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FROM ARTIFACT TO ICON:
An Analysis of the Venus Figurines in
Archaeological Literature and Contemporary
Culture

Volume 4 of 5

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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Piette, E. 1895

**“La station de Brassempouy
et les statuettes humaines de la période glyptique.”**

L’Anthropologie VI pp. 129-151

(Translation: Author’s own)

1. What is the context of this approach to the archaeological material?

The paper is comprised of two sections; the first outlines the history of excavation at the site of Brassempouy, with particular reference to the work undertaken by Piette and de Laporterie; the second part presents the description and interpretation of nine “human” statuettes and one fragment in the author’s possession.

2. What is the role of the material in the hypothesis? How is it used by the author and what is the hypothesis applied to it?

Piette’s approach to the material is governed by his interest in the identification of races inhabiting the Palaeolithic. His declared aim is to discover “with precision” the anatomical appearance of the inhabitants of *la période glyptique* – specifically, “the contours of the flesh, of the fatty masses, the characteristics of the hairstyles” – details that osteology has been hitherto unable to provide (Piette 1895: 130). The figures are therefore viewed in terms of providing evidence for the existence of specific “races” in the Palaeolithic.

Piette believes that the statuettes are realistic representations providing accurate indications of physical characteristics, in a similar way to animal sculptures, which he believes are so realistic that species can be immediately identified (Piette 1895: 129, 130). The figures are viewed as “copies of reality”, not “works of imagination” (Piette 1895: 130).

Piette describes each figure individually, and the search for racial traits leads to an emphasis on anatomical features, as he isolates those characteristics that can be compared to, or claimed to appear in, living races. In this way, anatomical features are identified and compared with those observed among members of contemporary hunter-gatherers, particularly the Bushmen people.

3. What terminology is used to introduce and subsequently define the material, and to what effect?

The figures are introduced as “nine human statuettes” (Piette 1895: 142) – although one example, the *femme au renne* (“Woman with reindeer”) is an engraving – and for the most part the term used is “statuettes”.

With the exception of the “bust of a woman” from Mas d’Azil, each figure is referred to by a specific name. *Le manche de poignard* (the “dagger-handle”) is so named due to its shape and postulated function (Piette 1895: 144). *La femme au renne* depicts a headless figure, interpreted as female, lying beneath a reindeer, and is also referred to as the *femme enceinte* (pregnant woman). The remaining figures are named *la figurine à la ceinture* (figurine with belt), *la figurine à la pèlerine* (figurine with cape), *la figurine à la capuche* (figurine with hood), *la fillette* (the girl), and *l’ébauche* (the “unfinished” figure). It can be seen that three of the figures are named with reference to specific items of clothing identified by Piette and that, with the exception of *l’ébauche*, the terminology strongly identifies the figures as female.

Reference is made to the previously discovered *Vénus impudique* (the shameless Venus) (Piette 1895: 138, 150). Only one figure amongst Piette’s collection is specifically named a “Venus” – *la Vénus de Brassempouy*, and Piette states that the figure was named *la poire* on its discovery by the “workers” of *l’Association française*, due to the “hugeness of the thigh” (Piette 1895: 143). The term Venus is not used as a generic term for the entire collection.

4. How is the category of material defined? To what does the label refer?

A category is defined in several ways: firstly, in the sense of the figures being assembled in a collection by Piette; secondly, in the chronological attribution of the specimens to “*la période glyptique*”; and thirdly, in the shared identification and designation of the figures as “human”, and as “statuettes”. This is perhaps an early indication of the flexibility of the category in that “the statuettes” also include an engraved figure (*la femme au renne*), hinting that the identification of “humans” is prioritised over the different media utilised.

While the figures are designated “human” rather than specifically “female”, they are identified and discussed throughout as female images. Only the female identification of *la figurine à la ceinture* is queried, and while Piette indicates that he consulted with others on the issue, he states that virtually all consider it to be a female figure (Piette 1895: 148).

The clearest definition of the material is in the division and subsequent presentation of the material as two separate groups, prior to individual descriptions of the figures. One is designated “adipose women, with pendent breasts, a voluminous stomach”, the other, “slender figurines, with a flat stomach” (Piette 1895: 142). This categorisation is further established by Piette’s assertion that these two groups correspond to “races”, specifically an “adipose” race, whose general characteristics are drawn from the four figures and one fragment in the first group, and a “svelte” race, drawn from the five examples in the second (Piette 1895: 142, 150).

5. Is a general characterisation of the material provided? How is the material characterised?

Only a brief comment is placed prior to the individual descriptions of the figures. Despite its brevity, this prominent position in the text allows a strong characterisation to appear prior to the discussion of the figures themselves. This is particularly significant as the comment concerns the clear identification of two distinct groups. As noted above, Piette describes the first group – the Mas d’Azil bust, *la poire*, *le manche de poignard*, both from Brassempouy, and the engraved *femme au renne* from Laugerie-Basse – as consisting of adipose women with pendent, hanging breasts and an ample stomach. The second group – *la fillette*, *la figurine à la ceinture*, *l’ébauche*, *la figurine à la pèlerine* and *la figurine à la capuche*, all from Brassempouy – is termed a group of slender figurines with flat stomachs (Piette 1895: 142). The figures are therefore characterised in terms of anatomical features.

Piette provides a further characterisation when relating the figures to the “races” that he seeks to identify. After description of the figures of the first group, Piette

inserts a summary, in which he characterises the “adipose race” on the basis of features noted on the four statuettes. He determines: “...a human race remarkable for the development of adiposity on the lower body and on the thighs of women... The breasts are long, cylindrical and *pendent*. The stomach is voluminous, prominent and *pendent*... There are fatty folds on the sides and fatty deposits more or less developed on the hips... The thighs are thick, adipose... The *Mont de Vénus* is large, triangular, a little protruding. The labias extend into a vulviform appendage. The legs are skinny. The hair is very developed. The stomach and chest are covered with hair arranged in small strips” Piette (1895: 146-147).

Summarising the statuettes of the second group, Piette describes them as belonging to a “svelte race”, as being skinny and slender, and “much more similar to our race” than the figures of the first group. He states that the limbs are more in keeping with “ours”, although “the face was very different and the “protruding nodule” at the base of the stomach “makes one suspect even greater differences”. He identifies the “individuals of this race” as wearing “rudiments of clothing”, probably as decoration, and contrasts this with the “adipose” women, who possessed only necklaces and bracelets, and observation that suggests to Piette that the social position of the second group was higher than that of the first (Piette 1895: 150).

6. Does the author accept or adopt groups as previously established, or are new groups created?

This is the first such grouping of “human” figures, comprising the figures excavated by Piette himself at Brassempouy and Mas d’Azil, and also including an example from Laugerie-Basse discovered by Abbé Landesque.

Piette divides the figures on the basis that; “When one places them all together before one, one recognises immediately that they belong to two different groups” (Piette 1895: 142), and the nine examples are accordingly divided into and discussed as two separate types. The first (Piette 1895: 142-147) – the Mas d’Azil bust, the “*venus*” of Brassempouy, *le manche de poignard*, also from Brassempouy, and the engraved *femme au renne* from Laugerie-Basse – is

described as consisting of “adipose women with *pendents* (hanging) breasts and an ample stomach”. The second group – *la fillette, la figurine à la ceinture, l'ébauche, la figurine à la pèlerine* and *la figurine à la capuche*, all from Brassempouy – brings together a group of “slender figurines with flat stomachs” (Piette 1895: 142).

7. How is the credibility of the material established?

The paper presents the results of Piette’s own excavations, and he provides a detailed account of the excavation of the site, the proposed stratigraphy, and the associated finds (Piette 1895: 129-141). As such, his own reputation and authority are strongly linked with the discovery and presentation of the material. To the greater extent, this personal involvement effectively serves to guarantee the credibility of the material.

8. Are details of archaeological context or dating discussed?

Yes. Details of excavations undertaken at the Brassempouy site, namely in the Grotte du Pape and the adjoining avenue, are provided in the first half of the paper. Description and illustration of Piette’s suggested stratigraphy is provided (Piette 1895: 137), and it is indicated that the statuettes were retrieved from Layer *E* (Piette 1895: 139).

Piette recounts that initial excavations at the site were begun in 1880, under the direction of Dubalen. A “Magdalenian” layer was removed, at which time Piette was invited to the site to give his opinion on a second archaeological layer (Piette 1895: 131). This excavation was abandoned in 1881, and work did not begin again until 1890, when de Laporterie and Dr. Dufour investigated the lower level described as containing “Mousterian” fauna (Piette 1895: 132-3). Piette illustrates several finds described as “pendants” (Figs. 1, 2 and 3), and “an ivory sculpture” resembling a “flower bulb” (Fig. 4).

The involvement of *l'Association française pour l'avancement des sciences* began on the 13th of March 1892, when M. Magitot, the president of the Anthropology section, wrote to Piette. A conference was to be held at Pau in September, and Magitot wished to know if Piette could recommend a suitable

deposit in the vicinity, one worthy of a visit from the members of the Congress. Piette indicated the station of Brassempouy, as the Magdalenian beds had been explored, and study of the “Mousterian” stratum below had not been completed (Piette 1895: 133). Having obtained the necessary permission from the Comte de Poudenx (proprietor of the wood in which the site was situated), de Laporterie suspended his right to excavate in favour of the Association, and on the 10th of September Magitot, Cartailhac, de Laporterie, Dubalen and Piette made a preparatory excursion to the deposit, where Piette states that they excavated for an hour (Piette 1895: 133-134). Piette gives few details of this “excavation”, merely stating that a layer of “Solutrean” age was noted in the avenue (an attribution based on the faunal remains described by Piette). Querying its place in the stratigraphy of Brassempouy, Piette comments that there was no time to throw light on the question, but that the issue would be resolved when the Congress duly visited. However, Piette continues that: “Unfortunately, when, on the 19th of September, the Sections of Geology and Anthropology returned to Brassempouy, the deposit had been so badly prepared that the rubble masked the outcrops, and all serious stratigraphic study was impossible” (Piette 1895: 134). Despite this, he asserts that the excavations of the Association had an important result – that the site contained some human statuettes of ivory. He also notes that, “the workers had also recovered several other objects in ivory, notably a ring and an object of unknown use, remarkable for its ornamentation...” (Piette 1895: 134).

Piette subsequently excavated the remainder of the layer with de Laporterie. He notes that, “after removing the debris left by the previous excavators, we recognised that to the right in the cave and in the avenue, the layer had been strongly cut into by the excavations of our predecessors” (Piette 1895: 134). It had been destroyed in several places, and in some areas remained only in the lower part (Piette 1895: 135). However, he states that it was the richest part of the deposit, and two statuettes and a cylindrical ivory form were discovered there. The remains of the layer were described by Piette as “quite comparable to the part of the formation which comes up still to the left. On this side there was a great strip remaining intact, stretching into the cave and the avenue”, and this

proved sufficient for Piette to illustrate a section of the stratigraphy (Piette 1895: 135-137).

The layer is described in detail (Piette 1895: 136-139, including illustration of the stratigraphy 1895: 137). The layer is stated to be 1-2.20 m. deep, consisting of yellow clay mixed with loose limestone fragments. The fauna is listed as including quantities of horse, mammoth and rhinoceros, with stag, reindeer and wolf appearing in lesser numbers (Piette 1895: 136). Flints of “Mousterian”, “Solutrean” and “Magdalenian” type are said to appear, with those of the “Solutrean” being most abundant. Burins of bone and ivory appear at all heights of the layer. Also noted are ivory “points”, bevelled at the base, pierced canines, and small strips of ivory “resembling” those that the Marquis de Vibraye found with the *Vénus impudique* at Laugerie-Basse (Piette 1895: 138). Piette devotes most attention to discussion of the hearths (Piette 1895: 138) encountered at all heights and described as being so numerous on the left side of the cave that they were often touching. In the avenue, they occur at spaced intervals, and it is in these areas that the ivories “spared by the fire” are found (Piette 1895: 139).

Piette divides the “*éburneene*” layer into three – D, E, and F. His reason for this is that, although the layer was homogeneous, the statuettes lay only in bed E, itself some 40cm thick (Piette 1895: 139). Piette’s proposed stratigraphy indicates three spots where the figurines were found, two of which are associated with hearths (Piette 1895: 137).

A more detailed reference to the find-spots of the Brassempouy figures is made in their individual descriptions. It is stated that *la poire* was found in 1892, by the “workmen of *l’Association française*”, lying in the right part of the cave, not far from the rock that formed the west wall (Piette 1895: 143). Similarly, *l’ébauche* was found by the workers of *l’Association* in the right part of the grotte (Piette 1895: 148). It is also stated that the “fragment” was found “during these excavations, at which time it was left lying on the layer and collected by the Comte de Poudenx (Piette 1895: 146).

The remaining figures were recovered during the excavations of Piette and de Laporterie, which commenced in 1894. *Le manche de poignard* was found in the left part of the avenue of the cave, “in the earth mixed with ash”, and Piette adds that the ivories found in these conditions were less well preserved than the others (Piette 1895: 144). *La fillette* was found in 1894 by Mascaraux (who Piette states assisted on several occasions) on the left side of the avenue, near the entrance of the cave (Piette 1895: 147). *La figurine à la capuche* was also found on the left side of the avenue (Piette 1895: 149). *La figurine à la ceinture* was found to the right, near the entrance of the cavern (Piette 1895: 147), and *la figurine à la pèlerine* was found at the side of *la figurine à la ceinture* (Piette 1895: 149).

Although this information is extensive, certain questions remain, as it remains the case that Piette’s account of the excavations is less than specific in detailing the precise circumstances and conditions governing the discovery of the figurines. Particularly, details of the “excavation” by *l’Association française*, and the initial discovery of the figurines, are somewhat sketchy. Although there seem to be two visits by *l’Association* to the site, Piette does not state on *which* visit the statuettes were found, as he does not indicate whether excavation resumed on the 2nd visit.

There is certainly indication of some confusion on Piette’s part regarding the attribution of certain of the finds recovered by *l’Association française*. Having stated that serious stratigraphic study was impossible on the visit on the 19th, he continues that: “The excavations of the *l’Association* had however an important result. The station contained ivory human statuettes. The workers also recovered several other ivory objects, notably a ring and an instrument of unknown usage, remarkable for its ornamentation marked with deep and undulating ridges. They also recovered bones of the cave bear and panther; I don’t know from what layer” (Piette 1895: 134). The lack of precision concerning the latter is repeated in his catalogue of finds belonging to the Layer *E*, when Piette notes that; “I must perhaps add to this list the panther and cave bear remains lifted by the workers of the *l’Association française*. But I don’t know if they came from this

bed, or that which contained the notched arrows and bay-leaf points” (Piette 1895: 138).

9. What is the total number of examples given for the material? How many are actually referred to or used as a database?

No number is given for the total of figurines discovered by this time, although mention is made of the previously discovered *Vénus impudique* from Laugerie-Basse. All nine figures and one fragment in Piette’s collection are discussed in the text.

10. Are specific examples and individual figures discussed?

Yes, each of the examples is described in detail. They are:

Mas d’Azil *bust*

Brassempouy *la poire*

Brassempouy *le manche de poignard*

Laugerie-Basse *femme au renne*

Brassempouy *fragment de sculpture*

Brassempouy *la fillette*

Brassempouy *figurine à la ceinture*

Brassempouy *l’ébauche*

Brassempouy *figurine à la pèlerine*

Brassempouy *figurine à la capuche*

11. Does the piece discuss a range of examples, or are generalisations made from a limited number of examples or prototypes?

While details of all examples are presented, ultimately the characteristics discerned and presented as belonging to the “adipose” and “svelte” races are generalised from what is essentially a small number of examples, four, plus one fragment, and five respectively, and there is obviously generalisation involved in the transposition of characteristics from “the statuettes of the second group” to “the individuals of this race” (Piette 1895: 150). The full extent of the generalisation is particularly apparent in cases where only one member of the group displays a particular feature. For example, as the only member of this group in which a head is present, Piette is specific in detailing the facial features

of the Mas d'Azil bust (Piette 1895: 142), and the description is repeated virtually in its entirety in a summary of the group characteristics, where it becomes representative of the entire "adipose race" (Piette 1895: 143).

This also occurs in the case of *la poire*. The figure is the only one to be described as featuring developed labias terminating in a vulviform appendage, yet this is repeated as characteristic of the entire "adipose" race (Piette 1895: 144 and 147).

12. In what depth are the figurines described or discussed?

Each piece is discussed in turn, with details of their material, state of preservation, date and place of discovery briefly noted. In the only case not associated with Piette himself (the *femme au renne*), the name of discoverer is given (Piette 1895: 145). For the Brassempouy figures, the general area of the find-spot is also indicated. Sizes are only given for *le manche de poignard*, *la fillette*, and *la figurine à la capuche*. Description of its appearance is given for each figure, with particular emphasis on an identification and illustration of those anatomical features that may be interpreted as racial characteristics.

13. Do the individual descriptions concur with the generalised characterisation given?

The figures are initially termed "adipose with pendent, hanging breasts and an ample stomach" and "slender with flat stomachs" (Piette 1895: 142). This characterisation is elaborated in Piette's characterisation of the two "races", and particularly so in the case of the "adipose race". In the summary of this group, Piette interprets the four statuettes as proving the existence of a race remarkable for the development of adiposity on the women's lower trunk and thighs. The race is described as possessing long, hanging breasts, a voluminous stomach, prominent and pendent, with fatty folds on the flanks and gibbosity on the hips (Piette 1895: 146). Other characteristics determined are thick adipose thighs with fatty tissue, a large, triangular and prominent mons veneris featuring extended labias and a "vulviform appendage", with well-developed hair identified as being marked in small strips on the stomach and chest.

However, many of the major points of this generalisation are not consistent across the four figures of the group. For example, “pendent, elongated, hanging” breasts are described only on the Mas d’Azil bust (Piette 1895: 142) and *le manche de poignard* (Piette 1895: 144), with the former distinguished by the presence of what appear to be “exaggerated teats” (Piette 1895: 142). On the *Vénus de Brassempouy*, although Piette interprets a “semi-circular notch” as an indication that the breasts *had been* pendent (Piette 1895: 143), only the lower part of the torso actually remains. On the engraved *femme au renne*, Piette concludes that the breasts are either not indicated, or marked merely by hatching. Thus, only two of the four actually feature *pendent* breasts, and similarly, “fatty deposits” and huge, adipose thighs are identified only in two Brassempouy examples, the *Vénus* and *le manche de poignard* (Piette 1895: 145). The marking of hair again occurs only on the *Vénus* and the *femme au renne*, with the arrangement of small strips occurring on the stomach in both cases.

Differences also occur in the depiction of the *Mont de Vénus*. It is not featured on the Mas d’Azil bust or *le manche de poignard*. On the *Vénus*, it is described as large, triangular and protruding, marked by the development of the labias. On the *femme au renne*, only a simple line indicates it.

The depiction of the stomach appears to be the only consistent characteristic, and it is described as ample in all cases, and pendent in all but the case of the *femme au renne*, a figure depicted lying on “her” back (although Piette notes that this figure is also known as the *femme enceinte*, the pregnant woman [Piette 1895: 145]).

The final description in this group concerns a fragment of ivory found from Brassempouy (Piette 1895: 146), although this piece is not mentioned in the total of figures. While Piette notes that identification of a “hairstyle” has been previously suggested, he refrains from any interpretation or even tentative identification (Piette 1895: 146). No reason is given for its inclusion in the “adipose” group, and it may be included simply on the basis of its general shape (for illustration, cf. Niedhorn 1993: Figure 7).

The race is therefore characterised from a selection of disparate elements, which appear in works of different media, recovered from three separate sites.

Piette's discussion of the features of the second – the svelte – group (Piette 1895: 147-150) also presents problems. The summary of these figures stresses their *difference* from the “adipose group” and their similarity to “us” rather than any shared features, and their common features are by no means unambiguous, with perhaps the clearest similarity occurring in their fragmentary nature. Again, only one example – *la figurine à la capuche* – has facial features, and racial elements are once more emphasised in the designation of its appearance as “mongoloid”. *L'ébauche*, *la figurine à la ceinture*, and *la fillette* are all said to feature joined legs, yet Piette's descriptions indicate differences in the depiction of sexual attributes. Only *la fillette* has the sex clearly indicated, by a line. *L'ébauche* and *la figurine à la ceinture* both feature a protruding “nodule”, which along with the flat stomach of the latter suggests to Piette masculine features, although he offsets this against the “feminine contours” of the thighs and legs in these cases. Such is the ambiguity of *la figurine à la ceinture* that Piette reports that he has sought numerous opinions regarding its sex, with almost all favouring a feminine identification. Piette also identifies *la figurine à la pèlerine* as female, although he notes that no bosom is depicted on the fragment, again suggesting that the statuette may be male (Piette 1895: 147-149). It is therefore apparent that although a flat stomach may be claimed in each case, the identification as female is uncertain in at least two examples.

While it may be admitted that there are differences between the “adipose” and “svelte” groups distinguished by Piette, it can also be said that there are differences and dissimilarities between the members of each group. This is particularly apparent in the “adipose” group, which brings together forms united only by a general similarity in morphological outline rather than in specific detail. As if reflecting this uncertainty, Piette later notes the *Vénus impudique* and the *femme au renne* could represent a mixed race derived from the adipose and svelte races (Piette 1895: 150).

14. What figures are selected for illustration, and what is the effect of the illustrations?

I was unable to obtain a copy of the original illustrations accompanying this paper. However, it is apparent from references noted in the text that all examples were illustrated in the original publication. The list below also indicates where Piette's illustrations have been reproduced or redrawn in later texts:

Plate I: *La Vénus de Brasempouy*

Plate II: *La Vénus de Brasempouy*

Plate III: *La Vénus de Brasempouy* (Two views reprinted in Macalister 1921: 445 Fig. 122)

Plate IV Fig 1, 1a, and 1b: *le manche de poignard* (Three views re-drawn in Sollas 1911: 265 Fig. 163a)

Plate IV Fig 2, 2a, 2b: *Le buste de femme: Mas d'Azil* (Reprinted in Macalister 1921: 444 Fig. 121)

Plate V Fig 1, 1a: *la figurine à la pèlerine*

Plate V Fig 2, 2a: *la figurine à la capuche* (Two views reprinted in Macalister 1921: 446 Fig. 123)

Plate V Fig 3: *fragment de sculpture*

Plate V Fig 4: *la femme au renne*

Plate VI: *la figurine à la capuche*

Plate VII Fig 1, 1a, and 1b: *la figurine à la ceinture*

Plate VII Fig 2, 2a: *la fillette* (Redrawn in Sollas 1911: 265 Fig. 163c)

Plate VII Fig 3, 3a, and 3b: *l'ébauche*

15. Are there indications of any criteria in the selection of figures for discussion or illustration?

No, it appears from the text that the only factor involved in the choice of these figures for presentation is that they belong to Piette, and it appears that all human figures contained in his collection at that time are discussed.

16. What comparisons are made between examples? Are these connections, stylistic, contextual, etc? What is the purpose of the comparison?

Connections are mainly stylistic and physiological, being based in the identification of anatomical features as they are depicted in the figures, and the

relationship drawn between these features and those said to be present in living races.

The strongest connection is in the clear binding of the figures into groups of adipose and svelte, and in the subsequent presentation of the characteristics of the two races. The positioning of the initial characterisation acts to govern perceptions of the following material, and the effect is that the figurines are stylistically determined, or pre-determined, from the outset. The group members are now strongly linked as members of self-contained “units”. Additionally, the generalised characteristics of the “adipose” group, originally drawn from the four individual figures, become representative and characteristic of those four figures, effectively reflecting back onto and re-inscribing the figures themselves.

Throughout the individual descriptions, attention is drawn to similarities between group members. A comparison is made between *le manche de poignard*, and the two statuettes previously described – the Mas d’Azil bust and *la poire*, as Piette points out that the “handle” gives us two characteristics already seen in the two preceding statuettes – elongated and “pendents” breasts, and a huge and “pendents” stomach (Piette 1895: 145). Piette then claims that a third shared feature is apparent, although to a lesser degree in the first two statuettes – fatty deposits on the hips (Piette 1895: 145). Elsewhere, the thighs of the *femme au renne* are said to resemble those of *la poire*, although it is noted that they do not bulge at the front (Piette 1895: 145).

For the “svelte” group, it is noted that the “sex” of *l’ébauche* is indicated in the same way as that of *la figurine à la ceinture*. Finally, *la figurine à la ceinture* is compared to the statuettes of the first group, emphasising that, in contrast to them, the figure is svelte and slender (Piette 1895: 148).

17. Is the material treated as a homogeneous group, or is the focus on diversity? Is this orientation related to, or dictated by, the author’s hypothesis? Is homogeneity deduced from the material after analysis, or assumed as a pre-condition?

Piette's analysis divides the material into two groups, the adipose and the svelte, which are characterised as being clearly distinct from each other. The identification of these clear groups is strongly linked to Piette's presentation of races, and the difference between the two is clearly indicated. Each group is strongly characterised, with strong similarities presented as existing within each group. Thus, homogeneity within each group is emphasised.

The generalisation of characteristics to the wider races serves to negate the differences that are apparent between the individual members of the two groups, as individual features of the statuettes are subsumed beneath group or race features. There is a further implication. While the generalised description ostensibly refers to "the adipose race", the observations additionally serve to characterise the group of statuettes themselves, allowing their representation as adipose, pendent breasted figures, and creating an impression of similarity at a general level even when the individual features do not correspond.

18. Is supporting evidence for a theory provided from the figures and their archaeological context, or from the application of external theory?

Underlying Piette's belief that the statuettes provide racial information is the more widespread belief that contemporary hunter-gatherers were sufficiently related to those "races" of the Upper Palaeolithic to allow their use as comparative material. The validity of his comparisons therefore rest on the belief that contemporary tribes were "primitive" and "unprogressive" – effectively, the last descendants of the Palaeolithic tribes, with whom they thus have a strong link. Piette clearly reflects the popular stereotypes of the time when he writes that, although the Somalis and the Bushmen still exist while the adipose races are on the way to extinction, "they are in conditions of inferiority that places them at the bottom of the social ladder" (Piette 1895: 151).

On this basis, similar features would be expected to occur in both the figures and contemporary peoples. For the most part, the hypothesis rests firmly on the identification of features, which Piette claims are shared by contemporary hunter-gatherers and the statuettes themselves. The figures themselves are the sole evidence for this. Having reunited the figures recovered from Brassempouy

at various times, along with several examples from other deposits, Piette believes that he has a sufficiently large number from which to draw conclusions, stating that, "This group is complete enough to allow a serious study, and to deduce the characteristics of the races" (Piette 1895: 130). Anatomical traits are identified on a number of occasions. The "svelte" race are described as similar to "our own" (Piette 1895: 150); a specific comparison of measurements is carried out on *la figurine à la capuche* and the skulls of contemporary "Mongolian" hunter-gatherers (Piette 1895: 149-50); the chin of the Mas d'Azil bust is compared with the jaw of the Naulette (Piette 1895: 142, reiterated 150); the depiction of fatty tissue on the *Vénus de Brassempouy*, the steatopygia on the buttocks, and the developed labias and "vulviform appendage" identified on the figure are all seen as traits displayed by Bushmen women (Piette 1895: 144). Although Piette does note that there are several differences between the "adipose" race and the Bushmen, he states that the "common characteristics are too numerous not to attract attention", particularly that both races are adipose. He concludes; "the Bushmen and the Somalis are the surviving branch, part of the same trunk as the extinct race of the caverns" (Piette 1895: 147).

