
HUMAN FIGURINES

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Figurines in the forms of people, animals, and other objects are recovered from archaeological sites throughout the world. They were constructed from a wide range of materials, including clay, stone, wood, and other perishable items such as split twigs. Stylistically simple and with little decoration, researchers often link these figures with fertility or cult rituals that may have been based in the household, or on a larger community-wide scale (Marcus 1998; Voigt 1983, 1991). Other possible functions included use as charms in healing rituals, use in rituals honoring family ancestors, and as toys. In the Greater Southwest, figurines such as these are recovered from various contexts that encompass an extensive time range.

Some of the earliest known ceramic figurines in human form were discovered at the Las Capas site, AZ AA:12:111 (ASM), in the Tucson Basin (Stinson 2005). All the figurines from this site are strikingly similar and came from deposits and features dated from 1200 B.C. to 800 B.C. These figurines consist of three separate pieces of clay joined together to form a large, rounded base with a narrow torso, and a head extending upward. Facial features include small, circular punctures for the eyes and, in some cases, a mouth. Hair, specifically braided hair, is the only other noticeable ornamentation. Nearly all figurine fragments from Las Capas had appliquéd clay strips formed into braids present on either side of the head. In cases where these braids are missing, there is evidence that the braids were once attached and broke off at some point during the thousands of years since their manufacture and use.

The Rio Nuevo sites yielded a total of 49 fired-clay objects, including 44 artifacts that could be identified as portions of fired clay human figurines (Tables 8.1-8.3). These artifacts were recovered from both an early site, Clearwater, AZ BB:13:6 (ASM), and a site occupied later in time, the Tucson Presidio site, AZ BB:13:13 (ASM). The majority, however, were found at the Clearwater site. Many of these fragments consist of leg segments or the end of an appendage. No complete figurines or heads were recovered. The fragments were primarily unburned, although obviously broken. They were overwhelmingly found in pit structures, with a few recovered from pits or other features.

Ceramic figures continued to be manufactured in the Tucson area for thousands of years after this. Slight changes in form occurred over this long period, although the basic shape and decoration remained the same. After the San Pedro phase (1200-800 B.C.), figurines were more common during the Cienega phase (800 B.C.-A.D. 50), with examples coming from the Santa Cruz Bend, AZ AA:12:746 (ASM); Coffee Camp, AZ AA:6:9 (ASM); and Wetlands, AZ AA:12:90 (ASM), sites. At Coffee Camp, the torso of a seated male figure was found with coffee bean eyes and an appliquéd necklace and hair (Ferg 1998). The origin and function of these early figurines is difficult to determine. However, the artifacts (phyllite wand, bone tube, shell, a piece of malachite, unworked pebbles, and two deer antler racks) found associated with the Coffee Camp figurine indicate a possible ritual function.

In the general Hohokam region, most studies of ritual concentrate on ballcourts and other forms of communal architecture such as platform mounds (Wilcox 1991). Figurines have been analyzed, but primarily from a descriptive basis only (Haury 1976; Morss 1954). To determine the function of figurines in the Tucson Basin, a number of characteristics can be compiled and analyzed. These attributes include intentional breakage, intentional burning, context in which they were discarded, use-wear, and sex characteristics. The figurines can then be placed into a functional category based on these attributes.

Prior to A.D. 900, the figurines appear to have been frequently utilized as representatives of deceased relatives in ancestor worship. Ancestor ritual is common in Africa, Asia, and North and South America, and it can be practiced on several different levels. However, certain attributes of ancestor worship seem universal throughout the world (Fortes 1976). Death does not end a person's participation in the lives of his or her family community. Instead, this participation simply takes a different form than if they were still living, and the contributions this person made while living are still recognized and valued. It is important for the ancestors to be reincorporated into the community in a different spiritual capacity after death, and this is frequently made real in specific material ways with the use of altars, shrines, memorial tablets, and figurines.

Table 8.1. Context of Rio Nuevo fired clay objects, by site.

Context	Clearwater, AZ BB:13:6 (ASM)	Canal Feature 144, AZ BB:13:481 (ASM)	Tucson Presidio, AZ BB:13:13 (ASM)
Stratum 504, pit structure	1	-	-
Stratum 504, nonfeature	2	-	-
Stratum 503, nonfeature	1	-	-
Cienega phase pit structure	23	-	-
Hohokam pit structure or pit	4	-	1
Hohokam canal	-	1	-
Territorial/Modern adobe structure	1	-	-
Territorial large pit	-	-	4
Spanish, large pit	-	-	1
Naturally deposited overburden	1	-	-
Sheet trash	1	-	8
Total	34	1	14

Table 8.2. Figurine and other fired-clay object types from the Rio Nuevo project, by site.

Object Type	Clearwater, AZ BB:13:6 (ASM)	Canal Feature 144, AZ BB:13:481 (ASM)	Tucson Presidio, AZ BB:13:13 (ASM)
Fired clay fragment	2	-	2
Individual human figurine fragment	3	-	-
Torso	1	-	1
Cylindrical segment	14	-	6
Pointed extremity	4	-	1
Rounded extremity	4	1	1
Blunted extremity	1	-	1
Spatulate extremity	-	-	1
Torso and extremities	-	-	1
Plain bead	3	-	-
Squeeze	2	-	-
Total	34	1	14

Table 8.3. Figurine characteristics from the Rio Nuevo project.

ASM Site	Unburned Figurines	Partially Burned Figurines	Heavily Burned Figurines	Broken Figurines	Decoration
Clearwater, AZ BB:13:6	20	7	2	29	1
Canal Feature 144, AZ B:13:481	1	-	-	1	-
Tucson Presidio, AZ BB:13:13	6	3	5	14	2
Total	27	10	7	44	3

Ancestors can also be used to mark a familial tie to certain places or rights (McAnany 1995). In this sense, ancestors are venerated by name so that their descendants can inherit certain places and resource rights, and ancestors were often buried within residential compounds to strengthen these ties. The interesting point is that the practice of ancestor worship is not about the actual dead; instead, in some instances, it is about how the living relatives used the dead.

A second possible usage of these figurines is in ceremonies intended to cure, heal, insure future health and fertility, and to ward off evil power. Magic is defined as a realm of power in which people can directly affect nature or other individuals, as exemplified by the practices of curing and witchcraft. Malicious behaviors are believed in many societies to cause illness, and witchcraft is thought to be a manifestation of this power (Crawford 1967; Simmons 1974). Therefore, figurines can be used to pro-

duce, prevent, or counteract a negative situation. These figures, along with other kinds of medicine or personal charms worn on the body, are safeguards, and they may even represent good spirits that are able to remove evil or perpetuate good. They may be used as part of a healing ritual strongly associated with fertility and pregnancy (Barbour 1975). They may also be used for everything from curing specific diseases to preventing illness and misfortune in all segments of the population (Bruce 1973; Follensbee 2000).

After A.D. 900 in the Hohokam area, the use of figurines appears to change; at that time, figures were most commonly buried with cremated individuals. They were also constructed from different clays, and they were formed in new ways that incorporated perishable material such as wood for the body. Further study will help explain these changes and allow a more clear definition of the functional uses of these figurines.

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