

Considering Creativity

Creativity, Knowledge and Practice
in Bronze Age Europe

Edited by

Joanna Sofaer

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Front cover: A passementerie fibula from Sviloš, Serbia (Archaeological Museum in Zagreb) and Bronze Age textiles from Hallstatt, Austria, (Natural History Museum, Vienna). Back cover: Axe made for the BOAT 1550 BC project (A. Lehoërff)

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Contents

List of Figures.....	iii
Notes on Contributors.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Joanna Sofaer	
1. Creativity and Knowledge	5
Bengt Molander	
2. Copying from Sherds. Creativity in Bronze Age Pottery in Central Iberia (1800-1150 BC)	19
Antonio Blanco-González	
3. Creativity versus Taboo in Late Bronze Age Central and Southeast Europe.....	39
Carola Metzner-Nebelsick	
4. Dull Hues versus Colour and Glamour. Creative Textile Design in the 2nd Millennium BC in Central Europe	55
Karina Grömer and Regina Hofmann-de Keijzer	
5. The Imaginary Crested Helmet of Vercingétorix: What is ‘Creativity’ in Bronze Age Metal Production?	67
Anne Lehoërf	
6. Creativity and the Making of a Pottery Decoration Style in Middle Bronze Age Transylvania: The Building of a Theory of Movement	83
Nona Palincas	
7. The Nordic Razor as a Medium of Creativity	105
Flemming Kaul	
8. In the Beginning was the Fibre	117
Antoinette Rast-Eicher	
9. Towards Textile Textures	133
Lise Bender Jørgensen	
10. The Appearance of Fibulae in the Late Bronze Age. Creativity in the Crafting of the First Clothes Fasteners in the South of the Carpathian Basin	143
Daria Ložnjak Dizdar	
11. Creative Elaboration in Clay in the Early Bronze Age in the Carpathian Region.....	151
Jozef Bátora	

List of Figures

2. Copying from Sherds. Creativity in Bronze Age Pottery in Central Iberia (1800-1150 BC)

Antonio Blanco-González

Figure 2.1. The Iberian Peninsula and the area of the Cogotas I culture (1800-1150 cal BC).....	20
Figure 2.2. 1a and b) Early Neolithic stab-and-drag examples from El Mirador (Burgos) and from 1c) Atxoste (Álava); 2a) Ciempozuelos Beaker bowl from Las Carolinas (Madrid); 2b) Beaker from Molino Sanchón II (Villafáfila, Zamora); 3a) Late Bronze Age vessel from Madrid; 3b) Late Bronze Age vessel from Cerro de la Cabeza.....	23
Figure 2.3. 1a) Encrusted Beaker carinated bowls with pseudo-excised motifs from La Salmedina (Madrid) and 1b) from Cuesta de la Reina (Ciempozuelos, Madrid); 2. Late Bronze Age jar featuring checkerboard excised motives with white paste from Pórragos (Bolaños, Valladolid).....	24
Figure 2.4. Duffaits sherds in Middle Bronze Age cave contexts.....	25
Figure 2.5. One of the earliest Middle Bronze Age excised motifs from a stratified context at Los Tolmos (Caracena, Soria).....	27
Figure 2.6. 1) Early Neolithic sherd with stab-and-drag decoration; 2) Bell Beaker sherd, both found in non-disturbed Middle Bronze Age contexts at El Cerro (Burgos)	30