19. How are references and sources utilised? To what extent is there dependence on previous authors?

Although there is mention of the previous find by the Marquis de Vibraye, the *Vénus impudique*, Piette's is the first work to bring together a group of "human" figures from this period.

20. How does this work contribute to the development, construction or consolidation of the group?

This work not only brings a group of Palaeolithic statuettes together for the first time, and interprets them in keeping with popular trends of the time that viewed modern hunter-gatherers as being descended from and related to Palaeolithic cultures, but also provides a strong characterisation of the figurines. However, while Piette identified two groups, it is the adipose that is more frequently cited, and this work introduces and effectively institutionalises the concept of the figurines as an "adipose" group, focusing attention on the exaggeration of proportions as characteristic of the group. This effectively creates and

establishes the “adipose” group as the stereotypical representation of the figurines. The initial formulation of an “adipose” group has persisted throughout the later literature, providing a strong characterisation for later authors.

More specifically, Piette begins the trend of describing the figures in terms of steatopygia, particularly, in his identification of *la poire* as steatopygous and “longinymphe” (Piette 1895: 143-4). The assertion that these features are shared with the Bushmen people, not only does this promote a view of the figures as literal and accurate representations, it also means that the figures are established in racial terms, as both “primitive” and “other”.

Sollas (1911) followed Piette’s approach and division of the material closely, although the racial hypothesis was attacked as early as 1921 (Macalister) and 1938 (Passemar). Despite this, reference to racial characteristics, particularly those of the “Hottentots”, continued to appear in the literature for some time (e.g. Absolon 1949). Similarly, the use of ethnographic analogy, drawn from the practices of African peoples, to account for features of the figures persisted (e.g. Harding 1976). In recent years, focus has again turned towards the racial characterisations of Piette, as the underlying racial motivations for such approaches have been exposed (e.g. Conkey 1997, Bisson and White 1996).

Niedhorn (1993) has discussed the Brassempouy finds, and Piette’s methodology and conclusions, in some detail as part of his argument that the “svelte” group are fraudulent.

Piette, E. 1902

“Gravure du Mas d’Azil et statuettes de Menton.”

Bulletins de la Société d’Anthropologie de Paris Series 5. Vol. 3. pp. 771-79.

(Translation: Author’s own)

1. What is the context of this approach to the archaeological material?

The text discusses an engraved anthropomorphic figure from the site of Mas d’Azil, and five figures from Menton (Grimaldi). The first part of the paper describes the engraved figure. The second part presents descriptions and interpretation of the statuettes, with additional mention of Piette’s previous finds at Brassempouy, and the *statuette en stéatite jaune* from Grimaldi, previously published by Reinach (1898). The section is concluded with comments from a number of Piette’s contemporaries.

2. What is the role of the material in the hypothesis? How is it used by the author and what is the hypothesis is applied to it?

As in Piette’s previous paper (1895), the figurines are taken to be the literal representation of physical types, and their anatomical features are isolated and compared with those of “living races”. The five statuettes of Grimaldi are introduced in terms of increasing our knowledge of “Pleistocene human races” (Piette 1920: 773). On this basis, the existence and identity of certain Palaeolithic races is postulated.

3. What terminology is used to introduce and to subsequently define the material, and to what effect?

The term predominantly used is “statuette”, although “figurine” occurs occasionally (Piette 1902: 773-777). The term Venus is not used. The statuettes themselves are not given specific names, and are simply described in the manner of a “head in several fragments” (Piette 1902: 773) and “the third figurine from Menton” (Piette 1902: 775) (for the purposes of this paper I will use the names by which the figures are more commonly known). Piette’s previous discoveries from Brassempouy are briefly noted with regard to adiposity and rudimentary clothing, without mention of the specific names attributed to them in the previous paper (Piette 1895).

4. How is the category of material defined? To what does the label refer?

The opening paragraph briefly describes the statuettes discovered at Brassempouy. Initial reference is to two statuettes found in 1892, of which one is described as representing a very adipose woman, who is also steatomeric and “longinymphe”, belong to [the adipose] race (Piette 1902: 773) (the second figure is not described). Piette then refers to his own discovery of five additional statuettes in 1894, drawing attention to the “rudiments of clothing” of the figurines. Two are referred to as male, including one in which the “sexual organs appear masked, confined in a sheath of skin” (Piette 1895: 773). The figures from Grimaldi are introduced immediately afterwards. Therefore, although no generic term is attributed to the statuettes, it is apparent that they are viewed as analogous to the examples from Brassempouy.

5. Is a general characterisation of the material provided? How is the material characterised?

When first introduced, the Grimaldi figures are characterised by a comparison with the statuettes of Brassempouy (Piette 1902: 773), being described as smaller and less well sculpted, with the “great masses” summarily marked (Piette 1902: 773).

As in Piette’s previous paper (1895), characterisation of the Grimaldi figures also occurs in racial terms. Indeed, it should be noted that the Brassempouy figures themselves are introduced by mention of *la poire*, reference to its anatomical characteristics, and attribution to the “adipose” race (Piette 1902: 773). The racial characterisation focuses on the interpretation of physical characteristics such as adiposity and steatopygia; the “third figurine” (later named *la polichinelle* [Luquet 1934]), is described as presenting the characteristics of the Somali or Bushman races, featuring enormous buttocks and steatopygia (Piette 1902: 775); the head now known as *la tête négroïde* is described as featuring “incontestably negroid” characteristics, namely a receding forehead, prominent eyebrows, oblique eyes, a flattened nose, a large, thick mouth and a short, slightly protruding chin (Piette 1902: 773); the 1897 discovery at Brassempouy (*le torse*) is described as displaying “the characteristics of our race”, being without steatopygia or steatomeria, with hips

devoid of rolls of fat. The back and the buttocks have a normal shape, as do those of “living Europeans” (Piette 1902: 776).

The identification of the extent and placement of adiposity or exaggeration is the definitive characteristic by which the figures are initially assessed and subsequently allocated to their corresponding races. The new figures are described as female, with the exception of the figure identified by Piette as a hermaphrodite (Piette 1902: 774). However, referring to the previous discoveries from Brassempouy, Piette refers to two figures as male, although all were originally identified as female (Piette 1895).

6. Does the author accept or adopt groups as previously established, or are new groups created?

It is immediately apparent that the Grimaldi figures are considered by Piette to be analogous with those of Brassempouy, and they are treated as an extension of the previous group of figures. The new figures are placed within and interpreted within the framework previously established by Piette, with the figures discussed in terms of the racial characteristics and traits identified in his previous work (Piette 1895).

While several of the figures are fitted into the adipose or svelte groups previously determined, the original identification of two races is expanded in this paper. The torso of a woman, found in 1897 at Brassempouy, is described as having buttocks like those of living Europeans, indicating the presence of “our race”. The figure presumably corresponds to the “svelte” group, being described as neither steatopygous nor steatomeic, with strong hips devoid of rolls of fat (Piette 1902: 776). However, *la tête négroïde* is termed “negroid” and “Neanderthal”, and Piette also identifies and introduces an adipose and steatomeic group that he suggests may represent a “mixed race” (Piette 1902: 776). This group corresponds to “the greater number” of the statuettes, and Piette names the *statuette en stéatite jaune*, *le manche de poignard*, and two of the Grimaldi figures [*le losange* and *la femme au goûté*] as members. The race is described as very adipose and steatomeic, with a flattened back and the well developed buttocks pushed towards the sides – a form of steatopygia, although

not in the same place as that of the Somali, who it is suggested they resemble (Piette 1902: 776). In total, four races are identified – Neanderthal, Somali, “our own”, and a race related to the Somalis, still with “pendent” breasts, but with their steatopygia positioned differently (Piette 1902: 776).

Piette therefore expands his original categorisation of races in this piece, perhaps as the new examples do not fit his previous definitions. While the racial element remains, it is also noticeable is that the category is now expanded to include male figures – two of the previously identified female figures from Brassempouy are briefly mentioned as male (Piette 1902: 773), and *l'hemaphrodite* is identified as wearing some kind of harness or “suspensory”, which is taken to indicate that the device seems to have been in use amongst the men of the “adipose” race (Piette 1902: 774).

7. How is the credibility of the material established?

Initially, this is done through reference to Piette’s discoveries at Brassempouy, which already form a body of material to which these may be added. The personal association of the author himself with the previous discoveries is important, and this point has already been made regarding the ‘credibility’ of those figures included in his previous paper (1895).

However, credibility is perhaps more specifically related to authenticity in this instance, as finds from Grimaldi were the subject of some controversy after the initial publication of the *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Reinach 1898; cf. Mortillet 1898, who argued against the authenticity of the figures). Piette’s own authority does not really extend to the new Grimaldi figures, which he admits were bought from Jullien (Piette 1902: 773), and – in contrast to Reinach – he provides no details of the transaction itself. Yet, Piette’s personal authority remains important, and his confident acceptance of the figurines, seemingly without question, would no doubt have been significant. Piette seems to feel little need to discuss the credibility of the material – only at the end of the piece does he mention their authenticity, stating that “it was not me who found the statuettes of Grimaldi; however I consider their authenticity as certain”, on the basis that they show the same characteristics as the figures of Brassempouy, and

display traces of a “ferruginous” deposit that corresponds to the beds of iron peroxide at the caves described by Riviere (Piette 1902: 776-777).

However, the authenticity of the statuettes is the focus of the comments by Piette’s contemporaries, and opposing viewpoints are apparent. Mortillet is the strongest critic, pointedly communicating his regret that the statuettes were not found in a scientific excavation, suggesting that Piette’s analogy between the Grimaldi and Brassempouy statuettes is questionable, and rejecting the technique as not “Magdalenian” (Piette 1902: 777-8). In contrast, Capitan, who supports Piette’s analogy with the Brassempouy figures, states that the technique of manufacture and general “character” of the engraving and sculpture “allows us to consider them as authentic”, although he also compares them to an amulet from the Congo, seeing a “curious” resemblance in the head, stomach, steatopygia and skinny legs (Piette 1902: 777). This is an interesting comparison, and Mortillet suggests that the figures seem African in style, using this to suggest that, even if they are not forgeries, they may actually have been bought by the workmen (Piette 1902: 777).

Capitan asserts that it is precisely because we do not have more of these examples that they are held in suspicion, and again supports Piette in claiming that study of the pieces clearly shows the existence of deposits of iron hydroxide on several statuettes, particularly the “one with the protruding stomach” (*la polichinelle*). His final evidence is the discovery of two skeletons in the Grottes des Enfants in 1901, which are identified as featuring “negroid characteristics”. Piette sees their characteristics as “indisputably negroid”, and their discovery as proving the authenticity of *la tête négroïde* (Piette 1902: 777-8). Similarly, Verneau cites the two skeletons of marked “negroid type” as evidence against Zabrowski’s claim that the “negroid” aspect of the head has nothing in common with the quaternary races of France, (a comment that may itself be prompted by racial motivation). As a last word, Riviere will only refer the reader to his comments made in 1898 (Riviere in Mortillet 1898, where he dryly commented that he had never found any engraved or sculpted piece during his extensive excavations at Grimaldi) (Piette 1902: 777-8).

8. Are details of archaeological context or dating discussed?

The precise circumstances of Jullien's discovery of the Grimaldi finds are not mentioned, other than de Mortillet's comment that the excavation was not scientific (Piette 1902: 777), and there are only fleeting references to the sale of the figures by Jullien (Piette 1902: 773, 776). Discussion of dating of the material rests on arguments of their claimed resemblance to the Brassempouy statuettes and the "negroid" skeletons, and the traces of deposits linking the statuettes to the layers at Grimaldi, discussed by Piette and Capitan (Piette 1902: 776-777). The precise archaeological context of the figurines is not otherwise mentioned, and Piette does not attempt to match the figures with specific caves or layers.

9. What is the total number of examples given for the material? How many are actually referred to or used as a database?

No total of statuettes discovered by this time is given, although Piette does refer to several others in addition to those of Grimaldi. Brief mention is made of the discoveries at Brassempouy, and their number is given as seven. Not all are specifically mentioned; those that are consist of *la poire* and "another found at the same time", *la figurine à la capuche*, *la figurine à la pèlerine* (described as male in this article), and *la figurine à la ceinture* (also stated here to be male).

The figures from Grimaldi described are:

a head in several fragments (*la tête négroïde*)

a hermaphrodite (*l'hermaphrodite*)

a woman sculpted from a narrow piece of stone (*la polichinelle*)

a woman with enormous hips (*le losange*)

a woman with a goitre (*la femme au goître*)

Several other figures are discussed, namely the *statuette en stéatite jeune* from Grimaldi, previously published by Reinach (1898), and an ivory statuette discovered at Brassempouy in 1897 (*le torse*, although this name is not used). There is no mention that any other statuettes were discovered at Grimaldi by Jullien.

10. Are specific examples and individual figures discussed?

Yes. Each of the new finds is described in terms of its appearance and features. Descriptions of the *statuette en stéatite jaune*, and *le torse* from Brassempouy are also provided. As noted above, these descriptions are primarily concerned with the description of anatomical features and the identification of racial traits.

14. Does the piece discuss a range of examples, or are generalisations made from a limited number of examples or prototypes?

As with Piette's 1895 paper, although a number of examples are presented, generalisations regarding race are made on the basis of the identification and similarity of their features. Indeed, Piette is forced to add new races to his scheme to account for those figures that do not fit into merely "adipose" or "svelte".

The steatomeric "mixed" race has most members, containing the *statuette en stéatite jaune*, *le manche de poignard*, *le losange*, and *la femme au goître*. The "European" race contains the *torse* from Brassempouy, and the *polichinelle* is allocated to the Somali race. The "suspensory", that Piette sees depicted on *l'hermaphrodite* is taken as evidence that such an item was worn by the "men of the adipose race" (Piette 1902: 774). The "Neanderthal" race contains only *la tête négroïde*.

12. In what depth are the figurines described or discussed?

A detailed description of the anatomical features and appearance of the five newly acquired statuettes is given. Sizes are not mentioned, although the materials utilised are indicated. Illustration is only provided of *la tête négroïde* and *la polichinelle*. Greatest attention is paid to *la tête négroïde*, the *statuette en stéatite jaune*, *l'hermaphrodite*, and *la polichinelle*, and in each case, identification with a particular race is made. Only brief details are given for the remaining two Grimaldi figures, again concerned for the most part with physical description and degree of exaggeration (Piette 1902: 775).

13. Do the individual descriptions concur with the generalised characterisation given?

It is apparent that the individual figures do not divide neatly into the adipose and svelte groups of the previous work and, as a result, Piette must refine and expand the categories themselves. The placement of the adiposity is particularly important in distinguishing the races. Having initially designated the *statuette en stéatite jaune* simply as a member of the “adipose race” (Piette 1902: 774), the statuette is later given as an example of an adipose and steatomeic race resembling the Somalis, with the difference that the developed buttocks are placed towards the sides, and mixed with the fatty deposits of the hips. Therefore, although steatopygic, this form of steatopygia does not occur in the same place as that of the Somalis (Piette 1902: 776). This type is said to correspond with the greater number of the statuettes, and as examples Piette also cites *le manche de poignard* and two of the Grimaldi figures (later named *le losange* and *la femme au goître*). *Le losange* is described as featuring a raised head, enormous hips, a flattened back, with buttocks wide apart and pushed towards the sides where they merge with the fatty deposits of the hips (Piette 1902: 775). *La femme au goître* is described only as similar to the preceding statuette, but with less exaggeration (Piette 1902: 775).

A “neanderthal” race is mentioned, due to the appearance of *la tête négroïde*, which is linked with a “neanderthal” skull, of the “same race” found at Grimaldi (Piette 1902: 774). The *statuette en stéatite jaune* is described as featuring enormous breasts, like those of a wet nurse, and a prominent circular stomach, yet the sexual organs are not represented, noted elsewhere as one of the more obvious proofs of the existence of the Bushman race (Piette 1902: 774), although Piette adds that this depiction is due to realism, as the organs are not visible when a woman stands up (Piette 1902: 775). It is interesting that Piette makes no comment on the clearly marked sexual organs of *la polichinelle* or *le losange*. It is noted that *la polichinelle* only presents Somali characteristics in profile view (Piette 1902: 775).

L’hermaphrodite is also difficult to fit into the previously designated female groups, as Piette clearly identifies it as displaying male features. It is described in some detail (Piette 1902: 774), although it is not illustrated. Piette writes that “the breasts are as ample as those of a woman” and that the arms, pressed

against the body, are hardly marked. The hands could be marked by “almost shapeless” projections. At the bottom of the stomach, Piette identifies “an enormous erect phallus, with the scrotum enclosed in some sort of “support” or “suspensory”, attached to threads that form a belt. Although this interpretation rather obviously does not concur with the characterisations provided by Piette, he expands the racial interpretation to include this figure, adding that the “suspensory” device seems to have been in use amongst men of the adipose race (Piette 1902: 774).

14. What figures are selected for illustration, and what is the effect of the illustrations?

Just two are illustrated – *la tête négroïde* and *la polichinelle*. No particular reason is given for this choice, although the head is described as “the most remarkable” example, and *la polichinelle* displays the claimed steatopygia most clearly (the figure is shown in profile view). It could be suggested that these two examples feature the strongest racial characteristics, and that they are also perhaps devoid of the ‘sexual’ connotations that figure in Piette’s interpretation of the *l’hermaphrodite*. On a more general note, Piette does comment that the bottle-green colour of four of the pieces (*la tête négroïde*, *la polichinelle*, *l’hermaphrodite*, and *le losange*) was not photogenic, and prevented their being photographed (Piette 1902: 773).

Note that the captions accompanying the illustrations characterise the figures strongly in racial terms. Fig. 3 describes *la tête négroïde* as of “race de Néanderthal”, and Fig. 4 describes *la polichinelle* as a “steatopygous female” (Piette 1902: 773, 775).

15. Are there indications of any criteria in the selection of figures for discussion or illustration?

No. The paper discusses each of the newly acquired finds, and mentions a number of previous finds from Brassempouy, which provide a context and comparative examples. However, only two of the five finds are illustrated in the paper – *la tête négroïde* and *la polichinelle*.

16. What comparisons are made between examples? Are these connections, stylistic, contextual, etc? What is the purpose of the comparison?

Although a similarity to the Brassempouy statuettes is mentioned several times, no specific comparisons are drawn. Similarities within the new group of Grimaldi figures are briefly noted. *La femme au goître* is described as belonging to the same type as the preceding figure (*le losange*), although with less exaggerated characteristics (Piette 1902: 775).

However, the strongest comparisons and links are made between these statuettes and those of the historic period, with similarities being pointed out with Egyptian and classical Greek statuary. Piette perhaps attempts to give the material some artistic credibility, or a sense of continuity with history and later pre-history, by detailing four features that link the “*temps glyptiques*” and historical times. These are: the use of a hairstyle later adopted by certain pharaohs; the use of a suspensory among men; the presence of a hermaphrodite statuette; the arrangement of the hair of the *statuette en stéatite jaune*, which conforms to the arrangement of the hairstyle in certain archaic Greek statues (Piette 1902: 774)

Indeed, it is stated that several comparative examples are contained in the Louvre at the time of writing. *La tête négroïde* is said to resemble that of a pharaoh in the Louvre (Piette 1902: 773), and *la tête à la capuche* is also noted as resembling a statuette of Isis in the Louvre (Piette 1902: 773).

17. Is the material treated as a homogeneous group, or is the focus on diversity? Is this orientation related to, or dictated by, the author's hypothesis? Is homogeneity deduced from the material after analysis, or assumed as a pre-condition?

Piette's approach is strongly influenced by his belief in the possibility that races and characteristics can be identified from these representations. Again, several of the figures are slotted into pre-existing groups, homogeneous in their components. It is apparent that the emphasis on exaggeration and adiposity as a means of distinguishing the races acts to preserve a common thread between many of the examples. Indeed, while the races themselves actually differ, the

material itself remains very much linked in its use as a means of identifying contemporaneous Palaeolithic races. However, Piette also draws attention to the different features of depiction, identifying new types to correspond with these features. It is also noted that male examples are incorporated into the scheme, with the identification of the hermaphrodite, and mention of two male examples in the “svelte” group at Brassempouy.

18. Is supporting evidence for a theory provided from the figures and their archaeological context, or from the application of external theory?

The basic hypothesis remains the same as in Piette’s 1895 paper, namely, the identification of races existing in the Palaeolithic. Evidence for the hypothesis and approach comes from two sources – the identification of anatomical features depicted on the figurines, and the use of ethnography and contemporary belief to support the designation of the “primitive” status of contemporary peoples, and their direct relationship with Palaeolithic inhabitants.

The first type of evidence is once again drawn from features identified as being depicted on the statuettes and compared to those of contemporary hunter-gatherers. Explicit links are drawn between certain of the figures and contemporary races. As in the previous work, the interpretation of the sexual organs depicted on the figures, and their identification with those of contemporary tribes, is seen as “one of the more obvious proofs of the existence of the Bushmen race” (Piette 1902: 774). The features of *la tête négroïde* are termed “incontestably negroid” (Piette 1902: 773), and the “European” race is identified on the basis of the lack of exaggeration demonstrated by *le torse*, which is described as presenting the characteristics of “our race” in its lack of steatopygia, steatomeria, and fatty hips. The back and buttocks are described as having a “normal shape”, like those of living Europeans, and this is taken as proof that “our” race inhabited the Palaeolithic (Piette 1902: 776). The link is clearest, and his own beliefs most apparent, in Piette’s description of *la polichinelle*. Describing the profile view of enormous steatopygic buttocks, Piette comments that they are characteristic of the Somali or Bushman race, and that the statuette not only belongs to this race, but is the start of it. On this basis he affirms the presence of the Somali race in the Palaeolithic (Piette 1902: 775).

19. How are references and sources utilised? To what extent is there dependence on previous authors?

There is mention of Piette's previous discoveries, which provide a context for the interpretation of the Grimaldi figures. Obviously, of greatest importance is Piette's (1895) previous interpretation of the Brassempouy statuettes in terms of racial characteristics, which provides a framework within which the Grimaldi figures are approached.

The original description of the *statuette en stéatite jaune* by Reinach (1898) is mentioned, perhaps to boost credibility and acceptance of the material by citing the precedent of the first discovery from Grimaldi to be published. The comments from Piette's contemporaries include several who argue authoritatively for the authenticity of the statuettes.

20. How does this work contribute to the construction and consolidation of the group?

This is an important consolidation of the group of material first presented in 1895, extending its membership through the introduction of a second important collection of figures, and effectively updating the group by the inclusion of the later discovery from Brassempouy and the previously published *statuette en stéatite jaune*. The new figures are strongly linked stylistically with those of Brassempouy, and the paper provides strong argument for the acceptance of the Grimaldi figures as authentic.

The discovery of this second group supports the attribution to the Palaeolithic of the first group, and establishes the core features of the group in terms of adiposity and exaggeration. *La polichinelle* is added to the existing adipose group, and although a new steatomeric group is introduced, the adipose and steatopygic types remain firmly established. There is continued emphasis of steatopygia and its interpretation as a racial indicator, thus maintaining the trend of viewing the figures in racial terms, and as realistic representations.

Sollas, W. J. 1911

Ancient Hunters: And their Modern Representatives

London: Macmillan and Co.

1. What is the context of this approach to the archaeological material?

The aim of the work is to present a survey of the archaeological evidence for the early history of man. Gaps in the archaeological evidence are supplemented by discussion of contemporary hunter-gatherers. Each Palaeolithic industry is discussed and followed by a complementary chapter on a group of modern hunter-gatherers, which are viewed and presented as the “equivalent” of the Palaeolithic stages. The Tasmanians are adjudged “the most primitive”, an “eolithic” race. Similarly, the Australian Aborigines are designated “the Mousterians of the Antipodes” (Sollas 1911: 170), and the Bushmen deemed equivalent to the Aurignacians. Underlying this approach, and the use of these groups, is the belief that “they afford us an opportunity of interpreting the past by the present” (Sollas 1911: 70).

2. What is the role of the material in the hypothesis? How is it used by the author and what is the hypothesis is applied to it?

The figures are discussed as one of the forms of evidence for the Aurignacian culture. However, they also fulfil a specific purpose in providing clear evidence for a postulated link between prehistoric and contemporary hunter-gatherers. The figures are introduced immediately after a discussion of Palaeolithic cave art, in response to the question; “If we assume as a working hypothesis a close alliance between these two [Aurignacian and Bushmen] schools of painting, can we advance a step farther and assume that the Bushmen and the Aurignacian race are closely connected by blood?” (Sollas 1911: 260). Sollas initial answers, “by no means. We cannot argue from identity of cult to identity of race” (Sollas 1911: 260), yet continues “But there is no reason why we should not continue our inquiry, and as a next step seek for evidence of another kind, this time anatomical” (Sollas 1911: 260-261). It is in this context – as evidence of the anatomy, rather than as merely “artistic” representations – that the figures are examined. The link between the figures, the people they are believed to represent, and contemporary peoples, is seen in terms of shared anatomical

features, primarily supported by the identification of presumed similarities in physical appearance between the representations and contemporary peoples. Characteristics, such as steatopygia and ‘negroid’ features, are identified as appearing in both the figurines and contemporary tribes, and are therefore cited as proof of the existence of a race akin to the Bushmen existing in Palaeolithic times (Sollas 1911: 266-268).

3. *What terminology is used to introduce and subsequently define the material, and to what effect?*

The figures are simply referred to as “figurines”, although it is specified that they “almost invariably represent woman in the nude” (Sollas 1911: 262). The four sets of illustrations (Figs. 160, 161, 162, 163) are each accompanied by the caption “Aurignacian figurines”. The figures are also called “statuettes”, and are described as “steatopygous” on several occasions (Sollas 1911: 265, 266).

The term Venus is only used for specific figures shown in the illustrations – “The Venus of Willendorf” (Fig. 160A), the *Vénus impudica* (Fig. 160B), *La Vénus de Brassempouy [le poire]* (Fig. 162A), *la Vénus innominata [le torse]* (Fig. 163B). The term Venus is not employed as a generic term in the text or captions.

4. *How is the category of material defined? To what does the label refer?*

The figures are given a chronological label, being attributed to the Aurignacian, and discussed in the chapter devoted to this stage. All figures are positioned within this period, including the *Vénus impudique*, the Trou Magrite and the Mas d’Azil figures.

The figurines are discussed separately from other forms of Palaeolithic art, and are viewed as the exception to an Aurignacian unwillingness to depict the human form (Sollas 1911: 262). As noted above, the material is deemed to consist “almost invariably” of women in the nude. Within the figurines, a distinction is made clear between two types, one resembling the Bushmen and showing steatopygia, and another, “harder to identify”, which is suggested as representing “the white race” (Sollas 1911: 264, 269).

