Joanna Sofaer. *Clay in the Age of Bronze: Essays in the Archaeology of Prehistoric Creativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 224pp., 32 b/w illustr., 7 maps, 2 tables, pbk, ISBN 978-0-521-15536-6)

More than just embodied, human thought is often handmade. This is not meant in the trivial sense where the hand executes the pre-conceived mental plans of the 'internal' brain. Rather, it is meant in the radically enactive, and inherently creative sense of the hand that constitutes thought through its evolved anatomy and affective capacity to engage with and manipulate different materials and associated milieus (Radman, 2013). Many aspects of human creativity, visible in the archaeological record, can be accounted for and explained better as parts of such a handmade, distributed, biocultural process realized along a continuum of neural, bodily, and material events in different contexts. The archaeological study of creativity has been constrained traditionally by several unhelpful 'cognitivist' assumptions about the nature of human intelligence. Those constraints have gradually been lifted, mainly through a new emphasis on the study of embodiment, materiality, situated intelligence, and the new focus on processes of making, engagement, entanglement, and enskilment (e.g. Hodder, 2012; Ingold, 2013; Malafouris, 2013). In this rich and thought-provoking book, *Clay in the Age of Bronze*, one can see the culmination of many of those trends in the form of a sophisticated, conceptually engaging, archaeological study of the process of creativity.

Indeed, one of the strengths of the book is that it renders creativity a quintessentially archaeological object. The book focuses on one specific material, i.e. clay, and explores some of the ways people interacted with it within local and regional contexts during the Bronze Age in the Carpathian Basin. What can we learn about creativity by studying this handmade world of clay? What can we learn about the people who lived in this handmade world by looking at their creative practices? Joanna Sofaer sets out to address these issues by exploring creativity not as a psychological property of the mind inside the individual head, but as an embodied and material phenomenon of situated intelligence that becomes realized in the material world of mediated action and interaction. Her major aim is to investigate the main ways by which the creative potential of clay became realized in different locations and how that process may have affected and inspired the minds of the people that came to work with it. The metaphor of 'material language' is often employed to express this process of embedded and embodied creativity instantiated here in the making of objects from clay within a specific cultural setting. This language of clay is open to a wide range of articulations, translations, and culture-specific local dialects. Yet it is inherently gestural and object-oriented, thus jointly constrained by the properties of the body and the affordances of the clay that moves with it. When learning from or working with clay, even the simplest motion instantiates a recursive dialectic between the agency of the potter's body and the material affordances of clay or, recursively, between the agency of clay and the affordances of the potter's body (Knappett, 2006; Malafouris, 2008; Sennett, 2008). Improvisation, responsiveness, anticipation, prediction all happen in the making. Naturally, given the nature of this interaction, the human hand emerges as the ontological centre of this unfolding process of creative enskilment and enactive discovery.

The book comprises eight essays. Chapter 1 'Hands' is an essay dedicated to this

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dialogue between hands and clay to create a wide variety of forms. This is an old theme revisited again and again by many scholars from different disciplines and Sofaer does a fine job summarizing some of the relevant literature and highlighting the importance of the 'thinking hand'. The essay focuses on the Bronze Age craft of ceramic miniatures and figurines, investigating the variety of creative possibilities that arise through the making of those objects. Influenced by the writings of Martin Heidegger, Richard Sennett (2008), and Juhani Pallasmaa (2009), Sofaer provides a detailed description of the processes involved in their making that invites the reader to 'touch the hand of the maker' (Pallasmaa, 2009: 104). Chapter 2, 'Recycling', is an essay on the reuse of objects and materials as possibilities for reconfiguring the old and constructing something new. It takes as an example the recycling or 'creative destruction' of ceramics at the tell site of Százhalombatta in Hungary (one could also think of the recycling of metal as scrap to create new items). As Sofaer points out, recycling reconfigures and redefines objects (parts or wholes) and their materials, provokes surprise, effects transformations, and in general generates novelty by means of combinatory thinking and conceptual blending. In a way, creativity is always about recycling (deliberate or accidental): the creation of something from something instead of from nothing. At the site of Százhalombatta, recycling was driven by social attitudes that 'embraced creative destruction as a means of generating endings and beginnings' (p. 54) rather than by necessity or response to the scarcity.

Making is closely linked with 'Design', and Chapter 3 explores the possible meaning of this term in the pre-industrial world of the Bronze Age, where many of the objects discussed are not necessarily preconfigured or pre-planned, but emerge partly from human intention and the constrains of established traditions and aesthetic sensibilities, partly from the affordances of the different materials and techniques. Moreover, modern distinctions that seem to relate 'design' with the production of multiple objects and contrast this with handmade, usually associated with a singular object, make little sense in the Bronze Age contexts under investigation. The book presents a variety of archaeological examples that clearly embody basic elements of design as we know them: many objects are produced in multiples, patterns are copied, forms are selectively repeated, and typologies are created. In this chapter the empirical focus is on one distinctive category, the so-called Swedish helmet bowls. One important difference between design as understood in the present and design as expressed in the past, for instance, in the case of the Swedish helmet bowls, might be that in the latter design is inseparable from the object you make whereas for the modern designer it often results in a series of instructions about how to construct a certain kind of object. Still, such a distinction is not always applicable. Maybe a more salient differentiating feature of the Swedish helmet bowl's design is to be found in the way it objectifies cosmology and embodies story-telling: 'stories were literally sunk into these things' (p. 67). More than just objects designed to shape visual experience, these vessels were designed to enable story-telling as a means to establish and reaffirm tradition.

