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Places of art, traces of fire. A contextual approach to anthropomorphic figurines in the Pavlovian

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Preface

What is the Upper Palaeolithic? Why is it so strangely familiar? We can recognize ourselves in the remains of Upper Palaeolithic people, in their art, burials, technological achievements, communicative networks. These are people like us. In this sense, the Upper Palaeolithic is the yardstick by which the ‘humanness’ of other hominids like Neanderthals is measured. But at the same time this statement presents the study of the Upper Palaeolithic with a problem: how to measure the yardstick? To what extent are we projecting ourselves in ‘recognizing’ them as people like us? These questions form the background against which this study developed. The following pages reflect the struggle in this study between the will to knowledge and an acknowledgement of the incomprehension that remained.

I was fortunate enough not to struggle on my own and this is the place to express my thanks to all the people who helped me in their own particular way. First of all, I would like to thank Wil Roebroeks for his confidence, occasional scepticism and the emphasis on accuracy, argumentation and honest analysis. His encouragement led me across Central Europe in an effort to see sites and material with my own eyes and become familiar with the palaeolithic archaeology of this region. None of this would have started if Jiří Svoboda did not offer me the possibility to work at stone artefacts from Pavlov I in 1995. He introduced me to Moravia, Bednář, the Pavlovian and the archaeology of the Pavlov Hills. I spent quite a lot of time studying the finds of Pavlov I, the loess sections in the Dolní Věstonice brickyards and site locations in the Pavlov Hills, always under the good care of L. Bureš. Unfortunately I did not witness the major excavations of these sites with my own eyes. This has caused me some doubts about my own efforts at reinterpretation, in particular due to changed insights in the geology of loess sediments and post-depositional processes on archaeological sites. At times I felt myself in danger of an unhealthy scepticism and unnecessary criticism. Nevertheless my efforts at reinterpretation above all acknowledge the major research activities carried out by the late Bohuslav Klíma. Himself building on the enormous excavations carried out by Karel Absolon, Klíma’s research placed the sites in the Pavlov Hills among the giants of Upper Palaeolithic archaeology.

I was privileged to be able to travel a lot. I would like to thank all those who allowed me access to study the material,

arranging my stays and sharing their first-hand knowledge. Of course they are not responsible for the mistakes and misunderstandings on my part, but the mistakes would have been all the greater without their help: K. Valoch and M. Oliva, Moravské zemské muzeum, Brno; P. Škrdl, AU Brno; L. Jarošová, AU Dolní Věstonice/Opava; W. Antl-Weiser and F. Barth, Naturhistorisches Museum, Wien, C. Neugebauer-Maresch, Klosterneuburg and T. Einwögerer, St. Pölten; M. Połtowicz, K. Sobczyk and J. Kozłowski, Jagellonian University, Krakow; J. Hromada (†), SAV Bratislava, L. Kaminská, SAV Košice, and M. Žemla, Piesťany/Hubina; V. Dobosi and K. Biro, Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.

My colleagues in the PIONIER-project ‘Changing views of Ice Age foragers’ at Leiden University, the Netherlands, have greatly influenced the directions of my thinking, sometimes in the directions they intended, sometimes maybe in a contrary way. In particular, Kier van Gijssel helped me a lot in getting some grip on the Pleistocene geology of the region. Jan Kolen was a great support, stimulating me by his enthusiasm and open-mindedness and by sharing a common interest in the archaeology and anthropology of hunter-gatherers, philosophical issues and football.

Thomas Jaroszek (Leiden) was the appreciated cause of some distress by providing me with texts by the German philosophers Gadamer and Heidegger. It was followed by the even more disturbing lectures by W. Oudemans (Leiden), opening the abyss between philosophy and archaeology, that gave me the nerve to write some of the ‘metaphysical twaddle’ that follows. I also like to thank Bert Huijzer for his insight in loess-stratigraphy and depositional processes. Karen Waugh corrected my double Dutch into comprehensible English. Paul Meijer (Rotterdam) and Henk de Lorm (Leiden) were kind and patient enough to compile, draw and redraw the many and sometimes complicated figures that illustrate this study. I would like to thank the editors Thijs van Kolfschoten and Piet van de Velde for their help in the transformation from a PhD.-preprint to a nice publication.

Last but not least, I thank Margrith for her understanding during my regular travels and for helping me not to forget that there is more to life than palaeolithic stones and bones.

Contents

Preface 5

Contents 7

Detailed contents 9

1. Introduction 13
2. The Pavlovian — stratigraphy, environment, settlement 23
3. Pavlovian anthropomorphic figurines 37
4. First analysis 89
5. The Pavlovian ‘ceramics’ 95
6. Intermezzo 101
7. Representation and realism 103
8. Anthropomorphic figurines, animals and the hunt 109
9. Camps, boundaries and art 117
10. By way of conclusion 129

