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MAGDALENIAN FIGURINE FROM OBLAZOWA CAVE

ABSTRACT

P. Valde-Nowak, A. Kraszewska, M. Cieśla 2017. *Magdalenian figurine from Oblazowa Cave*, AAC 52:299–304.

Oblazowa Cave was first excavated in 1985, and is best known for the discoveries of remains of settlement from the time of Middle and Upper Palaeolithic. The traces of most recent settlement in the cave, found in the uppermost part of the stratigraphy can be attributed to Magdalenian settlement. Results of latest excavation brought more precise date this occupation face. In years 2016 and 2017 in layer III of the cave a series of artifacts, and a small sandstone female figurine were found.

Key words: Middle Palaeolithic; Upper Palaeolithic; Polish Carpathians; Lalinde/Gönnersdorf style; Palaeolithic Venus

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I. INTRODUCTION

Oblazowa Cave (Nowa Biała, site 2, Nowy Targ district, Poland, GPS 49° 25' 43" N 20° 07' 37" E), that has been a subject of a research since 1985, is best known for the finds of Upper Paleolithic settlement linked with initial phase of Gravettian complex and Aurignacian and Szeletian cultures (Fig. 1). Development of field works has also led to a recognition and further exploration of a sequence of Middle Paleolithic layers. Traces of Paleolithic settlement were discovered also in the uppermost parts of stratigraphic sequences. In the monography of the site (Valde-Nowak, Nadachowski, Madeyska [eds.] 2003) they were attributed alternatively to Epigravettian or Magdalenian cultures. Field works were held in recent years, and their results suggest, that artifacts from layer III inside of the cave can be interpreted as connected with Magdalenian culture.

II. DESCRIPTION OF FIND

In 2016 in Oblazowa Cave a sandstone plaque, with features typical for Lalinde/Gönnersdorf style was found (Fig. 2). The artifact was discovered in layer III. Before its discovery, the character of formerly known stone implements, combined

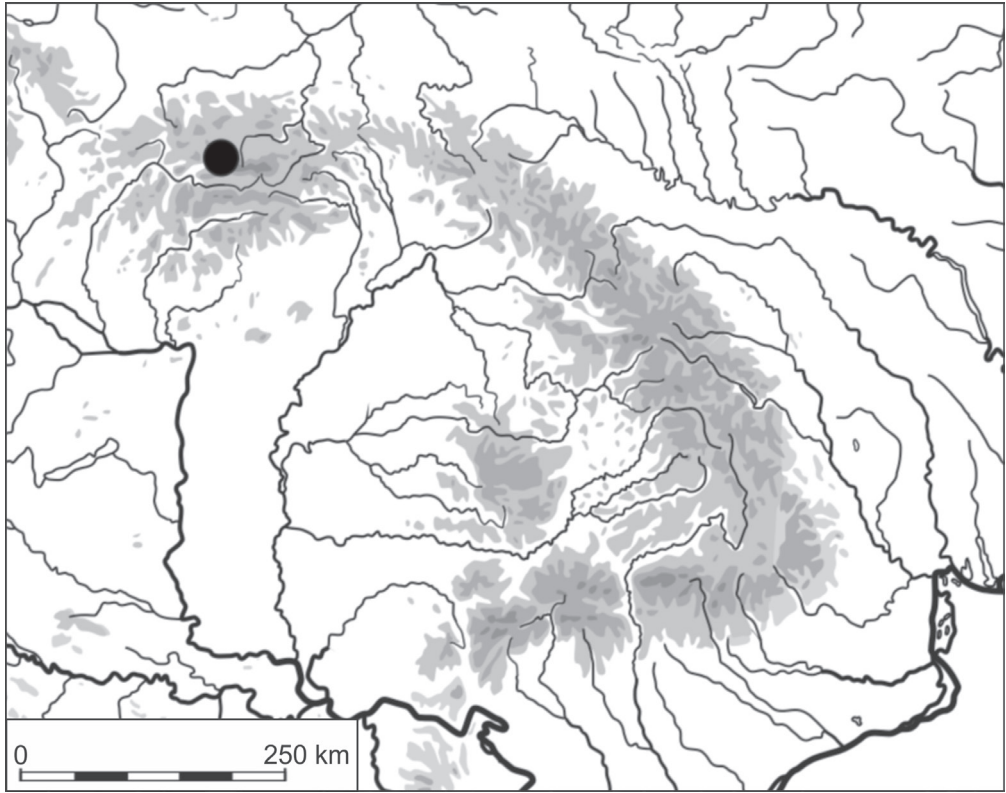


Fig 1. Nowa Białka, Nowy Targ district, site 2; The location of the Oblazowa cave; drawn by authors

with radiocarbon date obtained for the aforementioned layer (Valde-Nowak, Nadachowski, Madeyska [eds.] 2003, 57, 58; Lorenc 2006, 46) suggested alternatively interpretation of the inventory as Magdalenien or Epigravetian¹.

Level III of the Oblazowa Cave, as well as adjacent layers, is made of clay and limestone rubble. For geological reasons, sandstone fragments that are found there, must have been brought to the cave by man. Primarily, sandstone pebbles can be found in the riverbed of Białka river. Apart from the predominant granite and rarer quartzite boulders, also small sandstone pieces can be found in the Białka River sediments. Fragments of this rock are eroded from the nearby Podhale flysch, through which the river flow.

