fig. 5). This site is a fortified farm in the territory of the Iberian city of Tossal de Sant Miquel and was occupied between the fifth and the end of the third century BC. The miniature was deposited as an offering in an infant burial together with other grave goods: a small bronze ring, a small bronze bell and a marine shell



Figure 5 Left: pick in lead from La Bastida de les Alcusses (5.7cm long). Right: grave offerings in an infant burial from Castellet de Bernabé. Among them there is a bronze miniature pickaxe, 2.7cm long (Museum of Prehistory, Valencia).

(Guérin 2003, 47). We stress the domestic nature of this context, in spite of its being a burial. It may recall the fact that during this period in eastern Iberia new-born babies were buried beneath dwellings; infants and adults had a distinctive funerary ritual as they were cremated and buried in cemeteries outside the settlements (Chapa 2003). And, finally, there is an identical miniature bronze pickaxe from the fortified settlement of El Puig de la Nau (Benicarló, Castellón) (Oliver 2006, 49, 270) dated to the end of the fifth century BC. This object was found in a room, but has no relation to an infant burial.

Weapons

Weapons form another group of miniatures, albeit much less represented. Among the wide Iberian panoply formed by swords, shields, spears, javelins and daggers, only swords appear in miniaturized forms. Miniature falcatas – characteristic Iberian swords with a single-edged blade and a hook-shaped grip – made of iron have been found mostly in shrines outside the settlements in Cigarralejo, la Luz, la Encarnación and Casas Viejas (Murcia), although there is also one bronze miniature falcata from a settlement context (Cuadrado 1950; Lillo 1984–5; Quesada 1997, 164). They show a wide variety of types, grips and shapes and some of them may be rather simplified versions of long knives and stylized swords. In Covalta there is a bronze miniature object resembling a sword or knife of a different type from the falcata sword: it has a straight double-edged blade and the grip ends in a figured pommel. This object has four small holes, maybe for use in sewing on to clothing, and so may have been an amulet or personal item. Another sword, of a type dated to around the sixth century BC, comes from the settlement of El Tossalet de les Forques (Borriol, Castellón) (Fig. 6).

Finally, other swords in miniature have been found in tombs further north, near the Ebro, in the cemeteries of Mas de Mussols (Tortosa, Tarragona) and Coll del Moro (Gandesa, Tarragona) (Maluquer 1984, 89; Rafel 1993, 18). They are roughly dated to the sixth century BC.



Figure 6 Top: sword or long knife made in bronze from Covalta (9.7cm long) (Museum of Prehistory, Valencia). Bottom: sword made in bronze from El Tossalet de les Forques (6.7cm long) (Museu de Belles Arts, Castellón).

Summing up

The following conclusions can be drawn from the depiction of miniature artefacts. First, the production of these miniatures must have involved skilled artisans, potters, blacksmiths and metalworkers, not to mention the mobilization of labour and resources. They were the product of special know-how and complex technologies, from potting with the wheel to metalworking, including the mastering of pyro-technologies and melting processes like lost wax and wrought iron. However, miniatures remain distinct entities from full-sized objects: as the producers altered their *habitus* in the production processes, miniatures ‘may reflect a different categorization process whereby miniatures are a specific genre of material culture with different production acts directly leading to different uses and social meanings’ (Kohring 2011, 38). At any rate, miniatures should be seen as small-scale models, in Bailey’s words (2005) due to the level of precision and detail sought in their definitive form. Second, the contexts of location and date of usage provide clues to their interpretation. The vast majority come from powerful houses of central places and fortified, wealthy farmsteads, whereas weapons were mainly deposited in tombs and shrines. What is more, they appear around the fifth century BC; only some miniature swords from tombs in the northeast of Iberia may be dated slightly earlier. Finally, they are never very abundant and are restricted to specific types – pottery, tools and weapons – although the first two categories outnumber the last.

Several questions arise. Why did miniatures appear during this period and not before? Why were these specific categories of objects miniaturized? Were miniatures fundamental to people’s daily lives? What ideas and values did they convey? These issues are interrelated, and are the focus of the following sections.