5. Is a general characterisation of the material provided? How is the material characterised?

A general characterisation of the figures themselves is not given, beyond the statement that they “almost invariably represent woman in the nude” (Sollas 1911: 262).

However, prior to this reference in the text, the material has already been strongly characterised in racial terms. This is achieved when Sollas presents a discussion of the “anatomical evidence” with an identification of the physical characteristics of the Bushmen. Sollas writes:

“If we attentively examine the Bushmen as they are represented in their paintings, we shall perceive a peculiarity in their outline, owing to that excessive development of one feature which is known as steatopygy. Direct observation of existing Bushmen shows them to be steatopygous (Fig. 166); the Hottentots are still more so. In the women of these races this character is associated with another, that is, a remarkable elongation of the *labia minora*, so that they are sometimes spoken of as longinymph.” (Sollas 1991: 261)

This piece of text fills virtually an entire page, as inserted in its centre is Fig. 160, which illustrates the Willendorf figure in $\frac{3}{4}$ view, and the *Vénus impudique* in $\frac{3}{4}$ and rear view. Through this positioning, the two figures effectively illustrate those characteristics discussed and attributed to the Bushmen (Sollas 1911: 261).

Sollas continues that European women are sometimes “longinymph”, but never at the same time steatopygous, and that “the association of these two characters is peculiar to the Bushmen, Hottentots, and perhaps the Accas” (Sollas 1991: 261-262). These characteristics are then related directly to the archaeological material as Sollas cites Piette’s division of the figures into two groups, “one modelled from a race which it is difficult to identify, and the other (Figs 162, A, D, and 163, A) presenting just those characters which we have enumerated as peculiar to the Bushmen, Hottentots, and Accas” (Sollas 1911: 263-5).

6. Does the author accept or adopt groups as previously established, or are new groups created?

Piette's (1895) racial hypothesis and division of the material is closely followed by Sollas, who refers to Piette's division into two groups, which he defines as being "one modelled from a race which it is difficult to identify, and the other presenting just those characteristics we have enumerated as peculiar to the Bushmen, Hottentots and Accas" (Sollas 1911: 264).

However, Sollas includes the *Vénus impudique* and the Trou Magrite figure, both discovered prior to Piette's papers (1895, 1902) yet not included in his initial group. However, this is perhaps simply because his paper focused only those in his own collection.

7. How is the credibility of the material established?

The issue is not really broached. The author follows Breuil for the acceptance of the Aurignacian period (Sollas 1911: 210), and presents the chief sites of the period (Sollas 1911: 212). He does not specifically discuss the attribution of the statuettes, or their discovery, although he describes the discovery of Altamira (Sollas 1911: 223), the doubts that initially followed (Sollas 1911: 225), and the subsequent acceptance of cave painting as Palaeolithic (Sollas 1911: 226).

There is perhaps an attempt to stress 'artistic' credibility, and the period generally is seen as witnessing "the birth of the fine arts. Sculpture, painting, drawing, successively make their appearance, and the best examples attain so high a pitch of excellence that enthusiastic discoverers have spoken of them as superior in some respects to the work of the Greeks" (Sollas 1911: 222-3). Although Sollas describes the figures as being "of unequal merit", with some being "extremely crude", he goes on to say that "others, however, are true works of art, and well deserve the praise bestowed upon them by M. Salomon Reinach, who remarks that there are at least two examples among them which by their realism and intelligent rendering of the female form are superior to all the artistic productions of the Aegean and Babylonia" (Sollas 1911: 262-3).

8. Are details of archaeological context or dating discussed?

Reasons for attribution to the Aurignacian are not discussed, and details of specific excavations are not given. The figures are accepted as Aurignacian, and details of their discovery are not given. It is stated only that “a considerable number have been found in caves”, with Laugerie-Basse, Brassempouy, Grimaldi and Trou Magrite given as examples, and in the loess at Předmostí and Willendorf (Sollas 1911: 262).

9. What is the total number of examples given for the material? How many are actually referred to or used as a database?

No total number of figures is given. However, an impression of numbers is created. It is stated that “a considerable number” of the finds are discovered in caves, and that “at least a dozen” are preserved in the Museum at St. Germain near Paris (Sollas 1911: 262).

It is stated that finds occur at the sites of Laugerie-Basse, Brassempouy, Grimaldi, Trou Magrite, Předmostí and Willendorf, although no indication of numbers is given (Sollas 1911: 262).

The following figures are illustrated, and for some this constitutes their only reference in the chapter:

Willendorf figure

Laugerie-Basse: *Vénus impudique*

Brassempouy: *la tête à la Capuche*

l'ébauche

la figurine à la ceinture

la poire

le manche de poignard

Vénus innominata (later known as *le torse*)

la fillette

Trou Magrite figure

Mas d'Azil figure

Grimaldi: *statuette en stéatite jaune*

10. Are specific examples and individual figures discussed?

No, they are only discussed in general terms, without specifics. References tend to be to sites rather than individual figures. In addition to the general indication of figures found at particular sites (noted above), there is mention of “steatopygous figures found at Menton” [Grimaldi] (Sollas 1911: 268) although the examples are not further specified. Willendorf is mentioned more specifically as a “very Negroid looking statuette” (Sollas 1911: 268), and the Trou Magrite figure is described as a “puppet” (Sollas 1991: 268).

11. Does the piece discuss a range of examples, or are generalisations made from a limited number of examples or prototypes?

If anything, Willendorf emerges as the proto-type figure, simply for the fact that it is mentioned individually on more than one occasion, as a recent find (Sollas 1911: 262) and as “the very Negroid looking statuette” (Sollas 1911: 268), and prominently illustrated (Fig. 160a).

Examples are not discussed. The claim that they “invariably represent woman in the nude” is not supported by the citation of examples (Sollas 1911: 262) other than those selected for illustration, which comply with this general claim.

Further details to support the racial connections made are either not elaborated, or only vaguely noted as, for example, where the “steatopygous” figurines from Grimaldi are cited as support for the existence of a race allied to the Bushmen at the site (along with the negroid skeletons) (Sollas 1911: 268). Also, the Trou Magrite statuette is cited as proof of the spread of the “negroid” race. Those mentioned, then, seem specifically utilised to confirm the identification of races.

It could be noted that illustrations are allowed to stand as proto-types. The positioning of Fig. 160 has already been discussed, and rather than discussing examples in the text, Sollas refers his readers to Figs. 162 A, D, and Fig. 163 A when discussing figures modelled from a race presenting Bushmen characteristics (Sollas 1911: 263-4). This issue is discussed more fully in the following section.

12. In what depth are the figures discussed?

Little detail is given. There is no discussion of context, other than general reference to finds located in caves and loess. Individual characteristics are not discussed, other than describing Willendorf as “negroid looking”, and certain unspecified statuettes at Grimaldi and Trou Magrite as steatopygous.

The captions accompanying the illustrations do contain additional information, specifying details of the material utilised, and the either the size or scale of the figure.

13. Do the individual descriptions concur with the general characterisation?

Individual examples are not described in any detail, nor is a general characterisation of the figures provided. As discussed above, the overwhelming impression is a racial characterisation, and in this sense, those figures selected for specific mention are consistent with the generalisation, as they are noted for steatopygia and “negroid” features and therefore assessed only in these terms. Few details are provided, beyond the illustrations themselves, to allow the reader to make any judgement.

14. What figures are selected for illustration, and what is the effect of the illustrations?

Illustrations are drawn from the original publications of Piette, Reinach, Breuil and Dupont. These illustrations appear as drawings, and are presumably redrawn from the illustration in the original text. Either their size, or a scale, is indicated in the accompanying captions.

The figures are presented in groups, as follows:

Figure 160: *a.* Willendorf *b.* *venus impudique* (three quarter/ rear views)

Figure 161: *a.* *la tête à la capuche* (frontal/ profile) *b.* *l'ébauche* / *c.* *figurine à la ceinture*

Figure 162: *a.* *la poire* *b.* *statuette en stéatite jaune* (frontal/ profile views)

c. Trou Magrite (frontal/ profile views) *d.* Mas d'Azil (profile/ frontal views)

Figure 163: *a.* *le manche de poignard* (frontal/ profile/ rear views) *b.* *Vénus innominata* (profile/ rear views) *c.* *la fillette*

Those illustrated comprise a considerable portion of those known at the time, with many of the Brassempouy figures shown, Trou Magrite, Mas d’Azil, Willendorf, the *Vénus impudique* and one example from Grimaldi.

The figures of Willendorf and the *Vénus impudique* are standardised for presentation alongside each other, in the first illustration of the figures to appear in the text. The Willendorf figure is described elsewhere as “very Negroid-looking” (Sollas 1911: 268), and the *Vénus impudique* is shown in $\frac{3}{4}$ view and rear view, but not in frontal view. Thus, the views chosen draw attention to and accentuate the tilted posture of the figure and the shape of the buttocks (features which are not apparent in frontal view). This fits well with the insertion of the illustration into text describing the Bushmen and Hottentot characteristics of steatopygia and “longinymph” (Sollas 1911: 261). It could also be noted that, while specific figures pertaining to the “difficult to identify” race are not indicated, Sollas directs the reader to specific illustrations for the “Bushman” race (Sollas 1911: 264, Figs. 162 A, D and Fig. 163 A).

The *Vénus impudique* is also illustrated in Chapter XI, “Magdalenian Man” (Fig. 203b), although the accompanying caption re-iterates that it is an Aurignacian figure. In this illustration, it is shown in frontal view, where it is compared with “a tube carved in the form of a woman, by the Eskimo of the Lower Yukon” (Sollas 1911: 336, and Fig. 203a). It is interesting that this figure, when shown from different viewpoints, may be compared with such differently styled figures.

Fig. 161 shows frontal and profile views of the Brassempouy *la tête à la capuche*, positioned above *l’ébauche* and *la figurine à la ceinture*. This illustration is placed alongside Sollas’ discussion of the “artistic merit” of the statuettes, and it could be suggested that these are chosen as the most ‘classical’ looking of the examples.

The *femme au renne*, part of Piette's original collection (1895), now appears apart from the Aurignacian statuettes in the chapter concerned with "Magdalenian Man" (Sollas 1911: Fig. 208.4).

15. Are there indications of any criteria in the selection of figures for discussion or illustration?

Sollas does note that the figures are "of unequal merit", and that "some are extremely crude, others however, are true works of art" (Sollas 1911: 262), although he does not discuss examples. Those specifically cited – Willendorf, Trou Magrite and Grimaldi – are those that demonstrate a "racial" feature, and this would seem to be the major factor determining their referencing in the text.

16. What comparisons are made between examples? Are these connections, stylistic, contextual, etc? What is the purpose of the comparison?

Few explicit connections are made between statuettes. Other than a presentation of general similarity, for example, that they figures are "almost invariably representing woman in the nude" (Sollas 1911: 262), there are no specific comparisons made between one figure and another.

The only figures mentioned in connection with each other are the Willendorf figure and the examples from Trou Magrite and Grimaldi, which are cited as evidence of the extent of the Bushman race in Palaeolithic times (Sollas 1911: 268).

17. Is the material treated as a homogeneous group, or is the focus on diversity? Is this orientation related to, or dictated by, the author's hypothesis? Is homogeneity deduced from the material after analysis, or assumed as a pre-condition?

It could be suggested that the lack of specific examples named in the text leads itself to the presentation of a homogenised image of the group as a whole. Indeed, the strongest impression of the group is that it features "invariably nude women".

Sollas gives few written details regarding the statuettes, and the emphasis is strongly on the identification of two races as set out by Piette. While this division acknowledges some diversity of material, as does Sollas's own distinction between "works of art" and "crude" forms, the two types are not made explicit through the use and discussion of examples. Emphasis in both text and illustration seems to favour the "Bushmen" race.

18. Is supporting evidence for a theory provided from the figures and their archaeological context, or from the application of external theory?

The overall impression is of a strongly racial assessment along the lines of, and drawing heavily on, Piette's study (1895), in keeping with their shared belief in the relationship between the past tribes and contemporary ones. The approach focuses on racial traits and, having determined the characteristics of the races in question from independent, presumably ethnological sources, the 'evidence' comes from the identification of features on the figurines that may be said to correspond to these traits.

Sollas seems aware of the limits of this approach, noting problems with the ethnographic record (see below), and also, after initial comparison of Palaeolithic cave art and Bushmen art, stating that "We cannot argue from identity of cult to identity of race; the error of the philologist in treating a communicable character as an inborn gift has caused trouble enough in this respect, and we cannot be sufficiently on our guard against it" (Sollas 1911: 260). Yet, he pursues his argument utilising the figures as anatomical evidence (Sollas 1911: 261), rather than artistic, therefore accepting them as literal and accurate representations of the physical appearance of Palaeolithic peoples, and drawing explicit parallels between the Bushmen and the Aurignacians.

Piette's original identification of two races is cited, and the figures are linked with Bushmen and Hottentot traits (Sollas 1911: 264, 266). The characteristic peculiar to the Bushmen, Hottentots and Accas is given as the unique association of steatopygia and "longinymph", or elongation of the labia minora (Sollas 1911: 261). "The greater the development of these features, the greater the approach to a Hottentot's ideal standard of beauty" (Sollas 1911: 262).

Sollas goes on to cite Piette, who “was able to assert that if we seek for the nearest representatives of the people represented by the steatopygous statuettes, we shall find them among the Bushmen” (Piette 1895: 137, cited in Sollas 1911: 264-5). Sollas continues:

“Certainly the artists who carved the figurines have shown in the clearest manner that they were intimately acquainted with women who presented a close anatomical resemblance to the existing Bushwomen, and the presumption is that these were women of their own race.

The supposed connection between the Aurignacians and the Bushmen begins to acquire an appearance of probability, and the case is still further strengthened by the discovery of the actual remains of Aurignacian man himself.” (Sollas 1911: 266)

The discovery of two skeletons in the Grotte des Enfants is noted, and the conclusions of Verneau, who examined them, are also presented (Sollas 1911: 266-268). Attention is drawn to such features as “the nose flat, with nasal gutters at the base”, which is described as a “peculiarly Negroid character” (Sollas 1911: 267), and Sollas concludes that the skeletons prove the “existence of two individuals belonging to a Negroid race of low stature... We may infer that they lived among friends, and most probably therefore with people of their own race” (Sollas 1911: 268). Re-introducing the figurines as evidence, he states that “Steatopygous figurines found in adjacent caves at Menton strengthen this conclusion, and the evidence that Menton was inhabited in Aurignacian times by a race allied to the Bushmen amounts almost to positive proof” [Grimaldi] (Sollas 1911: 268). The geographic spread of the “negroid” race to Belgium and perhaps Austria is postulated on the basis of two figures, the figure from Trou Magrite, which is termed “steatopygous”, and Willendorf, which is described as “very Negroid looking” (Sollas 1911: 268). Yet he still expresses his reservation, in stating that “We must be careful, however, not to identify the Negroid race too closely with the Bushmen”, due to the discrepancy in the cranial capacities of the Aurignacian and Bushmen skulls (Sollas 1911: 268-269).

Oddly, some possible comparisons are not elaborated. For example, while “pellet like tufts” of hair are given as characteristic of the Bushmen (Sollas 1911: 272, Figs. 166, 167), no connection is made with the depiction of hair on the Willendorf figure, although this is described as “very Negroid-looking” (Sollas 1911: 168).

This theory reflects a number of trends popular at the time – the importance of ethnographic data regarding contemporary hunter-gatherers such as the Bushmen, and the belief that these races retain strong similarities to prehistoric tribes (Sollas 1911: 269). The contemporary thought underlying this approach is clearly stated in Chapter IV, “The Tasmanians”. Sollas states: “While commencing a chapter on Pleistocene man by an account of a recent race might seem a wilful anachronism; the Tasmanians, however, though recent, were at the same time a Palaeolithic or even, it has been asserted, an “Eolithic” race, and they thus afford us an opportunity of interpreting the past by the present... We will therefore first direct our attention to the habits and mode of life of this isolated people, the most unprogressive in the world, which in the middle of the nineteenth century were still living in the dawn of the Palaeolithic era” (Sollas 1911: 70).

Regarding the Bushmen, Sollas specifically states that, “If we succeed in finding traces of the Aurignacian culture among the Bushmen this is only because these were an unprogressive race” (Sollas 1911: 269). It is their unprogressive nature then, that allows the belief that contemporary tribes could be identified in the archaeological record. In contrast, his attempt to identify the second race is a more difficult task, as; “Given a progressive race and it will long since have emerged from that state, and may now have arrived at a stage of civilisation so advanced as to afford but little hope of discovering any indications of its origin. The statuettes of Piette’s second group do indeed suggest some resemblance to the white races, possibly the ancestors of existing Europeans, to whose subsequent history in Palaeolithic time we possess no clue” (Sollas 1911: 269).

The theory must also rest on the accurate assessment of the characteristics contemporary hunter-gatherers, and although he cites extensive references on the subject (Sollas 1911: 271-2, fn.1) he also acknowledges that the ethnographic evidence regarding the Bushmen is incomplete, stating: “Unfortunately we have here once more to lament many deficiencies in our knowledge, a vast amount of precious information having been irretrievably lost owing to the indifference of civilised governments, and so called civilised people, to the history and welfare of the primitive races with which they have been brought into contact” (Sollas 1911: 270).

This last paragraph indicates some regret at the treatment of the contemporary Bushmen, and this feeling is expanded in the concluding paragraphs of Chapter IX:

“And last a word of farewell to the Bushmen. The more we know of these wonderful little people the more we learn to admire and like them. To many solid virtues – untiring energy, boundless patience, and fertile invention, steadfast courage, devoted loyalty, and family affection – they added a native refinement of manners and a rare aesthetic sense. We may learn from them how far the finer excellences of life may be attained in the hunting stage. In their golden age, before the coming of civilised man, they enjoyed their life to the full, glad with the gladness of primeval creatures. The story of their later days, their extermination, and the cruel manner of it, is a tale of horror on which we do not care to dwell. They haunt no more the sunlit veldt, their hunting is over, their nation is destroyed; but they leave behind an imperishable memory, they have immortalised themselves in their art” (Sollas 1911: 305-306).

The chapter, therefore, is something of a eulogy to the Bushmen, and their virtually extinct hunting lifestyle is depicted in glowing terms. The above paragraph makes reference to their “golden age”, and they become, in effect, the embodiment of the “noble savage”:

“Although far from attaining to our standard of beauty, yet still there was something prepossessing about the Bushmen to those who looked with the

discerning eye, thus Burchell wrote, “The beautiful symmetrical form of our Bushman guide, who walked and sometimes ran before us with a gait the most free and easy I have ever beheld, his well-proportioned, although small and delicate figure, his upright and manly port, his firm, bold steps, and the consciousness of liberty which beamed in his countenance, afforded us indescribable pleasure” (Sollas 1911: 272).

Emphasising the hunting lifestyle of the Bushmen in near idyllic terms (Sollas 1911: 273-277), Sollas writes; “Armed with bow and arrows the Bushmen laid the whole animal world under contrition, and defended themselves against their foes, whether lion or Kaffir, with equal courage and success” (Sollas 1911: 276). There is reference to “his unconquerable love of a wild life” (Sollas 1911: 278), to the claim that “the Bushmen carried their love of art into every department of life” (Sollas 1911: 280), that they were “intensely fond of music” (Sollas 1911: 285), had “great intellectual ability”, “were distinguished for their hospitality to strangers, and for the unselfish way in which they divided their food. They loved their country and showed an unfailing devotion to their chiefs; they possessed all the noblest of the primitive virtues, and, not least, unflinching bravery and unquenchable love of freedom” (Sollas 1911: 300), and even did not participate in prostitution, “a vice which is common among the Bantus, most open and shameless among the Herero, and widely prevalent among the civilised people of Europe” (Sollas 1911: 291). Noting their extermination by the Boers in a war “shocking to our humanity”, Sollas states that “we cannot refuse a tribute of admiration to these brave people, who in almost every instance preferred death to surrender”, and he poignantly concludes that one of the last to be killed in the war was a painter, still wearing twelve horns filled with pigments (Sollas 1911: 301).

This strongly identifies the Bushmen with the concept of the “noble savage”, and is an aspect absent from Piette’s work.

19. How are references and sources utilised? To what extent is there dependence on previous authors?

Piette is mentioned several times, particularly as Sollas closely follows his argument and division of the statuettes into racial types (Sollas 1911: 263-4). Reinach is cited to confirm the artistic merit of the statuettes (Sollas 1911: 262).

20. How does this work contribute to the development, construction and consolidation of the group?

The work duplicates Piettes initial division of the group, and strongly promotes the link between the Hottentot/ Bushmen tribe and the Aurignacian. While Sollas notes that Piette divided the material into two races, his interest is in the “adipose” race, and these examples are used to confirm his racial beliefs in the connection between ancient and modern hunter-gatherers. Although a second race is noted, the possible ancestors of existing Europeans, examples are not given and more attention is paid to the statuettes that are termed “steatopygous” and “negroid”. The emphasis in the text is predominantly on those features, and the work demonstrates the continued identification of steatopygia as a racially distinctive trait. The work effectively reiterates and supports Piette’s identification and underlying methodology through emphasising the presence of steatopygous figurines, and linking them in popular perception with the Bushmen and contemporary tribes. Indeed, it could be said that the work goes further than Piette’s original proposal, in that it describes the lives and habits of the Bushmen in an attempt to ‘fill the gaps’ and provides details of Aurignacian life that the archaeological evidence cannot.

Burkitt, M. C. 1934

“Some reflections on the Aurignacian culture and its female statuettes.”

Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua 9 pp. 113-122

1. *What is the context of this approach to the archaeological material?*

The paper is specifically concerned with discussion of the figures and their place within the Aurignacian culture.

2. *What is the role of the material in the hypothesis? How is it used by the author and what hypothesis is applied to it?*

Much of the article is taken up with description of the figures, as one of the aims of the piece is to provide notes “which may be useful since the information concerning these little figures is very scattered” (Burkitt 1934: 117). The author feels that “in the majority of cases, except perhaps in some of the highly stylised specimens, the artist seems to have desired to represent pregnant women” (Burkitt 1934: 120).

To some extent, the paper presents an argument for the figures to be taken seriously in a wider artistic context. The author devotes some time to discussing the “attractiveness” of the statuettes and argues that although “to modern eyes the more naturalistic of these Venuses perhaps appear grotesque or even somewhat revolting” the statuettes may be “works of art” with “remarkable artistic merit” (Burkitt 1934: 121). Indeed, after some discussion of their composition, he appeals that their design “should win for them the serious consideration of the art-loving as well as the prehistoric world instead of the tolerant and somewhat condescending smile with which they are all too usually dismissed” (Burkitt 1934: 122).

Early approaches to these figures embodied aspects of the ‘art for arts sake’ paradigm that had emerged with the first discoveries of Palaeolithic art. Burkitt suggests that although their pregnancy renders them “grotesque” to modern eyes, such qualities as “skill in execution”, “real appreciation of beauty of line” and “feeling for line, symmetry and design” indicate that the figurines may be

“works of art made with no greater ulterior motive than some of the decorations on the Magdalenian bone tools” (Burkitt 1934: 120-121).

3. What terminology is used to introduce and subsequently define the material, and to what effect?

The title of the paper strongly links the “female statuettes” with the Aurignacian period. After brief mention of the geographical origins of the Aurignacian, the material is introduced as; “the “Venuses”, the famous statuettes representing the female form which occur in the Aurignacian levels in Western Europe...” (Burkitt 1934: 115). The material is referred to again as “Venuses” in this paragraph, although the term “statuette” is used throughout the descriptions to refer to the pieces and is the most common term, often linked with a descriptive term such as “ivory” or “Aurignacian”. The term “Venuses” is used more frequently in the discussion following the descriptions (Burkitt 1934: 120-22), where it is applied in such instances as “Some of the Venuses are more conventionalised than others” (Burkitt 1934: 120), and “the more naturalistic of these Venuses” (Burkitt 1934: 121). In these instances, it is used as a collective label, employed when discussing the group as a whole.

In the descriptions themselves, the term is employed to refer to a number of specific instances. The finds from Brassempouy are described as “twelve Venuses” (Burkitt 1934: 117), and it is used in the naming of several specific examples. Also mentioned in the text are the “Venus of Brassempouy” (Burkitt 1934: 117), the “famous late Aurignacian Venus” (Willendorf) (Burkitt 1934: 119-120), and the late Aurignacian Venus of Dolní Věstonice (Burkitt 1934: 119). A caption accompanying Fig. 2 presents “The Venus of Lespugue”, “The Venus of Willendorf” and “The Venus of Dolní Věstonice” (Burkitt 1934: 116). The term is again applied to Dolní Věstonice, Lespugue and Willendorf in the discussion (Burkitt 1934: 121). Therefore, the term is used as a generic term covering all female figurines included in the discussion when appropriate, and is also specifically associated with a number of examples.

It should also be noted that the “Venus of Brassempouy” referred to by Burkitt is not *la poire* (as in Piette 1895), but *la tête à la capuche*, for Burkitt describes

“the famous head and neck, known as the Venus of Brassempouy” (Burkitt 1934: 117).

4. How is the category of material defined? To what does the label refer?

The introductory reference to the figurines identifies the material as “Venuses”, and specifies them as follows: “... the famous statuettes representing the female form which occur in Aurignacian levels in Western Europe, are comparatively common as we pass over Central and Eastern Europe into Asia, until at the Mal’ta site, although on geological grounds considered by Russian prehistorians to be of early Aurignacian date, they are numerous and show a considerable amount of variation in the manner of their making” (Burkitt 1934: 114). This clearly outlines the distribution of the group, their link in time, and the identification of the group as consisting of female statuettes.

The statuettes are termed “the kernel of the matter” (Burkitt 1934: 117) and are discussed separately from other forms of “Aurignacian home art”, which is stated as consisting of engravings, reliefs and sculptures representing the human form (Burkitt 1934: 115). Examples given include an engraved male figure from Creswell Crags, conventionalised forms at Předmostí (Burkitt 1934: 115), and brief mention of the Laussel reliefs and *la femme à la corne* (Burkitt 1934: 116).

In this piece use of the term Venus is restricted in chronological terms, being specifically applied to “Aurignacian” figures, and in the form of material it is applied to, referring only to statuettes – the Laussel bas reliefs are mentioned separately, without reference to or use of the term (Burkitt 1934: 116).

5. Is a general characterisation of the material provided? How is the material characterised?

The Aurignacian statuettes are characterised as “almost entirely specimens of women (1934: 117).

A general characterisation is not provided prior to descriptions of the individual statuettes. In this section, however, there are several references to the “usual” or “familiar” type. Of the Brassempouy figures, he writes that there are “no less

than twelve Venuses”, and that “many of these are of the familiar type with exaggerated breasts, buttocks, etc” (Burkitt 1934: 117). The finds from Grimaldi are similarly termed “some ½ dozen of the usual type with pendulous breasts and large hips, buttocks”.

