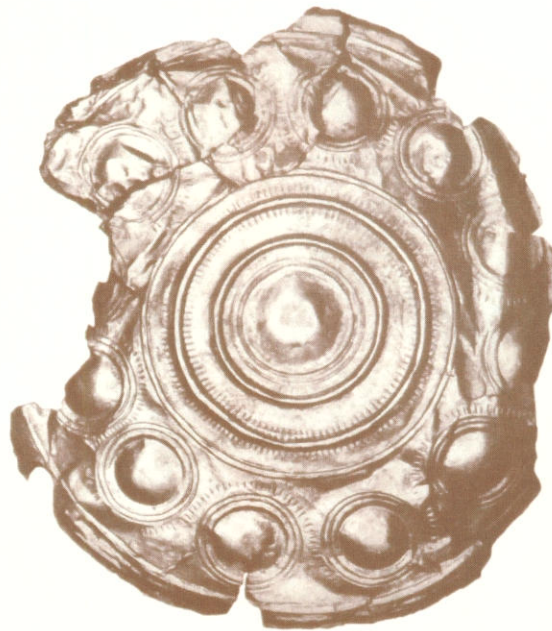


STUDIA HERCYNIA XV/1



PRAGAE 2011

First part: prehistory

Periodisation of prehistory: reasons for diversity during different periods of development

The prehistoric periods of the Czech lands are divided by archaeologists in following series of so-called cultures. Archaeological culture presents cultural entity in the sense of those relics that were preserved for us through the filtering of time, loss of the oral culture, of most of the objects of organic material, of upper parts of the buildings, etc. We don't know names of nations and tribes that lived here in prehistory, only at its end we have a few of them. The changes of cultures did not usually mean a total change of the population. Even after cruel war in which most of men from the conquered tribe were killed, the majority of women and children were integrated into the new community. These entities were also not isolated; they met in trade, in intercultural marriages, in religion in which significant sanctuaries were international centres to which long-distance pilgrimages were undertaken. The archaeological culture means first of all community of a certain artistic style, marking some kind of cultural identity. Its expression can be found in shapes of the stone tools in the Paleolithic and since the Neolithic in pottery shapes and decoration. Since the Bronze Age pottery reflects a broader fashion similarly as medieval Romanesque or Gothic style transcended the borders of national cultures of that time Europe.

The cultures represent communities with stabilised political, religious, economic values and common artistic taste. Normal communication supposes also common language of the cultural entity. Transition from one culture to another sometimes means only change in artistic style and in part of the ideas, like during transition from Halstatt to La Tène periods. Otherwise coping with crises was enabled by shift to another way of economy (agricultural use of land). The changes of cultures reflected environmental crises during climate oscillations. Many aspects of prehistory of Central Europe foretell later history; the changing phases with prevailing influence from either east or west, either north or south, all concerning conflicts, enrichment of culture or combination of both marked prehistory of this part of the world as well.

Sometimes the Czech lands resembled the conditions of steppe, while in other periods Atlantic climate with cold summers and mild winters prevailed. This gave preference to broader cattle breeding, while warm summers with a lot of snow in winter provided better chance for grain production even in higher altitudes. The most fertile parts of Bohemia and Moravia were permanently inhabited and cultivated, the higher altitudes and foothill areas were less intensively used for agriculture, but since Neolithic even mountain pastures were used during summer. The settlement in the prehistoric time was far sparser then nowadays and its continuity was less secured. Small family groups often started newly and vanished after several generations. After longer lasting bad harvest it was necessary to move on or change agricultural strategy. During later prehistory moving of tribes was common also according to historical sources or legends. A new culture often represents some new inhabitants that absorbed remnants of the old population. All European nations have many ancestors and among them are no doubts those who lived in Central Europe long before the arrival of Slavs and also the remains of Celtic and Germanic tribes.

Palaeolithic: the first known human cultures

The first known human settlements with chipped stone implements known in Central Europe belong to Old Palaeolithic. We know very few details of that time but remnants of activities of people of that time in various parts of Europe and Middle East are on general level similar; technology of stone working, a primitive way of settlement, the ways of animal hunting and crop

gathering – these strategies belonged to general property of mankind in many parts of Europe, Africa, and Asia. As far as we know groups of inhabitants of that time shifted from place to place and relations among groups were kept by mutual contacts during long periods. But there were probably not too frequent contacts between individual groups. According to present knowledge this period lasted long and cultural development was from our point of view rather small at least what we know from preserved artefacts. We do not have any human finds from our area from this period but, a.o. new discoveries in Georgia showed that primitive variants of humankind lived not only in Africa but also in other parts of the world.