Contextualizing Iberian miniatures

The Iberian scenario makes it very clear that the interest in miniaturizing certain everyday objects emerged around the turn of the sixth and fifth centuries BC (not before) and lasted up to the third and second centuries BC. This period coincides with the consolidation of hierarchies through a network of relations of dependence based on land, mining and trade, and on a warrior ideology expressed in tombs with weapons that appear in the sixth century BC and increase in number during the fifth and fourth centuries BC (Quesada 1997). The archaeological evidence from intensively surveyed territories shows that from the fifth century BC onwards new rural settlements were created from scratch (Bonet, Mata and Moreno 2008; Mata et al. 2009). Archaeobotanical information points to an agricultural system based on farming and focused on cereals and fruit trees (Iborra and Pérez Jordà 2013). There is also evidence of surplus production at certain sites, possibly used for trade.

In this context, iron tools and weapons must have been highly valuable items: the former as a means of production, necessary to maintain and prepare the land for cultivation or mining, the latter as items of warfare and violence. They were crafted by skilled artisans and produced with resources, technologies and know-how that were controlled by the elites. Iron metallurgy in the western Mediterranean remained restricted to the production of small, prestige items such as knives or bracelets until the sixth century BC, when new types of iron objects appeared: weapons, namely spears and javelins. Slightly later, in the fifth century BC, iron tools emerge,

always under control of the elites, but probably powered by the need to increase production. The evidence at La Bastida de les Alcusses, with up to twenty ploughs and many other iron tools, shows that they were owned by wealthy households. The fact that households at this site show differences in the number of ploughs and agricultural tools suggests that there were also differences in the access to land resources and labour, and that some of them relied heavily on farming (see details in Bonet and Vives-Ferrándiz 2011, 249).

So, our point is that miniatures reflect this world of social values. At a time when land ownership and farming had great social, economic and symbolic value, ploughs and oxen would have been held in high esteem due to their use in farming, and also as references to the land, rights and power. It cannot be a coincidence that miniatures of a plough and a yoked ox figurine appear at Covalta and La Bastida de les Alcusses, the latter in one of the wealthiest houses in the settlement. The question of land rights may be behind these objects too, and would have contributed to the construction and maintenance of a set of values and social relationships around land ownership and labour. The same can be said of picks and pickaxes in miniature that represent land and mining activities, another important economic resource for households. We should recall that the production of silver from argentiferous galena also increased in the fifth century BC (Rafel et al. 2010) and it is a well-recorded activity in the elite contexts we have dealt with so far.

As in other Mediterranean areas, land was a secure resource (Foxhall 2007, 55) acquired through warfare and violence. The group of miniature swords and a remarkable bronze figurine of an armed horseman from La Bastida de les Alcusses also point in this direction, reflecting the values attached to an elite warrior ideology. These leaders would have promoted warfare and the more successful among them achieved regional domination over other competing lineages.

The evidence also shows an increase in imported tableware from the fifth century BC onwards, and specifically of Attic Greek tableware (Sanmartí et al. 2009, 226). Plates, cups, bowls and kraters were imported by the Iberian elites, and imitations also appeared. They were used in feasts and social events where the consumption of food and beverages had a special meaning. The picture drawn from the miniature vessels fits neatly in this scenario: only tableware became miniaturized, with cups and bowls outnumbering other categories, and no miniatures of cooking utensils are found. This clearly indicates the social values that people sought: hospitality linked to acts of consumption of foodstuff and drinks.

By zooming in on the settlements, this picture becomes magnified and other details are revealed. The four-hectare hilltop settlement of La Bastida de les Alcusses is the best place to approach the distribution of miniatures in an Iberian *oppidum*, because it has been extensively excavated and it had a very short occupation span (Bonet and Vives-Ferrándiz 2011). Although not all the pottery was systematically documented, miniatures were recorded in fieldwork notebooks – they were probably easily spotted and recognizable during the excavations. Several conclusions can be deduced from Fig. 7. First, the distribution of the miniatures is quite regular all over the site, although there are some compounds without miniatures and others with very low numbers. It is worth noting that bronze figurines are found in the wealthiest block of houses. As regards pottery, drinking vessels easily outnumber plates and bottles, and they do not always form functional sets of tableware. Last but not least, it becomes clear that miniatures represent a type of material culture related to domestic spaces, as suggested by their scarcity in two blocks which have been interpreted as a storeroom and a public building for meetings (grey-shaded in the figure).

