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FROM ARTIFACT TO ICON:

An Analysis of the Venus Figurines in Archaeological Literature and Contemporary Culture

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the body of material known as the Venus figurines, which date from the European Upper Palaeolithic period. The argument proceeds in two stages: the first examines this material through a detailed textual analysis of the archaeological literature that has discussed these figurines since their initial discovery at the end of the 19th century to the present day; the second investigates the utilisation of particular Venus figurines in the contemporary medium of the World Wide Web. The textual analysis identifies and discusses a number of factors relevant to the presentation and fundamental construction of the Venus figurines as an archaeological category. These include examination of the use of terminology to label and define the figurines as a class of material (Chapter 2); assessment of information presented in the literature pertaining to contextual and chronological factors (Chapter 3); evaluation of the evidence provided for both the homogeneity and diversity apparent within this category (Chapter 4); Chapter 5 isolates and discusses a number of methods implicit in the production of the literature by which aspects of both individual figurines and the wider class are prioritised to create and consolidate a particular impression of the archaeological material; Chapter 6 presents three detailed Case Studies of these processes as they are in practice applied to the Venus figurines. In Chapter 7 the specific use of these figurines in one medium of contemporary culture, the World Wide Web, is examined. Within this medium, the figurines are removed from their original archaeological context and contemporary meanings are attributed to them. This popular usage is then compared and contrasted with archaeological practice. My analysis demonstrates that parallels between the two approaches can be drawn, and identifies the role of the Venus figurines as a "commodity" within both archaeology and contemporary culture.

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

Volume 1 of 5

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CONTENTS

VOLUME 1

CHAPTER 3
CHRONOLOGY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CATEGORY

VOLUME 2

CHAPTER 5

THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE CATEGORY

VOLUME 5

ILLUSTRATIONS

TABLES

DECLARATION

None of the material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other University.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the research

This thesis examines the archaeological category known as Venus figurines. In particular, I will be examining the way archaeologists have presented and made use of the category, and how this usage has spread beyond archaeology into many aspects of popular culture. I will argue that the Venus figurines have been dealt with in a less systematic and analytical manner than any other aspect of the Palaeolithic archaeological record. While they are the most iconic images deriving from the Palaeolithic, they have nevertheless suffered more from a suspension of rigor and empirical methodology applied to other aspects of the Palaeolithic material culture.

The thesis owes its present form to three factors that came together in the initial stages of my research. The first of these was a re-reading of two papers by Marcia-Anne Dobres, published in the same year and entitled "Re-Considering "Venus figurines": a feminist-inspired re-analysis" (1992*a*) and "Re-presentations of Palaeolithic visual imagery: Simulacra and their alternatives" (1992*b*). When I first read these papers my interest lay in Dobres' identification of androcentric bias in approaches to the Venus figurines. On re-reading these articles, however, I was struck by two points. Firstly, Dobres states that the figurines are interpreted as exclusively female, and that all researchers make three statements with regard to them: that the figurines are stylistically similar, with sexual features emphasised; that they occur within a limited chronological period; and that they occur across a wide geographical area (Dobres 1992*b*). Secondly, in the companion paper (Dobres 1992*a*) she prioritises the perceived female nature of the Venus figurines as the crucial factor in whether they constitute a single class of material. In addition, although aware of doubts relating to the reliability of the contextual evidence for the figurines and other Palaeolithic material, she dismisses such concerns as "positivistic assertions of verifiability" (*ibid*: 249). My own interest was aroused by this acknowledgement yet dismissal of evident contextual problems coupled with

her subsequent statement that this need not deter analysis as the material could be studied through an existing body of literature dealing with morphology and style (Dobres 1992a: 250). However, as my familiarity with this literature increased, it became increasingly apparent to me that questions of context were of equal importance in the definition of this class of material and that, in contrast to Dobres' claim, the literature was contradictory rather than consistent in its approaches to and presentation of this contextual information. This point will be discussed further in the section dealing with "Research Methods".

