

Daughters of the Sun



DAUGHTERS OF THE SUN

Small Human Images in Megalithic Iberia, 4th-3rd Millennium BC

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Cover figurines, from left to right:

1. Sculptural plaque with hands. Stone. Dolmen of Garrovillas, Cáceres. Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid
2. Cruciform (“anchor-shaped”). Bone. Blanquizaes de Lébor, Totana, Murcia. Museo de Almería
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4. Oculate on long bones, Cova de Bolumini, Alfafara, Alicante. Museo Arqueológico Municipal Camilo Visedo Moltó, Alcoy.
5. Oculate cylinder. Stone. Moncarapacho, Olhão, Faro. Museu Nacional de Arqueologia, Lisbon,
6. Geometric anthropomorphic figurine, cylindrical bipartite with flared ends, with face. Clay. Marroquies Bajos, Jaén. Museo de Jaén.
7. Trapezoidal oculate plaque with incised tritriangulars. Stone. Mértola, Beja, Museu Nacional de Arqueologia, Lisbon.

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The discourse that we have conveyed in the various exhibitions held between 2020 and 2023 in Spain and Portugal has focused on aspects that have not been sufficiently developed in the general issue of the study of Iberian figurines, especially their ancient trajectory, their capacity to provide information on identities, provenance, craftsmanship and their inventory as a unique legacy of portable human bodies, mostly female. It is only fair to thank colleagues, administrations, universities and museums for their support of the scientific and informative project *Ídolos. Miradas Milenarias*. The updating of the knowledge of these objects was carried out with the collaboration of colleagues in the various publications related to the exhibition, arguing the interpretations, contexts and chronologies that have marked European historiography. Our intention in those publications was to offer the public the wide range of interpretations of figurines of women in recent European prehistory, including proposals that differ from those maintained in this book, so that the discourse we proposed could be approached with more extensive tools than those traditionally referred to for this subject in the Iberian Peninsula (Bueno and Soler, 2020, 2021 a and b).

An important aspect of these records is their scant graphic documentation, an issue that the exhibition has sought to resolve by bringing together pieces that in many cases had never been exhibited before. In addition to the managerial efforts of the staff of all the Portuguese and Spanish museums that have collaborated, it has been necessary to provide quality photographic information. The Museums have been aware that access to these images is part of their dissemination and have therefore loaned them to us with great generosity and with few exceptions. The same can be said of the researchers whose images have been made available to us, always quoting their provenance in the captions.

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Working for culture is one of the greatest satisfactions that people involved in its research, administration and management can have, and we are enormously grateful for having fulfilled the ambition of making known to the public one of the many strengths of our archaeological heritage: the first production of portable art on a peninsular scale that focuses on women's bodies over almost three thousand years.

Since our meeting at the forum *Machines of time: archaeological museums in the century*, held in El Escorial in July 2016, when we began to think about the exhibition with Enrique Baquedano, we have built our friendship by exchanging views on the possibilities of research and dissemination of this legacy. We owe it to the *Daughters of the Sun* to have brought together our passion for prehistoric research and the luxury of sharing this vocation with that of many colleagues and professionals by coordinating the publication of catalogues and guides. Hand in hand, from the University of Alcalá de Henares and from the museums of the Diputación de Alicante, we have achieved an unimaginable goal, culminating in this edition, it is an achievement that excites us, a shared purpose.

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Foreword

Margarita Sánchez Romero

Professor of Prehistory University of Granada

Meaningful is the first word that comes to mind when reading this text; and after that, a few others: pertinent, rigorous, careful, informative... Also substantial, as I will explain later. As a researcher hugely interested in the study of the body from the perspective of bioarchaeology and the material culture associated with it, but not specialised in its representation, this book holds a wealth of tremendously significant and exciting information. I already found commendable the immense task undertaken by the authors of this book Primitiva Bueno Ramírez and Jorge A. Soler Díaz for the exhibition *Ídolos Miradas Milenarias / Ídolos. Olhares Milenares* promoted by the Fundación C.V. MARQ of Alicante, the Museo Regional de la Comunidad de Madrid and the National Museum of Portugal. So now, and going beyond the magnificent published catalogue, this book allows us to revisit the content in a recurrent, calm way and above all, the reflections derived from the elaboration of this exhibition.

