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

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Citation

Verpoorte, A. (2000, December 7). *Places of art, traces of fire. A contextual approach to anthropomorphic figurines in the Pavlovian*. *Archaeological Studies Leiden University*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/13512>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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.

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