3. Creativity versus Taboo in Late Bronze Age Central and Southeast Europe

Carola Metzner-Nebelsick

Figure 3.1. 1) Early Bronze Age armlets from the hoard of Berlin-Lichtenrade, Germany; 2) the hoard in a grave from Lockington, England; 3) Late Bronze Age armlets from kurgan 24 from Hordeevka, Ukraine; 4) Late Bronze Age hoard of Derrinboy, Co. Offaly, Ireland; 5) Late Bronze Age hoard of Hinova, western Romania	40
Figure 3.2. Selection of Early Bronze Age bronze artefacts which did not form a tradition: 1) sceptre-like staff from Welbsleben; 2) club from Thale, both Saxe-Anhalt, Germany; 3) cast bronze jar from the Skeldal hoard, Jutland, Denmark; 4-5) chains from the hoard of Stará Boleslav near Prague, Czech Republic.....	41
Figure 3.3. Bronze grave goods from the 13th century B.C. burial mound from Čaka, Slovakia	44
Figure 3.4. Reconstructed sheet bronze cuirasses from 1) Čaka; 2) Ducové; 3) Čierna nad Tisou, all in Slovakia; 4) Saint-Germain du Plain.....	45
Figure 3.5. Votive of a miniature cuirass from a 'founder's hoard' ('Brucherzhort') from the Brandgraben	45
Figure 3.6. Reconstruction of the four-wheeled-wagon with bronze fittings from Münchsmünster, southern Bavaria, from a grave context 13th century B.C.....	47
Figure 3.7. Standard equipment of prestigious drinking in the Urnfield Culture in central southern Europe: bucket, cup and strainer here shown from the Hart a.d. Alz elite burial in southern Bavaria, 12th century B.C.....	48
Figure 3.8. Bronze bucket of Hajdubörszermény type from Sâg, Romania, 10th century B.C. height: 34.8 cm	48

4. Dull Hues versus Colour and Glamour. Creative Textile Design in the 2nd Millennium BC in Central Europe

Karina Grömer and Regina Hofmann-de Keijzer

Figure 4.1. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	55
Figure 4.2. Bronze Age textiles from Hallstatt, Austria, 1500-1200 BC	57
Figure 4.3. The Franzhausen textile, grave context , and its reconstruction, Austria, c. 2000 BC.....	61
Figure 4.4. Hallstatt Textile 288, Austria with striped tablet woven border, 1500-1200 BC	62
Figure 4.5. Winklarn, Austria 1) Dress fittings and jewellery; 2) Pattern of placement on the body; 3) Reconstruction of a dress based on the figurine from Kličevac and the textile from Irgenhausen with objects from Winklarn	63
Figure 4.6. Gold threads from Óbuda in Hungary, 11th century BC	64

5. The Imaginary Crested Helmet of Vercingétorix: What is ‘Creativity’ in Bronze Age Metal Production?

Anne Lehoërff

Figure 5.1. Bronze Age Helmet from the Bernières d'Ailly Hoard (Normandy); example from the Odescalchi collection, Rome.....	67
Figure 5.2. Detail of the archetypal ‘Gallic’ helmet, based on the original, Vercingétorix jette ses armes aux pieds de Jules César, oil painting, 1899, by Lionel Royer (1852-1926), Crozatier Museum, Le puy-en-Velay, France	69
Figure 5.3. Henry Morin (1873-1961), Les Gaulois, advertisement on Post card for the Bultheaux Champagne, around 1900	69
Figure 5.4. Bronze Age Helmet from La Seine (Musée d'archéologie nationale, number ‘Paris 358’, collection Napoléon III).....	70
Figure 5.5. Axe from Thanet Earth, Thanet, Kent (England).....	72
Figure 5.6. Sword from Jugnes, Aude, France.....	73
Figure 5.7. Axe just after casting	75
Figure 5.8. The finished axe.....	75
Figure 5.9. The handle of the sword, just after foundry stage.....	76
Figure 5.10. The finished sword.....	77
Figure 5.11. Detail of the inscription ‘ Jean Guilaine/Christiane Guilaine ‘ on the blade.....	77
Figure 5.12. Identity and fabrication of one object	78

6. Creativity and the Making of a Pottery Decoration Style in Middle Bronze Age Transylvania: The Building of a Theory of Movement