I refer to this book as substantial, essential, for several reasons. Firstly, because it is pertinent, because it brings to the table the debate on the meaning of these figurines. A debate, at times, full of preconceived ideas and “authoritative” knowledge that, at times, has oversimplified the explanation of a very significant material reality of made up of more than 6000 recorded items and which appears in the southern half of the Iberian Peninsula, especially between the middle of the 4th millennium and the last quarter of the 3rd millennium BC. The updated, open and rigorous approach of the authors of this book also makes it substantial, in the most nutritional sense of the word, as in one book it provides us with everything we know so far about such important representations.

Secondly, because of the rigorous, excellent research that lies behind each of the chapters. In a very wise decision, the authors chose to structure the content through a historiographical journey through the different hypotheses, reasons and views that explain these representations, through what has been said about them; and it is essential to understand these explanations in the social, political, economic and even ethical context in which they are produced, in which this scientific knowledge is generated, because they explain, to a large extent, the reason for these accounts; without present day value judgements, but aware of the need for a critical and calm review of many of these affirmations. Moving away from interpretations of religious beliefs and moving towards those that have to do with social, territorial or gender identities allows us to open up a highly worthwhile field to gain knowledge on past societies.

Thirdly, the impressive graphic apparatus of the volume is a real luxury, a very welcome effort that allows us to go through the text in an informed way: contrasting, observing, enjoying the enormous variety of images that fulfil their function of making the comprehension of what is being explained much more fluid. The possibility of paying attention to the descriptions of bodies, signs, clothing, decorations, colours and materials make the book much richer to read.

Fourthly, it is a text with a clearly informative vocation, designed for a university audience, as a manual for students, but which, at the same time, can be read by anyone with an interest in these cultural manifestations. Primitiva Bueno and Jorge A. Soler are fully aware of the need to spread scientific knowledge, because that is the way in which Archaeology can be relevant in today’s societies; not with the simple idea of showing knowledge, but with the desire for that knowledge to be transformative in the present day.

One last note, as Primitiva Bueno and Jorge A. Soler point out, the volume is called *Daughters of the sun* because of the enormous number of female representations that appear related to this typology, in their words: *Assuming that they represented bodies of different ages and genders the protagonism of women is a fact that the title Daughters of the Sun seeks to resituate in their social sphere. They collaborated in a very direct way to spread common mythologies, enrich symbolism, and in the extension of technical knowledge, in daily care and in the rituals of death that we perceive in the megaliths.* I could not agree more. In 1981, in her article *Prehistoric Venuses: Symbols of Motherhood or Womanhood?*, Prudence Rice already made a detailed survey of the so-called Palaeolithic *venuses* and their diverse bodies: adolescents, pregnant women, elderly women, adult women, adorned, dressed, hair arranged, depicted in more or less abstract forms, pointing out precisely this, that what these figurines showed was an idea of femininity, and not of reproduction or sexuality

as previously it had been made to seem so simply, but also so efficiently in terms of the transmission of certain discourses.

That women are socially, economically or politically relevant in the communities of the past should not surprise us. Even, and we do not deny this reality, in forms of patriarchal social organisation (or at least on the way to becoming patriarchal) such as those that are the object of study of this book. Giving value to these representations and thus to those who are represented does not lead us to speak of matriarchy. That would result in another simplicity, but it does lead us to investigate in these societies concepts such as matrilocality, the system of post-marital cohabitation in which a married couple resides in the sphere of the wife's family; or matrilineality, when the affiliation of people to the social group is done through the maternal line. It invites us to understand women as conscious and recognised social agents in their societies. The possibilities are many, the research to try to glimpse the different contingencies for specific cases is fascinating, and it is necessary to put an end to narratives that try to explain (explain to us) societies in a global and homogeneous way. In this sense, this book is a (welcome and effective) step forward, not only in our knowledge of women in the past but, above all, in our knowledge of the societies of the past.