Interglacial period preceding the penultimate (Riss) glacial was climatically hospitable and traces of human activities from that time are known in Europe. Advanced old Palaeolithic, called the Rissian, represents time when people related to modern species were living here but evidence of their presence is scarce. Fire was surely used in that time and the means of subsistence were collection and hunting. Geometrical beautifully shaped so-called “hand axes” are not as perfect in Bohemia as in France but even here they show sense for conscientious forming of geometric shape.¹

Middle Palaeolithic, characteristic by moustérien, was time of the Neanderthal man in Europe that was known from more places of Europe – also from Slovakia (Gánovce) and Moravia (Šipka near Štramberk). People then often lived in caves, but they constructed primitive huts as well. Their tools were made by flaking off from previously prepared core. They used mainly quartz material less suitable for chopping (quartz, quartzite, siliceous schist) and therefore the tools of the Central European Middle Palaeolithic are not as typical as in classic French cultures.² In the settlement pattern known in this area there were probably many gaps, many groups did not coexist although mankind as such preserved.

In the first interstadial of the Würm glacial period Bohunice and aurignacien cultures existed, the latter was probably arriving from the east, while szeletien developed probably from the moustérien. The cultures of the Würm interstadial were related, aurignacien and szeletien only in several kinds of tools: in szeletien leaf shaped points were popular, while in aurignacien was carinated grinder. People then lived both in caves and in primitive huts. In Barca in Slovakia pit dwellings with traces of poles carrying roof were discovered. Mammoth, reindeer and bison were hunted. Also bone flute and pierced sea shells are known. Aurignacien was a time of presence of *Homo sapiens* although still with primitive features.

The paintings in the Chauvet cave in France were first much surprising, but their date in the aurignacien was later doubted. They still, however, surprise by their unusually perfect paintings they are technologically the most developed items from all Palaeolithic cave art. They could perhaps be connected with the Plato's legend on Atlantis rather than hypotheses on relations between the Atlantis legend to Thera, Troy and other places in the Mediterranean. But here we are connecting the area of legends into which the present science cannot penetrate.³

After aurignacien the Central European facies of gravettien is known mainly from Moravian finds by the Pálava hills, from Dolní Věstonice and Pavlov; this phase is now called *pavlovien*. A new technology of chopping enabled gaining long blades of which small tools were made: points, grinders, scrapers and drills. People then hunted flocks of animals; in Předměstí it is said that bones of more than one thousand mammoths were found. From Předmostí u Přerova a secondary burial of twenty people in disused hut is known. Beside the game these people gathered also seeds of some grass. They used spear as weapon, possibly also spear throwers and boomerangs. They lived in huts slightly sunk under the terrain level with bent upper construction.

¹ Fridrich, J., *Staropaleolitické osídlení Čech (Old Paleolithic in Bohemia)*. Praha 1997. *Památky archeologického dědictví* 10.

² Svoboda, J., Middle Pleistocene adaptations in Central Europe, *Journal of World Prehistory*, 3 1989, pp.33-44.

³ Cf. Bažant, J., “Paleolitické umění”, prvních sto let (Paleolithic art). In: *Archeologie nenalézáného. S. Vencla*. Praha 2002, 9–33.