Nona Palincas

Figure 6.1. The Wietenberg area and its main directions of long distance trade and exchange (routes are approximated) along with the main places mentioned in the text. 1) Bidirectional trade (vessels, miniature clay wagons etc.) with the Otomani area (Boroffka 1994: 285-288); 2) Vessels from the Verbicioara Culture (Ciugudean et al. 2005: 47; Marc et al. 2014); 3) Wietenberg sherds in the area of the Tei Culture and Tei finds in the south-eastern area of the Wietenberg Culture (Boroffka 1994: 285-288); 4) Trade with vessels (Popescu 2008), shaft hole axes (Vulpe 1970: pl. 46B; 50B) and other objects with the Monteoru Culture; 5) Ridge-butted Transylvanian axe in the area of the Costișa Culture (David 2002: 203); 6) Mycenaean rapiers and their local imitations (Bozhinova et al 2010: 78-84; Bader 1991: 17-30, 36; Gogăltan 1997); 7) Possible area of Wietenberg contact with Aegean writing (Otroshenko 1990; Ovcharov 2005: 98-99, lower photograph; Fol and Schmitt 2000; Boroffka 1994: 194; Dietrich and Dietrich 2011: 75-76, fig. 5); 8) Bone and antler objects with pulley motif and incomplete spirals (Kull 1989; David 2007) and sea shell <i>Hypopus maculatus</i> and <i>Conus mediterraneus</i> (Jurcsák 1984: 113, fig. 1.c; 2.a; 7); 9) Ridge-butted axe (David 2013); 10-11) Various axes decorated in Hajdúsámson-Apa style (David 2002: maps 5, 8, 10); 12) Cheek pieces (Boroffka 1998: figs 12 and 16); 13) Smoking pots (Kacsó 1998); 14) Gold ear-rings from Țufalău and Mycenaean, Shaft Graves A III and B Omicron (Bouzek 1985: 54; figs 1-5, 7).	84
Figure 6.2. Comparison of decorative motifs from pottery and other, not war-related categories of object (metal ornaments and pieces of architecture): 1. Sighișoara-‘Wietenberg’, decorated hearth; 2) Oarța de Sus, vessel from the sanctuary; 3) Geoagiu de Sus, broken off bird-like head from a plaster screen; 4) Uroi-‘Sigheti’, bird-shaped vessel; 5) Târgu Mureș, gold bracelet with silver inlay; 6) Jigodin, zoomorphic protoma; 7-9) Meander motifs; 10) Pipea, gold bracelet with pulley motif; 11) Oarța de Sus, vessel from the sanctuary 12) Albești, stray find	86
Figure 6.3. Comparison of decorative motifs 1-3) typical Wietenberg pottery; 4-6) frying pans of Keros Syros Culture	87
Figure 6.4. Geoagiu de Sus. Three plaster bird-like heads from a ritual pit a) decorated side; b) the plain side.....	88
Figure 6.5. Wietenberg pottery decoration in relation to the idea of movement. 1-2) Geoagiu de Sus, bird-like protome broken off from a plaster screen; 3) Ciceu-Corabia, fragment of a miniature clay ‘wagon’; 4). Derșida, bird protome, stray find; 5) Derșida, horse-like protome from the settlement; 6) Păuleni, sherd with Wietenberg I wheel-motif; 7) Sebeș-‘Între răstoace’, vessel from a grave; 8-10) Geoagiu de Sus, sherds from the ritual pit; 11) Sighișoara-‘Wietenberg’, sherd; 12) Photograph of a Kelvin-Helmholtz cloud in Transylvania; 13-14) Selection of various Wietenberg spiral-hook- and crochet-based pottery decorations	90
Figure 6.6. Comparison of decorative motifs from pottery and war-related objects 1) Țufalău, gold butted-axe; 2) Oarța de Sus, Pit 1, fragment from the writing related signs; 3) Ciceu Corabia, fragment of a miniature clay ‘wagon’; 4) Oarța de Sus, clay lid; 5) Cajvana, disc-butted bronze axe with decoration in Hajdúsámson style; 6) Inner side of a Wietenberg III vessel; 7) Someșeni, disc-butted bronze axe decorated in Gaura style; 8) Cluj-Napoca, plate from a ritual pit; 9) ‘Turda’, disc-butted bronze axe decorated in Turda-Zajta style; 10) Cluj-Napoca, plate from a ritual pit; 11) Wietenberg line-based motifs	93
Figure 6.7. Photograph of a Kelvin-Helmholtz cloud seen over Cluj-Napoca from Florești (Transylvania)	95