An additional feature of the group is seen in the lack of exaggeration of the arms and facial features, and Burkitt suggests that, apart from in very conventionalised cases, the desire of the artist was to represent pregnant women (Burkitt 1934: 121).

6. Does the author accept or adopt groups as previously established, or are new groups created?

The statuettes are treated as a chronological group from the outset, and it is apparent that the Siberian statuettes are included in this grouping. The term Venuses seems to refer to all the statuettes thought to be of this time period recovered thus far, although variation in their depiction is noted, particularly amongst the Mal'ta sample.

7. How is the credibility of the material established?

The figurines are confidently linked with the Aurignacian period from the outset, and their widespread distribution is noted. This use of the term “familiar” and reference to the “usual” type” in the case the Brassempouy and Grimaldi examples indicates the presumption that his readership is already sufficiently aware of the material, with the implication that the constitution of the group is already well known and established, effectively meaning that Burkitt does not need to elaborate further. This terminology also serves to establish that “the familiar type” is the type we expect or should expect, and the placement of Fig. 2 prior to the descriptions and discussion perhaps serves to confirm this impression, as this figure illustrates Lespugue, Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice.

Although some references to figurines not found in context are made, the figurines are accepted without any indication of doubt. Regarding the Péchialet figure, Burkitt writes; “Found among the *debris* of the superficial excavation of a gallery in the cave, but doubtless of Aurignacian date...” (Burkitt 1934: 117).

Of Sireuil, he writes; “The object was not actually found *in situ*, but Breuil and Peyrony give its date as probably Middle Aurignacian” (Burkitt 1934: 118), and of Savignano, “It was unfortunately an isolated find unassociated with other datable objects, but on typological grounds it must belong to the Aurignacian culture” (Burkitt 1934: 118).

8. Are details of archaeological context or dating discussed?

Brief details of context are given in some cases. The Kostenki statuette is described as being “recovered from a great depth in one of the three Quaternary deposits of Kostenki”, and of Gagarino it is said that, “All were found close to the walls of a sort of *fond de cabane* whose sides were reinforced with blocks of limestone and perhaps long bones of rhinoceros and mammoth” (Burkitt 1934: 120). Problems with context have been noted above for Pécchialet, Sireuil and Savignano.

For the other examples, no details are given other than the name of the site itself, and the Grimaldi figures are simply described as coming from the caves of Grimaldi (Burkitt 1934: 118).

There are several references to figures without strict archaeological context. It is stated that the Pécchialet figure, “doubtless” of Aurignacian date (Burkitt 1934: 117), was found amongst the site debris. Similarly, he notes that the Sireuil figure was not found *in situ*, and that the Savignano example “was unfortunately an isolated find unassociated with other datable objects” (1934: 118).

9. What is the total number of examples given for the material? How many are actually referred to or used as a database?

No total number for finds so far discovered is given. However, a certain impression is created, for Burkitt describe the figures as “comparatively common as we pass over Central and Eastern Europe”, and at Mal’ta they are described as “numerous”. Postulating the discovery of further sites of this type, Burkitt states that, “If they resemble Malta at all, the production of Venuses in

that area will be shown to have been on a very considerable scale” (Burkitt 1934: 114).

The finds are discussed by site, with a total given for each, rather than discussion of individual figures. Those discussed are:

Brassempouy – “twelve Venuses”

Lespugue – statuette

Péchialet – statuette

Sireuil – statuette

Grimaldi – “some half dozen”

Savignano – statuette

Willendorf – “the famous late Aurignacian Venus” and a second statuette

Moravia – “a number of statuettes in bone and ivory, including several rough sitting figures... from Předmosti” and the “late Aurignacian Venus” from Dolní Věstonice

Mezine – “eight ivory images”

Kostenki – statuette

Gagarino – “seven small ivory statuettes”

Mal'ta – “eleven bone statuettes”

From this listing, it is possible to estimate that there around 60 statuettes, although precise numbers are not given in some cases.

10. Are specific examples and individual figures discussed?

As indicated above, only certain of the statuettes are selected for further discussion, beyond the noting of the site and the quantity found. Those for whom brief details are given are as follows:

Venus of Brassempouy – materials, brief description, size

Lespugue – material, size, description

Péchialet – brief remarks on appearance

Sireuil – description, size, discussion of context, material

Grimaldi – six of the usual type, material but no sizes or descriptions

Savignano – material, size, description, context

Willendorf – size, description of hair only

Dolní Věstonice – size, description

Předmostí – rough sitting figures only

Mezine – eight figures usually described as phallic, materials. No descriptions

Kostenki – material size, not described other than to say it is headless

Gagarino – materials, context of all. Two said to be intact. One described thin, two as similar to Willendorf. No further descriptions

Mal'ta – described as dressed, and in general as not resembling Willendorf. Hair mentioned as hanging free in one, dressed in another. Two have arms meeting in front. No further descriptions.

Lespugue and Willendorf are discussed in more detail in the discussion (Burkitt 1934: 121).

11. Does the piece discuss a range of examples, or are generalisations made from a limited number of examples or prototypes?

While brief descriptions are provided for a number of figures, strong generalisations are made. Certain figures are obviously more “popular”, and greater attention is paid to these examples, particularly Willendorf and Lespugue. These could be termed prototypes, and this role is particularly fulfilled by the three “Venuses” illustrated in Fig. 2. The generalisation of pregnancy specifically excludes the “more conventionalised” statuettes, and those of Mal'ta, yet Péchialet and Dolní Věstonice are also stated to be without exaggeration. The “twelve venuses” of Brassempouy include both of Piette's “groups” – the adipose and the svelte, yet these are also subsumed by the generalisation.

12. In what depth are the figurines discussed?

For each site, brief notes and a reference are provided. It should be noted that the emphasis is on the site rather than individual descriptions. Length of descriptions, and the amount of detail provided, tends to vary from example to example. In the cases of Brassempouy and Grimaldi, the descriptions are abbreviated to mention of “the usual” or “familiar” type.

In the cases of Lespugue and Willendorf, the descriptions are elaborated in the discussion (Burkitt 1934: 121), where there is a more general discussion in a

passage discussing the composition of the statuettes from an artistic, and perhaps aesthetic point of view.

13. Do the individual descriptions concur with the generalised characterisation given?

There are several references to the “usual” and “familiar” types, although the features are not elaborated in these cases, so no assessment is possible. Presumably, these examples concur strongly with the “type”, although the lack of specific description means that the reader is unable to assess the individual pieces themselves. However, a number of comments indicate that there are variations from the type, for example, Péchialet, Předmostí, Mezine, Gagarino, Mal'ta. If these are all taken into account, the group actually consists of a variety of diverse types.

Referring to “no less than twelve Venuses” at Brassempouy, Burkitt states that, “Many of these are of the familiar type with exaggerated breasts, buttocks, etc” (Burkitt 1934: 117). Notes for the Lespugue figure do not mention breasts or exaggeration (though as this is on the page facing Fig. 2, perhaps such a reference would be superfluous). Attention focuses on lines representing hair and an apron (Burkitt 1934: 117), although this figure is later described in such terms that even the most pendulously breasted woman would not have breasts “so low down on the body” (Burkitt 1934: 121). The Grimaldi figures are described as “some half dozen late Aurignacian statuettes of the usual type with pendulous breasts and large hips, buttocks etc” (Burkitt 1934: 118). The Savignano example is termed “a comparatively tall, almost featureless, probably pregnant woman with pendulous breasts and pronounced buttocks” (Burkitt 1934: 118). The description of the “famous late Aurignacian Venus” found at Willendorf mentions only its hairstyle, and although a second discovery is mentioned, it is not described (Burkitt 1934: 119). The “Venus” of Dolní Věstonice is described as possessing “breasts which are pendulous and other features are not extravagantly exaggerated”. There is also note of facial features and four holes on the top of the head (Burkitt 1934: 119). The Mezine images are noted to be “generally described as phallic” (Burkitt 1934: 120), and the Kostenki figure noted only to be headless (Burkitt 1934: 120). It is noted that, of

the three examples from Gagarino, “one is comparatively long and thin, two others definitely resemble the somewhat tubby Venus of Willendorf” (Burkitt 1934: 120). It is stated that the Mal’ta types are long, narrow and conventionalised, and “in general do not resemble the Willendorf type” (Burkitt 1934: 120).

While the paper promotes the existence of stylistic characteristics throughout the group, chronological attribution to the group nevertheless takes place in the case of examples lacking certain of these features. It is asserted that the Péchialet figure is “doubtless” of Aurignacian date (Burkitt 1934: 117), although Burkitt notes that the figure was found amongst the site debris, and admits that it is not exaggerated in form, an observation confirmed by its illustration in Fig. 3. He notes that, other than the well-marked but not exaggerated shoulder blades and buttocks, no other features are stressed (Burkitt 1934: 117). Similarly, he notes that the Sireuil figures was not found *in situ*, and whereas the buttocks “as often” are exaggerated, he admits that in this case the breasts are not. (1934: 117). He sees eight figures from Mezine as being “doubtless degenerated female statuettes” while noting that they are “generally described as phallic” (Burkitt 1934: 120).

The only figure he has described with both exaggerated breasts and buttocks is that of Savignano, an isolated find without archaeological context, regarding which Burkitt states “on typological grounds it must belong to the Aurignacian culture” (Burkitt 1934: 118). His own descriptions indicate variation from the “type”. At Dolni Vestonice, the late Aurignacian Venus is seen as possessing pendulous breasts, although he notes that the other features are not extremely exaggerated, and facial features are attempted (Burkitt 1934: 119). Of the 7 Gagarino statuettes, he notes that 2 resemble the Venus of Willendorf, yet another is long and thin (Burkitt 1934: 120; and both types are illustrated in Fig. 4), pointing towards variation not only within the group as a whole, but within a particular site. He includes the 11 statuettes from Mal’ta, although in contrast to the “type” they are described as conventionalised, long and narrow, with hair and arms sometimes depicted (Burkitt 1934: 120).

14. What figures are selected for illustration, and what is the effect of the illustrations?

Fig. 1: Distribution of the female statuettes.

Fig. 2: The “Venuses of Lespugue, Dolní Věstonice and Willendorf”.

Fig. 3: 1. Venus of Brassempouy
2. *le manche de poignard*
3. Péchialet
4. Sireuil
5. *statuette en stéatite jaune*
6. *la polichinelle* (2 views)
7. Savignano

Fig. 4: 1. Mezine long
2. Mezine squat
3. Kostenki
4. Gagarino squat
5. Gagarino long
6, 7. Mal'ta (3 views of 7)

An illustration (Fig. 2) is placed in the text prior to the descriptions. This shows photographs of Lespugue, Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice Venus I. The images are shown side by side, without any border or background. All are face on, and their heights have been adjusted so that they are the same size. No scale is provided. The caption describes each as “The Venus of Lespugue”, etc. It is interesting that the three Venuses best known are included together in a photograph, accentuating their similarity, and presented prior to the descriptions. For the casual reader, they present the “usual” type referred to in the text on the opposite page, as they are the only illustrations on these first pages of description, and they are also the first illustration of the figurines themselves.

Figs. 3 and 4 consist of sketches of the figures. Details are marked to a degree. No scale is provided and the sizes of the figures have been adjusted for the arrangement, although the figures are not shown at identical sizes.

The illustrations selected for presentation in Figs. 3 and 4, in contrast to the homogenised appearance of the photographs in Fig. 2, are shown as line drawings, with some differences in size apparent. They are presented as two groups, with the Western European examples in Fig. 3, and the Russian and Siberian specimens in Fig. 4. Presenting *la tête à la capuche* and *le manche de poignard* alongside the Sireuil, Pechialet and Savignano figures shows clear variations in form in the western group, and a comparison of the Russian figures shows similar results, particularly between the Mezine, Kostenki and Gagarino examples. Rather than consolidating the “usual” types, they serve as an illustration of the variety within the groups.

15. Are there indications of any criteria in the selection of figures for discussion?

Burkitt describes “the most notable specimens”, highlighting that less notable specimens exist and are excluded.

This reference to the “most notable” indicates that this may be a factor influencing selection. “The most notable specimens have been found at Brassempouy, Lespugue, Pechialet, Sireuil, Mentone [Grimaldi], Savignano, Willendorf, Dolní Věstonice, Mezine, Kostenki, Gagarino, and Malta” (Burkitt 1934: 117). Of the twelve said to be at Brassempouy, only one is specifically mentioned, “the famous head and neck, known as the Venus of Brassempouy” (Burkitt 1934: 117). Lespugue is described as “the particularly interesting late Aurignacian statuette” (Burkitt 1934: 117). At Moravia, the existence of a “number of statuettes” is indicated, but the only one mentioned by name and described is the Venus of Dolní Věstonice, termed as “the most interesting figure” (Burkitt 1934: 119). Willendorf is “the famous late Aurignacian Venus” (Burkitt 1934: 119).

In the discussion following the descriptions, only the Venuses of Dolní Věstonice, Brassempouy and, in more detail, Lespugue and Willendorf are mentioned, in the context of a specific focus on their perceived ‘artistic merit’. Here, Burkitt specifically presents those figures he feels most suitable for this argument.

16. What comparisons are made between examples? Are these connections, stylistic, contextual, etc? What is the purpose of the comparison?

Reference to the “usual” and “familiar” type indicates strong links between the figures, and the existence of a tangible ‘group identity’. This is particularly strong in the cases of Brassempouy and Grimaldi. The strongest connections are made in the selection of the Venuses of Lespugue, Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice as works of art, and for presentation together. Explicit similarities with Willendorf are noted for two of the Gagarino statuettes, although not a third. The statuettes are all firmly linked to the Aurignacian, and the introductory paragraph emphasises their distribution as part of the same widespread phenomenon.

Lespugue and Willendorf are specifically compared in the discussion. While Willendorf is seen as more “naturalistically treated” than Lespugue, a specific parallel is drawn in that “the arms are bent at the elbows and rest upon the breasts. And this is not the only trait which these two figures, geographically so widely separated and artistically so differently treated, have in common. Maybe it is this attitude or maybe it is the bent head which gives to them both, particularly when seen in profile, a sense of calm yet comfortable dignity not inconsistent with their presumably pregnant condition” (Burkitt 1934: 121).

17. Is the material treated as a homogeneous group, or is the focus on diversity? Is this orientation related to, or dictated by, the author’s hypothesis? Is homogeneity deduced from the material after analysis, or assumed as a pre-condition?

Variation is noted by Burkitt, although it tends to be characterised as being between naturalistic and the more conventionalised. While there is reference on several occasions to the “usual” or “familiar” type, differences are pointed out in the Mal’ta statuettes, and it is made clear that there are two types at Gagarino. However, the general conclusions designate all except the most conventionalised as pregnant.

References to the “usual” and “familiar” type create an impression of similar and group conformity. However, the generalised comment regarding the “twelve Venuses” at Brassempouy is stretching the truth somewhat, as many are not large buttocked and breasted as claimed (Burkitt 1934: 117). Therefore, although Burkitt’s description of the figures may match his characterisation, this is not an accurate representation of the material itself.

18. Is supporting evidence for a theory provided from the figures and their archaeological context, or from the application of external theory?

Much of the author’s discussion is based on subjective and aesthetic judgements of the figurines themselves. This can particularly be seen in the discussion of their ‘artistic merit’, where the author himself judges and argues that they are indeed works of art. The claim that the artists’ desired to represent and symbolise pregnancy an example of Burkitt’s own opinion, attributed to the artists themselves (Burkitt 1934: 120). Several figures are attributed to the period and judged authentic, although no basis is explained regarding how this judgement has been made. Indeed, in the case of the Pécchialet figure, the argument is purely one from authority, without any substantiating evidence being offered. It is also interesting that a number of the figures do not share the exaggeration cited as “usual” or “familiar”, yet their inclusion is not questioned. Similarly, the Mezine statuettes are “doubtless” female images, perhaps for the simple reason that this best suits the overall approach, or perhaps dictates their identification.

19. How are references and sources utilised? To what extent is there dependence on previous authors?

Burkitt does not refer to the works of other authors in the text, although a reference is given for each site, directing the reader to more detailed reading. It could be that Burkitt’s assessments of the statuettes are influenced by the references he cites, and he refers to Breuil and Peyrony’s attribution of Sireuil to the Aurignacian as support for its allocation to the period (Burkitt 1934: 118).

20. How does this work contribute to the construction and consolidation of the group?

It is the author's stated intention to bring together the scattered information on these figurines. This in itself is important, as it brings the group itself together with a strong characterisation. There is emphasis of the figures of Willendorf, Dolní Věstonice and Lespugue in the presentation of the famous three Venuses together, and their discussion in the text. They emerge as strong prototype figures. Burkitt firmly links the figures as a chronological group with widespread distribution.

There is emphasis of the stereotypical features of breasts and buttocks, along with pregnancy, characterised by references to the "usual" type. This particularly homogenises the diverse types at Brassempouy and Grimaldi. Burkitt's summaries raise several points. Of the Brassempouy figures, he writes that there are "no less than 12 Venuses", and that "many of these are of the familiar type with exaggerated breasts, buttocks, etc" (Burkitt 1934: 117). The finds from Grimaldi are similarly termed "some ½ dozen of the usual type with pendulous breasts and large hips, buttocks". This use of the "familiar" and the "usual" type" indicates the presumption his readership is already sufficiently aware of the material, with the implication that the constitution of the group is already well known and established, effectively meaning that Burkitt does not need to elaborate further. This terminology also serves to establish that "the familiar type" is the type we expect or should expect, and the placement of Fig. 2 perhaps serves to confirm this impression. The assertion that "many" of the Brassempouy figures are of the "familiar type" is an inaccurate representation of the material on several counts, as there are indeed less than 12 "venuses", and stylistically, the greater number adhere to what Piette termed the "svelte" group. It can be seen, therefore, that these descriptions generalise at the expense of individual features, linking and emphasising the "familiar" or "usual" with the exaggeration of breasts and buttocks.

Absolon, K. 1949

**“The diluvial anthropomorphic statuettes and drawings,
especially the so-called Venus statuettes, discovered in Moravia.”**

Artibus Asiae Vol XII pp. 201-220.

1. What is the context of this approach to the archaeological material?

The work is concerned with the “diluvial anthropomorphic statuettes and drawings”, with emphasis on what are termed the “Venus” statuettes, with particular discussion of Absolon’s own discoveries at Dolní Věstonice and their place within the larger group of anthropomorphic statuettes. The early history of the discovery of the figurines is outlined to provide a background for the descriptions of the Dolní Věstonice statuettes. A wider range of anthropomorphic, or more specifically, female representations are then introduced and divided into stylistic groups.

2. What is the role of the material in the hypothesis? How is it used by the author and what is the hypothesis is applied to it?

The main purpose of the paper is to discuss Absolon’s discoveries at Dolní Věstonice, and these figures are placed in the context of previous discoveries of anthropomorphic statuettes. Absolon indicates their value by writing of “the great importance of these plastic portrayals of the nude female body for the general history of culture, morals, the psychology of primitive art” (Absolon 1949: 202). Descriptions are provided for a number of the Dolní Věstonice finds, although not all. Description of the figures mainly concerns the identification of features depicted, and both these identifications and the interpretation of the figures is highly sexualised. Absolon described one figure – Venus XIV from Dolní Věstonice – as “a diluvial plastic pornography” (Absolon 1949: 208) and states that the origin of the figures is “due to sexual-biological, erotic motives” (Absolon 1949: 204).

The Dolní Věstonice figures are discussed in terms of the wider stylistic context of the female figures. Traits are discussed, and ten types determined (Absolon 1949: 214-19).

3. *What terminology is used to introduce and subsequently define the material, and to what effect?*

The material is termed “Venus” statuettes in the title of the work (Absolon 1949: 201), and this designation is used throughout as a term of identification and reference. Examples include mention of Pekárna’s “hyperstylized Venus statuettes” (Absolon 1949: 203), and the “Venus statuettes” of Dolní Věstonice (Absolon 1949: 203). “These Venuses” are mentioned (Absolon 1949: 204), and there is also note of “diluvial Venus statuettes” (Absolon 1949: 220), and “Siberian Venus statuettes” (Absolon 1949: 207).

More specifically, there is reference to “the famous six partly steatopygic Venus statuettes of the Mentone Barma Grande cave” [Grimaldi] (Absolon 1949: 201), and the “long Venus” of Gagarino (Absolon 1949: 215). Individual figures are referred to as “the most beautiful ivory Venus statuette [*la poire*] (Absolon 1949: 202), the “famous obese Venus” [Willendorf] (Absolon 1949: 204), and “the classical Venus of Vestonice [Venus I] (Absolon 1949: 202-3). The term is also used in the names of specific figurines, for example “undoubtedly the greatest of the Palaeolithic Venuses [*la poire*], like the Willendorf Venus” (Absolon 1949: 204-5), and for the “Venus of Lespugue” (Absolon 1949: 205).

The Dolní Věstonice finds are described as fifteen figures including naturalistic, tattooed, stylised, “hyperstylized”, sexual-biological, *pars-pro-toto*, expressionistic and other types (Absolon 1949: 204). This terminology indicates that there are a variety of types and styles, yet firmly establishes their classification first and foremost as Venuses. All the Dolní Věstonice figures are referred to as numbered Venuses. This designation indicates that Venus is not a term used only for individual figures; rather, it is a generic name describing a distinct class or type to which the Dolní Věstonice figures belong.

Although Venus is the most common terms, other do occur. The initial reference to the material is in connection with the first discovery – the Trou Magrite figure, which is referred to only as an “anthropomorphic statuette” (Absolon 1949: 201). There is general reference to “plastic portrayals of the female body”

(Absolon 1949: 202), and example from Předmostí is distinguished as a “stylized female figure” (Absolon 1949: 204).

4. How is the category of material defined? To what does the label refer?

While the title indicates that the material consists of “anthropomorphic statuettes and drawings”, the use of Venus distinguishes particular statuettes as a distinct group of female representations. Thus, the Venus figurines are a specific group of female representations existing within a wider body of apparently female images. However, there is no discussion of any criteria that indicate when a figure is specifically a Venus, although the term does not seem to be applied to later, more stylised images, although these are also interpreted as female.

The wider body of material presented also includes female depictions from beyond the Palaeolithic, showing either the persistence of representational features, or that characteristics often deemed “Palaeolithic” can occur outside this time period.

5. Is a general characterisation of the material provided? How is the material characterised?

Although there is early mention of “plastic portrayals of the nude female body” (Absolon 1949: 202), the figures are not characterised prior to the discussion of the Dolní Věstonice examples, but rather as an introduction to the stylistic division of the material, at which point a comparative review is presented to discuss the similarities between the 91 “Palaeolithic female statuettes” (Absolon 1949: 214). Similarities between statuettes are characterised as the lack of modelling of facial traits (which Absolon identifies at Grimaldi, Savignano, Lespugue, in two examples from Gagarino, and two from Willendorf), negligent treatment of arms, with their frequent appearance touching the body (identified at Grimaldi, in two examples from Gagarino, and the *Vénus impudique*), and the “universal” neglect of legs, with the stumps schematised into a conical shape (seen in twelve examples from Malta, six from Grimaldi, three from Dolní Věstonice and at Savignano, Lespugue and Mainz-Linsenberg) (Absolon 1949: 214).

The Dolní Věstonice figures are all characterised by the use of the term Venus, and they are further strongly characterised in sexualised terms. This is particularly apparent in the descriptions of Venus XIII and XIV, where the former is described as featuring “legs, gently bent towards each other, therefore with sexual emphasis”, and the latter as “a diluvial plastic pornography” (Absolon 1949: 207, 208).

6. Does the author accept or adopt groups as previously established, or are new groups created?

Reference to the “so-called Venus statuettes” shows the group is already recognised and acknowledged. The discoveries of Dolní Věstonice are fitted into this pre-existing group, both in terms of naming, and through initial comparisons of Venus I with Willendorf and Lespugue (Absolon 1949: 204-5).

On this basis, Absolon divides the figures into a number of stylistic groups (Absolon 1949: 214; See Table 2 and Figure 12), although he states that they are “not yet sharply separated” (Absolon 1949: 214). The groupings are as follows:

1. The Vestonice type.
2. The Willendorf type.
3. The Malta type
4. The Grimaldi type.
5. The Predmost type.
6. The Lespugue type.
7. Stylized “Posterior” Silhouettes.
8. The Mezine group.
9. Hyperstylized individual types.
10. Portrayals of heads.

While ostensibly demonstrating the shared characteristics of certain figures, this division into types also illustrates the differences within the group as a whole. Lespugue is termed a unique type, without parallel in Palaeolithic art. However, the figures remain strongly grouped in their identification as female, and it is noticeable that even the most stylised figures are interpreted as “female” images,

even in the cases of schematised forms such as the Dolní Věstonice “rod” and “fork” (Venus XIII and XIV).

7. *How is the credibility of the material established?*

Credibility is initially established through reference to previous discoveries, and Absolon outlines a brief history, from the first finds at Trou Magrite and Grimaldi, to provide a general background to the topic (Absolon 1949: 201-204). Absolon emphasises that “These statuettes play no small part in the evolutionary history of human artistic sense and they deserve their extensive place in the scientific literature...” (Absolon 1949: 202). This demonstrates not only how important Absolon thinks the figures are, but also shows that they already have a formidable history of research. This is echoed in his comment regarding “the great importance of these plastic portrayals of the nude female body for the general history of culture, morals, the psychology of primitive art...the discovery of each of these statuettes was an event” (Absolon 1949: 202-3). His own role, and his pride, is evident when he states that, “Since 1925 I have established a new world record in the discovery of Venus statuettes in Dolní Věstonice” (Absolon 1949: 203).

Credibility is similarly established through numerous reminders of the fame of the statuettes, and repetition of their ‘importance’ and artistic merit. For example, he refers to “the famous obese Venus” of Willendorf (Absolon 1949: 204), and describes *la poire* as “undoubtedly the greatest of the Palaeolithic Venuses” (Absolon 1949: 204). His own find, the Dolní Věstonice Venus I, is described as “the equal of the best prehistoric female figures. It even has the advantage of being unimpaired” (Absolon 1949: 204). The Venuses are additionally placed in the context of a history of art, being likened to aspects of modern art and Absolon urges that they be studied by an art historian (Absolon 1949: 220).

8. *Are details of archaeological context or dating discussed?*

While citing the discoveries as “events”, Absolon does not discuss the archaeological context of the finds, even those of Dolní Věstonice. It is simply stated that the figures of Central and Western Europe are “Aurignacian”

(Absolon 1949: 216), although there are no details of their attribution, nor attention drawn to any problems. Although finds are linked to the mention of excavation at specific sites in many cases, and the name of the excavator or discoverer is given, there is no mention of associated finds, layers, or means of chronological attribution, with the exception of a discussion of the Siberian Palaeolithic in the case of the Mal'ta statuettes. Grimaldi is merely stated to be one of the earliest, with the figurines found in 1884, and there is no reference to the circumstances of their discovery (Absolon 1949: 201).