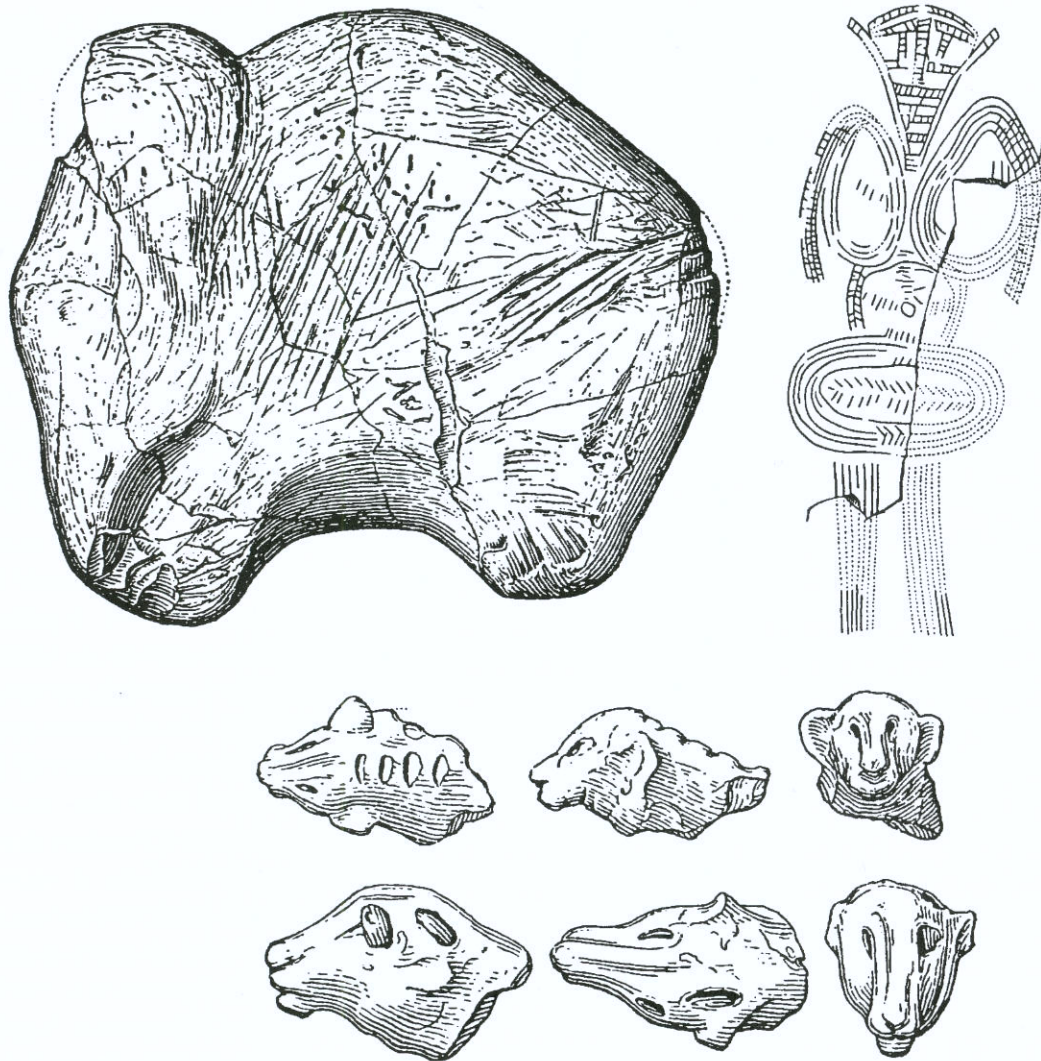


Fig 1. Předmostí near Přerov, Late Paleolithic. Above: On the left a statuette of mammoth made of mammoth tusk, on the right engraving of female, also on mammoth tusk. Below: Animal figures from Dolní Věstonice. After Podborský ed. 1993.

of oval or round shape.⁴ Inside the dwellings several fireplaces were found, bone waste was found inside the huts and outside as well. In the Late Palaeolithic of central Europe a number of facies or cultures are classified but we spare the reader of this book from more detailed information.

Sculptures of bone and clay are remarkable. Human figures are mainly female: giving birth, keeping family succession, multiplying of game animals, were all task of those forces that are best manifested in females. Maternal female goddess, representing those natural forces was apparently worshiped in the first place. Besides famous Venus of Věstonice (made of special ashy-clayish material) there is also engraving of female form known in geometric style from Předmostí (Fig. 1 above right), thus showing abstract stylisation, marking the system of warmth and other streams in human body used e.g. in acupuncture; also statuette of mammoth from ivory came from this site (Fig. 1 above on the left). Clay figurines of animals from Věstonice are among the first products of its kind in the whole world (Fig. 1 below). Among the statues from Věstonice there is besides more stylised figures an ivory head of woman with asymmetric face implying portrait features (Fig. 2) From the later magdalénien finds of which are only partly covered by loess originate masterly engravings of fighting animals from the Pekárna cave in the Moravian Karst

⁴ Svoboda, J. a. o., *Paleolit Moravy a Slezska (Paleolithic of Moravia and Silesia)*. Brno 1994.