7. The Nordic Razor as a Medium of Creativity

Flemming Kaul

Figure 7.1. A razor from Sennels, Northwest Jutland, Denmark, with charming double horses related to a ship. Upper, the whole razor, below detail showing the double horses, Montelius period IV, 1100-900 BC	107
Figure 7.2. Upper, a razor from Sevel, West Jutland, Denmark; lower, a razor from Vendsyssel, North Jutland, Denmark, both 1100-900 BC	109
Figure 7.3. A razor, probably from Jutland, Denmark, 900-700 BC	110
Figure 7.4. Reconstruction drawing of a razor from Knuthenborg, Lolland, Denmark, 900-700 BC	111
Figure 7.5. Graphics of the ship motifs of the razor from Knuthenborg, Lolland, Denmark. Upper, the folded ship of the blade unfolded – the first ship – specific points in time are marked; lower, the ship consisting of the handle of the razor and keel lines of the surfaces of the razor unfolded and twisted – the second ship, the night ship. The ‘stem aft’ is partly shared with the first ship	112
Figure 7.6. A razor from Veddinge, Northwest Zealand, Denmark, 900-700 BC. Upper: a view where the ship comes into focus; lower: a view where the snake shows itself in focus.....	113

8. In the Beginning was the Fibre

Antoinette Rast-Eicher

Figure 8.1. Woven textile of the Neolithic period made of lime bast with knotted decoration. Zürich-Mythenschloss (Switzerland)	118
Figure 8.2. Wiepenkathen, Kreis Stade, Germany, wool threads around the Neolithic flint dagger	120
Figure 8.3. Two bronze bracelets from grave No. 5. Tursko-Těšina, Czech Republic	121
Figure 8.4. Detail of a mineralised textile fragment on bracelet No. H1-51 525. Both systems as well as four samples taken for SEM are indicated	122
Figure 8.5. Impressions of woollen fibres in completely mineralised textile fragment from bracelet No. H1-51 525. A distinction between thin and thick fibres is clearly visible	123
Figure 8.6. Lenk-Schnidejoch, Switzerland, Bronze Age textile found in the ice.....	124
Figure 8.7. Wardböhmen, Kreis Celle, Germany, thread made of mainly very coarse fibres (around 100µ)	125
Figure 8.8. Sion Petit-Chasseur, Switzerland, anthropomorphic stele with engraved garments.	126
Figure 8.9. Hallstatt (A), salt mine, Bronze Age textile (HallTex 238-5) with same scale directions in the thread showing low processing of the fibres	127
Figure 8.10. Hallstatt (A), salt mine, Bronze Age textile (HallTex 275) made of light wool	128
Figure 8.11. Hallstatt (A), salt mine, Bronze Age textile (HallTex 275): wool without pigmentation and dyed (seen as brown, but chemically green)	128
Figure 8.12. Hallstatt (A), salt mine, Iron Age textile with crimp	129

9. Towards Textile Textures

Lise Bender Jørgensen

Figure 9.1. Bronze Age textile textures. 1-3) Different fabrics from an oak log burial at Nybøl, 3) with remains of nap; 4) Warp-faced tabby from Fahrenkrug, Schleswig-Holstein (Ke9849A; CinBa dBase DE 072b; Ehlers 1998, cat. SH:72). 5) 2/2 twill from late Bronze Age bog body found at Damendorf-Ruchmoor (CinBA dBase DE 048; Ehlers 1998, cat. SH:48)	134
Table 1. Range of yarn diameters in various parts of Europe	136
Figure 9.2. Different textile textures made by hand weaver Lena Hammarlund, based on Bronze and Iron Age textiles from Hallstatt and Scandinavia.....	139

10. The Appearance of Fibulae in the Late Bronze Age. Creativity in the Crafting of the First Clothes Fasteners in the South of the Carpathian Basin

Daria Ložnjak Dizdar

Figure 10.1. Violin-bow fibula from Gorjani, Croatia and a modern safety pin.....	143
Figure 10.2. Fibulae types from the Brodski Varoš hoard, Croatia	144
Figure 10.3. Jewellery set that was probably made in a single workshop: pin from Slavonski Brod, fibula from Mačkovac, torque from Poljanci 1	145
Figure 10.4. A passementerie fibula from Sviloš, Serbia.....	147