Preface

António Carvalho

Director Museu Nacional de Arqueologia (Portugal)

The presentation at the Museums of Archaeology of Alicante and Alcalá de Henares, in Madrid, of the exhibition *Ídolos Miradas Milenarias* coincided with the COVID 19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, which led to an unprecedented political decision, taken on a global scale, to almost completely halt human activity on our planet Earth in 2020 and 2021.

The directors and teams of the entities organising the exhibition - the Fundación C.V. MARQ, of Alicante - and two important museums - the Museo Arqueológico de Alicante (MARQ) and the Museo Arqueológico y Paleontológico da Comunidad de Madrid, in Alcalá de Henares -, as well as the Scientific Curators, Primitiva Bueno Ramírez and Jorge A. Soler Díaz, specially supportive, were tireless in gathering the means and will to ensure that the exhibition would not be confined to the eyes of a few thousand visitors, but that it could be internationalised with its presentation at the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia in Lisbon, thus marking the programme of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which Portugal took over in the first half of 2021. At the same time, it was part of the programme of *Mostra Espanha 2021*: a biennial programme of cultural activities promoted in Portugal by the Spanish Ministry of Culture and Sport, through the Directorate General for Cultural Industries and Cooperation, in partnership with *Acción Cultural Española (AC/E)* and the Spanish Embassy in Lisbon, which involves multiple institutions with different ownership in both countries.

It was fortunately possible to reschedule the exhibition even during the first year of the pandemic and to present it at the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia, after the period of the second and definitive confinement, which was a very special moment of great significance for all of us and marked the history of the Museum's exhibition programme, by bringing the possibility of extending the exhibition with the revision of historical collections coming mainly from megalithic contexts dating back to the 4th and 3rd millennium BC in Central/Southern Portugal.

Thus, at the presentation of the exhibition in Lisbon, the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia ceased to be, as is natural, only the largest Portuguese museum, overshadowing its counterpart, the Museo Nacional de Arqueología in Madrid for the Spanish reality, to become, thanks to the generosity, vision and competence of the organisers and the Scientific Commissions, a co-organising museum, as it presented a revised and enlarged exhibition to the public with the same concept and museography, but expanding the corpus and the nuclei.

The exhibition was particularly well visited and commented on. As in previous exhibitions in Spain, it was accompanied by an excellent cultural programme that brought together many institutions and a particularly active communication plan. In addition to the exhibition guide and other four-language support, it was possible to publish an impressive catalogue *Ídolos. Olhares Milenares. The State of the Art in Portugal*. In this edition, in partnership with the Imprensa Nacional, we show a point of view of situation on our knowledge about the ongoing research on archaeological sites and contexts and artefact collections in Portugal, involving Portuguese researchers of different generations with different experiences, perspectives, schools of thought, positionings and views.

The undeniable success of the presentation in Lisbon was the result of the particularly friendly and collaborative attitude of all those involved and consisted of a review of the historical collections, as well as an exhaustive photographic campaign of the items selected for the corpus that are now also published in this book. On the other hand, it involved several national institutions, which made it possible to bring together in the exhibition and in the Museum other collections that were absent from the previous exhibitions and that would be very difficult to bring together again, which made it possible for many to realign ideas or change perspectives of interpretation, but for all of us to enrich our vision.

The Museu Nacional de Arqueologia has also been able to deal in the 21st century with a subject which, although it was always present in the programming concerns of the exhibitions held by the generations that preceded us at the Museu, it has never been possible to present to the public.

We remember all this history in connection with the publication of the book *Daughters of the Sun. Small human images in the time of the great stones. Iberia. IV- III millennium B.C.* because we consider that this book is indissociable from this path. We can even consider it a consequence of this journey.

This book represents the moment when its authors, Primitiva Bueno Ramírez and Jorge A. Soler Díaz, reach the peak of the process of research, reflection, experimentation and consolidation of concepts on this subject, obtained through parallel paths pursued simultaneously to reach this summit.

Because we write this by the mouth of the River Tagus, allow us to take a literary liberty and say that this book is like the long estuary of a long mighty river in which water from many affluents is mixed.