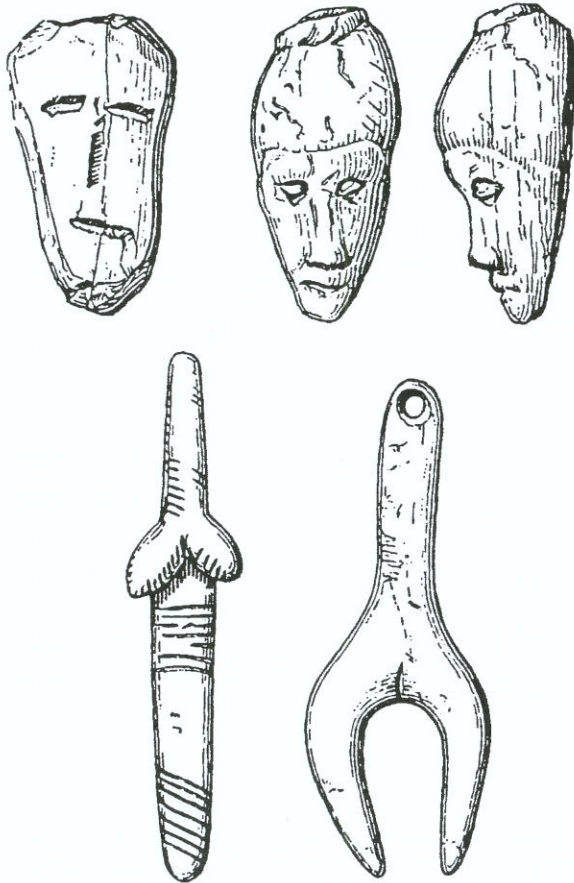


Fig. 2. Above male and female head, below stylized statuettes of women from Dolní Věstonice. Female head implies in the face asymmetry some portrait features, pavlovien. After Podborský ed. 1993.

Mediterranean; human groups in that time probably moved on bigger territory and sometimes they met. During long time periods common basic culture developed its archaeological expression in standard form of chipped tools and weapons.

Final Paleolithic and Mesolithic: hunters and collectors living in most parts of Bohemia and Moravia

Magdalenien was the last culture of the last glacial period; with its termination the glacier retreated and plants and animals started to return to the north. Reindeer disappeared, but other smaller animals were common. Rivers abounded with fish and possibilities of fruits gathering and vegetal food in general improved. Final Palaeolithic was followed by Mesolithic. Chipped tools grew smaller, we speak of Mesolithic microliths. Small blades of geometric shape were inserted into wooden handles and thus composite tools were constructed, e.g. harpoons. The raw material was often transported from far away, as flint from southern Poland. So-called tardenoisien culture of middle Mesolithic spread from Western Europe to Ukraine and southern Russia. Świderien

(Fig. 3). It represents a sketch of immediate impression as do magdalénien paintings from French and Spanish caves.

Palaeolithic artists were masters in immediate sketching of character, essence of animals. The sense of their art was probably connected to hunting magic, securing abundance of flocks for subsistence, but it showed also attempt of securing harmony between men and nature; the parallels with modern shamans show that their authors also had access to some different perception than us.⁵ Pictures and engravings preserved until today are the relics of the last phases of rituals the part of which was presenting immediate vivid pictures of forms of animal bodies. Sometimes other objects were depicted, but mainly in abstract form.⁶ Jewels are also known from Late Palaeolithic – necklaces composed of teeth, shells and other pendants, other embellishments and amulets. Palaeolithic people, notably ladies, tried to look the best. Both gravettien and magdalénien hunters were specialised in hunting big animals of their time. In gravettien they were mainly mammoths, in magdalénien mainly reindeer and horses.⁷ Dog was already domesticated.

All these cultures in the general sense (not the facies defined in more detail) are known in the most of Europe and the main parts of the

⁵ Lewis-Williams, D. 2005: *Mind in the Cave*, Johannesburg-London

⁶ Good illustrations in Poulík, J.- Forman, W., *Prehistoric Art*. Praha 1956, Fig. 1–16.

⁷ Cf. Vencl, S. Hostim, *Magdalenien in Bohemia*. Praha 1995. *Památky archeologické*, supplementum 4. Cf. Also the volume *Pravěk Čech 1: Paleolithic and Mesolithic*, Prague 2008.