9. What is the total number of examples given for the material? How many are actually referred to or used as a database?

It is stated that 91 figures have been recovered from 21 sites (Absolon 1949: 201). A list of these sites and numbers is provided (Absolon 1949: 214). Eighty-three figures can be specifically allocated to sites from this list, with an unspecified number occurring at Kostenki, Mezine and Petersfels.

Figures/ sites mentioned:

Trou Magrite (Absolon 1949: 201)

Grimaldi (6 figures) (Absolon 1949: 201)

La poire (Absolon 1949: 201)

Předmostí (7)

Pekárna

Dolní Věstonice (15) (Absolon 1949: 203-4)

Willendorf (Absolon 1949: 204)

Předmostí stylised figure

Those figures described are as follows:

Dolní Věstonice Venus I (also with reference to Lespugue, Willendorf, *la poire*) (Absolon 1949: 204-6)

Dolní Věstonice Venus V (Absolon 1949: 206-7)

Dolní Věstonice VIII (fork) (Absolon 1949: 207)

Dolní Věstonice XIV (rod) (Absolon 1949: 208)

Dolní Věstonice Venus XII (Absolon 1949: 209)

Dolní Věstonice Venus IX (briefly)

Dolní Věstonice Venus XV (in detail) (Absolon 1949: 210-2)

Pekárna statuette (Absolon 1949: 212), which is compared with “silhouettes” from Hohlenstein, La Roche and Petersfels.

Absolon states that the Venuses II, III, VI, VII, VIII, X, XI do not need describing.

In the stylistic groupings, Absolon allocates a number of figures.

The Vestonice type includes Dolní Věstonice Venus I, the Venus I of Kostenki, and “the “long Venus” of Gagarino (Absolon 1949: 215).

The Willendorf type contains Willendorf I, the “two broad figures of Gagarino”, one from Grimaldi, and from Brassempouy *la poire* (Absolon 1949: 215).

The Malta type contains only the Siberian examples, although no examples are mentioned (Absolon 1949: 215-8).

The Grimaldi type features “the Mediterranean statuettes”, namely three from Grimaldi, in addition to Savignano and Sireuil (Absolon 1949: 218).

The Předmostí type contains “crude types” including Venus III from Kostenki (Absolon 1949: 218).

The Lespugue type is “unique and a special type”, with parallel (Absolon 1949: 218).

Stylized “Posterior” Silhouettes.

The Mezine group includes “undetermined stylizations” (Absolon 1949: 218)

Hyperstylized individual types are found only at Dolní Věstonice, consisting of Venus XII, XIII, and XIV (Absolon 1949: 218).

Portrayals of heads features “three physioplastic portrayals of heads” from Brassempouy, Grimaldi and Dolní Věstonice Venus XV (Absolon 1949: 218).

10. Are specific examples and individual figures discussed?

As previously noted, a number of the Dolní Věstonice figures are described in detail (Venus I, V, XIII, XIV, XII, IX and XV). Figures from other sites tend to be briefly mentioned as comparative material rather than described. Absolon’s final description refers to a “hyperstylized Venus statuette” from Pekárna, which is also illustrated alongside eighteen other items, tracing the development of the female image. Absolon identifies the governing principle in this instance as the

representation of hypertrophic buttocks, rather than breasts, a style characterised as the “Buttocks (Posterior) Silhouette” (Absolon 1949: 212).

11. Does the piece discuss a range of examples, or are generalisations made from a limited number of examples or prototypes?

In the comparison itself, the general characteristics are noted, alongside a number of examples for each point (Absolon 1949: 214). Similarly, several examples are cited for each stylistic “type”, and the choice is compounded by their illustration in Fig. 12 (Absolon 1949: 215-219).

It can be said that a range of examples are presented from Dolní Věstonice, although a number are excluded from the analysis. In stating that he has chosen to discuss only those of “theoretical interest”, Absolon obviously employs prototype figures. For Dolní Věstonice these are Venus I, V, XII, XIII, XIV, and XV. The first four figures form the basis for the assertion that the figures are concerned with “sexual-biological” motivation.

12. In what depth are the figurines discussed?

As seen above, several of the Dolní Věstonice figures received detailed treatment, and are also illustrated from several views. For the most part, the focus of description is on anatomical features.

The “Venus I” is considered in some detail (Absolon 1949: 204-6). It is noted that facial traits are neglected, although the eyes are marked “like medieval visors”, and four holes are placed on the head. The depiction of arms, and a stylised fold across the body are also noted (Absolon 1949: 205). The breasts are termed over-sized and hanging, rather than hypertrophic. Absolon also specifies that, in contrast to Willendorf, the *mons veneris* is omitted. Similarities noted consist of a “fatty cushion” at the rear, which is also identified on two other statuettes from Dolní Věstonice, and the modelling of the torso, which resembles Venus V. Despite the absence of a *mons veneris*, the statuette is designated a “sexually accentuated steatomeric type” (Absolon 1949: 206).

The Venus V (Absolon 1949: 206-7) is described as a flat, ivory sculpture, without head or upper body. It shares with Venus I the depiction of navel, abdominal fold the dorsal groove, yet contrasts with it in the representation of the *mons vénérés* by a deeply carved cut. Absolon identifies an incision on either side of the cut as two hanging lobes, which he characterises as “resembling the horrible organs of the Hottentot women”. He sees the centre of the abdomen as protruding, suggesting a pregnancy, and thus claims that, despite its flat shape, one can “clearly recognise the intent of portraying a fat, broad Venus” (Absolon 1949: 206).

The Venus XIII, Venus XIV and Venus XII are identified as “hyperstylised” forms, and they are characterised in highly sexualised terms. The Venus XII is interpreted as “a hyperstylized, steatomeric, pars pro toto Venus statuette”. He sees the cylinder of the ‘fork’ shaped figure as representing the upper body, with the *mons vénérés* stressed by a deep groove. Absolon identifies “legs” on the figure, describing them as “gently bent towards each other, therefore with sexual emphasis” (Absolon 1949: 207). Similarly, the Venus XIV is “ a sexual-biological hyperstylization”, identified as a cylindrical body with hypertrophic breasts, prompting him to claim that the “artist neglected all that did not interest him, stressing his sexual libido only where the breasts are concerned – a diluvial plastic pornography” (Absolon 1949: 208). Comparison with the Venus XIV leads to an interpretation of the Venus XII as also representing breasts, and each bead is seen as a “small hyperstylized figurine of a woman, pars-pro-toto”, once more “proving sexual-biological motivation” (Absolon 1949: 209-10). After description and identification of the Venus XV as a female, and brief mention of two “caricature” portraits (Absolon 1949: 210-212).

For the wider group Absolon is concerned with the identification of stylistic traits, on which basis he divides the group. Again, the traits are determined by the depiction of the anatomy. It has already been noted that a number of figures are not discussed.

13. Do the individual descriptions concur with the generalised characterisation given?

The Dolní Věstonice figures are the only ones described in detail. The stylised nature of the rod, fork and Venus V separates them from other statuettes. In addition, they are interpreted in a highly sexualised way, and as possessing specifically emphasised features. In this sense, the descriptions agree with their characterisation, as they are specifically interpreted in this way. One could therefore query whether the overarching interpretation actually dictates the identification of particular features. This can be seen in the instances of Venuses V, VII, VIII, and VIV.

The Venus V is actually made to fit in the interpretation. The Venus V (Absolon 1949: 206-7) is described as a flat, ivory sculpture, without head or upper body. It shares with Venus I the depiction of navel, abdominal fold the dorsal groove, yet contrasts with it in the representation of the *mons vénérus* by a deeply carved cut. Absolon identifies an incision on either side of the cut as two hanging lobes, which he characterises as “resembling the horrible organs of the Hottentot women”⁴. He sees the centre of the abdomen as protruding, suggesting a pregnancy, and thus claims that, despite its flat shape, one can “clearly recognise the intent of portraying a fat, broad Venus” (Absolon 1949: 206).

14. What figures are selected for illustration, and what is the effect of the illustrations?

There are detailed views of Venus I and Venus V (Figs 1 and 3)

Fig. 2 Venus VI (2 views)

Fig. 4. Venus XIII (4 views)

Fig. 5. Venus XIV (4 views and drawings)

Fig. 6. Venus XII (presented as necklace)

Fig. 7. Venus IX (1 view)

Fig. 8. Venus XV (5 photos and 2 drawings)

Fig. 9. head (1 view)

Fig. 10. head (2 views)

Fig. 11. Posterior silhouettes:

Savignano

Cucuteni

L’Egypte

Cucuteni
 Pekárna
 Cucuteni
 Petersfels (2)
 Pekárna
 Hohlenstein
 La Roche

- Fig. 12. *a.* Dolní Věstonice I, Kostenki (I), Gagarino long
b. Willendorf, Gagarino (2)
c. Malta (4)
d. *la polichinelle*, Savignano
e. Předmostí (2), Kostenki Venus III
f. Lespugue
g. Amalgamated group of style 7 and 9 – Pekarna, Petersfels, Dolní Věstonice fork and rod

These examples in Fig. 12 present the most characteristic, and probably the most familiar of each type, emphasising the basic features through the presentation of the most typical example. They are selected for their similarity to each other, to show the style of each group. They are impressions and clearly interpretive, rather than an accurate representation of the material. This is particularly apparent in the example of the Kostenki I figure, which is shown with a head shaped similarly to that of the Dolní Věstonice I, although it was actually discovered without a head (Fig. 12).

15. Are there indications of any criteria in the selection of figures for discussion or illustration?

Absolon is selective in his descriptions. Having described Venus I, he states that “Of the further Venus statuettes found in Dolní Věstonice we shall deal only with those which are either intact or possess some theoretical interest” (Absolon 1949: 206). Indeed, after these descriptions, Absolon dismisses the remaining finds, stating that, “The remaining statuettes, including a male figure, are mostly incomplete ceramics which do not call for a description in this article” (II, III, VI, VII, VIII, X & XI)” (Absolon 1949: 210). Aesthetic appreciation may play a

part here, as Absolon devotes most attention to Venus I, which he describes as “the equal of the best prehistoric female figures. It even has the advantage of being unimpaired...” (Absolon 1949: 204), continuing that “Anatomically the workmanship of Venus I is the best” (Absolon 1949: 205).

When discussing the whole group, Absolon states that, “It is impossible to describe all these statuettes here. I merely wish to discuss some of the similarities” (Absolon 1949: 214). This focus on similarities obviously limits discussion and governs selection.

16. What comparisons are made between examples? Are these connections, stylistic, contextual, etc? What is the purpose of the comparison?

Several comparisons between figures are noted in the text. The Dolní Věstonice Venus I is noted to be in better state of preservation than the Lespugue of Brassempouy examples (Absolon 1949: 204). The breasts of this figure are stated to dominate the whole body, as do those of Lespugue (Absolon 1949: 205). It is noted that the figure lacks a *mons vénérus*, in contrast to the Venus of Willendorf (Absolon 1949: 206). It is also stated that a figure was found in 1934 with “exactly the same type of conical representation of the legs, so that we know with certainty how the missing part of our Venus had been modelled” (Absolon 1949: 206). Two “cushions” of fat are identified on the rear of the figure, and “in later years we found two more statuettes with identical fatty “cushions”, although Absolon cites only Venus VI (Absolon 1949: 206). Describing Venus V, Absolon writes that, “In spite of the great apparent difference between Venus I and V we can notice great morphological, anatomical resemblances in the shape of the navel, the abdominal fold and the dorsal groove; the anatomical idea was the same” (Absolon 1949: 206). Venus I is also compared to illustration of a 26 year old steatomeric German woman, a North German woman, and a Hottentot woman (Absolon 1949: 206).

One particularly interesting comparison is made. Noting the four holes appearing on top of the head of Dolní Věstonice Venus I, Absolon states that there is no analogy for this feature in the Palaeolithic period, “but there exists a convergent ethnological parallel in negro sculpture”, specifically idols of the

Baluba and Benikanioka tribes in the Congo also have four holes in the head (Absolon 1949: 205)

It is noted that the Venus XIII was worn as an amulet, like the “Siberian Venus statuettes” (Absolon 1949: 208), and that Venus XIV features a left breast larger than the right, as in Venus I (Absolon 1949: 208). Venus XIV is closely linked with the “breast” beads of Venus XII, whose shape only became comprehensible after the discovery of the former (Absolon 1949: 209-10). Venus IX is briefly mentioned as showing an “ornamental cicatrisation resembling one found today among tattooed African natives” (Absolon 1949: 210).

The comparative review presents strong links between the 91 “Palaeolithic female statuettes” through a discussion of their similarities (Absolon 1949: 214). Connections are clearly stylistic, and apparent in the division into groups. Parallels are drawn between examples and similarities summarized, and certain figures are grouped together as a result:

Lack of modelling of facial traits (Grimaldi, Savignano, Lespugue, two examples from Gagarino, two from Willendorf)

Negligent treatment of arms, with their frequent appearance touching the body (Grimaldi, two examples from Gagarino, the Venus impudique)

Universal neglect of legs, with the stumps schematised into a conical shape (twelve examples from Mal'ta, six from Grimaldi, three from Dolní Věstonice, Savignano, Lespugue and Mainz-Linsenberg) (Absolon 1949: 214).

Fig. 11 presents a typology of female “posterior silhouettes”. Its starting point is a profile view of the Savignano figure, and presents examples from Petersfel, Pekárna, Hohlenstein, La Roche, and the Neolithic site of Cucuteni. This highlights the occurrence of Palaeolithic features outside the immediate period, and this impression is confirmed by several other comparisons indicated by Absolon. He notes that Eskimo carvings strongly resemble Dolní Věstonice Venus I “in their ideology, the neglect of facial expression, arms and legs” (Absolon 1959: 219). He continues that such ideology occurs in many prehistoric cultures, for example, the pre-dynastic cultures of Egypt of 4500 BC,

“where only the breasts of the female statuettes are stressed on the cylindrical, hyperstylized bodies”, and in the Moravian Neolithic, where many statuettes show a strong “steatomery” (Absolon 1949: 219).

Absolon’s final example concerns modern expressionistic art, where he cites Professor W. Paulcke’s work on modern and Palaeolithic art (“Steinzeitkunst und moderne Kunst”): “The exaggeration of special characteristic features in the Palaeolithic art (in our case of the breasts, of the steatomery), the sharply defined stressing of the notion of what is to be expressed, while neglecting whatever appears secondary to the artist (in our case face, arms, legs), is an artistic principle of the new and especially typical peculiarity of modern expressionism” (Absolon 1949: 219). Absolon selects for comparison three works by Alexander Archipenko – his “Female Figure”, “Gondolier” and “Heros” – noting a “striking resemblance between the execution of the face-less, spherical head of the “Female Figure” and Věstonice Venus I (Absolon 1949: 220).

17. Is the material treated as a homogenous group, or is the focus on diversity? Is this orientation related to, or dictated by, the author’s hypothesis? Is homogeneity deduced from the material after analysis, or assumed as a pre-condition?

The Dolní Věstonice statuettes are clearly diverse, and accepted as such by Absolon is describing them as naturalistic, “hyperstylized” and so on, yet their designation as Venuses again homogenises them all, and facilitates an interpretation as female.

In comparing the wider group of figures, Absolon states that he is merely interested in discussing some similarities (Absolon 1949: 214). The analysis does not explore features that are not shared. Homogeneity is clearly prioritised over variability, although division into groups indicates that numerous variable forms exist. The stylistic groups themselves each contain a small number of statuettes, thereby increasing the impression of homogeneity within each group.

18. Is supporting evidence for a theory provided from the figures and their archaeological context, or from the application of external theory?

Absolon gives no basis for his belief in the sexual and erotic motives for the creation of the figures and advances no specific interpretation of the figurines other than their sexualised nature. Again, this is drawn purely from the author's response to the appearance of the figures, being largely based on the identification and interpretation of features, as in such instances where Venus XIII and XIV are interpreted as legs and breasts respectively. Interpretation also tends to dictate the identification of features and even the artist's intent, as seen in the discussion of Venus V and Venus XIV, where Absolon states that "the artist has neglected all that did not interest him, stressing his sexual libido only where the breasts are concerned" (Absolon 1949: 208).

19. How are references and sources utilised? To what extent is there dependence on previous authors?

Passemard (1938) is described as the "height" of scientific literature (Absolon 1949: 202). Reinach and Piette are mentioned as publishing the Grimaldi figures (Absolon 1949: 201), perhaps as a means of circumventing their lack of context. Paulckes art historical view of Palaeolithic art is cited for its specific comparison of Palaeolithic and modern art (Absolon 1949: 219).

20. How does this work contribute to the development, construction and consolidation of the group?

The Venus term is used most strongly in this work. The figurines are strongly characterised as Venuses, particularly the new discoveries of Dolní Věstonice. The major focus is the introduction of the Dolní Věstonice figurines into the existing Venus group. The description of each of the Dolní Věstonice figures as a female figure, and as a Venus, strongly confirms the images as part of the group, and the group is strongly characterised as female, with the only extant male statuette noted not described. However, the work does place the Venus statuettes as part of a wider group of female images, linking the statuettes with the "buttocks silhouettes", stressing the occurrence of the feature as a persistent type and its repeated interpretation as representing the female form. However, there is no real explanation of why one figure may be called a Venus and

another not, although it is clear that there are several different representations of the female form. The strongest hint may be that it is the statuettes only that are Venuses, and this is given in the listing of the sites where Palaeolithic figures occur (Absolon 1949: 214).

The interpretations also sexualise the images, particularly those of Dolní Věstonice. It appears from Absolon's terminology that breasts and "bent legs" are interpreted as erotic, and that the nudity of the figures is seen as sexual, particularly in its emphasis of the organs of reproduction.

There are several comparisons between the figures and African peoples, and the work particularly echoes Piette's racial terminology in the comparison of Venus V to the Hottentot organs, and also compares Venus I with the "Hottentot woman" (Absolon 1949: 206).

Eisenbud, J. 1964

“A recently found carving as a breast symbol.”

American Anthropologist 66 pp. 141-147.

1. What is the context of this approach to the material?

The paper describes a stone effigy, described as resembling “a frog or a toad” which was recovered from the Browne Site in Ventura County, California (Eisenbud 1964: 141). Eisenbud proposes that the “function of this effigy was as a charm to be held in the hand in connection with magical or religious ceremonies designed to insure abundance of food supplies” (Eisenbud 1964: 142).

The specific mechanism by which this works is that such a magic practice has a “psychophysiological prototype” in the “suckling period of infancy” – the purpose of handcharm practices (e.g.. touchstones, rubbing and “security” stones) might originally have been “to unite in one mystic act a regressive reference to that secure period of infancy where, during suckling, the hand reflexly grasps and fondles the breast with what might be termed a *progressive* wish that the same hand might now secure just as bountiful and as gratifying sustenance by its skill in husbandry, hunting and fishing” (Eisenbud 1964: 142).

Eisenbud suggests that particular features in “art forms of a symbolic nature” may represent a “condensation of two or more confluent ideas”, further suggesting that the Browne Site carving doubles “as a breast on a symbolic level”, but also that one of its features - a pair of bulging eyes – “may have been intended to incorporate this meaning as a symbolic condensation. Similar small hemispherical protruberances were used to represent breasts (and, in a somewhat obscure stylised linkage, knees) in Etruscan and Roman votive figures, hermaphrodite and other...” (Eisenbud 1964: 145).

2. What is the role of the material in the hypothesis? How is it used by the author and what is the hypothesis is applied to it?

The figures are introduced as similar examples of this “symbolic condensation”. This “symbolic condensation”, Eisenbud believes to be well shown in a figure

like that of the “so-called Venus of Lespugue, which I suspect also to have been a magical hand piece” (Eisenbud 1964: 145). It is stated that this condensation “gives a “breasts-within-breasts” effect” (Eisenbud 1964: 146), one also seen in “other Venuses” at Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice, which “happen to fit the hand perfectly” (Eisenbud 1964: 146).

The figures are therefore used as comparative material, identified as magical hand pieces or “rubbing stones”, symbolically and functionally related to the Browne Site effigy “which have the breast as at least one root in common” (Eisenbud 1964: 146).

3. What terminology is used to introduce and subsequently define the material, and to what effect?

Each figure is referred to as a Venus, beginning with the introduction of “the so-called Venus of Lespugue” (Eisenbud 1964: 145), and continuing with reference to “other Venuses, notably those of Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice” (Eisenbud 1964: 146). The term is also used for each figure in their respective illustrations (Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). The reference to other Venuses indicates figurines of a ‘type’ of some sort, and the insertion of the epithet “so-called” indicates that a group of material is recognised as such. It also indicates that the author is perhaps borrowing the term from previous works, and merely applying the accepted terminology in order to identify clearly the material. There is also brief and unelaborated reference to “upper Palaeolithic figures” (Eisenbud 1964: 146).

4. How is the category of material defined? To what does the label refer?

The reference to “other Venuses” and the designation of each figure as a Venus indicates a related group of material, and their similar character is highlighted by their interpretation as hand pieces. However, the “Venuses” themselves are cited as supporting evidence, rather than being the focus of enquiry, and the category that emerges in the paper is a cross-cultural collection of examples selected for their possible shared purpose and function, including the Palaeolithic examples alongside later examples, including a Neolithic Czech figure, and a figure form

the Turner-Look site in East Central Utah, dated to around 1150 AD (Eisenbud 1964: 146).

5. Is a general characterisation of the material provided? How is the material characterised?

The characterisation has its roots in the suggested interpretation as a psychological substitute for the breast, and the figures are characterised as fitting the hand perfectly (Eisenbud 1964: 146).

Eisenbud states regarding Lespugue that, "In this clearly abstract carving everything suggests "breastiness", the buttocks doing double duty in this respect (as they often do in normal and abnormal human symbolic representations) while the nipple-like head and abstractly fused leg stumps could conceivably have been used for magical purposes based upon the early prototypal role of the nipple" (Eisenbud 1964: 145-6). It is then suggested that this is a "breasts-within-breasts" effect also applicable to the "other Venuses, notably those" of Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice (Eisenbud 1964: 146). This is further elaborated with reference to the hair of the Willendorf figure, which is suggested to resemble "a mammary areola" (Eisenbud 1964: 146).

In short, characterisation of the figures may be summed up in Eisenbud's term "breastiness" (Eisenbud 1964: 145).

6. Does the author accept or adopt groups as previously established, or are new groups created?

Reference to "the so-called Venus of Lespugue" and the "other Venuses" indicates general acceptance of the group as established elsewhere. The figures are simply utilised as suitable examples for the hypothesis without further examination.

7. How is the credibility of the material established?

This is not approached, although the provision of dates for Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice give the superficial impression of 'reliable' archaeological material.

8. *Are details of archaeological context or dating discussed?*

There is no discussion of dating, although two dates are provided, citing Movius as the reference – Willendorf is dated to “ca 30,000 B.C.” and Dolní Věstonice to “ca 23,500 B.C.” (Eisenbud 1964: 146). Context is not discussed.

9. *What is the total number of examples given for the material? How many are actually referred to or used as a database?*

No total is given for the figures.

Three examples are cited – Lespugue, Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice, although the mention of “other Venuses”, of which Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice are “notable” indicates that additional figures exist (Eisenbud 1964: 146).

10. *Are specific examples and individual figures discussed?*

Three examples are mentioned – Willendorf, Lespugue, and Dolní Věstonice – with brief comment on each.

11. *Does the piece discuss a range of examples, or are generalisations made from a limited number of examples or prototypes?*

The three examples utilised are true prototypes. While their characteristics are not specifically generalised to a wider body of material – the “other Venuses” – it can be seen that the three are the ‘notable’ representations of the group. However, it should be noted that Eisenbud is not attempting to interpret all Venuses as magical hand pieces (although this is the unspoken implication), but rather to select and identify the most suitable examples to support the interpretation of the Browne Site figure.

12. *In what depth are the figurines discussed?*

Only brief description accompanies mention of each figure, and this is focused on drawing attention to the relevant features of “breastiness” and fit to the hand. A date is provided for Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice, although not for Lespugue. A further comment is added regarding the “slit-like mouth” of the Dolní Věstonice figure (Eisenbud 1964: 146).

13. Do the individual descriptions concur with the generalised characterisation?

The individual features discussed focus on breasts, so in this respect both Lespugue and Willendorf concur, particularly with references to their “nipple-like” heads (Eisenbud 1964: 145, 146). No specific mention is made of the breasts of the Dolní Věstonice figure, although it is suggested that the “slit-like mouth” is also related to psychodynamic processes (Eisenbud 1964: 146).

14. What figures are selected for illustration, and what is the effect of the illustrations?

Each of the three figures is illustrated.

Fig. 5. Lespugue (3 views, with height given)

Fig. 6. Willendorf three-quarters view

Fig. 7. Willendorf held in hand

Fig. 8. Dolní Věstonice three-quarters view

Fig. 9. Dolní Věstonice held in hand, with the head viewed as a nipple being rubbed

Fig. 10. Willendorf seen from above

The illustrations demonstrate the use of the figures as “hand pieces”, showing Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice being held, and also drawing attentions to their “nipple-like” qualities. Interestingly, the illustrations accentuate the small size of the figures by showing them *with* a hand i.e. in an active context of interaction rather than one of isolation. This feature is not often apparent in other works.

15. Are there indications of any criteria in the selection of figures for discussion or illustration?

Yes. The three examples are chosen specifically for their qualities of “breastiness” and their fit to the hand, as these specifications match the hypothesis.

16. What comparisons are made between examples? Are these connections, stylistic, contextual, etc? What is the purpose of the comparison?

The major comparison is the identification of “breastiness” for the figures, and this being their chief feature. It is this that links the full range of examples, including those from beyond the Palaeolithic, together. Other ‘breasty’ examples are the Neolithic Czech figure, and the “nipple with areola” from Turner-Look site (Eisenbud 1964: 146, Figs. 4, 11, 12).

Eisenbud writes of the Dolní Věstonice figure; “...the curious slit-like mouth of the latter. (This feature resembles that of the Browne Site carving, as well as other Neolithic and Upper Palaeolithic figures, and suggests certain psychodynamic conjectures which need not be touched upon here)” (Eisenbud 1964: 146). As Eisenbud indicates, this feature is not discussed more explicitly.

17. Is the material treated as a homogenous group, or is the focus on diversity? Is this orientation related to, or dictated by, the author’s hypothesis? Is homogeneity deduced from the material after analysis, or assumed as a pre-condition?

The figures are all presented as similarly ‘breasty’ – it is for this reason that they have been selected for inclusion. The similar general features, the “breastiness” and likening of the heads to nipples, is directly related to the hypothesis. However, it is not suggested that all the Venus figurines are identical, although the reference to “other Venuses” indicates a general group similarity in features related to purpose and function at least (Eisenbud 1964: 146).

18. Is supporting evidence for a theory provided from the figures and their archaeological context, or from the application of external theory?

This is a universalising interpretation, drawing together disparate images and linked them to a theme ultimately rooted in Freudian theory.

The figures are related to the theory based on Eisenbud’s assessment of their features. However, more than this, they are linked because of Eisenbud’s emphasis of their ‘breasty’ aspects, and the reading of this as their principal reason for being. It cannot be disputed that the figures are hand-sized, although this in itself does not link them more specifically to either function as magical hand pieces or breast substitutes.