The authors' task, although exciting and rewarding, was not easy. They analysed the particularly complex subject in depth, collecting and processing a vast amount of data from third party excavations in Spain and Portugal, both old and recent, and with different levels of records. They critically reflected on this data, bringing the information together in a legitimate way. It is clear that despite the book being about this reality in the Iberian Peninsula, they did not confine themselves to Iberia, as they are especially attentive to the comparative reading of these realities with other similar ones, of various chronologies, in different geographies. They then combine it with their own research in the field and the review of museum collections. Particularly relevant is the fact that the authors, with the resources that scientific research currently allows them, calibrated with the conceptual premises that this historical period offers them, provide us with a holistic interpretation that unequivocally allows us to venture into a change of conceptual and explanatory paradigm about these figures of ancient bodies, mostly portable.

The research carried out for the conception and production of the exhibitions referred to above has also allowed them to examine, several times, the transfer of scientific knowledge to society in an accessible and inclusive way. This book efficiently and effectively fulfills this desire; and, of course, it constitutes one stage of a scientific and academic, but also cultural, civic and emotional journey that Primitiva Bueno Ramírez and Jorge A. Soler Díaz have been on for years.

This book is a synthesis, but not a superficial one. It is simple and accessible, but deals with complex problems that are difficult to explain, as the authors attempt to reconstitute and critically interpret lost and distant realities. It constitutes a repository, a complete manual properly ordered, in the form of a dictionary. It is a true state of the art on the subject for the Iberian Peninsula, pre-announced, if we consider the writing, revision or orientation exercise over the last 4 years of the exhibition room texts, the exhibition guides and catalogues in Alicante, Alcalá de Henares, Lisbon and, more recently, for Huelva, and, of course, the two volumes (Nos. 23 and 24) of the journal *Zona Arqueológica* published by the Museo Arqueológico y Paleontológico de la Comunidad de Madrid and entitled *Mobile Images of Ancestral Bodies: a Millenium-Long Perspective from Iberia to Europe*.

An edition of this book in Portuguese is extremely important: for the importance of the subject; for the fact that it deals with National Heritage; for the large community of interested parties, in several generations of current and future archaeologists, for the interest of historians and art historians, and all those who are interested in the subject of humanity's relationship with small, fragile and beautiful anthropomorphic figures; as it is a unique synthesis of the subject; as it considers a geographical reality that includes Portugal and because it is undoubtedly up-to-date.

The book for which Primitiva Bueno Ramírez and Jorge A. Soler Díaz invited the current Director of the National Museum of Archaeology - admittedly a non-specialist - to preface, can only be explained by the fact that they trust that the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia, the respective team and its Director, have accompanied them during this time on the path of rediscovering and re-reading through the unique exhibition that we recall above.

The exhibition "Ídolos. Olhares Milenares / Ídolos. Miradas Milenarias", in Lisbon, through contact with a historical heritage of unique dimensions, and with other sources, in particular the scientific illustration of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, even if modestly, contributed so that the authors, who already considered and reflected on the Portuguese data, became aware of the impact that their work of synthesis and dissemination also had in Portugal.

In times of executing the financing attributed to the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia in the Recovery and Resilience Plan of Portugal that implies the integral remodelling of the building and the complete exhibition reprogramming of the Museum, all the reflection presented in this book and this synthesis are especially opportune and useful, as can be seen specifically in chapter 15 entitled "An exceptional legacy" where the authors make proposals for the valorisation of the anthropomorphic groups.

The vision that the book provides us with is especially interesting and opportune for the task that the team of the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia has in hand, so that it also takes on special importance for us at this time.

The Museu Nacional de Arqueologia, thanks Primitiva Bueno Ramírez and Jorge A. Soler Díaz for inviting us to continue on this path together, for the international projection that has been given to the collections and to national archaeological research.