11. Creative Elaboration in Clay in the Early Bronze Age in the Carpathian Region

Jozef Bátora

- Figure 11.1. 1) Spišský Štvrtok, portable hearth (pyraunos); 2) Gáborján, portable hearth (pyraunos); 3) Spišský Štvrtok, distillation device; 4) reconstruction of a distillation device.....152
- Figure 11.2. 1) Budkovice, perforated 'fire cover'; 2) Budkovice, possible vessel for butter production; 3) Šurany-Nitriansky Hrádok, vessel with spouts that may be for mixing drinks154
- Figure 11.3. 1) Santovka, pottery with plastic decoration of anchor shaped pendants; 2) Rybník, anchor shaped pendant made of bronze; 3) Ižkovce, vessel with plastic decoration of heart shaped pendant; 4) Dunaújváros, vessel with plastic decoration of arm and dagger; 5) Pakozd-Vár, pottery with plastic decoration of a hammer axe; 6) Mende, vessel with plastic decoration of arm and dagger156
- Figure 11.4. 1-7) Košice-Barca, flat stylized female figurines; 8) bronze half-moon shaped pendant157
- Figure 11.5. 1) Piliny-Várhegy, bird shaped clay rattle; 2) Rybník, flask shaped clay rattle; 3) Rybník, miniature hammer axe made of clay; 4) Piliny-Várhegy, miniature hammer axe made of clay; 5-7) Rybník, animal figurines158
- Figure 11.6. 1a-1b) Nižná Myšľa, clay model of a chariot from grave 40; 2a-2b) Pocsaj, clay model of a chariot; 3) Veľké Raškovce, amphora from a cremation burial with epic depiction of a deceased individual carried on a two wheeled war chariot to the grave161

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Joanna Sofaer

Introduction

Joanna Sofaer

Creativity is embedded in human history. Indeed, it is impossible to understand material change and the development of the new without invoking creativity (Bender Jørgensen, Sofaer and Sørensen 2018). The location, exploration and analysis of creativity should therefore be of particular concern to archaeologists. This volume engages with this challenge by focusing on the outcomes of creativity – material culture – and an exploration of creative practice. The European Bronze Age provides a useful focus for discussions of the outcomes of creativity because in this period we see the development of new materials that we take for granted today, in particular textiles and bronze. We also see new ways of working with existing materials, such as clay, to create novel forms. In both new and existing materials it is frequently possible to see the growth of technical skill, to produce complex forms and elaborate decorated surfaces.

The papers in this volume view Bronze Age objects through the lens of creativity in order to offer fresh insights into the interaction between people and the world, as well as the individual and cultural processes that lie behind creative expression. Many have their origin in the international conference *Creativity: An Exploration Through the Bronze Age and Contemporary Responses to the Bronze Age* held at Magdalene College, University of Cambridge in 2013 as part of the HERA-funded project Creativity and Craft Production in Middle and Late Bronze Age Europe. Contributions span the early to late Bronze Age, deal with a range of materials including textiles, metal, and ceramics, and reflect on data from across the continent including Iberia, Scandinavia, Central and Eastern Europe. This breadth illustrates the wide-ranging importance and applicability of creativity as an heuristic concept. The volume further develops a range of theoretical and methodological directions, opening up new avenues for the study of creativity in the past.

The first paper in the volume, *Creativity and Knowledge*, is by Bengt Molander and offers an epistemological framework for addressing skill and knowledge in creative practices. It sets the tone for the volume by presenting an important argument for creativity and knowledge not just as abstract concepts, but as important aspects of human life that are accessible through material culture. He argues that ‘creativity’ and ‘knowledge’ are important ways of understanding people through human practices, and that they are very much complementary. This is not, however, to say that ‘creativity’ and ‘knowledge’ are necessarily easy, transparent or unproblematic. For Molander, creativity does not imply ideas that ‘change the world’, instead ‘it has more to do with having an eye for new ways of ‘making things better’, coming up with new ideas, or being able to catch new possibilities that may occur’. Knowledge, or as he calls it ‘insight’, is closely linked to skill and artistry, and to the practices of knowing human beings. Molander provides an insightful discussion of these notions and how they may be linked through learning and the idea of ‘attentiveness’. To Molander, practices themselves constitute forms of understanding of the world, thereby placing creativity and knowledge firmly within the realm of material culture in terms of ‘how people create’.

