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

In the previous chapters I have presented an overview of Pavlovian figurines. I have tried to justify my selection of anthropomorphic figurines and described the find circumstances as honestly as I could. A first analysis and a technological interpretation have also been presented. In the next chapters a discussion will follow on this basis.

It will concern three themes outlined in the introduction:

1. the question of representation, resemblance and realism (chapter 7);
2. the interpretation of the relations with zoomorphic figurines (chapter 8);
3. the nature of the sites at stake (chapter 9).

I think it is necessary to consider another issue before engaging in these discussions. The reason is that anthropology[1] forms an important source of inspiration in the following chapters. Therefore the relation between anthropology and archaeology needs to be considered shortly. It deserves attention because 1. archaeology may utilize a smattering of fanciful, 'exotic' ethnography, 2. there is always an ethnographic example for an archaeological interpretation, 3. ethnography and anthropology are nice and all, but it is not yet (in this case) the Pavlovian.

In other words, paraphrasing Saccasyn – della Santa (1947, 50), to what measure is prehistoric archaeology nót sufficient in itself? What roles are reserved for anthropology in the following discussions? I distinguish between three uses.

Firstly, anthropology can provide a cautionary tale as an argument against a theory. An interpretation can be undermined by a counter-example. There is a serious danger here that archaeology ends up as poor ethnography. Archaeology can become an ethnography with insufficient data.

Secondly, anthropology can provide an imaginative example, which may serve as an illustration of an archaeological interpretation. The danger is that the ethnographic example takes over and becomes a justification of an archaeological interpretation.

Thirdly, anthropology can provide a number of analytical concepts and generalizations. I am thinking, for example, of theories of exchange, liminality and cosmology. I shall make use of such generalizations concerning hunting and nature based on intercultural comparison. Recent hunter-gatherers, i.e. groups classified as such because of an economy formerly dominated by hunting and gathering wild foods, dominate the concepts and generalizations (as well as the cautionary tales and the imaginative examples) that I will use in the following discussions. Such generalisations about hunting and gathering draw a strong contrast with cultivating groups. Though blurring such distinctions is fashionable, probably for good reasons, I will retain the difference in the following chapters. A crucial insight, in my opinion, is the idea put forward by Bird-David (1990, 1992, 1999) that hunting and gathering is not only an economic system, but a way of life that pervades everything from subsistence activities to making camp, from dealing with other groups to cosmology, from raising children to burying the dead, from (not) killing an animal to telling stories around the fire.

There are many problems, in particular with the use of generalizations and the analogies with recent hunter-gatherers. In anthropology, like archaeology, there are many perspectives, characteristic of the plurality of the modern, 'transparent' society (Vattimo 1998). There are usually many ethnographies of more or less the same group, from different theoretical backgrounds, with different emphases and research interests, but also from different periods in the history of the modern world and the science of anthropology. There is also a strong tendency towards particularism — Nelson (1983), for example, explicitly warns *against* the generalization of his insights in the Koyukon view of nature — and towards the celebration of another unique member of the 'great arc of cultures' (Carrithers 1992).

Another problem is that investigating ethnographies from the point of view of archaeology tends towards 'orientalism'. Contemporary 'others' become contemporary ancestors and a distance in space becomes a distance in time. In this regard Gosden seems to argue for a separation of anthropology and archaeology when he writes that:

I feel that ethnoarchaeology is immoral, in that we have no justification for using the present of one society simply to interpret the past of another, especially as the present is often seen as a latter-day survival of a stage passed elsewhere in the world, for instance where hunter-gatherer groups from Africa or Australia are used to throw light on

the European Palaeolithic. Societies ought to be studied as interesting in their own right or not at all. (Gosden 1999, 9)

At the same time, the use of anthropology may also entail a denial of history. Hodder (1982, 9) is unexpectedly explicit: 'The past is the present in the sense that our reconstructions of the meaning of data from the past are based on analogies with the world around us'. This is not unproblematic. With respect to recent hunter-gatherers, it has been noted, especially in the context of the 'revisionism'-debate, that they are encapsulated by agricultural and pastoral peoples, modern states and globalization. They are marginalized environmentally, economically and socially. They have a long history of interactions in pre-colonial times, colonialism, developmental aid and globalization. A very simple consequence is that the Upper Palaeolithic is already entirely different because of its place in history: in the Upper Palaeolithic, hunters and gatherers were on top of the world, not marginal dwellers vulnerable to representation as noble savages.

It is clear that there are many squabbles with the use and purport of anthropology in archaeology. However, I would like to emphasize another side of anthropology. It can help to open up the space between a consciousness of one's own prejudices and premises and the acknowledgement that everything may have been quite different then. In this way, anthropology serves not so much to become more familiar with the past, but rather it may allow for an awareness of the difference of and friction with the past. Of particular importance here is the watershed brought about by the scientific world view that is dominant nowadays. With the scientific world view that pervades our world from the sciences to the arts and from information technology to leisure, the pre-scientific world has become knowable but unthinkable.

For example, writing about the Dreaming, Myers (1986) refers to it as a distinctly Aboriginal cultural construction. However, elders explaining the Dreaming to him say: 'It's not our idea, it's a big law. We have to sit down alongside of that Law like all the dead people who went before us' (Myers 1986, 53). In other words, for them it is not a cultural construct at all. The difference might be termed a lack of understanding, a *terra incognita* for further research. But in my opinion, this difference cannot be removed and the friction remains worrying.

In the following chapters I hope to make some moves towards such friction with the Upper Palaeolithic through the discussion of the three themes indicated: representation, relations with animals and the nature of sites.

notes

1 'Anthropology' refers here to social and cultural anthropology, not to physical and biological anthropology.