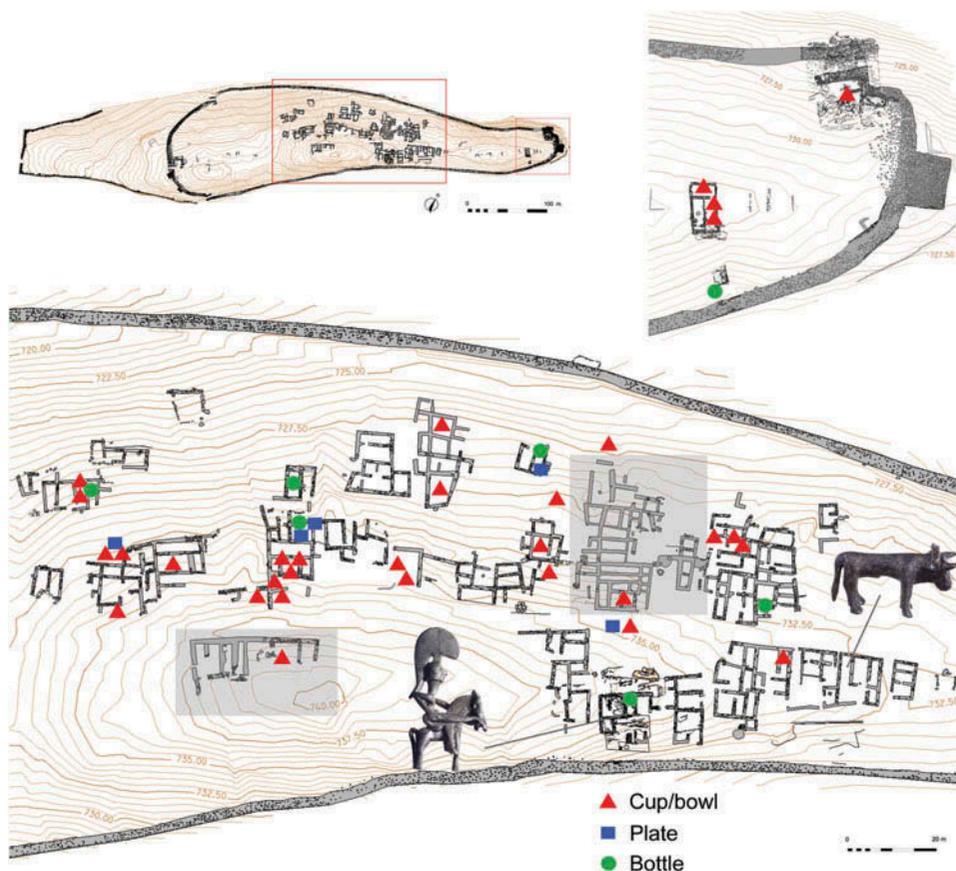


Figure 7 Distribution of miniatures at La Bastida de les Alcusses.

We should recall Kohring's comment (2011, 36) that miniatures are linked to private actions, not public events, and that they entail and reveal an intimacy in the engagements. The house is the place for actions at this scale. So here we see the prominence of the house, both as a locale for relations and as a social institution (Joyce and Gillespie 2000). Bigger, complex houses appear in settlements, and changes to houses show transformations in these societies from the sixth and fifth centuries BC onwards at the same time as the emergence of elaborate graves for individuals. Houses and graves suggest the role of lineages in the transmission of power, probably controlled by females represented in the sculptures (Chapa 2008). In this situation, social institutions like the household arise in order to pass on rights and power.

Miniatures, socialization and learning

The contexts considered so far – settlements and houses – were the main locus where daily maintenance activities took place as well as much of the socialization, including the rearing of children (Sánchez-Romero 2010; Lillehamer 2010). This process of learning norms and

accepted behaviour is encapsulated in the word *enculturation*. One form of enculturation is through playing. In pre-modern societies, playing was frequently inseparable from working or learning (Kamp 2010, 104) and Iberian miniatures may bear witness to this connection inasmuch as they were ‘teaching aids’ (Bailey 2005, 28) involving the enculturation of roles through the manipulation of objects. Miniatures may have been the medium by which adults defined the teaching of certain values, norms and accepted behaviour embodied in a group, an age group or gender (Sánchez Romero 2010, 11). In fact, some scholars have already associated miniatures, toys and children in Iberia (Chapa 2003), a connection neatly illustrated by the infant tomb from El Castellet de Bernabé, with a miniature pickaxe which may have served as an amulet, along with other grave goods. Magic and power may have been attached to miniatures such as this one or to others bearing holes to allow them to be sewn or hung on to clothes.

