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The Review

of the dissertation of PhDr. Barbora Půtová, Prehistoric Culture and Birth of Human Imagination (Pravěká kultura a zrození lidské imaginace)

The PhD dissertation of Mrs. PhDr. Barbora Půtová is a monograph devoted to the ideas of the oldest documented (with findings) imaginaries of prehistoric culture, with particular emphasis to the Paleolithic art. It has done the survey of main cultural units of Upper Paleolith within the work.

The work contains 262 pages of the text together with bibliography (20 pages). It is illustrated with numerous colour photographs which are not numbered and locked-in text, and the gallery of thirteen large photographs at the end.

The thesis is divided into 11 main chapters. After the introduction the author outlines the topic and the purpose of the study and subsequently discusses the current state of research which are being raised in the dissertation. Later on in the content the author will discuss the theoretical ground of elaboration, the method of procedure and the structure of the study. Next we can read about the preliminary symptoms of art, with the reference to the world of the Neanderthals. The controversial premise, providing for such early props during the early events associated with the spiritual needs of contemporary groups has been reminded. There are many inspiring insights within the work, such as the issue of artifacts creation whose function probably was not utilitarian. Also the tendency to increase a sense of symmetry and neatly finished artifacts indicate a high level of Neanderthals culture.

We need to note with appreciation that PhDr. Barbora Půtová reliably and completely brings up the series of incorporated facts about aspects of the spiritual life of Neanderthals, among which such peculiar like alleged mask of La Roche-Cotard occur.

Further we can encounter the review of main stages of the Upper Paleolithic art development, and subsequently the survey of major discoveries of art from this period. Finally we get to the periphrasis of research problems in the term of analysis of the oldest forms of art. Next some reflections concerning formative processes emerge, which in the Upper Paleolithic reality might lead to the formation of manifestations of art. Some interpretive proposals will be discussed here, as well as the technical background issues of such kind of behavior will occur here too. A separate issue raised in the subsequent chapter of the book are hypotheses concerning the institution of the Upper Paleolithic art. We will find some considerations which characterize the lifestyle of the Upper Paleolithic hunters and

gatherers, as well as the revelation of their attitude to the contemporary, late Pleistocene realities of life. For the revelation of late-Pleistocene fauna and Upper Paleolithic settlements in Central and Eastern Europe a separate discussion had required.

On the page 45 it begins the recollection of the history of archaeological research with the particular reference to the relics of art, having been found in various circumstances. The next chapter presents hypotheses and theories, which are useful for the interpretation of the relics of the paleolithic art. As we know, these manifestations of human creativity were initially interpreted only as the spare time activity. More ideas emerged later. They took into account the symbolic meanings, as well as they have been illustrations of gender or manifestation of a hunting magic. In the following content the dissertation provides the periphrasis of the natural environment of the Upper Paleolithic man and the review of manifestations of art in the main technokomplexis of this time.

It begins with Aurignatian culture, presented both in terms of the famous miniaturized mobile art as well as in the context of relatively recently discovered on-the-rock paintings sanctuary and cave paintings that we know from the Chauvet cave. This review is updated with the latest and surprising discovery of this kind of art in romanian mountains, in the Cave Coliboaia by Apuseni. A parallel procedure will embrace younger stage of development of the Upper Paleolithic art, associated with Gravettian groups. Beyond the associated zoomorphic art, as well as the anthropomorphic one (after the Gravettian culture is already being characterized) a periphrasis of animal introductions takes place. A similar pattern has been adopted in the reference to the Magdalenian culture, distinguishing on-the-rocks and mobile art, with distinction the stone slabs, so characteristic for Magdalenian.

A various attempts to interpret the Upper Paleolithic Venus are specified in detail. Exept the standard views with the reference to maternity and the mother goddess, some further interesting proposals are also known, for instance, the treatment of these statuettes as the representation of women in a various phylogenetic stages. Some people explain a big differences in the appearance and proportions of the figures with this. I must remark that Dr Putova writes about various proposals thoroughly and completely, striving to reliably show not only the most recognized and famous concepts, but she strives to point out many other, less familiar concepts and discoveries.

A very important place in this study is occupied by still unexplained Gravettian hand figure, often with an incomplete set of fingers. It is worth to point out the ritual transition theory of Victor Turner here as well as many different alternative possibilities.

The presentation of further manifestations of art runs correctly, through Magdalenian and Solutrean cultures. Also in these cases, besides the most famous views, some less known have been brought up.

Latterly Czech and international visual artists who popularized the prehistoric art in various ways have been introduced. The inclusion of their biographies into the elaboration is relatively strange treatment which crumbles the tidied vision of development of the art of upper and decadent paleolithic communities.

The work of PhDr. Barbora Půtová is reliable review maintained in the character of synthesis. We can find however much of a deeper reflection within and some attempts to

work out a new key to understanding these representations. The expositions of wizards, shamans or human-animals figures seem to be particularly valuable in this context.

The survey of Czech and foreign illustrators of paleontology and others disciplines does not fit the hitherto content, although it is a value in itself.

The advantage of this elaboration is uniform revelation of anatomically modern human's arts, both the most famous as well as those less explored.

The work meets the conditions required for dissertation. I support and fully recommend PhDr. Barbora Půtová admission to the further steps in the procedure on this basis.

Reviewer's questions:

1. What was the purpose of placing the biographies of Czech and foreign illustrators of prehistoric times within the text?
2. What are the major differences between Gravettian and Aurignatian's art?

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'P. Půtová', written in a cursive style.

Kraków/Cracow 9. August, 2012