Presentation

Primitiva Bueno Ramírez and Jorge A. Soler Díaz

The intention of making ourselves visible through engraved, painted and sculpted images has fascinated all audiences and has been the subject of archaeological, anthropological, cognitive and social research for many generations. The most ancient representations of human bodies are associated with the graphic productions of Palaeolithic groups throughout the world, their best known representation being the famous female images that came to be known as *venus*. During the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, with the settlement of habitation areas and the great development of funerary customs, an important inventory of human representations is known all over the world, with a prominent role for female references.

This period appears in all the textbooks as the beginning of the first groups of producers and metallurgists. Ceramics, polished stone, basketry, metal tools or weapons and ornaments are some of their best-known material manifestations, both in everyday life and in funerary deposits. Megaliths are the most outstanding structure, and since at least the second half of the 5th millennium BC they have been a feature of the funerary landscapes of much of Europe. Inside them, in addition to the human remains of different generations and their grave goods, there are small human figurines. Of all that period, what is most newsworthy are the great stones, the moving and lifting of which required very significant collective efforts; but the small bodies that accompanied men, women, girls and boys in death and probably also in life, hold precious information that enriches and complements that provided by other more studied materialities.

The wealth of portable Iberian figurines is unique in Europe, not only because of their quantity but also because of their variety and association with megalithic contexts with a wide territorial implantation. The Iberian pieces offer relevant data for the reconstruction of megalithic funerary scenarios and for unravelling their role in everyday life. Their codified formulas have an impact on the rest of Europe, not only in the symbolism of the megaliths but also in the configuration of the statuary associated with them, their influence being particularly visible in the Menhir statues of the South of France or in the series of Alpine statuary representations.

It is not common to dedicate a university text to small objects from prehistory. The visual strength, the level of craftsmanship and specialisation they show, the economic capacities and the connectivity they point to justify this book as an approach to rituality, funerary customs and the social cogs in a specific area of Southern Europe, Iberia.

A long habit over time and space of interacting with these images provides an initial consideration. It is not easy to confine their meaning to a single motive, nor has their role been unchanged from the most ancient to the most recent representations. Throughout this time, the image of women has been an essential reference point in symbolism, generating forms that have transcended to the present day: from the inspiration of cubism in some Palaeolithic pieces, to the expression of power through its association with solar images.

This book focuses its study on the portable versions of human bodies seen from the front, where the way in which the eyes are represented surrounded by rays, like suns, stands out. For this reason, they have been called oculates or sun-eyed figures. Some represent whole bodies, but generally it is the upper part of the body that appears, so that we might think that they are fragmented bodies or seated figures of which only the upper part is visible; without ruling out the possibility that they were intended as the upper part of supports made of wood, clay or other perishable materials on which they rested. The information we have from the most detailed and complete images that are drawn in some painted shelters in the Iberian Peninsula, shows diverse actions of social clustering in which the sun-eyed figurines are the protagonists. Although schematic art has been linked to the Mediterranean origin of Neolithic cultures, there is no territory in the Mediterranean, nor in the rest of Europe, with such a rich and varied development as Iberian schematic art. A future line of research will have to address this aspect in order to position themes and techniques of Iberian schematic art as a key reference in the study of the symbolism of recent prehistory in Southern Europe. The first chapters are aimed at outlining these aspects in order to introduce readers to the general problem of representations of women's bodies from the Upper Palaeolithic, to their development throughout Europe and to their insertion into a broader set of elaborate codifications that develop in everyday

and funerary life. The figurines cannot be understood in isolation from the rich inventory of female images that accompany recent European prehistory and, more intensely, that of the Iberian Peninsula.

We will try to approach the research from distant goddesses from the East to everyday references that were part of the social codes transmitted from generation to generation for more millennia than our current culture. The interpretation of the small bodies of Neolithic and Chalcolithic women reveals the profound changes in thought applied to the cultures of the past. Magic, religion and shamanism as generalised explanations for ancient symbolism have in many cases been exercised as an active tool for undervaluing past societies. Nowadays, contextual, territorial, social and economic interpretations weigh more heavily, including these figurines in the social narrative of cultures with a strong ideological component. We will review the different interpretations of the long journey of Iberian historiography in order to situate ourselves in the most up-to-date hypotheses. This journey is marked by some of the works that built the ideas that still form part of the interpretation of these records today.