The illustrations of Dolní Věstonice, with finger on the head, and Willendorf as an areola are subjective. One could suggest that the “areola” of Willendorf is missing a central nipple. The resemblance of the Dolní Věstonice and Lespugue heads to nipples is a superficial resemblance at best, and perhaps no more than wishful thinking. The suggestion that the bulging eyes of the Browne Site figure are also intended to suggest breasts perhaps indicates precisely how subjective it is (Eisenbud 1964: 145). This is used to suggest a link between the frog image and the nursing situation, and the other figures are then cited as examples of the “symbolic condensation” embodied in the frog itself (Eisenbud 1964: 145).

Eisenbud does not offer any evidence to document the claimed link between magical hand pieces and nipple substitution (nor to support the importance of the breast and nipple itself in the early stages – or is this just taken for granted in a mother goddess suckling kind of way?) Eisenbud writes that, “It must be remembered that the role of the hand in the nursing act is not a casual or an accidental one but is insured neurologically by a set of powerful inborn connections uniting grasping and sucking into a complex reflex pattern. This tie up is, of course, perfectly apparent to any nursing mother or observer and is well portrayed in countless Madonna and Child pictures of the Medieval and Renaissance painters” (Eisenbud 1964: 142). Citing herself as evidence, Eisenbud adds that, “It plays a considerable role in normal and abnormal human functioning throughout life (Eisenbud 1960) (Eisenbud 1964: 142, 145).

19. How are references and sources utilised? To what extent is there dependence on previous authors?

Movius is cited for dates for Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice (Eisenbud 1964: 146).

20. How does this work contribute to the construction and consolidation of the group?

Three popular and well-known images are here selected from the group and used to illustrate a specific hypothesis. The choice of Willendorf, Lespugue and Dolní Věstonice is another example of their role as strong prototype figures. The

figures themselves are virtually removed from any archaeological context, and the emphasis is completely on their anatomical features, particularly, their depiction of the breasts. As such, they are strongly characterised in terms of “breastiness”, and this further establishes and reinforces the stereotypical image of the figures as voluminous and over-exaggerated. In addition, they are characterised so strongly as “breast symbols” that even other anatomical features depicted are interpreted in these terms. The interpretation again ties the figures to fertility, albeit in a slightly less orthodox way than usual. However, one point does emerge, the emphasis on the ‘handling’ of the figures is rarely elaborated, and the illustrations serve to indicate the actual size of the figures, in one way contextualising them by showing them *with* a hand.

M. Mussi, J. Sinq-Mars, P. Bolduc. 2000

“Echoes from the mammoth steppe: the case of the Balzi Rossi.”

in W. Roebroeks, M. Mussi, J. Svoboda

and K. Fennema (eds)

Hunters of the Golden Age:

The Mid Upper Palaeolithic of Eurasia 30,000-20,000 BP.

pp. 105-123.

Leiden: Faculty of Archaeology, University of Leiden

1. Overview of text: What is the context of this approach to the material?

The paper appears in a volume based on a collection of papers resulting from a workshop looking at the variability within periods of the Palaeolithic. The aim of the volume is to look at cultural developments as not being simply triggered by climatic stress, but as historical processes, an aim enabled because “for the first time we have a rather fine chronological resolution” (Mussi, Roebroeks and Svoboda 2000: 2).

The paper itself presents the preliminary analysis of a fuller report (in press), and is specifically concerned with the figurines of the Balzi Rossi [Grimaldi] caves. It provides analysis of the 15 figurines from this site, drawing comparisons with statuettes discovered across Europe and Siberia, and providing a specific interpretation of the figurines in both a local and wider context.

2. What is the role of the material in the hypothesis? How is it used by the author and what hypothesis is applied to it?

The paper proceeds in stages:

1. Background of the Grimaldi caves and finds.
2. Analysis of the figures, presented only in summary (Mussi *et al* 2000: 106-7). They state that more than 50 entries were made for each figure, ranging from raw material, technical aspects of carving, typology of every part of the body, state of preservation, and evidence suggestive of use ((Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). They also stress the need for detailed and accurate anatomical descriptions (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). The paper presents some aspects of analysis that have

emerged thus far to give a better understanding of the Grimaldi specimens, and an understanding of their place in the wider Eurasian context (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109). This is a new focus on including the “complete” set of Grimaldi figures, and consideration of how the inclusion of the rediscovered figures changes the appearance and perceptions of the group.

On the basis of definite and postulated identifications of perforations in nine cases, and distal fractures (which are linked with the placement of perforations at the distal end) they suggest that there are only two exceptions to the feature of perforation at the distal end – *la polichinelle* and *la tête négroïde*. (For the purposes of this analysis only, from this point, I will employ the names given to the figurines by Mussi *et al*, as these differ from those given in other works). This, taken in consideration with their small size, leads the authors to suggest that the figures are pendants intended to be pinned, suspended or otherwise fixed (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109). That they were perhaps worn or displayed is suggested by analysis and identification of polish as signs of use wear (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109).

They see the Grimaldi material as being characterised by a number of double representations, whether through representation of two joined bodies, figures marked on the opposite faces of the same specimen, or “playing-card” type representations on the same face of the statuette (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). The authors see the double figures as indicating a complex set of beliefs pertaining to duality and multiple levels of reality, and that the double figures, especially, suggest that, rather than different beings being represented, it was “manifestations of single entities, undergoing or having achieved a process of transformation”, which they term “morphing” or “palaeo-morphing” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). On this basis, the set of beliefs is suggested to include the possibility of changing from the state “fully human”, to the next “non-human”, and that “women, or perhaps more precisely womanhood was somehow perceived by the MUP populations as endowed with the ability or the power to shift from one level of reality to another, perhaps as intermediaries between different worlds” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112).

The analysis is also said to produce “evidence of similarities” with other specimens across Europe, specifically “close technological and typological similarities” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 105). Similarities are discussed amongst both figures (“Kostenki-Lespugue” and “Western” types) and “masks” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112-3), and in the use and working of ivory (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113-117). This section of the analysis leads the authors to suggest that various elements of the imagery were shared (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117), and that relationships existed across Eurasia to Siberia (Mussi *et al* 2000: 118).

3. What terminology is used to introduce and subsequently define the material, and to what effect?

The figures are introduced as the “Balzi Rossi figurines” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 105, 108, 109), and also the “Balzi Rossi collection” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109, 110). They are also referred to as “statuettes”, specimens (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108, 109), figurines (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109), objects (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110) and “female figurines” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112). “Figurines” is the term most frequently employed.

The term MUP (Mid Upper Palaeolithic) is introduced (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108) and there is reference to “MUP female figurines” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112), “MUP figurines”, and “MUP female imagery” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 120).

The term Venus is not commonly used. It is mentioned in connection with Mauern, where it says “and at Mauern where the “Venus” can be seen as both a feminine and masculine representation” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). There is reference to the “yellow Venus” of Grimaldi (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112, 113), the “Savignano Venus” and “Trasimeno Venus” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113), although also to the “Tursac statuette” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113). The term is also used in connection with the Balzi Rossi [Grimaldi] site, which is said to contain “figurines commonly known as “Venuses” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108).

Discussing figures found elsewhere in Europe (the MUP European figurines), they name a “Kostenki-Lespugue” type (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112), relating to a “homogenous” and specific type of representation “found all over Europe” from

the westernmost example at Lespugue, including Willendorf, many Russian examples and the “yellow Venus” from Grimaldi (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112-3).

A “Western type” is also designated, including Savignano, Trasimeno and Mauern (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113).

Certain other figures are referred to by a specific name. There is mention of “the Dame of Brassempouy” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 118), and several of the Russian figures are cited by their specific number – Kostenki 83-1 and Avdeevov 77-1.

The Grimaldi figures are referred to by individual names:

The Doublet (or The Beauty and the Beast) (also known as the Two-Headed Figure)

The Bicephalous (also known as the Double Figurine)

The Janus

The Hermaphrodite (*l'hermaphrodite*)

The Nun (the Flattened Figurine)

The Goitered Lady (*la femme au goitre*)

The Ochred Lady (the Red Ochre Figurine)

The Abrachial (The Brown Ivory Figurine)

The Lozenge (*le losange*)

The Punchinello (*la polichinelle*)

The Yellow Venus (*statuette en stéatite jaune*)

The Innominate (*statuette non décrite*)

The Bust

The Negroid Head (*la tête négroïde*)

The Mask

(Mussi *et al* 2000: 106-107).

The term Venus is utilised only for occasional statuettes, particularly those of the western type. Therefore, the term Venus is not used as a generic term for the entire range of statuettes as much as in recognition of its previous use for this purpose, as acknowledged in the reference to the Grimaldi figurines being “commonly known as Venuses” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108).

4. How is the “category” of material defined? To what does the label refer?

The Grimaldi material is introduced as 15 figurines, “the largest collection of this type from western Europe” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 105). The Grimaldi figures are frequently referred to as a clear group; “the Balzi Rossi collection” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109), which accounts for more than one third of western Europe MUP female images, or almost half of the MUP figurines.

Regarding western Europe, the authors cite Delporte – “According to Delporte’s inventory (1993) this region has so far yielded 14 localities containing such sculptures” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). This is another indication that the Grimaldi figures are viewed as part of a wider body of similar material.

The chief category is, therefore, MUP female figurines, and within this category two sub-types are defined – the Kostenki-Lespugue type, and the Western type.

There is a slight distinction within the MUP figures, between MUP female imagery (total 42), which contains bas-reliefs, and MUP figurines (total 34) (Mussi *et al* 2000: Fig. 3). The figurines are therefore a category defined as female, forming part of a wider group of “female imagery”. The chronological tag MUP – Mid Upper Palaeolithic – to which the figures are tied, is not further specified.

There is clear definition of certain sub-types in the designation of Kostenki-Lespugue and Western types, and “masks” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112-3).

5. Is a general characterization of the material provided? How is the material characterized?

Illustration of the Grimaldi figures, accompanied by a brief description of each, is placed immediately on the 2nd and 3rd pages of the paper (Mussi *et al* 2000: 106-7).

Early emphasis is on the different nature of the Grimaldi figures, as Mussi draws attention to the double figures and new figures to demonstrate that; “...the reunited collection demonstrates very clearly that the “classic” (i.e. Saint-

Germain-en-Laye) Grimaldi contingent of figurines, which played a major role in the construction and formulation of stereotyped models of female palaeolithic imagery, was a highly skewed and non-representation sample” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108).

No introductory summary characterisation of the Grimaldi figures is provided. They are discussed with reference to their function as pendants, and their possible representation of “palaeo-morphing” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109). Therefore, any characterisation is in terms of features i.e. perforations, related to function, and double figures, related to interpretation. The emphasis therefore is on diversity rather than conformity.

The double figurines, or features appearing on two faces, is identified as strongly characteristic of the Grimaldi figurines, and evidence is also adduced in the differing head shapes of the figures. Of the 15 –

2 are double

4 have features on both sides

1 is a double figure in the distal/ proximal relationship

The 15 figures are thus seen as representing 22 beings (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110).

Strong definitions are given of the Kostenki-Lespugue and Western types. The Kostenki-Lespugue type is described as:

“In our definition, the Kostenki-Lespugue figurines are in an upright position, with a bent head, and the maximum width in the trochanteric region. The profile of the cranial part of the head is rounded, starting with the bent nape of the neck. The rounded shape ends in the anterior part of the head with a straight surface which connects the head to a short or even notch-like neck. The upper thorax is flat, with minute shoulders. The lower thorax bulges with voluminous, pendulous breasts, directly resting on a rounded belly which, in turn, protrudes over a realistic pubic triangle. In posterior view, the back is straight. It ends with a V-shaped waist, on top of flattish buttocks exhibiting marked lateral expansion. Furthermore, each of the two buttocks is recognisable as such, and the anus or coccyx is marked. Both right and left lower limbs are fully and clearly delineated, in frontal as well as dorsal views.

Minor variations associated with this general pattern include the realistic representation of a cap or of other details of garments, ornaments or hair, and the presence of tiny upper limbs and knees. Such objects were made from both ivory and stone.” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112).

The Western type are described as:

“Made of coloured soft stones, they are characterised by a high level of abstraction, as well as by a plastic sense of volume. The final shape derives from a clever exploitation of the original shape of the support cobble or pebble. In these cases, symmetry seems to have been valued more than the realistic rendering of anatomy. In most instances, the rendition of the upper and/ or lower part of the body corresponds to a conical element.” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113)

Masks are described as:

Masks are flat, small-sized, sub-circular representations of the face of non-human beings, either in stone, or in ivory. Drilled or partially drilled eyes are a prominent feature. The Grimaldi mask also exhibits a widely open, circular mouth, similar to the one found on the Předmostí fragment. The specimen from the former site, on the other hand, closely resembles the proximal, circular flat ends of the so-called “spatulas” from Kostenki and Avdevo, notably in the cat-like eyes which have been enlarged by deep transversal incisions. A pattern or series of short radial incisions located around the face – akin to a fur trim – can also be seen on many specimens.” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113)

6. Does the author accept or adopt groups as previously established, or are new groups created?

Mussi *et al*'s grouping is the most inclusive for some time, as it includes the full range of Grimaldi figures, the Kostenki-Lespugue and Western types, and also includes the Mal'ta figures that are often excluded from the discussion of Upper Palaeolithic female figures or Venus figurines on the grounds of stylistic difference and chronology (Mussi *et al* 2000: 118-9). However, the Siberian statuettes, which are used strong comparisons with the Grimaldi material (see especially Mussi *et al* 2000: Fig. 17a and b), are used a little disingenuously, as

they are introduced late in the discussion, without fanfare. Indeed, there is no indication of their relationship to the other figures, and Siberia is not mentioned in relation to either of the two MUP groupings previously stated. This harks back to formations of the group by such as Graziosi (1960), who also compared features of the Siberian figures with Western examples (specifically Brassempouy).

As the authors note, the Kostenki-Lespugue type re-unites the types and sub-types identified by Gvozdover (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112). The identification of the two types superficially echoes Gamble's division of the material in Groups A ("Classic") and B (the different treatment of the basic theme) (1982). However, the Savignano figure appears in the Western group in the recent work (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113). Ultimately, these remain stylistic sub-divisions within the all-encompassing MUP group.

"Masks" are introduced to the discussion of figurines, and a group is defined here including examples from Grimaldi, Předmostí, Kostenki and Avdeevo (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113 and Fig. 13).

7. How is the credibility of the material established?

This issue is simply not called into question. The abstract states that half of the Grimaldi figures have been "long on display in archaeological museums" (Mussi *et al* 2000: 105), stressing the long period of their acceptance. The interpretive importance and implications of the new figures – "this rather unique collection" – are stressed (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). Emphasis of Grimaldi as a "collection" – the "unique collection" (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108), the "reunited collection" (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108) – employs a term with art-historical connotations, one that implies a recognised, catalogued and coherent body of material. It conjures images associated with other "collections", be they of great paintings, or finds from a site. The term lends credibility to the material to which it is applied.

It is stated that the Grimaldi finds were discovered by "a French amateur, Louis Alexandre Jullien between 1883 and 1895", although it is noted that this was "in

the course of scientifically uncontrolled excavations” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). The details are presented as accepted and unquestioned fact: “Two or more were first found in the Barma Grande, and the other ones were later discovered in the Grotte du Prince. Part of the collection was sold by Jullien before the end of the century, and seven statuettes eventually ended up at the Musée des Antiquités Nationales of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, near Paris (France).” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108).

While it is acknowledged that Jullien retained eight figures “for reasons we shall never fully understand” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108), one of which was sold to the Peabody Museum in 1944, and the others later resurfacing in Montreal, the most pointed question with this group of figures is once again unasked – not whether the figurines are from a particular cave at Grimaldi, but whether they were ever genuine in the first place.

8. Are details of archaeological context or dating discussed?

Details are not really discussed. The abstract does note that the archaeological record is “characterised more by gaps than solid evidence” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 105, yet do not expand this statement with reference to the figures themselves. As the paper closes, it is noted that “temporal gradients” are yet to be grouped due to the standards of modern research being only slowly achieved “at the expense of many important western sites like Balzi Rossi” [Grimaldi] (Mussi *et al* 2000: 119-120). No dates are given for any of the statuettes. There is no attempt to place the figures in a more specific cultural or chronological frame of reference, other than in the reference to ivory working during OIS 2 being an indication of long-distance links due to an absence of mammoths in Italy at this time (Mussi *et al* 2000: 114). Definitions of the Kostenki-Lespugue and Western types focus on style and geography, without mention of chronological or contextual details (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112-3).

Statements are made confidently: “we shall describe here remains from Barma Grande and Grotte du Prince” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108), where it also states that the figures were discovered by Jullien, in a scientifically uncontrolled

excavation, with two being recovered first from the Barma Grande and the others from the Grotte du Prince (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108).

There is incidental reference to the “pristine condition” of the Grimaldi statuettes, and the conclusion that “they were originally deposited in contexts that were conducive to their preservation” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109), but these contexts are not elaborated.

9. What is the total number of examples given for the material? How many are actually referred to or used as a database?

The paper presents the 15 figures from the Balzi Rossi [Grimaldi] caves (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). Reference to “Delporte’s inventory” states that 14 localities in western Europe have “such sculptures” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). From these sites, totals are given as 42 for MUP female imagery (including bas-reliefs), and 34 for MUP figurines (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108).

No totals are given for the Kostenki-Lespugue types, although attention is paid to their geographical spread. It is stated that they are “found all over Europe” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112), with Lespugue being the westernmost example, with “multiple” examples across the Russian Plains, with Grimaldi being the southernmost site of this “vast” geographic distribution (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112-3). No total is given for the western group (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113). It is stated that masks are rarer, although again no total is given (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113).

The 15 Grimaldi figures are described briefly in the text, accompanied by illustrations – “a synoptic presentation” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 106-7 and Fig. 2). Each figure appears later in discussion in the main text.

A number of figures are mentioned when comparing specific features similar to those of the Grimaldi figures. Unspecified examples at Mal’ta, Kostenki, and Avdeevo are said to be perforated, as is the Sireuil figure (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109).

Double figures are also said to occur at Laussel, Lespugue, Savignano, Gagarino and Mauern (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110).

Examples of “palaeo-morphing” are cited at Pech-Merle (the “bison-women”) and in (unspecified) “polyiconic” representations at Avdeevo (Mussi *et al* 2000: 111).

Examples of the Kostenki-Lespugue type are not specified beyond their stated occurrence at Lespugue, Willendorf, the “yellow Venus” of Grimaldi and “multiple” examples at Kostenki, Avdeevo, Gagarino and Khotylevo (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112-113).

Masks are said to be found at Předmostí, Kostenki and Avdeevo (“spatulas”), although their numbers are not specified (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113).

Stated examples of the Western type occur at Savignano, Trasimeno, Tursac and Mauern, each of which contains only a single figure, referred to by the name “Venus” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113).

There is further discussion of Kostenki-Lespugue type heads at Kostenki (unspecified examples), Willendorf and Lespugue (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117). A patterned hairdo is mentioned for the “dame of Brassempouy”, and there is part-specified mention of “some figurines from Kostenki” (83-1 specified) and Avdeevo (77-1 specified) (Mussi *et al* 2000: 118). “One of the statuettes” from Mal’ta is not specified in the text, but by reference to Abromova’s illustration (No. 4), and in Mussi *et al*’s Fig. 17 (Mussi *et al* 2000: 118). Elsewhere there is reference to several unspecified specimens from Mal’ta (Mussi *et al* 2000: 119). The “several” Mal’ta statuettes that display a “V” shape are not specified in the text, but in Fig. 17b (Mussi *et al* 2000: 119).

10. Are specific examples and individual figures discussed?

The discussion focuses on the 15 Grimaldi figures, all of which are discussed with reference to specific features, in addition to the summary description provided of each.

A number of other examples are noted in the text. Sometimes, this is by a specific name e.g. the Mauern “Venus”, at others it occurs using an unspecified example or examples from a named site. Certain examples are referred to in connection with features e.g. the depicted “cap” of the Willendorf example (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117).

11. Does the piece discuss a range of examples, or are generalisations made from a limited number of examples or prototypes?

All 15 figures from Grimaldi are discussed, so in that instance it can be said that a full range is presented. However, some generalisation of characteristics occurs. From the “Doublet” and the “Bicephalous”, Mussi generalises that “womanhood” was perceived in certain ways by “the MUP populations” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112).

However, regarding the Kostenki-Lespugue type and Western type, only a few figures are mentioned, and the respective sizes in each group are not given. For the former, Lespugue, Willendorf, and “multiple” but unspecified examples are noted at Kostenki I, Avdeevo, Gagarino and Khotylevo, alongside the “yellow Venus” of Grimaldi (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112-3). For the western figures, it is stated that there is no example of the western style at Grimaldi, although “the punchinello” is compared to Savignano, which is stated to be “one of the finest examples of the western group” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113). Also noted are Trasimeno, Tursac and Mauern.

12. In what depth are the figurines discussed?

A summary description is given for the 15 Grimaldi statuettes, noting size, material, colour, weight, preservation, general description and current location (Mussi *et al* 2000: 106-7). Each is discussed in more detail with reference to particular features.

Many of the other statuettes noted are not described in full, and only those features relevant to a comparison with the Grimaldi statuettes are noted,

described or discussed. Choice and discussion is strictly limited to those with relevant features for comparison.

13. Do the individual descriptions concur with the generalised characterisation given?

A general characterisation of the Grimaldi statuettes is not given, indeed, the claim is made that the novel features and character of the new figures indicates that the “classic” figures are non-representative. In this sense, the ‘new’ figures cannot be expected to conform to any generalised description of the other Grimaldi figures.

Only one Grimaldi figure is specifically included in the Kostenki-Lespugue type – the “yellow Venus”.

For the types themselves, only a few examples are mentioned. At a general level the examples cited could be said to concur with the general characterisations, although this is difficult to assess as individual descriptions are not given.

14. What figures are selected for illustration, and what is the effect of the illustrations?

The choice of illustrations continues the discussion of the use of a range of examples versus prototypes, as in Figs. 12 and 15, only one figure is chosen in the cases of Kostenki, Gagarino and Khotylevo, presumably the most suitable, from the wide range at each site, to demonstrate the point to be made.

Fig. 1. Map of the Grimaldi caves.

Fig. 2. One drawing of each of the 15 Grimaldi figures, accompanied by a brief description.

Fig. 3. Charts of MUP imagery

Figs. 5-8. Analysis of the features occurring on the Grimaldi figures.

Fig. 9. The Doublet – 5 views (including 2 of the “inside face” of the figure)/ the Bicephalous – 3 views.

Fig. 10. Examples of “palaeo-morphing” – the Negroid head, the Lozenge, the punchinello, the yellow Venus, the Nun, the Doublet, the Bicephalous, the Innominate.

Fig. 11. “Palaeo-morphing” on selected anthropomorphic figures from Kostenki.

Fig. 12. Kostenki-Lespugue examples –Lespugue, yellow Venus, one each shown from Willendorf, Kostenki, Gagarino (No. 3!), Khotylevo and Avdeevo. Map of site locations is also shown.

Fig. 13. “Masks” Grimaldi mask, Předmostí (2 examples), Kostenki, Avdeevo (2 examples, 3 views each). Map showing location of sites.

Fig. 14. Western type. Punchinello, Tursac, Savignano, Trasimeno and Mauern. Map showing location of sites.

Fig. 15. Kostenki-Lespugue figures “with emphasis on heads and faces”. This is a slightly different choice to that of Fig. 12, featuring Lespugue, the yellow Venus, Willendorf, and one each from Kostenki, Gagarino (No. 1), and Avdeevo.

Fig. 16. The rendering of buttocks illustrated by “a few examples”; the Abrachial, Kostenki (unspecified), Avdeevo (unspecified) and Mauern.

Fig. 17a. Location map comparing Grimaldi with Mal’ta. Hair/ bonnets – the Bust, Mal’ta 2 figures (2 views each) (unspecified).

Fig. 17b. The Lozenge, Mal’ta (1 view of each).

Obviously, examples are selected specifically to display particular characteristics, and to match characteristics with those of Grimaldi. This includes the typological ordering of types in certain figures to accentuate similarity. Particularly, “types” are arranged in profile view, and at similar size, thereby increasing the impression of homogeneity. Additionally, only certain sites are selected to illustrate a “type” – no Brassempouy figures appear.

15. Are there indications of any criteria in the selection of figures for discussion or illustration?

The Grimaldi figures are chosen as the focus of the work as the inclusion of the rediscovered figures makes them the largest western European collection (Mussi *et al* 2000: 105, 108), and also because when consideration of the “new” figures is taken into account “it becomes evident that the actual contribution of the Grimaldi series to the overall Western European sample is far more important than previously known”, not only in terms of size, but in the variation from the

“classic” examples, which are now viewed as a non-representative sample (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). Further importance is that the classic figures “played a major role in the construction and formulation of stereotyped models of female Palaeolithic imagery” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). Emphasis is therefore directed to the introduction of this “new” material, and to the implications and opportunities raised by its inclusion.

As the previous section illustrates, the majority of examples referred to in the text are used as comparative material, to demonstrate the presence of features similar to those identified in the Grimaldi specimens. They are obviously *selected* for this purpose, as it is apparent that to use a figure without such similar features would prove no point whatsoever.

16. What comparisons are made between examples? Are these connections, stylistic, contextual, etc? What is the purpose of the comparison?

Finding links through comparisons is one of the main aims of the paper, and therefore, stylistic identification and comparison remains the chief methodology employed. Features are isolated on the Grimaldi figures, and then similar instances identified elsewhere. Indeed, their claim is that “A systematic analysis of the 15 specimens allows us to make comparisons on a much wider scale than before...” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 105). They later state; “Our analysis of the Grimaldi collection has also provided us with evidence of similarities with specimens discovered in other, distant parts of the Palaeolithic world. In order to understand if we are dealing with casual or accidental trait convergence, or with actual evidence of cultural relationships across vast distances, some examples will be discussed in detail” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112).

The first set of comparisons between the Grimaldi figurines and other figures is based on the identification of perforations on the former figures (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109). “Drilled or otherwise perforated figurines are well known in Eurasia” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109). The “best examples” occur at Mal’ta, where holes or slots appear at the distal end. At Kostenki and Avdeevo there are “at least a few” that “exhibit elongated holes or slots between the legs”, “which could possibly have had a functional purpose” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109), although

this seems a less certain identification. The final comparison is an example from Sireuil in Western Europe, where “a hole between the conjoining feet has also been detected” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109).

The second comparison occurs in the identification of the Grimaldi figurines as characterised by the presence of double figures, particularly the Doublet and Bicephalous (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). The authors state that; “Such double figures are not peculiar to the Grimaldi, and have long been recognised elsewhere in Europe. For example, they have been found at Laussel, Lespugue, Savignano, Gagarino... and at Mauern where the “Venus” can be seen as both a feminine and a masculine representation...” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). References are cited here to support these identifications. The figures themselves are not described, discussed, or specifically compared at a detailed level.