The second and third factors were a result of external stimuli and pure chance. While re-reading Dobres' papers with questions regarding the presentation of the material uppermost in my mind, a colleague who had outgrown her own research into the Venus figurines donated to me a file containing her own data and a collection of publications. Amongst these articles was a cutting from the *Life* section of an edition of *USA Today* containing a report on *FAT!SO?*, an American organisation concerned with raising public awareness of issues of 'fat acceptance' (Hainer 1996: 1-2). The article describes the adoption of the Venus of Willendorf as their mascot, and places the figure in a thoroughly contemporary frame of reference by characterising her as "a short, squat, faceless figurine with prodigious love handles. And breasts so large that – well, let's just say she doesn't need the Wonderbra" (*ibid*: 2) (Figure 1). In the accompanying photomontage, the Willendorf figurine is the centrepiece, where she is reproduced at a scale in which she appears larger than Eddie Murphy and Luciano Pavarotti. The third factor occurred while watching a film, the Hollywood psychological thriller *The Silence of the Lambs*, in which an FBI agent attempts to track down a serial killer known as "Buffalo Bill". As Bill – a thwarted transsexual who seeks to *become* 'woman' through the removal and appropriation of real women's skins – poses and displays his body in a scene of self-admiration, I became aware that a small pendant worn around his neck depicted an image of the Venus of Willendorf.

These two examples of an entirely non-archaeological usage of the Willendorf figure led me to realise that the archaeological material known as the Venus figurines has applications and meanings in a contemporary context far removed

from the discipline of archaeology. This in turn re-focused my attention on the nature and presentation of the class of material and its utilisation for hypotheses and theory building in archaeology itself

This thesis will therefore consider the extent to which the category of Venus figurines may be one created and maintained in the archaeological literature through such means as the definition of the category, the creation of context and the attribution of meaning. The class of material created may then be utilised to validate our speculative hypotheses and interpretations. However, it is also my intention to show that this material is not the exclusive preserve of the archaeological domain, rather that the figurines have a contemporary meaning for and relevance to contemporary individuals and organisations beyond conventional academic boundaries. Through identification of the more overt yet fundamentally similar processes of creation and utilisation occurring in the latter instances, I will demonstrate that insight can be drawn from this medium to illuminate the practices and motivations underlying our own archaeological approaches.

Aims of the research

The aim of this research is to enhance our understanding of archaeological practice and its approaches to and uses of the past through examination of the construction of the Venus figurines in archaeological literature and contemporary culture. To undertake this research, I will proceed with an analysis of three major themes. Theme one reviews the way in which the archaeological material is presented in the literature and identifies the impressions that this creates. It will focus on how the category has won acceptance and credibility through such factors as the terminology employed and the examples selected for discussion. Most importantly, it will explore the two related aspects of style and chronology and the manner in which they have been used to delimit the parameters of the material. Chapter Two will therefore examine the labelling and classification of the body of material known as Venus figurines. Chapter Three will consider the archaeological and chronological context for the figurines, and the utilisation of stylistic similarity to support chronological attribution.

Theme two contains the major analytical section of the thesis with regard to the Venus figurines as archaeological material. The aim of this section will be to demonstrate that the category is maintained and reinforced through literary practice as much as through any inherent properties of the archaeological material itself. This section is divided into three separate aspects. Chapter Four will discuss the use of a generalised characterisation and the prioritisation of particular features in relation to approaches to the homogeneity and diversity of the figurines constituting the class; Chapter Five will examine the means by which the integrity of the class is maintained in the archaeological literature through such techniques of presentation as the selection of prototype figures to represent the group as a whole. To draw these threads together, Chapter Six will present three case studies illustrating the preceding points: "The use of the 'lozenge composition'" will critically review the stylistic canon identified by Leroi-Gourhan, the relationship of this canon to his analysis of the figurines, and the impact this archaeological construct has had on the subsequent literature; "The impact of inclusion" will consider the persistence of the category in the face of new discoveries and the variability already existing within it; "Ancient artifacts; contemporary meanings" will examine the way in which selected figures have been variously portrayed in the archaeological texts, highlighting the differing meanings subsequently attributed to them.