We have followed the thread of discoveries and classifications based on the publications of Siret, who also collected the ones of those who preceded him, especially Leite de Vasconcellos and Estacio da Veiga. The sequence of publications and interpretations of the first half of the 20th century is based on his proposals, an aspect that we wanted to underline by numbering Siret's typologies in order to verify their concordance with those made well into the 20th century. This is the subject of chapters 4 and 5, before presenting the state of knowledge of the figurines in the different Iberian geographies and their preferred materials in chapters 6 to 8. For this purpose, the data collection was based on the most important references, which explains the number of bibliographical citations, including those of the contributions to the different publications of our colleagues, and our own. Where citations are direct, they are enclosed in quotation marks, as is the usual practice.

Sorting these records is a necessary starting point to facilitate the analysis of their proximities and differences, chapter 9. Their discussion is developed from chapter 10 onwards, presenting some of the formal, technical, social, functional and identity aspects of the figurines. The synthesis and conclusions in Chapter 14 underline the enormous potential for the study of the portable heritage of the first extended reproductions of women's bodies in Iberia, which has yet to be tackled. The effort to contrast with a Reference Base since Siret (RBD), how these pieces were named and their analysis by means of a geometrically based organisation, is a tool for following the historiographical trajectories of these pieces. The correlation between the nomenclatures of the organisation in Chapter 9 and the RBD takes the form of updated definitions and citations that allow this information to be used as an up-to-date reference.

Bringing together the Iberian portable figurines under the title *Daughters of the Sun* reflects the overwhelming representation of women's bodies and their close relationship with figures wearing solar garments, who are directly associated with solar representations or who are "dressed" as the sun. The images we are going to deal with, daughters of the sun, are transmitters of ancestral knowledge, justifiers of collective origins, markers of inheritance and lineage. In short, a synthesis of the stories that brought together common origins in singular lines, identities, in different areas of the Peninsula. Stories of generations far removed from our own that share the value of the sun as central characters in our own cultural stories: saints, kings and other ideological references, which have sustained the foundation of their social and ideological power in their connection with the sun.

There are many and varied works on the figurines, but few are devoted exclusively to these portable pieces. Siret and later authors did not produce any monographic publications. The only one published in the 1970s by M.J. Almagro Gorbea, with drawings and a few black and white photographs, is surpassed by the reality of the artefacts. In recent years there has been a growing interest in an archaeology that looks for people in the little things. One of the latest examples, the volume published by Insoll, *Figurines*, in 2017, has been a huge success, but the Iberian series is not valued for its contextual richness, variety or evidence of connectivity. This situation made us realise the need to work on the scientific and social dissemination of this impressive legacy that is so little known. It was with this objective in mind that the exhibition, *Ídolos Miradas Milenarias / Ídolos. Olhares Milenares*, promoted by the Fundación C.V. MARQ of Alicante, the Museo Regional de la Comunidad de Madrid and the Museu Nacional de Portugal, brought together in 2020 and 2021 in Alicante, Alcalá de Henares and Lisbon more than two hundred pieces from different museums in Spain and Portugal, achieving the publication of three scientific volumes (in Spanish, Portuguese and English) as well as two guides, catalogues, which have been the subject of scientific reviews (Cubas, 2020; Guilaine, 2022; Díaz Guardamino, 2023). In 2023 a new exhibition at the Museo de Huelva has added more pieces from Portuguese museums and from Huelva's own collection, as well as an updated catalogue and a scientific volume in Portuguese and Spanish.

The museums in much of the south of the Iberian Peninsula offer a very good idea of the wealth of forms of these pieces, which are almost like jewellery due to their detailed workmanship. We can directly in person see the shapes, volumes, craftsmanship and emotion by visiting the Museo Arqueológico Nacional de Madrid, Nacional de Arqueología in Lisbon, the archaeological museums of Andalusia, the Valencian Community, the Region of Murcia, Extremadura and others in Portugal, many of which have provided us with images of the most outstanding pieces for the purpose of this publication.