Having identified the process of “palaeo-morphing”, the authors state that this “is certainly not unique to the Grimaldi series. Long ago, Leroi-Gourhan (1965) underlined a similar process of deformation in the “panneau des femmes-bison” of the Grotte du Pech-Merle, in France. We also suspect that something similar could be highlighted in the rich series of Kostenki I, as Abramova (1967, 1995) clearly describes, in her terminology, several “anthropo-zoomorphic” figurines (Fig. 11), and Gvozdover (1995) illustrates “polyiconic” representations at Avdevo” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110-111).

The Kostenki-Lespugue and western groups are each linked by the identification of shared features (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112, 113). No specific comparisons are made amongst the Kostenki-Lespugue examples cited, although it is noted that the “Willendorf figurine is another rendering of the same general model” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113). A more specific comparison takes place in the definition of the western group, where it is stated that; “While there is no fully “Western” figurine at the Grimaldi, it is worth noting that the Punchinello has long been compared to the Savignano Venus which is one of the finest examples of the Western group (Mussi 1995, 1996). Indeed, there can be seen on the Grimaldi specimen the same symmetry of the upper and lower conical ends, as well as an obvious commonality in the rendering of the protruding buttocks, in the shape of

the legs, and in the final addition of a lateral incision starting at the point of the head. All in all, this indicates that some of the attributes of the Punchinello do overlap with those of the Western group, whose figurines are characterised by conical extremities...” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113).

Several comparisons are made in the identification of “masks”. The Grimaldi mask is noted to have a widely open, circular mouth similar to the one found on the Předmostí fragment. The Grimaldi mask is also suggested to closely resemble the “proximal, circular flat ends of the so-called “spatulas” from Kostenki and Avdeevo, notably in the cat-like eyes which have been enlarged by deep transversal incisions. A pattern or series of short radial incisions located around the face – akin to a fur trim – can also be seen on many specimens” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113).

The scale and distance of the “shared features” is often emphasised, usually at the end of a paragraph, and with reference to the geographical range:

“...a yet-to-be elucidated representational theme (that of the “mask”) which extended from the Russian Plain to the Mediterranean shores of Western Europe” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113).

“... the immense variability (in terms of regional and local stylistic adaptations, additions, deviations, etc) that should be expected in the context of a tradition that once spanned all of Europe” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117).

“...it can also be used to propose – as suggested by similarities noted between the Grimaldi and Mal’ta figurines – much longer distance relationships, nearly spanning the whole of Eurasia” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 118).

“...a very longlasting, complex, and dynamic chain of communication that once linked various segments of the Eurasian continent” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 119).

“...the successful implantation of humanity across the whole of the Mammoth Steppe, from the shores of the Atlantic ocean and the Mediterranean sea to the easternmost margins of the Beringian world” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 121).

Comparison is expanded beyond stylistic features. “Links between the Balzi Rossi and other more or less distant places can be identified on the basis of more than just the typology/ morphology of the figurines. Such can also be adduced

from the detailed examination of various technological attributes that pertain to the manufacture or carving of objects found over vast stretches of Eurasia” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113). This claim is based on an analysis of the carving of ivory (Mussi *et al* 2000: 114-6). The authors state that ivory carving is not a skill that can be improvised, it requires technical expertise and the skills have to be acquired (Mussi *et al* 2000: 115). The carving of the Abrachial and the Ochred Lady are viewed as skilled, and as evidence of long distance links or contacts between the Mediterranean shores and higher European latitudes (Mussi *et al* 2000: 116).

The authors summarise that typology, techniques and modes of display and ideology suggests shared elements of MUP imagery (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117).

The heads and faces of the Kostenki-Lespugue type are compared (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117). Strong similarity is identified between Kostenki and Willendorf, although it should be noted that the reference to Kostenki is totally unspecified. “Looking at the bent head of the Kostenki-Lespugue figurines, it is quite clear that, at Kostenki itself just as at Willendorf, an ornamented tight cap is represented, and that the straight facet just below is the face. Such a face is flat, without any chin, and the figurine looks downward (Fig. 15)” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117).

Termining this type “the capped, downward-looking” style, the authors see differences in the Lespugue figure, which is termed a “hairy, forward-looking” figurine. In this instance, the “flat, anterior facet connecting head to neck clearly is the throat. The face itself, capped with hair, is straight, and displays a definite chin”. This is also seen on the “yellow Venus”, which features a “protruding” chin (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117). Compared to the previous figures, the face has “slipped upwards, squeezing the volume of the cranial part of the head, and allowing for the rendition of both a chin and a throat” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117).

It is stated that “intermediate postures” occur at Avdeevo, where “the profile of the head rather suggests a forward-looking face, with a chin and a throat, but the

ornamentation of the cap is extended from the top of the head, all over the face to the putative chin” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117).

The rendering of the buttocks is also discussed (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117). The authors cite Leroi-Gourhan’s (1965) illustration of how “a series of statuettes (which happen to belong to our Kostenki-Lespugue type) are characterised by a progressive enlargement of the small of the back, while the buttocks are unrealistically squeezed (Fig, 16). They eventually nearly disappear, being represented more and more like a fold, or as paired folds, making room for the expanded, saddle-like loins, with the coccyx ending up in the position of the anus” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117). The Abrachial is situated at “the very end of this drifting representational process. The progressively displaced buttocks are no more than a strip of flesh at a right angle with the thighs” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117). The authors sum this up as, “The process of transformation of the back, also seen in the Kostenki-Lespugue figurine, has gone full circle. A progressively deformed part of the body has become totally unrecognisable. All the same, the traditional, if incomprehensible, pattern has been carefully retained, and new anatomical landmarks have been simply added to the old ones” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117). (One could ask to what extent is the archaeological formation of a series simply a way of bringing together different representations of a standard anatomical feature? No examples are cited in the text, although Fig. 16 shows unspecified figures from Kostenki and Avdevo, and the Mauern figure).

A method for the “drilling” of holes or perforations on steatite with a tiny burin or a rectangular-shaped hafted burin spall is also viewed as an “early form of technological borrowing”, as this technique appears with greater frequency on ivory items “throughout Eurasia (i.e. from Mal’ta to Sungir”, from Mamutowa cave to Gouran)”, yet only on the “Mask” amongst steatite objects (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117-8).

Technical, as well as stylistic adaptation, is also identified in the rendering of the buttocks of the Abrachial and the Ochred Lady where, in both cases, the buttocks are more bulging than on most ivory statuettes and there seems to have

been an effort made to shape the buttocks in a way recalling the soft stone figures of Western Europe more than the ivory ones from further east” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 118).

Perhaps the strongest comparisons and similarities are drawn between the Grimaldi figures and the figures from Mal'ta in Siberia (Mussi *et al* 2000: 118-9, Fig.17a, b). The hairstyle of the Ochred Lady is compared with the “Dame of Brassempouy” and some Kostenki and Avdeevo figures (with Kostenki 83-1 and Avdeevo 77-1 specified) (Mussi *et al* 2000: 118). They specify that, “By far the best comparison can be established with one of the statuettes discovered at Mal'ta (Fig. 17)”, and state that “the shape of the hair is the same, around a featureless, convex face in a straight position. In both instances the same elongated locks, made by sinuous incisions, are evidenced in the lower part” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 118-9).

The authors state that several of the Grimaldi statuettes are characterised by a “straight, flat face, surrounded by a bonnet” i.e. the Beauty side of the Doublet, both faces of the Janus, and the Bust. “This peculiar rendering of faces and bonnets is not documented elsewhere in Europe, but is found on several specimens from Mal'ta” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 119, Fig 17). A further similar element is stated to be the “pointed breasts” of the bust, which are “relatively common at Mal'ta but unusual on European MUP figurines” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 119).

A similar comparison is made for the Lozenge: “The lower part of the Lozenge, with its maximum width in the trochanter region, is also without any strict counterpart in Europe” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 119). This is summarized as “the general shape framing the belly is a smooth “V” which ends downwards into a pubic triangle”. This arrangement is also identified in “several of the Mal'ta figurines, with the “V” shape from hips to lower extremity being “exactly the same” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 119). They conclude that, “The similarity with the Grimaldi is even more striking if one takes into consideration, as we have suggested earlier, that a hole was once drilled at the distal extremity of the

Lozenge. Such distal holes are displayed by several of the Mal'ta figurines, including some "V" shaped ones" (Mussi *et al* 2000: 119).

17. Is the material treated as a homogenous group, or is the focus on diversity? Is this orientation related to, or dictated by, the author's hypothesis? Is homogeneity deduced from the material after analysis, or assumed as a precondition?

The variation amongst the figures is referred to on several occasions, indeed, a major aim of the paper is to show that the "classic" Grimaldi figures are "non-representative". It is the inclusion of the new figures that allows a new interpretation and re-evaluation to take place. However, with regard to the aim of identifying similarities across Europe, an impression of homogeneity is bound to be created, as the paper is not interested in discussing examples that do not display similarities.

Regarding variety, textual references include, for Grimaldi, the emphasis of the variety of the "new" Grimaldi figures, and the implications for the "classic" group, as noted above (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108); for the Kostenki-Lespugue type, "Among the great variability of MUP female figurines, we underline the homogeneity of a specific type of representation" (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112). This indicates that homogeneity is prioritised – also suggests that styles and figures are excluded from the analysis. Note that the authors mention, "Minor variations associated with this general pattern" (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112).

They note; "In addition to the apparent homogeneity mentioned earlier, it is clear that the different "postures" identified within the Kostenki-Lespugue group are also telling of the immense variability (in terms of regional and local stylistic adaptations, additions, deviations, etc) that should be expected in the context of a tradition that once spanned all of Europe" (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117). Variability is once again glossed over by means of presenting variation as "to be expected" in the context of a pan-European tradition. It is therefore justified, and rendered unimportant.

Figures of western type are stated to differ from some Kostenki-Lespugue types in the depiction of the buttocks (Mussi *et al* 2000: 117). However, the authors use this and go on to describe a typological process, which actually serves to link the figures rather than separate them.

An important paragraph acknowledges that there are differences, yet still justifies linking the figures:

“In our view, the similarities that can be identified in the female imagery from the Grimaldi and Mal’ta are too numerous and diverse to be explained as purely coincidental, and this even if they represent, admittedly, only a very small portion of an assemblage of traits which are otherwise substantially different. Such elements of dissimilarity can be seen, for instance, in the flat rendering of the Mal’ta statuettes *versus* the vigorous sense of volumes at the Grimaldi, not to mention the numerous types of figurines from Mal’ta that are simply totally alien. This clearly indicates that the aforementioned similarities are best viewed as representing the faint outlines and distant echoes of a very longlasting, complex, and dynamic chain of communication that once linked various segments of the Eurasian continent.” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 119).

They continue:

“... our analysis shows that many of the aforementioned elements of variability can best be explained as part of a representational continuum whose main characteristic has to do with shape shifting or transformation, and which we have called “palaeo-morphing”” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 120).

Stress, therefore, is on homogeneity, and particularly the homogeneity of features. In identifying “palaeo-morphing”, the authors state that, “It is quite evident that such observations can only be arrived at through the detailed examination of sufficiently large samples of culturally homogeneous representations” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 111).

Proving definite links is the aim of the paper; “Our analysis of the Balzi Rossi collection has also provided us with evidence of similarities with specimens

discovered in other, distant parts of the Palaeolithic world.” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112)

Willendorf is noted as “another rendering of the same general model” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 113).

“Among the great variability of MUP female figurines, we underline the homogeneity of a specific type of representation, found all over Europe, and that we shall call the Kostenki-Lespugue type” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112).

18. Is supporting evidence for a theory provided from the figures and their archaeological context, or from the application of external theory?

The underlying theoretical influences are “shamanism” and the empowerment of women. The former strand is acknowledged by the authors (Mussi *et al* 2000: 120-121).

Much of the evidence is based on a detailed analysis of the Grimaldi figures, which is described as a “methodical and systematic description of every statuette, currently taking into account more than 50 entries for each specimen” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). These entries are listed as ranging from raw material, technical aspects of carving, typology of every part of the body, state of preservation, and evidence suggestive of use (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). The authors are well aware of the importance of this type of approach, stating that, “We also stress the need for detailed and accurate anatomic descriptions. In our opinion, such an approach, involving careful and systematic examination and recording of all and every aspects of Palaeolithic works of art, is the only scientifically valid means of avoiding the facile and unwarranted speculations that frequently mar the literature (see, for instance, White 1997, and his so-called “interpretation” of female imagery)” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). This preliminary analysis is seen as “a first step in the right, more objective direction, this process will allow for the cross-checking of observations” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 108). This approach leads to two developments:

1. the identification and consideration of features often ignored

2. re-evaluation of features already noted, leading to a change of focus of attention away from the standard stereotype, leading to the consideration of the figures in a different light.

Features are identified and then compared with other examples across Europe. These comparisons are both technological and typological. This gives a firmer technological and scientific base for the analysis of the figures, but while it provides clearer details than previously, ultimately the interpretation of the figures takes a leap into the subjective. A question is – to what degree can the comparisons be substantiated. Obviously, this preliminary report presents only a small sample of comparative material. Statistically, how reliable is the identification of two similar features across 1000's of miles and years, and could parallels be drawn with material outside the Palaeolithic? Contextual evidence is not taken into consideration. It is not even mentioned for the Russian figures, where it is available.

Specific claims made in the text:

1. The figures are pendants. The evidence for this is the identification of perforations (identified due to the “excellent state of preservation” of the material). The perforations are said to be “clearly identifiable in 6 instances”, and “also considered to occur in 3 additional cases” (the Bust, Abrachial and Lozenge), “where various segments of perforations can be identified on broken edges” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109). This is backed up by the claim that fractures are most likely to occur in the area of perforation. Distal fractures are said to outnumber all others (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109, Fig. 6), and this is “best explained by presence of a perforation at this broken end” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109). As the final evidence for “pendants”, they cite Hahn’s (1990) survey of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures, which states that the so-called “small statuettes”, those less than 100mm in length, “are better interpreted as pendants” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109).

Similar examples are then identified. “Drilled or otherwise perforated figurines are well known in Eurasia. The best examples are probably those from Mal'ta”, which also have “holes or slots at the distal end” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109). A

question raised is whether slots are actually the same thing. This is also relevant to the examples suggested at Kostenki and Avdeevo, as the authors state that “At least a few of the statuettes discovered at Kostenki and Avdeevo also exhibit elongated holes or slots between the legs (i.e. between the knees and feet), which could possibly have had a functional purpose” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109). Only one example exists for Western Europe – “a hole between the conjoining feet has also been detected on the Sireuil specimen” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109).

Further evidence for the claim that the figures were worn is drawn from the identification of use-wear, as a distinct polish appears around the hole between the 2 heads of the Doublet, and between the 2 heads of the Bicephalous. The Bicephalous is also said to display a similar polish on the thighs, below the buttocks, and on the side (Mussi *et al* 2000: 109), which is interpreted as evidence that the figure had been tightly fixed or secured to some kind of support (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). More generally, they claim this is also indicated by their detection of various “facets” “that can be” (in their opinion!) detected on one or more faces of each figure. These are perceived as acting to allow a stable resting position, and they are taken to indicate a prolonged contact with a smooth and somewhat rigid surface (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). This suggests to the authors that they may have been secured for public display, rather than “hung” as pendants in the strict sense (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). This is the use of vague “technical” details to back up claims.

Many of the Grimaldi figures are interpreted as “indicative of attempts on the part of the MUP artists to illustrate much more than just different types of beings or entities but, perhaps more importantly, the complex set of relationships that these beings (human as well as non-human) had with one another and the world(s) they lived in” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). They go on to say that the doubles “clearly bespeak of a rich and complex set of beliefs that, as early as the MUP, was addressing questions pertaining to duality and multiple levels of reality. In this respect, the most eloquent examples (the Doublet and the Bicephalous) do suggest that what was being illustrated was not so much different beings (i.e. human and non-human) but parts of, or manifestations of

single entities undergoing or having achieved a process of transformation” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110).

At Grimaldi the authors identify “double” figures illustrating three basic types of relationship.

1. Couples → the doublet (2 bodies)
→ bicephalous (one body/ 2 heads)
2. figures found on opposite faces of a specimen – Janus – Mask – Nun - Goitre
3. Distal/ proximal opposition of figures (“playing card” type) on the same face – hermaphrodite.

They state that these representations of doubles are not simply mirror-like, but illustrate “shifts” from one type of rendition to another. These range from the subtle e.g. slight variation on the same theme (the Nun), to the obvious (Doublet and Bicephalous), with clear representation of different beings (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110).

However, the authors claim that all demonstrate a “definite level of representational correspondence, even if expressed by different means” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). This is elaborated as “the two bodies of the Hermaphrodite are symmetrically opposed on each side of the round abdomen, which is common to both; the two faces of the Janus, the Mask, the Nun, the Goitered Lady, all correspond to beings which are of the same size, are positioned in the same direction, and exhibit the same general shape to suggest anatomical details, including the head. The equivalences between the two arched bodies of the Doublet are less obvious, if only because they are nearly completely separated from each other (Fig. 9). However, the general symmetry of the object, the common position and orientation, the equivalent size of the gross anatomical parts, the deformed aspect of the woman’s head when seen in profile, and then the three connections at the head, shoulders and lower end, all underline a subtle link between the opposed bodies. This is also true for the minute Bicephalous on which the proportions and orientations of both (human and non-human) heads

provide a sense of balance and symmetry to what is clearly a complex representation” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). This is not a technical argument.

Their citation of “double figures” elsewhere is questionable, and references are cited for each identification, as if to bolster support and assert authority. References for Laussel, Lespugue, Savignano, and Gagarino are given as Tarassov 1971, Coppens 1989, Mussi 1995 and 1996. The reference for Mauern is Zolt 1955 and Mussi 1997. Interpretations of the Laussel double figure, and whether it is or not, range widely. Unspecified examples give the impression of weight of numbers, but the fact that they are not discussed means that no doubts can be indicated.

The “transformation process” itself is, they claim, “well illustrated by the head shapes and their relationship to one another” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). Again, their emphasis is on the empirical approach; “Upon detailed examination, they can be shown to represent more than just a “human”/ “monster” opposition; there are also the not-fully-human ones, that we have labelled as “deformed” (Fig. 8). When taken together, these show what appears to be a continuum ranging from truly human heads, and then to full monstrous ones (Fig.10)” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). They continue, “we can perceive in the entire sample more than the differences and changes that are so obvious in the paired beings on the doubles (e.g. the Doublet or the Bicephalous). In other words, both the internal and external variations observable in the whole series present us with an obviously complex and very subtle set of progressive physical and, likely, symbolic transformations and shifts” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110). This, then, is “palaeo-morphing” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110).

Having identified this process, they then proceed to identify other instances, as if the phenomenon is already an evidenced, accepted fact on the basis of those examples. They say, “Palaeo-morphing is certainly not unique to the Grimaldi series. Long ago, Leroi-Gourhan (1965) underlined a similar process of deformation in the “panneau des femmes-bison” of the Grotte du Pech-Merle, in France. We also suspect that something similar could be highlighted in the rich series of Kostenki I, as Abramova (1967, 1995) clearly describes, in her

terminology, several “anthropo-zoomorphic” figurines (Fig. 11), and Gvozdover (1995) illustrates “polyiconic” representations at Avdeevo” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110-111).

Again there is emphasis of the empirical foundation for the study; “It is quite evident that such observations can only be arrived at through the detailed examination of sufficiently large samples of culturally homogenous representations” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 111).

Their conclusion to this section is that palaeo-morphing “provides clear indications of the existence of a very complex set of beliefs which included the possibility, for selected beings, of changing from one state to the next, from a fully human character to a non-human one. As plastically illustrated by the Doublet and the Bicephalous (Fig. 9), women or, perhaps more precisely, womanhood was somehow perceived by the MUP populations as endowed with the ability or the power to shift from one level of reality to another, perhaps as intermediaries between different worlds” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 112). This obviously goes beyond the mere analysis of the figures themselves, and relates external theory and beliefs to the analysis. The “palaeo-morphing” theory is itself based on a comparatively small number of examples.

Evidence for comparisons and links is discussed in comparisons. Their conclusion is that, “This clearly indicates that the aforementioned similarities are best viewed as representing the faint outlines and distant echoes of a very longlasting, complex, and dynamic chain of communication that once linked the various segments of the Eurasian continent” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 119).

19. How are references and sources utilised? To what extent is there dependence on previous authors?

The majority of the references are to Mussi and Bolduc’s previous work on the figurines. The work is not heavily dependant on the arguments of others, although previous works are cited to support the identification of “double figures”, and Leroi-Gourhan’s identification of “palaeo-morphing” (Mussi *et al* 2000: 110-111).

20. How does this work contribute to the construction and consolidation of the group?

This is an important discussion of the full range of Grimaldi figures, integrating them into a wider context (indeed, drawing an interpretation for them and trying to apply it across the wider range) yet also stressing their individuality. The work forms a specific group identity for the Grimaldi figures, although perhaps does not draw enough attention to the stylistic factors that strongly differentiate them from other types. The links drawn also bring the Mal'ta statuettes back into the wider group and indeed, the strongest links are made with these.

Soffer, O., J. M. Adovasio, D. C. Hyland 2000

“The “Venus” Figurines: Textiles, basketry, Gender, and Status in the Upper Palaeolithic.”

Current Anthropology 41 (4) pp. 511- 537.

1. What is the context of this approach to the archaeological material?

The paper is concerned specifically with the Venus figurines, and their use as evidence for the existence of woven clothing in the Palaeolithic. The relevant technologies of production are specifically associated with women, prestige and value. In broader terms, the authors intend to re-align the focus of enquiry towards perishable materials, arguing for the importance of textiles in the Upper Palaeolithic. Furthermore, the paper is an attempt to redress what have been perceived as ‘biased’ male-oriented reconstructions of the past that have left women, children and the elderly as a Palaeolithic “silent majority”.

2. What is the role of the material in the hypothesis? How is it used by the author and what is the hypothesis is applied to it?

As the title suggests, the Venus figurines are central to the hypothesis, providing evidence that can be interpreted by the authors as showing that woven clothes were worn by Palaeolithic women. Indeed, this iconographic material is the only evidence that can ‘prove’ the claim. They claim to identify three types of “dressed” depiction, consisting of types of headgear, bandeaux, and “at least” one type of skirt. The figures are further interpreted as indicating that such woven items were exclusively worn by women, and the care of depiction is also taken as an indication that value was attached to the skills, the textile producers, and the wearers. The textiles, therefore, are symbols of value and prestige.

3. What terminology is used to introduce and subsequently define the material, and to what effect?

The paper refers to “The “Venus” Figurines” in the title, and this term is employed throughout (e.g. Soffer *et al* 2000: 511 footnote 1, 512), where it is commonly used without inverted commas. It is explained that the term refers to “Palaeolithic depictions of women, commonly termed “Venuses” in the literature” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514). The term, therefore, carries strong

connotations of usage by previous authors, and previous definitions of the material. If Palaeolithic depictions of women are “Venuses”, Soffer does narrow the field of enquiry somewhat by noting that the Palaeolithic depictions of women “by now number well over 200 examples for the Gravettian period alone” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514-5). While, use of the term “Venus”, “Palaeolithic depictions of women”, and even “Upper Palaeolithic female figurine” are imprecise, they serve to emphasise the existence of the figures as a body of material.

The term is also employed more specifically in “European Venus figurines” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 517). The term “Upper Palaeolithic female imagery” is used as a sub-heading introducing discussion of the material (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514), and the material is also referred to as “female figurines” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 515), and “Upper Palaeolithic female figurines” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 516). It is apparent therefore, that there is little distinction between the terms “Venus figurines” and “female figurines”, with both intended to indicate a similar range of material.

The term achieves an almost slang usage in references to “the Venus bodies” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 516), “Western Venus attire”, “Venus-wear” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 522), and mention of “what the well-dressed Venus wore” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 521). “The Dressed Venus” is used as a heading (Soffer *et al* 2000: 517), and there is also reference to the “clad Venuses” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 525).

Numerous figures are specifically referred to as “the “Venus” of...”, for example “The Venus of Willendorf” and “The Venus of Lespugue” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 515, caption to Fig. 2; 520), and also as “the well-known Venus of Willendorf” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 517), the “Venus with the horn” and the “Venus with the grid-like head” from Laussel (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518), the “Venus from Dolní Věstonice” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520), and “The Venus of Brassempouy” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 528 and caption to Fig. 7).

4. How is the category of material defined? To what does the label refer?

It has been noted that the term “Venuses” commonly refers to Palaeolithic depictions of women, and that the “Venus figurines” correspond to the Upper

Palaeolithic “female figurines”. The range of material of interest to the authors is further specified by a brief discussion of male figures (whose scarcity is contrasted with the distribution of the female figures) and sexless examples. It is stated that both types are depicted either naked, in the case of the former, or without markings (Soffer *et al* 2000: 516). Emphasis is therefore solely on the female figurines.

It is noted that, “Upper Palaeolithic female figurines, naked as well as partially clad, occur across Eurasia from the Atlantic Ocean to Lake Baikal (e.g. Abramova 1962, 1995; Delporte 1993; Gvozdover 1989*b*). Their distribution contrasts sharply with the scarcity of unambiguous depictions of Palaeolithic males (e.g. Brno II, possible Städel, possibly the Avdeevo male, fragments from Dolní Věstonice and Pavlov I, and the more ambiguous male from Brassempouy) and humans of unknown sex who are depicted either naked (in the case of unambiguous males) or lacking any marking” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 516). Thus, while the “category” is clearly defined as female, it is apparent that other figures exist.

The general terminology, as seen above, tends to relate the material to the Upper Palaeolithic, and seems content to note initially “depictions of females” (e.g. Soffer *et al* 2000: 514), which could occur in a variety of media. However, the emphasis is narrowed to the Gravettian period in a particular sub-section “Gravettian Diversity” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514), which notes that there are over 200 female depictions in this period, and refers to Gvozdover’s study of the figures of this period, which is roughly identified as the period 27,000 – 20,000 years ago (Soffer *et al* 2000: 515). This is repeated (Soffer *et al* 2000: 517).

Although figures extending to Lake Baikal are mentioned, the Siberian examples are not discussed in the text. Also, while the focus appears narrowed to figurines, several bas-reliefs at Laussel are also mentioned.

5. Is a general characterisation of the material provided? How is the material characterised?

The “Venuses” are strongly characterised as female, rather than male or sexless. The latter types are clearly differentiated, not only regarding their sex, but also due to their lack of depicted decoration (Soffer *et al* 2000: 516). While it is noted that some female figures are not clothed, the figurines presented in the article are strongly associated with items of clothing, rather than nudity. More specifically, this clothing is textile related, rather than being made of fur or skins.

The authors note that much of the previous attention “has, by and large, been directed to certain features common to many of them, namely, the emotionally charged primary and secondary sexual characteristics – vulvae, breasts, stomachs, and buttocks”, which is described as a “selective focus” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514). In this work, emphasis is on clothing, with section headings discussing “The Elaborated Body”, “Dressed Bodies”, and “The Dressed Venus” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514, 517).