All the processes described so far take place in space and time. Creativity, like any other situated cognitive process is the product of place. However, there seems to be no universal recipe of what makes a creative locality. 'Margins' (Ch. 4), according to Sofaer, seem to provide a good starting point for exploring creativity in the past in that they enable the meeting and combinatory mingling of people, ideas, materials, traditions, and practices. Of course, this process of re-creation or of creative re-appropriation of objects,

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actions, and ideas is part of a wider political tactic through which people exercise their creativity as a means of resistance. Chapter 5, 'Resistance', drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau (1984), explores those political reconfigurations of cultural forms (material and discursive) focusing on Late Bronze Age ceramic assemblages from cemeteries in Croatia and Slovenia. In particular, Sofaer interprets certain distinctive design features in the form of the Velika Gorica and Dodova funerary urns (i.e. holes in the vessels' walls) as creative responses by which the dominant Urnfield practices and aesthetics were being resisted or challenged and a new local identity was asserted.

The previous argument paves the way for discussing 'Mimesis' (Ch. 6). Influenced by the work of Walter Benjamin (1933), the discussion here turns into the creative dimensions of mimesis as this can be expressed in the archaeological record through acts of making, and in the choices and use of specific material—in particular, the fabric of the ceramics at Vukovar Lijeva Bara. Mimesis is discussed as a form of illusion, assimilation, simulacra, and non-sensuous similarity. All the creative dimensions discussed so far gain their affective power and social meaning through a variety of different types of performance. Chapter 7 seeks to understand this critical link between creativity and performance. 'Performance' creativity is a multidimensional phenomenon with transformative qualities. Sometimes performance may be deemed creative as a source of improvisation, in other cases as the vehicle for the re-enactment of tradition. Also, performance and the creativity embedded in it is a distributed phenomenon that involves relations between people (performers/audience) and between people and things. The example of the burials at Carna in Romania is used to illustrate such a creative performance in the deployment of ceramics to articulate the identity of the deceased. The book ends with an essay on 'Failure' (Ch. 8) that Sofaer sees both as a persistent threat and as a precondition of the creative process. The making of new things involves taking risks, which embody the possibility of failure. However, failure in this context can be productive and useful as the source of new insights, beginnings, and ideas. Failure, then, is often a necessary and integral part of the creative process. Of course, failure, especially in ceramic production, rarely leaves easily identifiable archaeological traces. Still, an Early Bronze Age Nagyrév jug from Hungary and a Late Bronze Age vessel from Romania provide convincing examples.

The issues addressed in this book are ambitious. Sofaer successfully conveys the breadth of creativity in clay in the Bronze Age by integrating empirical case studies with different data sets and theoretical insights from different disciplines on the material, experiential, and social dimensions of the creative process. The book makes a strong archaeological case in support of viewing creativity as an embodied, situated, and distributed phenomenon that is realized through matter. I think that the choice of themes and examples serves well the book's aims and provides opportunities for cross-disciplinary dialogue beyond archaeology and anthropology. However, I would have liked to see some explicit justification, and more theoretical discussion, about the logic of those choices and the links among the different categories (the Afterword has been useful in that respect). Also, one of Sofaer's conclusions is that the creative use of clay in the present is very different from that in the Bronze Age. I think it is rather our dominant conceptualization of creativity that is probably different and not the creative affordances of clay. Certainly we no longer live in a 'clay world', but, whatever aspect of contemporary materiality we choose to emphasize, creativity remains largely handmade

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(even when performed through digital media). What I call the feeling *of* and *for* clay (Malafouris, 2014) is very much alive now as it was in the Bronze Age, not in the forms of the vessels produced or in the functions that they serve, rather in the process of creative material engagement by which the potter's body meets the plasticity of clay. No doubt bodies are different, minds are different, clays are different, and settings are different, and yet their creative entanglement renders them comparable. Overall, this is an important book, timely, erudite, and conceptually pleasing, that anyone with an interest in the creative potential of clay should read.

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Howard Williams, Joanne Kirton and Meggen Gondek, eds. *Early Medieval Stone Monuments: Materiality, Biography, Landscape* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2015, 293pp, 89 b/w figs, hbk, ISBN 978-1-78327-074-3)

In the long history of archaeological scholarship on early medieval stone sculpture, it might be said that we have progressed through three phases. The first phase grew out of antiquarian and art historical approaches, and concentrated on cataloguing particular types of sculpture, although not always systematically. Elaborate and unusual examples were highlighted, and interpretations focused on unpicking what obscure figural scenes or symbols were attempting to represent through reference to Biblical or mythological narratives. This stage was followed by the first truly distinctive archaeological approach, which undertook comprehensive surveys focused on classifying styles, types, and ornaments, and which for the first time often included every small fragment as well as complete pieces, and poorly executed, plain, and 'uninteresting' stones alongside the fine, ornate, and exotic ones. These surveys also delineated basic patterns