References 133

Detailed contents

Preface 5

Contents 7

Detailed contents 9

1.	Introduction	13
1.1	The Venus of Dolní Věstonice: the year 1925	13
1.2	Structure of the text	15
1.3	Main issues	15
1.4	What is art?	15
	1.4.1 The aesthetic theory and practice of art	16
	1.4.2 Comments	16
1.5	What is meaning?	17
	1.5.1 Two approaches to meaning	17
	1.5.2 Motivation of a contextual approach	17
1.6	History of interpretations: a sketch	17
	1.6.1 The female body	18
	1.6.2 Structural analysis	19
	1.6.3 Information economy	20
	1.6.4 Conclusions and consequences	20
1.7	Regional case-study: why Central Europe?	21
2.	The Pavlovian — stratigraphy, environment, settlement	23
2.1	Introduction	23
2.2	A geography of Central Europe	23
	2.2.1 Of mountains and basins	23
	2.2.2 Climatic consequences	24
2.3	Outline of a stratigraphic framework	24
	2.3.1 The Dolní Věstonice brickyard	25
	2.3.2 Regional comparisons	27
	2.3.3 Environmental trends	29
2.4	The Pavlovian: a sketch	30
	2.4.1 Definition	30
	2.4.2 A geography of the Pavlovian	30
	2.4.2.1 Distribution of Pavlovian sites	30
	2.4.2.2 Lithic raw materials	32
	2.4.2.3 Molluscan evidence	32
	2.4.3 Aspects of Pavlovian settlement	34
	2.4.3.1 Site differentiation	34
	2.4.3.2 Site location	34
	2.4.3.3 Open-air sites and caves	34
	2.4.3.4 Long-term trajectories	35
2.5	Conclusion	35

3.	Pavlovian anthropomorphic figurines	37
3.1	Introduction	37
3.2	Definition: what is an anthropomorphic figurine?	37
	3.2.1	Criteria 37
	3.2.2	Remarks 37
3.3	Description	38
3.4	The Pavlovian	38
	3.4.1	Dolní Věstonice I 38
	3.4.1.1	Research history 38
	3.4.1.2	Spatial subdivisions 38
	3.4.1.3	Chronology 40
	3.4.1.4	Catalogue 40
	3.4.2	Pavlov I 58
	3.4.2.1	Research history 58
	3.4.2.2	Subdivisions and chronology 58
	3.4.2.3	Catalogue 59
	3.4.2.4	Biconical heads and ‘phallic’ shapes 70
	3.4.3	Předmostí 72
	3.4.3.1	Research history, divisions, chronology 72
	3.4.3.2	The question of anthropomorphic figurines 72
	3.4.3.3	Final remarks 77
	3.4.4	Final remarks on the Pavlovian 77
3.5	Other sites with anthropomorphic figurines	78
	3.5.1	Aurignacian 78
	3.5.1.1	Galgenberg, Stratzing/Krems-Rehberg, Lower Austria 78
	3.5.2	Willendorf-Kostienkian 78
	3.5.2.1	Willendorf II — level 9, Lower Austria 78
	3.5.2.2	Brno II — Francoušká ulice, Moravia 80
	3.5.2.3	Petřkovice — Landek, Silesia (Czech Republic) 82
	3.5.2.4	Moravany — Podkovica, Slovakia 82
	3.5.2.5	Final remarks on the Willendorf-Kostienkian 83
3.6	Recapitulation and conclusion	83
4.	First analysis	89
4.1	Introduction	89
4.2	Material, size and fragmentation	89
	4.2.1	Material 89
	4.2.2	Size 89
	4.2.3	Fragmentation 89
	4.2.4	Material and fragmentation 90
	4.2.5	Material and size 90
4.3	Heads and faces	91
4.4	The middle body part	92
4.5	Primary sexual characteristics	92
4.6	Conclusion	93
5.	The Pavlovian ‘ceramics’	95
5.1	Introduction	95
5.2	Sites	95
5.3	A typology of ‘ceramics’	97
5.4	Context — the hearth?	97

5.5	Technological characteristics	97
	5.5.1	Raw material 98
	5.5.2	Moulding 98
	5.5.3	The firing process 98
	5.5.4	Breakage 98
	5.5.5	Summary 98
5.6	Evaluation	99
5.7	<i>Excursus</i> : comparison with ivory figurines	99
5.8	Conclusion	100
6.	Intermezzo	101
7.	Representation and realism	103
7.1	Introduction	103
7.2	Representation of human beings — realism	103
7.3	Representation and resemblance — Goodman	104
7.4	Two types of anthropomorphic figurines	104
7.5	<i>Excursus 1</i> : matter and form	105
7.6	<i>Excursus 2</i> : geometric art — representation or decoration?	106
7.7	Representation and image: towards the Pavlovian?	107
8.	Anthropomorphic figurines, animals and the hunt	109
8.1	Introduction	109
8.2	Nature and society	109
	8.2.1	Two categories — two models 109
	8.2.2	The hunted and the represented animal 109
	8.2.3	Justification 110
8.3	Relating anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations	111
	8.3.1	Evolution of palaeolithic religions 111
	8.3.2	Confrontation 1 112
	8.3.3	The domestication of the wild: women, fire and dangerous things 112
	8.3.4	Confrontation 2 113
	8.3.5	General comments on structuralist approaches to palaeolithic art 113
8.4	Alternative options	113
	8.4.1	Social function 113
	8.4.2	Allegorical interpretations 114
	8.4.3	Cosmology 114
8.5	The hunt	114
	8.5.1	Animals and sharing 115
8.6	Final considerations	116
9.	Camps, boundaries and art	117
9.1	Introduction	117
9.2	The Pavlov Hills	117
	9.2.1	Overview of sites 118
	9.2.2	C14-chronology 121
9.3	Pavlov I	123
	9.3.1	A short history of interpretations 123
	9.3.2	Geological observations 123
	9.3.3	Archaeological observations 123
	9.3.4	Conclusion 124

9.4	Settlement system	125
9.4.1	Tethered nomadism	125
9.4.2	Implications for other sites	126
9.5	Site clusters and art	126
9.6	Places and paths	127
9.7	Pavlovian camps	127
10.	By way of conclusion	129
10.1	Pavlovian anthropomorphic figurines and the female statuette zone	129
10.2	The historization of material culture and the nature of ‘ceramics’	129
10.3	Sharing and contextual analysis	130
10.4	Approaching the Upper Palaeolithic, speculating about boundaries	131
References		133