In *Copying from Sherds. Creativity in Bronze Age Pottery in Central Iberia (1800-1150 BC)* Antonio Blanco-González takes up the challenge of addressing what is, and is not, creative within the context of Bronze Age pottery in Central Iberia. Through a detailed case study of Cogotas I style ceramics and their ornamentation, he argues that the continuity of tradition is due not to passive inertia, but to its active regeneration. Thus enduring practices and the rupture of tradition are not diametrically opposed or clear-cut categories but rather an outcome of dynamic processes that involved mimetic expression through the fitting together of existing and new motifs linked to the socio-political, cosmological and technical contexts of practice. Tradition is also a key concern of the following chapter, *Creativity versus Taboo in Late Bronze Age Central and Southeast Europe* by Carola Metzner-Nebelsick but, in contrast to Blanco-González, she addresses

the deliberate suppression of creativity and innovation, arguing for constraints on creativity for metal objects in Late Bronze Age Central and Southeast Europe. In particular, the iconic nature of certain objects meant that creativity became limited in the sphere of status representation as traditionalism became an important way of maintaining the social and cosmological order.

Karina Grömer and Regina Hofmann-de Keijzer focus on the human motivations that may lie behind the creative elaboration of Bronze Age textiles - their surfaces, textures and colours. In *Dull Hues versus Colour and Glamour. Creative Textile Design in the 2nd Millennium BC in Central Europe* they take inspiration from classic work in psychology and neuroscience. They are particularly influenced by American psychologist Abraham Maslow and the more recent work of archaeologist Peter Wells who has also taken on psychological insights, to suggest that Bronze Age textiles served aesthetic and visual purposes as well as basic physiological, functional ones. They suggest that the contact of a textile with the human body means that its haptic aspects may be especially closely experienced, thereby lending creativity in textiles heightened significance. Grömer and Hofmann-de Keijzer show how Bronze Age textiles, though primarily based on simple cloth types, were the product of substantial experimentation and innovation. These had the potential to play an important role in social strategies and were designed to impress the onlooker and to create social categories. In *The Imaginary Crested Helmet of Vercingétorix: What is 'Creativity' in Bronze Age Metal Production?* Anne Lehoërff moves forward the discussion of creativity in making objects through a detailed consideration of the history and technology of the famous 'helmet of Vercingétorix' - a Bronze Age crested helmet of Bernières d'Ailly type found in the hoard of the same name. She uses this object as a jumping off point to discuss the notion of 'uniqueness' in archaeological objects. The nature of uniqueness, and thus of similarity and difference in material culture, is a recurring question in archaeological discussions. Lehoërff's focus on creativity and technology offers a new dimension to this longstanding issue that asks us to consider technological possibilities and social choices in the production of objects as an integral part of prehistoric creative endeavour and its enduring legacy.