6. Does the author accept or adopt groups as previously established, or are new groups created?

The author refers throughout to the Venus figurines, female imagery and Upper Palaeolithic female figurines, with the terms interchanged regularly. Footnote 1 specifies that “the original Venus figurines” are housed in museums in France, Austria, the Czech Republic and Russia (Soffer *et al* 2000: 511) and the terminology here seems to indicate an albeit unspecified range of material as it may have been presented in previous texts, however that may be. Soffer also refers to the literature on the Venus figurines, and it seems that they have taken the group at face value as previously established in the literature.

However, it could be noted that the range of material usually designated “Venus figurines” contains examples without clothing. From this range, only examples displaying clothing are selected for analysis.

7. How is the credibility of the material established?

Reference is made to the published literature, and to the authors’ examination of the original figurines in museums in France, Austria, the Czech republic and

Russia, and a substantial number of authorities receive acknowledgement for their assistance (Soffer *et al* 2000: 511). The authors state that viewing the figures both confirmed their initial hypotheses and revised others, as well as significantly enlarging their sample, and this is indicative of their emphasis of the importance of actual study of the figures, and their belief in the authority that is derived from this contact. This attitude surfaces later in the text, where they stress the correctness of their interpretations of particular figures, based on this detailed study.

Several comments in the text hint at an extensive history of research into the material, and it is made clear that there have been numerous previous studies. “No item of Upper Palaeolithic material culture has received as much attention from amateurs or professionals alike, as depictions of humans (Soffer 1987, Soffer and Conkey 1997). Particular attention has been paid to Palaeolithic depictions of women, commonly termed “Venuses” in the literature” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514). Reference is also made to “the well-known myriad of conflicting unitary explanations for the Venus figurines. These explanations are as numerous as commentators venturing an opinion” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514). Reference is also particularly made to Gvosdover’s study (1989), describing it as “rigorously analysed” and “the first truly archaeological study of this category of material culture” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 515).

Attention is drawn to the lack of credibility of previous approaches. While reviewing a number of previous approaches, Soffer states that “other scholars have raised serious objections to such explanations, pointing to the selectivity, lack of attention to context, uncontrolled chronologies, and unjustified assumptions” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514).

8. Are details of archaeological context or dating discussed?

The context of the figurines is only briefly mentioned; “Upper Palaeolithic female figurines and figurine fragments, however, as Gvozdover (1989*b*; see also Praslov 1993) has noted, do not appear to be restricted to specific depositional contexts. Some came from inside dwellings and from cultural

layers outside such features; some were found in pits, others not. The pieces recovered from Dolní Věstonice I and Pavlov I show no spatial patterning (Soffer 1997), and the contextual evidence from Brassempouy, Grimaldi and Willendorf is equally uninformative (Delporte 1993)". On this basis, this source of information is rejected (Soffer *et al* 2000: 523).

It is ironic in view of Soffer's comment regarding the credibility of the previous literature, that the material itself is not questioned. Although well aware of the lack of context, this is not elaborated, and the implications of this are not considered. Soffer does not use either context or chronology in the discussion, and neither is used to establish the credibility of the material. In a final section, containing the authors' reply to invited comments, their reasoning is further specified, when they "respectfully disagree" with Mussi and Hadu's suggestion of a re-evaluation of contextual information (Soffer *et al* 2000: 534), replying that "We simply have no contextual data other than the site names for the figurines recovered in Europe at the beginning of this century". It is further stated that, for Eastern Europe "there are no specific contexts that have yielded the figurines". In something of a *fait accompli*, they conclude by suggesting that; "we have to remember that the contextual circumstances of disposal may not reflect the circumstances of use" (Soffer *et al* 2000: 535).

9. What is the total number of examples given for the material? How many are actually referred to or used as a database?

Soffer states that Palaeolithic depictions of females "by now number well over 200 examples for the Gravettian period alone" (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514). Reference is also made to Gvozdover's study of "over 100 figurines and figurine fragments" from Gravettian age sites in European Russia (Soffer *et al* 2000: 515).

No figure is given for the total number of decorated figures. Examples from ten sites are discussed in the text – Brassempouy, Lespugue, Laussel, Grimaldi, Dolní Věstonice, Pavlov, Willendorf, Avdeevo, Kostenki and Gagarino (Soffer *et al* 2000: Fig. 1) – however, no total number of relevant examples at each site is specified, and specific names for figurines are not often used. Only seven

specific examples are discussed in detail – Willendorf, two figures from Kostenki, the Venus of Lespugue, the Venus of Brassempouy, the Grimaldi “negroid” head, and the Laussel “Venus with the grid-like head” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518). Six other figures are briefly mentioned as featuring items of clothing, but all other examples of decoration are noted merely as unspecified examples occurring at a site.

10. Are specific examples and individual figures discussed?

Specific examples are mentioned, although the number discussed in detail is relatively small, when compared with the given figure for the possible sample as “200”. These are Willendorf, which is also illustrated in frontal view and with three views of the head in close-up (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518 and Figs. 2 and 4), “the Kostenki I marl figurine” found in 1983, shown in 3 views (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518, 519, Figs. 5 and 8), and the Venus of Lespugue (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520 and Fig. 10). Lesser discussion is devoted to “the Venus of Brassempouy”, the Grimaldi “negroid” head, and the Laussel “Venus with the grid-like head” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518). Of these, only the Venus of Brassempouy is also illustrated (Soffer *et al* 2000: Fig. 7).

Willendorf is discussed as the clearest evidence for headgear, and the argument is strongly against previous interpretations of the hairstyle.

A further number of figures are briefly mentioned as examples of a specific item of clothing. These are given as; Dolní Věstonice figure (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518 and Figs. 2 and 3), an ivory head from Dolní Věstonice, Kostenki 83-I, a fragment of marl head from Avdeevo (Gvozdover 1995: fig. 110), a large head fragment from Kostenki (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518 and Fig. 6), and a figure from Avdeevo (6) (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518, 519).

A greater number of examples are noted without specific indication of the figurines concerned. Discussion of certain “Kostenki figurines” is limited to their interpretation as displaying bandeaux. The figures themselves are specified only by an accompanying reference (citing Abramova 1995: figs. 59, 60, 73, 74), and they are not illustrated in the present work (Soffer *et al* 2000: 519).

Quantities and names or numbers of particular figures are not given. This occurs in a number of instances; the claim, that examples of figurines with belts occur among clay figurine fragments at Dolní Věstonice and Pavlov I, is made with general reference to the sites only, rather than specific examples. No indication of how many figures are relevant is given, and the reader is again provided only with an external reference (Klima 1991: fig.15) (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520). Similarly, it is mentioned that heads featuring a clear depiction of the hairdo occur at Dolní Věstonice, Pavlov, Kostenki, Avdeevo, and Gagarino (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518; several of those from Dolní Věstonice and Pavlov are shown in Fig. 3). In an even more generalised case, it is stated; “Bracelets and necklaces are found on a number of Central and Eastern European pieces” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520). No examples are given.

There is brief reference to several examples outside the data-set. The Laussel “Venus with the horn” and “numerous of the Grimaldi pieces” are noted as having heads devoid of detail (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518), and “unambiguous depiction of possible males” are stated to occur at Brno II, “possibly” Städel, and Avdeevo, with fragments at Dolní Věstonice and Pavlov. A “more ambiguous male” is mentioned at Brassempouy (Soffer *et al* 2000: 516), also referred to as “the ambiguous belted figurine fragment from Brassempouy (Soffer *et al* 2000: 521). None of these examples are illustrated.

12. In what depth are the figurines discussed?

As noted above, only six examples are discussed in detail, with a further six more briefly mentioned as representative of particular features. Discussion is restricted to the identification and description of particular items of clothing. Close attention is paid to the “head-gear” of the Willendorf figurine, leading the authors’ to propose that it represents a woven cap featuring a spiral design (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518, also 532, where it is discussed in the authors’ reply). These descriptions focus so closely on the relevant clothing that other features of the statuettes are not integrated into the discussion, other than in such general comments as the observation that “when hats or caps are depicted on Upper Palaeolithic figurines, facial details are absent” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518). These

are often accompanied by illustrations showing several views of a figure, although the quality and detail of these photographs are not always sufficient for the reader to judge the claims made. As previously noted, many of the examples noted by the authors are simply mentioned as being representative of the presence of a particular item of clothing, without additional details.

13. Do the individual descriptions concur with the generalised characterisation?

As the descriptions in this paper are solely concerned with the identification of various types of decoration, this question concerns the authors' identifications of items of clothing, and whether these are correct.

In a wide sense, the individual descriptions concur with the general theme of woven clothing as identified and interpreted on the figurines. However, this argument is weighted, pre-determined and tautological, as these examples are selected for the reason that they feature the decoration, making the result a foregone conclusion. Only those that fit have been selected.

The authors describe particular items in great detail, particularly in the instances of the Willendorf and Lespugue figures. For the former, they specify that the cap is a "spirally or radially hand-woven item which may be initiated by a knotted centre", adding that "several areas on the body of the cap appear to illustrate splices, where new material has been added" (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518). For Lespugue, they identify a skirt "composed of 11 cords plied around a base cord which serves as the belt... Several of the cords show as many as 30 and 40 separate incisions illustrating individual twists, and great care has been taken to depict progressive changes in angle of twist" (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520).

In their interpretation of the Dolní Věstonice Venus and similar pieces, "highly abstracted horizontal lines girdling the body" are interpreted as belts (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520). Such identification is based on a reading of the figurines as literal representations. While the authors make it clear that their conclusions are based on detailed study of the original pieces, there is ultimately an element of subjectivity in their identifications, and little evidence that may be adduced in

support. For example, suggesting that the Grimaldi “negroid” head, the Venus of Brassempouy and the Laussel “Venus with the grid-like head” may represent hairnets or netted snoods, the authors’ are forced to cite an analogy that is by their own admission, “far removed in time and context”, namely that examples of such items have been recovered from prehistoric burials in Danish bogs (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518). Interpretation seems very like simple assertion when the authors state, regarding Lespugue, “Although no details of cord splicing are evident, our examination confirms Barber’s (1991, 1994) observation that the garment depicted was *clearly* made of plant fibre” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520, emphasis added).

11. Does the piece discuss a range of examples, or are generalisations made from a limited number of examples or prototypes?

If there are some two hundred figurines, as the authors claim, then it is clear that the authors’ specifically discuss only a small proportion of these, and for the majority of examples only the name of the site is provided, rather than a precise identification of the relevant figure or figures. It is therefore difficult to evaluate precisely how many figures are depicted with items of clothing, and whether this may be truly representative of the wider material.

The material is often referred to in generalised and non-specific terms; for example, as “the figurines from Central and eastern Europe” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 517), “the Kostenki figurines” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518, 519), and “a number of Central and Eastern European pieces” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520). Ultimately, the lack of specificity allows generalised statements to be made. For example, although they admit a “paucity” of female images for Western Europe, the authors’ still claim that “String skirts are seen only on Western European figurines” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 521). This is perhaps ambitious when one considers that the only evidence for a string skirt on any of the Western figures is their identification on the rear view of the Lespugue figure (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520).

There are subtle indications that the hypothesis is only applicable to certain of the wider group of Venuses. For example, it is noted that, “The association of

textiles and basketry with just some of the Venuses indicates...” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 525). Similarly, “... the woven garments worn by one group of Venuses” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 524). Yet the impression created is one of quantity, for there are references to “the iconographic evidence for woven clothing often found on European “Venus” figurines” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 512), and particularly in the statement: “We focus on these features also because when the female images are depicted as decorated or clad, as much attention is paid to the detailing of the items of clothing as to the depiction of their primary and secondary sexual characteristics, something clearly in evidence on the well-known Venus of Willendorf and a myriad of other figurines and figurine fragments” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 517). As noted, this may suggest a false impression of quantity. Note that only Willendorf, the familiar figure, is specified – the “myriad” of others are not.

References to “dressed Venuses” also give an expansive impression of the material. Also relevant here is the use of Gvozdover; “Gvozdover (1898*b*) has noted the presence of upper body decorations on a large number of the Kostenki and Avdeevo figurines” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518). Also, “Bandeaux... are present on almost all Eastern European figurines wearing woven headgear” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 519), although even this latter association is not proved, and the numbers wearing head-gear is not given. The generalised impression of group coherence, without the actual citation of numbers, is also apparent in the statement, “Belts, sometimes attached to string skirts, are worn on the waist or low on the hips” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 519). While each area is mentioned, there is specific discussion only of Lespugue (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520).

Ultimately, and in part due to the acknowledged nature of the evidence, the hypothesis must lean heavily on the Russian and Central European statuettes, although the results are certainly generalised across Europe.

14. What figures are selected for illustration, and what is the effect of the illustrations?

Many of those figures selected for description are illustrated; the Dolní Věstonice Venus (Figs. 2 and 3), Willendorf (Fig. 2 and Fig. 4), the Kostenki

marl figurine (Figs. 5 and 8), the large marl head from Kostenki (Fig. 6), the large figurine fragment from Kostenki (Fig. 9), and Lespugue (Fig. 10). Heads from Dolní Věstonice and Pavlov are shown (Fig. 3), as is a profile view of the Venus of Brassempouy (Fig. 7).

Fig. 12 shows Gvozdover's identification of the location of decoration on female figures from Kostenki and Avdeevo (Gvozdover), and Fig. 11 demonstrates the distribution of the different types of "clad Venus figurines", with pictures of Lespugue, Willendorf, Brassempouy and Kostenki positioned on a map of Europe.

Several additional illustrations appear in the comments section – two "belted" figures from Pavlov (Fig. 1) – and in the reply – Fig. 13 a stylised figure from Mezine, Fig. 14 design motifs at Mezin, Fig. 15 Mal'ta statuettes.

Obviously, as figurines without clothes are not shown, the illustrations strongly support the impression created in the text of a quantity of clothed figurines. It should also be noted that a number of those figures mentioned, rather than discussed, as displaying items of clothing are not illustrated. Thus, the illustrations present only a small number of the total figurines.

15. Are there indications of any criteria in the selection of figures for discussion or illustration?

The authors' focus on textiles governs their selection, and only those figures with features identified as examples of clothing are illustrated and discussed in detail.

16. What comparisons are made between examples? Are these connections, stylistic, contextual, etc? What is the purpose of the comparison?

Clear groupings are indicated, although the examples are discussed only with reference to the relevant feature in each case. Grouping also occurs with reference to depictions of headgear, where the Willendorf and Kostenki heads are compared (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518). Heads without detailing are also grouped (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518).

17. Is the material treated as a homogeneous group, or is the focus on diversity? Is this orientation related to, or dictated by, the author's hypothesis? Is homogeneity deduced from the material after analysis, or assumed as a precondition?

The authors make a number of references to the diversity of the female imagery, and the variability of the Venus figurines in terms of the modelling of their bodies (Soffer 2000: 515). They cite Gvozdover's (1989) study, which identified at least main types of figure, to state that the variability is rigidly patterned, with thighs and hips accentuated in Western Europe, breasts and bellies in Eastern Europe, with an intermediate position occupied by Central Europe (Soffer *et al* 2000: 515). They illustrate the Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice Venus I figures side by side to demonstrate that even central European depictions are internally varied (Soffer 2000: 515 and Fig. 2). This amounts to an emphasis on the diversity of depiction.

It is noted that the Upper Palaeolithic female figurines are naked as well as clothed (Soffer *et al* 2000: 516). Differences are also identified in the types of clothing itself, with the authors noting that there are "clear differences between western, Central and Eastern Europe concerning what the well-dressed Venus wore", with the Western Venuses minimally featuring a netted snood and sometimes a belted string skirt worn low on the hips, an item unique to these figures, and the central and Eastern figures, in contrast, said to always have a basket hat, often accompanied by woven bandeau and belt, and by necklaces and bracelets (Soffer 2000: 521).

Several differences are apparent in the figures of Western Europe. Bandeaux are absent from Western Europe, which the authors link with the semantic emphasis identified by Gvozdover (Soffer *et al* 2000: 519). Bracelets and necklaces are also absent from Western Europe (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520). There are differences in the placements of belts (Soffer *et al* 2000: 521), and it could be suggested that these differences, in sum, could be related to stronger differences and problems with the western figures.

As the central and eastern groups are considered more “similar”, they are compared first, and material from their “western equivalents”, which is different, discussed after (Soffer *et al* 2000: 517-8). This serves to establish the ‘core’ prior to discussion of the variable figures.

However, despite these differences, the authors’ focus on the Venus figurines as a female group, and their exclusion of any other examples, fosters an impression of homogeneity. The Venus figurines are clearly differentiated from male and sexless images, therefore maintaining the female association of the Venus figurines themselves (Soffer 1000: 516). The authors’ hypothesis requires the figures to be female and the rarity of male examples, and the absence of any with clothing, is made clear, allowing identification of this symbolism as specific to women. Furthermore, all the examples are linked in a unitary interpretation of the clothed figures. Decoration is linked to a specific hypothesis, conveying the impression that the figurines are linked in intent, meaning, purpose, and perception – effectively, the figurines represent the same thing wherever they are, as they are all within the same system of meaning.

The use of the term Venus figurines, almost used as a “tag” for the relevant group of material, implies the existence of a connected group of figurines. It is noted that the figurines from central and eastern Europe belong to a single culture (P-W-K-A), and exhibit a greater similarity to each other than to their “western equivalents”, including a reference to “this category of material” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 515 and 517) that indicates a perception of the entire range as a “group”.

18. Is supporting evidence for a theory provided from the figures and their archaeological context, or from the application of external theory?

There are several stages to the argument. The first claim is that people wove or plaited plant based fibres by Gravettian times. Evidence is cited for the production and use of textiles, cordage and basketry, from impressions on ceramics at Dolní Věstonice and Pavlov (36 from Dolní Věstonice I, one from Dolní Věstonice II and 42 from Pavlov) (Soffer 2000: 512-514). They identify single ply, multi-ply and braided cordage, knotted netting, plaited basketry and a

variety of woven and twilled objects. However, it becomes speculative here, as they cannot identify “with confidence” what was produced, although it is “highly likely” that the plaited items are baskets or mats, and the wide range of textile gauges and weaves suggests mats, “perhaps” wall hangings, blankets and apparel forms including shawls, shirts, skirts and sashes. They identify seams joined by whipping stitches, indicating the sewing of textiles and clothing or bags, with their “fineness” and “variety” indicating some previous history of development (Soffer *et al* 2000: 513). All samples are from the Pavlov culture ca. 29,000 – 24,000 BP, and other examples may come from younger sites at Badegoule and Lascaux in France (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514). Associated needles and possible loom weights and spindle whorls, although all speculative identifications, come from Předmostí and Avdeevo (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514).

A number of arguments are drawn from other authors, mainly theoretical points of the proposal. Several works are cited in support of stages of the argument. For example, regarding the claim that patterning of decoration might represent clothing, Joyce’s work on Meso-American figurines is cited, who says that no detail is accidental, but a selection of attributes linked with the construction of human identity (Soffer *et al* 2000: 516).

“...when the female images are depicted as decorated or clad, as much attention is paid to the detailing of the items of clothing as to the depiction of their primary and secondary sexual characteristics, something clearly in evidence on the well-known Venus of Willendorf and a myriad of other figurines and figurine fragments” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 517). Their argument is that “such attention to detail offers us a rare, unambiguous entry into Upper Palaeolithic ideologies and helps us to identify the roles that some females played in Late Pleistocene societies” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 517). Lesure is cited in support, who states regarding figurines in Mexico that: “If figurines really were a medium for active construction of social identity, then the stereotypes represented in figurine assemblages can provide important clues about what was talked about and what was not, in conversations about social identity.... By looking at what was and was not represented, and how social categories were distinguished within figurine assemblages, it is possible to develop hypotheses about the subject

matter of conversations about social differences” (Lesure 1997: 229, cited in Soffer *et al* 2000: 517).

A further part of the argument is that the human body is a medium ideally suited to reflect social differentiation, and that it is universally used for this purpose. Turner (1980: 112) is cited here; “The surface of the body, as the common frontier of society, the social self, and the psycho-biological individual, becomes the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted, and bodily adornment... becomes the language through which it is expressed”. This leads the authors to conclude that detailing should therefore be expected on the figurines.

Information concerning the existence of worn woven clothing is based on the identification of features depicted on the figurines, a subjective interpretation of features. Information from the figurines therefore consists only of a visual analysis and interpretation of the figurines themselves – context is specifically discounted as evidence in this enquiry.

The authors’ state that; “Extensive firsthand examination of the original Venus of Lespugue illustrates conclusively that the cords that make up the body of the skirt loop over the foundation element in the manner described in our article. It is also abundantly clear that the cordage twist details, including the sequential change of angle of twist, are a deliberate attempt to depict the gradual untwisting of the cords and not a function of the tools used to produce the figurine” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 531). “Unfortunately, many of these details are masked in even the best of casts and require high-resolution photos of the original specimen for verification” (Soffer 2000: 531). The implications are that only a limited number are suitably qualified or privileged to make such identifications, or have access to do so. While they deem McDermott an “argument from authority” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 532), this is equally true of their own work.

They argue that the garments depicted on the European Venus figurines “clearly and unambiguously” reflect plant-based textiles and basketry. This is a strong

claim specifically related to, and supported by, their detailed examination of the figurines themselves.

This involves some assumption on the part of the authors. In a manner reminiscent of Marshack, depictions of headgear and the heads themselves are identified in some cases because “the presence of necklaces on them strongly suggests that they are images of the heads and necks of females” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518). Yet, there is no proof that the “necklaces” are actually necklaces. Furthermore, the heads would not necessarily be female simply due to an association with a “necklace”. The heads themselves are not sexed.

The engraving of the Brassempouy head is described as schematic, and as “not sufficiently detailed, yet they still provide a ‘face value’ interpretation of it (Soffer *et al* 2000: 518).

They admit that schematically depicted bracelets are more difficult to associate with fibre-based products (Soffer *et al* 2000: 520). More generally, and perhaps more importantly, they admit that the paucity of western images leads to a “very tentative reconstruction of the western Venuses”, yet they proceed to generalise nonetheless, as they “suggest that the available data indicate that it minimally consisted of a netted snood and sometimes a belted string skirt worn low on the hips”, continuing that “String skirts are seen only on western European figurines” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 521). The latter statement in fact glosses over the fact that there is only one example, at Lespugue, whose identification is disputed in the comments.

The patterning is associated exclusively with women, the only query being the “ambiguous belted figurine fragment, the *figurine à la ceinture* at Brassempouy, which is not discussed or described. They state; “the rare male depictions and the undifferentiated anthropomorphs lack any such detailing. This patterning clearly associates garments with females but only with some of them” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 521-22). To further support this they cite Gvozdover’s argument associating patterns on utilitarian implements with their identification as synecdoches of the dressed female figurines, and suggest similar occurrences at

Dolní Věstonice and Pavlov. However, the original claim is speculative. Their conclusion is that “These two sets of data permit us to argue unambiguously... that what was important and “talked about” some 29,000 to 20,000 years ago across Europe was woven and plaited clothing and headgear made of plant materials which were associated with one category of Palaeolithic women” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 522).

The association of textiles and basketry used as clothing with one category of social female is specified as “their likely inventors and producers” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 524). The basis for the claim is their belief that the carvers were obviously familiar with the relevant technologies, and that if they were not the actual wearers, they must have been extensively guided by the latter’s knowledge (Soffer *et al* 2000: 525).

The sources of information regarding social categorisation are limited. The information of spatial context is specifically rejected (Soffer *et al* 2000: 523), and funerary evidence is sparse, leaving only iconographic evidence (Soffer *et al* 2000: 523).

Conroy is cited for the argument that women’s bodies were transformed into a cultural construct while men’s were not (Soffer *et al* 2000: 523). The authors then suggest that iconography and analogy with the ethnographic record indicate that it was Palaeolithic women who were most likely the weavers and basket makers in Palaeolithic times. However, they must resort to the use of the use of the ethnographic record, “which documents the close association of women” with plant harvesting, processing and the transformation of plant products by weaving and basketry. They claim that male-based production is the exception, as this association is valid for all “simpler societies” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 524).

The next stage of the argument is the “high value of this labour”. The theory relating the depiction of clothing on the figurines to their prestige and value is based on an assessment of the “care” taken in the carving of the figurines. The argument for relating the observed clothing to the construction of female identities and value rests solely on a functionalist equation of labour and

prestige; “the exquisite and labor-intensive detailing employed in the depiction of the woven garments worn by one group of Venuses clearly shows that weaving and basket-making skills and their products were valued enough to be transformed...” (Soffer *et al*: 2000: 524). They continue; “We suggest that being depicted wearing such garments associated the wearer and, by extension, the maker of them with a marked position of prestige (Soffer *et al* 2000: 524). In effect, status positions restricted to a particular category of social females. The “labour intensive weaving” is example of “symbols of excellence” and socially valuable (Soffer *et al* 2000: 524), with this ritual wear signally distinct social categories (Soffer *et al* 2000: 524).

Several of the comments query whether the group can be accepted as presented in Soffer *et al*. Mussi queries whether there are 200 as stated – if heads, torsos and fragments are excluded there are only about 70 Gravettian figures (Soffer *et al* 2000: 528). The important point remains for McDermott, the “universal nudity of these figurines” (Soffer *et al* 2000: 527). These comments allow some to re-assert their own previously expressed position. For example, McDermott goes on again to argue against male figures and sexless examples (Soffer *et al* 2000: 527).

19. How are references and sources utilised? To what extent is there dependence on previous authors?

The piece begins with a citation from Marshack, selected for its emphasis on the meaning and symbolism of the Willendorf figure, as well as the metaphorical references to her being “clothed” and “wearing the fabric of her culture” – a double entendre linked with meaning and the nature of this work (Soffer 2000: 511).

However, references, sources and citations are more usually used to present ‘authoritative’ information concerning the figurines, which may then be taken as accepted ‘fact’. This is apparent in the use of Gvozdover, who is cited in support of a number of points (Soffer *et al* 2000: 515, 516, 517 and 518). Mention of previous works is also used to present a background of research.

20. How does this work contribute to the construction and consolidation of the group?

The term “Venus figurine” is employed throughout. The term is associated with a widespread popular image, and its use perpetuates this. Such common usage merely reinforces a perception of the material as a unified category. There is no attempt to integrate male or sexless figures into the “group”, and no explanation is offered for those figurines that are not female, or do not display items of clothing. While the focus of attention is clothing, rather than nudity, the impression is maintained of a distinct group of female figurines. What does change from previous works is the focus of attention, and the value attributed to the women themselves, from sex objects to textile producers with social significance.

The emphasis on clothing cannot be extended to all the figurines, and only a relatively small number are discussed in detail, and the presentation tends to stress the most famous Venuses – Willendorf, Brassempouy *la tête à la capuche*, Dolní Věstonice Venus I and Lespugue. So, while it is a challenge to the traditional stereotypes, it still consolidates the Venus figurines as a clear and distinct group of female figurines with single meaning, and repeated use of the term merely strengthens the group identity.

Despite the difference of emphasis, it is the typical prototype figures that are used.