Theme three seeks to expand this consideration of meaning in relation to the figurines through the examination of the occurrence of this archaeological material in an entirely different medium, that of the Internet or World Wide Web (WWW). Chapter Seven will therefore investigate the utilisation of the figurines in this context. From this, I will consider the extent to which these perspectives may provide insight and a standard of analysis that may be used to re-evaluate archaeological approaches to the material. This will not only allow examination of the role of the Venus figurines within both archaeology and contemporary culture, but also allow consideration of the nature of the relationship between the practice of archaeology and its wider contemporary context.

Research Methods

The Venus figurines

This thesis will review the archaeological class of material known as Venus figurines. The exact constitution of this class, and the criteria for inclusion within it, are objects of inquiry that will be discussed in some detail in subsequent chapters. The research outlined above requires two separate analyses: firstly, a study of the archaeological literature that has presented the class of Venus figurines to a predominantly academic audience for over a century; secondly, an examination of the occurrence and utilisation of the Venus figurines in the wider and predominantly non-academic context of the World Wide Web. At this stage it is therefore useful to provide a working definition of the Venus figurines and specify their role in this thesis.

The archaeological material – the Venus figurines themselves – will be discussed at second rather than first hand, through their presentation and discussion in the media of archaeological publications and WWW websites. It is the *appearance* of the Venus figurines in and through these two mediums that provides the basic data for my research, rather than direct analysis of the Venus figurines themselves. The starting point for this research is the archaeological literature, and this thesis will therefore discuss those Palaeolithic figures that have either been specifically named a Venus or been included in an analysis or discussion of the Venus figurines in one or more of the publications studied in the course of my research. The publications concerned are listed at the end of this chapter. The corpus of archaeological material derived from this literature is listed in Table 1 (Appendix C). An illustration is provided for each example along with details of discovery, first publication, find-spot, context and age. Indication is also given of the extent to which each figure is discussed in the literature.

The figures contained in Table 1 are presented in chronological order of discovery, allowing the reader to follow the development of the corpus through time. As the publications studied determined which figures were included, an attempt was made to extract the information provided in Table 1 from those same publications. In a minority of instances, the required information was not

specified in the literature studied; this will be noted where relevant. Furthermore, as my Introduction has indicated that the literature may be inconsistent in its presentation of contextual information, it should be noted that certain information provided in this table (e.g. chronological attribution/age of figures) will be the subject of detailed discussion in the following chapters, and should not be regarded as concrete in all cases. Chapter 6 will conclude with a review of the present standing of this corpus of archaeological material in the light of this discussion.

Two final points should be made concerning the terminology employed in this thesis. Firstly, various forms of the Venus terminology appear in the literature studied. As much of the discussion of the Venus figurines to follow involves the citation of examples from this literature, variations of the phraseology will occur in those instances where reference is being made to the presentation of the figures in an original publication, so as to precisely convey the terminology and emphasis employed in the particular text under discussion. All such citations from the literature will appear in inverted commas.

Secondly, the figure from Willendorf predominantly referred to in this thesis is one of two recovered from the site. However, the second figure is only occasionally discussed in the literature and therefore, while the latter will be referred to as Willendorf 2, for simplicity the former will be referred to throughout as Willendorf or the Willendorf figure, rather than Willendorf 1. To avoid confusion in few instances where both figures are discussed or referred to, the numbers for both figures will be specified.

Theoretical Orientation
This thesis will take a critical approach to the literature and the archaeological category of Venus figurines presented within it. Such an approach identifies with trends of post-processual thought, particularly a focus on the relationship between the archaeological material and the interpretive process that acts upon it (e.g. Olsen 1990; Tilley 1993). In such approaches, emphasis is laid on the identification of archaeology as a contemporary practice, a mode of cultural production in which the remains of the past are turned into forms of knowledge

for publication (Mackenzie and Shanks 1994: 29). As such, the practice of archaeology necessitates the creation of the past in the present through the production of a body of archaeological literature that mediates and *re*presents, rather than transparently reflects, the material culture it aims to describe. The original archaeological material is recreated in a new and contemporary frame of reference, by means of archaeological interpretations that are informed by contemporary interests and values (Tilley 1993: 6; Shanks 1995: 52).