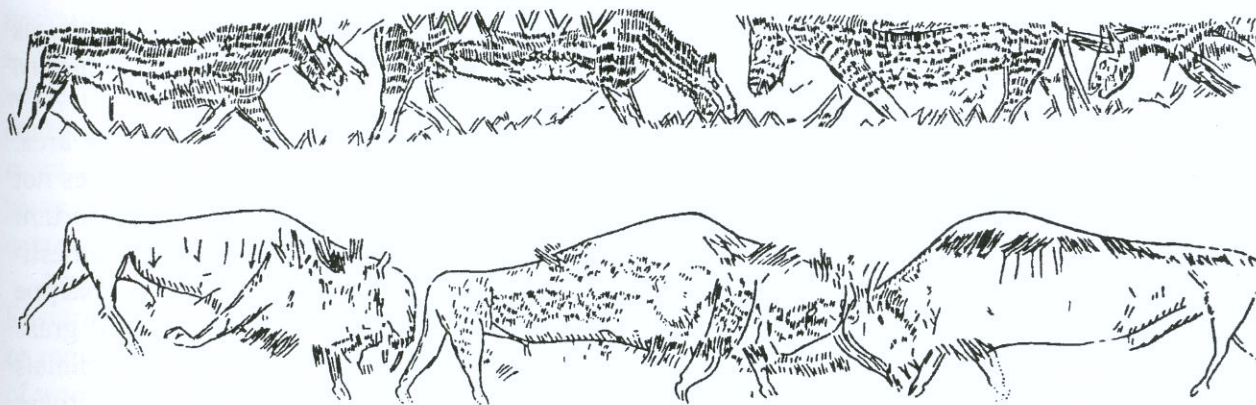


Fig. 3. Two engravings on horse ribs from Pekárna cave: animal fighting, magdalenien. Both of them have parallels in France. After Podborský ed. 1993.

known from southern Poland is also known from northern Moravia; Mesolithic people were culturally more diversified than Palaeolithic man. Bow and arrows became main hunting (and assault) weapon, dog helped hunters with chasing game. Many settlements were made on dunes by the rivers; fishing was probably important source of nourishment. Surroundings of lakes in southern Bohemia and notably the Třeboň basin were inhabited more intensely than in later Neolithic.⁸ The art of that time is little known with exception of Final Palaeolithic Franco-Cantabrian region in south-west France and eastern Spain where wall painting continued and changed into more schematic but narrative style; dramatic scenes from wars and hunts are often depicted. The first Neolithic wall paintings known mainly from the hilly parts of eastern Anatolia are linked to the former. Mesolithic European people were absorbed by agriculturalists arriving into Europe from the southeast. It seems nowadays that many Mesolithic groups were able to learn agriculture from these incomers and from their neighbours; this process lasted for many centuries. It is highly probable that for certain period Mesolithic people lived together with the Neolithic population in Central Europe mainly on places that were not inhabited much or at all by farmers – in higher altitudes of hill areas. It is also supposed that large part of Mesolithic people joined the farmers; this new way of subsistence secured food reserves that were not possible in Mesolithic way of life, but it needed much more work. In legends, the coming of the Neolithic Age is called the transition from Golden to Silver Age; the farmers had to work more hours per day than the hunters and gatherers.

Neolithic: beginning of farming, land cultivation and cattle breeding

Protoagriculture, a phase of gaining subsistence when cattle started to be bred and crops were collected more intensively is not known (until now) in Central Europe. The closest from Central Europe was discovered in Greece in the Franchti cave in eastern Peloponnese, but it is better known in the hill area between nowadays Turkey and Iran. Human dwelling was first of round plan at the time when pottery was not yet used but crops were already grown. Houses were built usually of mud bricks or *pisé* (mixture of clay, straw and dung) on stone substructure, some vaulted huts from Upper Iran and Cyprus resembled in shape the Eskimo igloos. The relationship to his dwelling was first not defined according to three planes of three-dimensional space, but it was constructed like a round wrap surrounding human being like a kind of cupola of the world

⁸ Vencl, S., Mesolitické osídlení Českého krasu (Mesolithic settlement of Bohemian Karst). *Archeologické rozhledy*, 22, 1970, 643–657; Svoboda J. a. o., *Mezolitické osídlení severních Čech* (Mesolithic settlement of North Bohemia). Brno 2003.