Paweł Valde-Nowak, Anna Kraszewska, Magda Cieśla

Magdalenian figurine from Obłazowa Cave

ABSTRACT


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

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

Received: 18.10.2017; Revised: 5.11.2017; Revised: 21.02.2018; Accepted: 23.02.2018

I. INTRODUCTION

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

II. DESCRIPTION OF FIND

In 2016 in Obłazowa Cave a sandstone plaquette, with features typical for Lalinde/Gönnersdorf style was found (Fig. 2). The artifact was discovered in layer III. Before its discovery, the character of formerly known stone implements, combined
with radiocarbon date obtained for the aforementioned layer (Valde-Nowak, Nadachowski, Madeyska [eds.] 2003, 57, 58; Lorenc 2006, 46) suggested alternatively interpretation of the inventory as Magdalenien or Epigravetian¹.

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

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

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

¹ Complete description of Magdalenian inventories (layer III in the cave chamber and the fireplace in a rock shelter above the cave) will be a subject of a separate article.
end. Also on the left edge, in the proximal part, a tiny notch was made. Moreover, on the left curved edge in the medium part of the piece one can see a belly of pregnant woman or faintly silhouetted breasts. On both faces of the figurine there are some calcite lines that make the artifact even more attractive.

III. CONCLUSION

Lalinde/Gönnersdorf figurines and engravings are strictly stylized and considered as evident female forms, with over-sized buttocks, long trunks, small or missing breasts, and no heads (Bosinski 1982; Bosinski, d’Errico, Schiller 2001; Fig. 3).
The function of such objects of art is unclear. Marcel Otte (1990, 189) interprets them as a shard symbol expressive of the ideological unity of Magdalenian communities in Europe. According to Sabine Gaudzinski-Windheuser and Olaf Jöris (2015, 291): “ [...] the schematic style characterizing Late Magdalenian depictions represented an artistic reflection of changes in the social role of women during a period of rapid range expansion of Late Glacial populations some 16–13,000 years
ago.” Another interpretation suggests the possibility that such figurines were a kind of “(...) photographs (...) of girls carried by their boyfriends on their long hunting expeditions” (Schil d 2014, 110).

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

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

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude towards the participants of excavation in Oblazowa Cave in 2016, especially PhD students: Krzysztof Rak, Jakub Skłucki, Albert Wydrzycki, and students: Katarzyna Lajs, Martyna Lech, Grzegorz Kampka, Bartosz Kapinos and Artur Bugaj.

The research reported in this paper was performed as a part of grant NO UMO-2015/17/B/HS3/00181 “Paleolithic ritual place in Oblazowa Cave” obtained from the National Science Center.

REFERENCES

Bosinski G.

Bosinski G., Fischer G.

Bosinski G., d’Errico F., Schiller P.
2001 Die gravierten Frauendarstellungen von Gönnersdorf, Der Magdalénien-Fundplatz Gönnersdorf 8, Stuttgart (Franz Steiner Verlag).

Feustel R.

Fiedorczuk J., Bratlund B., Kolstrup E., Schild R.
2007 Late Magdalennian feminine flint plaquettes from Poland, Antiquity 81:311, p. 97–105.

Foltyn E., Foltyn E.
2007 Magdalenian flint workshop at Samborowice, site 2a (Upper Silesia, Poland), [in:] M. Masoń, T. Płonka, B. Ginter, S. K. Kozłowski (eds.), Contribution to the Central European Stone Age papers dedicated to the late Professor Zbigniew Bagniewski, Wrocław (Institute of Archaeology/University of Wrocław), p. 53–75.
Gaudzinski-Windheuser S.
2013 Raumnutzungsmuster des späten Jungpaläolithikums in Oelknitz (Thüringen), Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz 105, Mainz (Schnell & Steiner).

Gaudzinski-Windheuer S., Jöris O.

Ginter B., Połowicz M.

Ladier E.
2001 Nouvelles figures féminines schématiques de type Lalinde-Gönnersdorf dans la vallée de l’Aveyron, PALEO 13, p. 265-274.

Lorenc M.

Maier A.

Otte M.

Oliva M.

Schlör R. (ed.)
2014 Wilczyce. A Late Magdalenian Winter Hunting Camp in Southern Poland, Warsaw (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences).

Valde-Nowak P., Nadachowski A., Madeyska T. (eds.)
2003 Obłazowa Cave. Human activity, stratigraphy and palaeoenvironment, Kraków (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences).


Addresses of the Authors
Magda Cieśla
Anna Kraszewska
Paweł Valde-Nowak
Institute of Archaeology
Jagiellonian University
Gołębia 11
31-007 Kraków
POLAND

e-mail: nn8065@gmail.com
e-mail: anna.kraszewska@uj.edu.pl
e-mail: p.valde-nowak@uj.edu.pl