Although such post-processual arguments have circulated in archaeology for over fifteen years, the status of archaeological interpretation as a real or discursive practice is still termed the key issue generating debate (Rowlands and Kristiansen 1998: 3). Jones has seen the division in terms of archaeological scientists and theoretical archaeologists, who speak "quite different languages" with "quite different visions of what the study of archaeology entails" (Jones 2002: 1-2). A crucial point of debate concerns the question of meaning – to what degree can meaning be recovered from, or merely attributed to, the material culture that forms the archaeological record. A distinction between those who believe that the past contains a true meaning that may be recovered through the application of modern methodology, and those who believe that any meaning the archaeological record may have is created purely in the present, was proposed by Tilley:

> "The traditional way of viewing material culture, and more widely the archaeological record, is that it is in some way a self-sufficient repository of meaning. The task of the archaeologist is to develop theoretical and methodological tools that will enable the efficient extraction of this meaning. The meaning of material culture is furthermore regarded as stable and invariant. The alternative position... is to regard the archaeological record as the end product of the way in which contemporary individuals experience it. What the archaeological record is, the properties it manifests, is constituted through theoretical labour acting on it. No meaning is determined or indelibly privileged by something inherent in the archaeological record itself" (Tilley 1993: 7).

This statement characterises the respective positions of those who view the interpretation of the material remains of the past as a viable means of accessing "what actually happened" (Bintliff 1991: 276) and those who view the 'facts' produced by archaeological interpretation as having only a "linguistic existence" (Olsen 1990: 194). Taken at face value, Tilley's proposed opposition assumes a clear-cut divergence in both the theoretical approach to and practice of archaeology, and neither position as represented by Tilley is entirely satisfactory. While claims to objectivity have persisted (e.g. Moore 1994: 52), such claims – or the necessity for them – are less relevant to the earlier authors reviewed in the present work, emerging only as such particularly contentious issues with the paradigmatic change from processual to post-processual thought. Indeed, in times described as so cripplingly self-conscious that the individual creativity of the archaeologist is sapped (Bradley 1993: 132), it is not the intention of this work to 'judge' the literature purely by the imposed 'self-reflexive standards' of post-processualism. Nevertheless, it is necessary to identify a starting point from which to review over a century of literature dealing with the Venus figurines, a period of time in which a variety of approaches and hypotheses will be represented as the social contexts of the authors themselves change, and in which these changes could be expected to be reflected in the literature produced. In this sense, a usefulness of Tilley's statement for this work lies in its delineation of two extremes lying at either end of a scale, and it is my intention to apply this scale to the texts to assess to what extent the two positions are relevant to and apparent in the literature dealing with the Venus figurines. Furthermore, the opposition provided by the two extremes allows the literature to be reviewed with questions of meaning uppermost in mind. It will be considered whether archaeologists claim to provide a true meaning and create an impression of indisputable 'fact' in these texts, and if so, how this is achieved and by means of what evidence. The relationship of the meanings provided in the texts to the archaeological material itself will be questioned. The Venus figurines as the 'end product' will also be examined, with attention to what this may represent, and how this is perceived and experienced by the reader.

It is my contention that regardless of whether archaeologists (be they traditional, processual or post-processual) declare their own background and influences or not, and whether they believe their interpretation is *the* answer or just one of many possibilities, each draws inferences from the archaeological material, and it is the degree of correspondence between these inferences and the original data that should determine the usefulness of the subsequent interpretation. It therefore becomes a key issue whether archaeologists allow their hypotheses, which may reflect their contemporary concerns and interests, to *determine* the answers they find in the archaeological data. In this sense, the chief value of Tilley's statement is to focus a critical enquiry, a means of looking beyond the archaeological literature as unquestioned "fact sheets" (Bintliff 1991: 276).