We have already seen that Iberian miniatures conveyed the ideology and values that mattered during the Iron Age: the importance of the land and of mining; commensality and feasting, as a social arena in which status, power and identity were displayed; and the use and control of weapons and violence to secure power. But, because miniatures require tactile and intimate engagements, we would now like to explore their role as learning tools in the processes of teaching and acquiring specific social roles. This process of learning is embodied in the miniatures through *enactive knowledge*, which is a kind of learning acquired not in isolation but through observation, communication and even instructions from others; it is a kind of knowledge that is retained in bodily sensory-motor responses (Bennett and O’Modhrain 2007, quoted in Tringham 2012, 188).

For instance, miniature vessels are certainly small in scale but they are by no means useless in the functional sense. Despite their size, plates and bowls could indeed have held foodstuffs, and bottles and containers could have stored liquid. Accordingly, they might have been used for the teaching of certain roles and for the inculcation of *habitus* in social events such as feasts. Equally, the manipulation of a horseman, a miniature sword or a plough implied the learning of values required to become a warrior or a landowner. Indeed, a number of horse figurines in terracotta have been found in Iberian settlements such as El Tossal de Sant Miquel. Among the group recorded to date in this settlement, one is finely decorated with tack for the horse’s head that parallels contemporary representations on pottery or sculpture, although the figurines are rendered distinctively (Bonet 1995) (Fig. 8). The bronze figurine of a horseman from La Bastida de les Alcusses also falls into this category of representations. Because these figurines come from houses of the powerful, and horsemen were among the ruling elites, interacting with horses might have been a way in which people learned who they were and who they would become. Gender roles and norms must also have been included in the processes of learning to become a social persona, as the masculinity of the weapons and horse figurines suggests. In fact we can deduce even more, as omissions are meaningful too: for instance, there are no miniatures representing cooking or weaving implements, activities generally associated with women. This may indicate that women’s roles were not promoted through engagement with miniatures.

These engagements and interactions with miniatures would have not been restricted to children; their invention, production and use have involved adults through a lifetime. By creating and manipulating miniatures, people would have conveyed how to behave and act, how to speak or how to move in social situations. And, as the learners reproduced roles and norms, they were also continually reminded of their role in society.



Figure 8 Left: bronze figurine of an armed horseman from La Bastida de les Alcusses (7.3cm high). Right: a horse terracotta from Tossal de Sant Miquel (7.8cm long) (Museum of Prehistory, Valencia).

Conclusions

Miniatures were connected to objects such as artefacts and houses, to social institutions and values and to humans at different stages of life. In this article we have dealt with miniatures from domestic contexts in Iron Age Iberia. The first point to stress is that miniatures appeared in Iberia around the sixth and fifth century BC, precisely coinciding with the emergence of a hierarchical social structure based on hereditary power and ruled over by a few households. We have explored the use of miniatures as learning tools in the processes of enactive knowledge, through manipulation and interaction with other people. The paradox of size with miniatures, in Bailey's words, is that 'the small stimulates very big thoughts about larger worlds'. In our case study, miniatures conveyed specific values that mattered enormously at the time – the importance of land resources, feasting and the use of weapons and horses – which would be learnt over a lifetime. Some of these values, norms and behaviours were embedded in gender ideals and were fundamental for the enculturation and construction of social personae.

It is true that magic and power may have also been attached to certain miniatures, but we reject a universalistic interpretation of miniatures in terms of votive offerings and symbolic objects with little or no functional use. The boundaries between functional and symbolic are often blurred. The fact that miniatures occur in very limited numbers in houses – in some cases, only one specimen is found – suggests that their interpretation as votive offerings is questionable. On the other hand, they provide a great deal of information about social roles learnt through everyday interactions.

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