We associated dissemination with research in a planned strategy that brought these two fields together, as the most active way of bringing scientific issues closer to the general public. When subjects of this importance are disseminated scientifically, it is usually an impulse for a boom and renewal of their studies, an effect that we seek starting with the research carried out in the framework of this exhibition. We hope that this will open up a fruitful period of documentation more in line with scientific archaeology.

The participation of specialists from different institutions and countries has been a great opportunity to show different views on these small objects, ranging from the positions most closely linked to exclusively religious evaluations to those that explore the social codes that sustained this type of production in recent European prehistory. The advantage for those who read this book and consult the publications mentioned above, is that they will be able to have access to the arguments that are deployed for these interpretations. Only with open and public information will those who access it have the basis for understanding the evolution of interpretations of the symbols of these societies and the role that scientific archaeology has played and continues to play in these changes. This journey is set out in the first eight chapters.

There are many ways of approaching a study such as the one we are attempting and, without undermining those that focus on the religious aspect, from chapter 9 onwards we will highlight, the ancestral trajectory of the figurines, their social value, identity, gender, age and status, information on special clothing for specific actions (dances and funerary rites), details of hairstyles and adornments. Likewise, the aspects of craftsmanship, specialisation and workshops are fundamental in enlightening us on the economy that these pieces represent. Those who incorporate them into their burials usually display various objects of external provenance and sometimes of great value, which was probably also the case during their lifetime. The search for raw materials, their relationship with specific territories or the quality of the work systems all adds information to contribute to the study of the groups that produced these images.

The time in which these figurines existed goes beyond the classic divisions between Neolithic and Chalcolithic, as is the case with other expressions associated with megalithism, drawing attention to the rigid interpretations that connect cultural and technological evolutions. The transversality of funerary customs reveals the social role of symbolic, cultural, architectural and ideological formulas of the first producer groups in the construction of the symbolism of the societies of recent European prehistory.

Between 5800 / 5600 and 2200 cal BC these coded versions of human images were common in Iberia, especially concentrated in the South and West, the areas where most of the megaliths are located along with the most common habitation installations at that time, the moat enclosures and fortified enclosures. Enclosures and megaliths require the collective effort of digging, extracting, dragging, lifting, propping up, all actions that require “coarse” tools; but the figurines show highly refined workmanship and complex technical elaborations of a specialised craftsmanship, workshops and distribution in local and outside networks.

It is a privilege to have the forewords by Margarita Sanchez Romero, Professor of Prehistory at the University of Granada, and Antonio Carvalho, Director of the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia in Lisbon, who address the two lines that these volumes aim to highlight. The value of the information housed in museums and their role as a nexus between research and dissemination, and the advance in the study of the role of women in prehistory, with the updating of the historiographical trajectory of the largest Iberian record of representations of women’s bodies. The quality of both considerations makes them a reference in themselves and gives us motivation to continue with this task, which still has a long way to go.

This publication aims to set out the foundations of a narrative rooted in the earliest Neolithic period in Iberia, which underpinned the contents of the exhibition *Ídolos. Miradas milenarias*. Part of it is collected in the Catalogue-Guides and in the articles and texts published by the authors of this book. The collaboration, experience and intellectual weight of those who participated in the various scientific publications make up the multiple kaleidoscopic visions from which we learned and continue to learn. This dynamic project does not end here, but rather continues to

shape new exhibition content that does justice to the unusual visual, formal, social and cultural wealth of the small bodies of women in Iberia.

The figurines are part of the components of the oral narratives that presided over social organisation in everyday life and funerary life. The sculptural images of the Iberian Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods constitute an exceptional legacy deserving of the best measures to ensure their preservation and dissemination, together with the cave paintings, some of which are already *World Heritage Sites*. A collection that has prevailed for centuries and which avoids detailed figuration, its framework being its main reference point. They are the only European evidence of portable versions of Schematic Art that expresses and transmits messages based on codes largely resolved by combining geometric shapes.

Bringing this knowledge together in a university handbook projects the value of a repertoire of human images encoded in Iberia, which transports us to the human views of other times.