This is relevant to the problems of empirical methodology suggested in "Rationale for the research". Bintliff has insisted that archaeologists must "start at the bottom", basing their research on the "firm foundation" of traditional archaeological practice that includes "empirical data-collection" and "rigorous data-description" (Bintliff, in Thomas and Tilley 1992: 113; Bintliff 1991: 277). Similarly, Kohl has stated that archaeologists "should not be Jean Auel" (a reference to the author of fictional novels set in the Palaeolithic) and contrasts "rigour and archaeological examination" against "multiple post-processual readings" (Kohl 1993: 15), specifying that criticism and self-reflection should not be a substitute for uncovering new data (*ibid*: 18). From the post-processual viewpoint, Johnson has argued that a variance exists between what is said in theory and what is done in practice, claiming that "an insistence on the epistemological primacy of the data does not necessarily go hand in hand with using those data" (Johnson 1999: 185). Viewed in this light, Tilley's emphasis on the constructed nature of the archaeological material in the literature allows examination of whether the interpretations proposed by archaeologists correctly apply available methodologies and the accepted rules and practices of archaeology to the archaeological material. This provides an opportunity for identifying, highlighting and ultimately removing examples of 'poor archaeology' from the study of the Venus figurines. If, as Dobres claims, the Venus figurines can be studied through the existing literature (Dobres 1992*a*: 250), it becomes imperative that these texts and the information they contain are

subject to evaluation and analysis rather than taken at face value. Without looking at the texts in such a critical way, deeply ingrained assumptions may pass unquestioned, repeated so often that they become truths, thus allowing established categories of material to remain unchallenged.

It therefore follows that the classification of the archaeological material as Venus figurines, and the ways in which this class of material is approached and maintained in the literature, are key areas for examination. As the initial classification of any archaeological material is a crucial factor in its subsequent perception, it is necessary to briefly review archaeological approaches to this subject in the discipline as a whole.

Classification is deemed a fundamental tool in the practice of archaeology, for the simple reason that everything we deal with as archaeologists must be identified and given a name if order is to be brought to a diverse range of material (Turner 1994: 114). Its primary methodology – typology – is still a major tool in the creation of chronological order (Sørensen 1997: 180). The continued importance of classification and typology has regularly led to calls for a critical reassessment (e.g. Spaulding 1953; Hill and Evans 1972; Dunnell 1986; Turner 1994; Sørensen 1997). Key issues have concerned whether a typology is revealed in the original material or simply created by the archaeologist, and whether the classification determined by the analyst has any relationship to prehistoric classification.

Early works focused on the purpose and uses of the "type" as an organisational tool but one that nevertheless corresponded to *"demonstrable historical meaning in terms of behavior patterns"* (Krieger 1944: 272, emphasis in original text), and whose properties demonstrate a "characteristic pattern", identification of which would lead to the "discovery of combinations of attributes favoured by the makers of the artefacts" (Spaulding 1953: 305). Hill and Evans characterised these approaches to classification as the "empiricist model", which they contrasted with their own "positivist model" (Hill and Evans 1962: 233). In a passage that prefigures the language and sentiments in the passage drawn from Tilley above (Tilley 1993: 7), they proposed that proponents of the "empiricist

model" believed in and sought a single inherent meaning in the data, which it was the task of the archaeologist to discover. These "meanings" related to three things: "ideas, customs or mental templates; functional meaning; or 'historical-index' meaning" (Hill and Evans 1972: 233-4).

While Hill and Evans stressed that "we know of no archaeologist who really conforms in practice to the tenets of the empiricist model in its pure form" (Hill and Evans 1972: 236), their belief was that the hypothetical "empiricist model" had nevertheless gained a level of acceptance in archaeological practice, with the result the classificatory schemes devised by archaeologists were viewed as a valid reflection of those operating in the past, and that they could be used to accurately identify 'cultures' and trace the distribution of peoples across time and space. Furthermore, Hill and Evans saw a major problem in the tendency for the analytical types devised by archaeologists to become reified into *the* type, which would then be viewed as existing with an identical meaning in both the past and the present, and on which further interpretation could be based without question (*ibid*: 239, 241, 243).