Nona Palincas returns to ceramic ornamentation as a means of exploring the creativity embedded in the practice of pottery production. In *Creativity and the Making of a Pottery Decoration Style in Middle Bronze Age Transylvania: The Building of a Theory of Movement*, she uses the distinctive motifs on Wietenberg pottery, in particular the spiral-meander motif, as well as those which are local variants of motifs found elsewhere, to explore questions of authorship, how creative processes may have unfolded, and the consequences of these for local society. She argues that ritual, warfare and social distinction were driving forces behind the creation of the new Wietenberg pottery style. The decoration of Wietenberg pottery not only required more complex technical skills but also the understanding of motifs as part of a wider philosophy in which the motifs were a 'meditation on movement'. She suggests that the movement of heavenly bodies formed part of a cosmology that was understood and guided by a ritual elite, and that this social context underpinned ceramic production. Wietenberg decoration thus erased personal preferences in favour of the promotion of a Wietenberg world-view. The importance of cosmology and ritual knowledge as a driving force for new creative practices is further emphasised by Flemming Kaul in *The Nordic Razor as a Medium for Creativity*. Kaul draws on the rich iconography of the Nordic Bronze Age to argue for a fundamentally different view of creativity to that frequently articulated in discussions of twenty-first century art. He suggests that Bronze Age figural art served purposes that went beyond the inner personal and rebellious urge of a romantic artist. The Bronze Age artist was not concerned with challenging the social order or norms, but rather was concerned with maintaining social and cosmological order. Here creativity was employed to find ways of delivering religious or cosmological messages in four dimensions, including space and time, so that the pictorial realization of a central myth became a creative art form in itself. Thus, while the objects on which the messages were deployed were very personal, they were also designed to remind their owners of a wider shared world view.

Antoinette Rast-Eicher, with contributions by Thereza Štolcová and Helena Březinová, takes the discussion of Bronze Age creativity in a different direction. In *The Beginning was the Fibre* offers a close exploration of the ways in which the emergence of white wool, which could be dyed, allowed creative developments through new coloured patterns and designs. This is followed by Lise Bender Jørgensen's

chapter *Towards Textile Textures* which takes the story of creativity in textiles further by focusing on the affordances of fibres, and choices made by Bronze Age people in fibre selection and preparation, the development of yarns, weaving, the shape of fabrics, and in finishing processes. She demonstrates how textile craftspeople explored the affordances offered by fibres, yarns, weaves and other methods in order to obtain variation in the basic structure of textiles. Some of these were variations of existing techniques but others represent the exploration of new materials and techniques, such as the introduction of wool, twill and dyestuffs. Some were simple, while others required good command of techniques and technology.

Daria Ložnjak Dizdar's chapter bridges creativity in textiles and metals. *The Appearance of Fibulae in the Late Bronze Age. Creativity in the Crafting of the First Clothes Fasteners in the South of the Carpathian Basin* discusses violin bow fibulae - the precursor of the modern safety pin. She traces the development of the fibulae and how this was not only related to developments in textiles which required solutions to fastening garments, but also to the cultural conditions in the Carpathian Basin. These provided the setting for creative exchange of ideas and the development of solutions through interaction between different circles of production and communication, that resulted in the shaping of new costume pieces, primarily intended for individual use. The final paper in the volume is by Jozef Bátora. He too focuses on creativity in the Carpathian Basin but through a discussion of Early Bronze Age ceramic objects. *Creative Elaboration in Clay in the Early Bronze Age in the Carpathian Region*, examines novelty in the development of two groups of objects. The first are objects associated with food preparation that not only reveal shifts in food preparation but creativity and ingenuity in the production of objects required to facilitate new ways of eating. The second are objects used for ritual purposes that reveal creative developments in form and in new ways of thinking about the world, which were made material through clay. Many of the artefacts that Bátora describes were completely new in this period and he explores what underpinned this sudden burst of innovation. He too points to the importance of cultural conditions and external inspirations for creativity in material culture, as well as to cosmology in stimulating creativity by making beliefs real and tangible.

In *The Act of Creation*, the writer Arthur Koestler famously stated that, 'true creativity often starts where language ends' (Koestler 1964:177). This statement has particular resonance for the archaeological study of objects, which are the material outcome of creative processes and that therefore move beyond language. The contributions to this volume highlight both the importance and accessibility of studying creativity in Bronze Age objects, which not only predate the written word but are the product of different kinds of knowledge and making practices, including the technical, the social and the cosmological. They show that material culture need not 'stand for' or 'represent' creativity as an abstract, unknowable process. Instead, making, using and perceiving objects require a material engagement that is both mental and physical. Knowledge and practice are not directly aligned with either of these concepts but lie in the intersection between them. It is through the investigation of knowledge and practice in material culture in terms of an understanding of continuity and discontinuity, the multi-dimensional roles of objects, technical and social choices in production, material affordances, the social and cosmological order, and cultural conditions, that understandings of creativity are starting to emerge.

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