Small stylized plaquette is 53 mm long, 32 mm wide and 7 mm thick. It was made of a flat pebble of flysch sandstone. It is of a Dexter type, which means that the over-sized buttocks are located on the right edge.

The right edge was formed into a notch by retouching of a distal end (abrupt, partly alternating retouch), an intentional break-effect is visible at the proximal

¹ Complete description of Magdalenian inventories (layer III in the cave chamber and the fireplace in a rock shelter above the cave) will be a subject of a separate article.

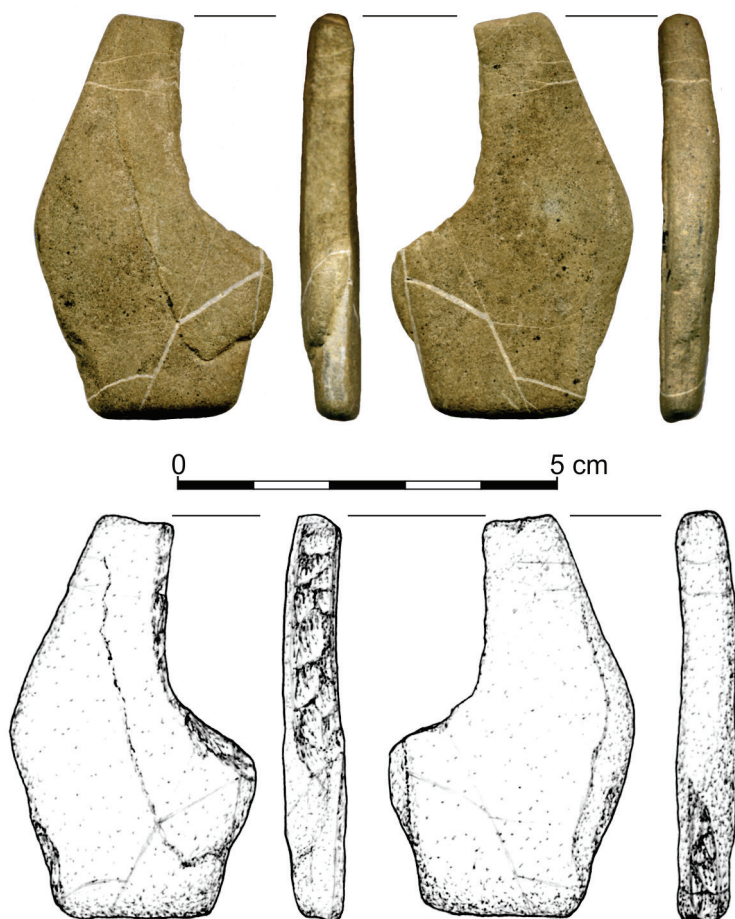


Fig. 2. Nowa Biała, Nowy Targ district, site 2. Figurine from Oblazowa Cave;
Photo by U. Bąk, drawing K. Lajs

end. Also on the left edge, in the proximal part, a tiny notch was made. Moreover, on the left curved edge in the medium part of the piece one can see a belly of pregnant woman or faintly silhouetted breasts. On both faces of the figurine there are some calcite lines that make the artifact even more attractive.

III. CONCLUSION

Lalinde/Gönnersdorf figurines and engravings are strictly stylized and considered as evident female forms, with over-sized buttocks, long trunks, small or missing breasts, and no heads (Bosinski 1982; Bosinski, d'Errico, Schiller 2001; Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Figurines from Ölnitz, Saale-Holzland-Kreis and Gönnersdorf, Landkreis Ahrweiler; after Bosinski 1982; Bosinski, Fischer 1974; Feustel 1970; Lalinde/Gönnersdorf Figurines and Engravings-elect.doc.

1–5, 7, 8 — Ölnitz, Saale-Holzland-Kreis district, Germany; 6 — Gönnersdorf, Ahrweiler district

The function of such objects of art is unclear. Marcel Otte (1990, 189) interprets them as a shard symbol expressive of the ideological unity of Magdalenian communities in Europe. According to Sabine Gaudzinski-Windheuser and Olaf Jöris (2015, 291): “[...] the schematic style characterizing Late Magdalenian depictions represented an artistic reflection of changes in the social role of women during a period of rapid range expansion of Late Glacial populations some 16–13,000 years

ago.”. Another interpretation suggests the possibility that such figurines were a kind of “(...) photographs (...) of girls carried by their boyfriends on their long hunting expeditions” (Schild 2014, 110).

These images have been found at among others Gönnersdorf (Bosinski, d’Errico, Schiller 2001; Fig 3:6) and Ölknitz (Feustel 1970; Gaudzinski-Windhauser 2013; Fig. 3:1–5, 7, 8) in Germany, La Magdeleine-La Plaine in France (Ladier 2001), Pekárna and Býči Skála in the Czech Republic (Oliva 2015, 145, 149) and many Magdalenian sites in Europe (Maier 2015, 176). In Poland figurines are known from Wilczyce, Sandomierz district (Fiodorczuk *et al.* 2007), Dzierżysław, Głubczyce district (Ginter, Połtowicz 2002) and most probably from Samborowice, Racibórz district (Foltyn, Foltyn 2007).

Discovery of the next plaquette in Oblązowa Cave proves once again the importance of that site for Palaeolithic hunters.

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Photo: Don Hitchcock 2015, Source: Monrepos Archäologisches Forschungszentrum und Museum, Neuwied, Germany <http://donsmaps.com/couze.html> (accessed on 10.11.2017)

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