They urged recognition of the active role of the investigator in the selection of attributes involved in the formation of any typology (*ibid*: 252-3). Hill and Evans' own model refuted the proposition that a "best" type could be found, and rejected the pursuit of "all-purpose, standardized typologies" that purported to be devoid of theory or bias in their construction, in favour of those that could be varied and determined by the specific research questions to be addressed (*ibid*: 237, 252). In terms again similar to those later used by Tilley (Tilley 1993:7), the "positivist model" proposes that "... there is no inherent meaning (e.g. norms, templates, preferences, functions, etc.) to be discovered in an assemblage of artefacts. In fact, [the archaeologist] can choose to make many different typologies, each with its own meaning. The meanings he chooses to impose depend on *a priori* problems, hypotheses, or other interests" (Hill and Evans 1972: 252).

Later works have continued to emphasize that the classifications and types employed by archaeologists may bear no relation to those employed by the

original makers (e.g. Barrett 1991: 204). Hodder sees two problems: firstly, that a contemporary classification unrelated to any original classification may nevertheless produce consistent patterning; secondly, that an original classification may have been contested by different groups within society (Hodder 1999: 73). Miller's study of ceramic types in an Indian village indicated that characteristics considered as diagnostic by the archaeologist were of no importance to the producers of the ceramics (Miller 1984: 198). The validity of contemporary analytical types has also been raised in Dibble's re-evaluation of Bordes classification of Middle Palaeolithic scrapers; while Bordes' (1961) initial study identified over a dozen distinct types, with an assumption that these types were similarly viewed by the original users, Dibble (1987; 1988) argued that the variability discerned by Bordes represented the differential use wear of only one basic type.

Miller has highlighted a further issue, claiming that a failing of both traditional and processual approaches to classification was that they sought material relations, rather than social relations, as an explanation for change (Miller 1984: 2). His own study focused on exploring the factors underlying variability in artefacts through the identification of this variability as the result of the organisational principles involved in human categorisation processes (Miller 1984: 1). This approach represents a move away from traditional typologies that have been criticised for treating similarities between objects "in a rather simplistic manner" (Sørensen 1997: 182). Shanks and Hodder see this as a basic problem with classification, that it "operates under a 'rule of the same'" without provision for assessing "the variations within a class, nor the variability of variability" (Shanks and Hodder 1995: 6). Sørensen claims that in such studies similarity itself becomes the value, similarity is seen as "*the* meaning" (Sørensen 1997: 182, emphasis in original text). My introductory section has noted that the claim that the Venus figurines are presented in the literature as a class of material boasting strong stylistic similarity; degrees of homogeneity and diversity within the archaeological material will be discussed in Chapter 4, with a view to determining whether the above criticism may have relevance to this class of material.

Following Miller (1984), a number of works have re-aligned their focus away from traditional archaeological forms of classification towards the study of human categorisation processes (e.g. Turner 1994; Sørensen 1997) In these works it is seen as crucial that, before any assumptions can be made about the ordering of the material in the present, attention must be directed towards how human categorisation processes assist human agents in their understanding of and interactions with the material and social world around them (Turner 1994: 119). Turner's (1994) re-evaluation of Bronze Age metalwork classification draws heavily on Rosch's (1978) paper on human categorisation. While this paper has value for Turner in the application of its principles to account for change in the archaeological material under study, Rosch's work also has value for this thesis in providing a possible account of processes that may underlie our contemporary practice of classification and have bearing on the presentation of the Venus figurines in the literature. I will therefore discuss several points in detail.

Rosch proposes that categories may be divided into three levels – superordinate, base and subordinate – which can be differentiated on the basis of their number of shared attributes. The base level is where people operate most comfortably, as this is where the number of shared attributes are at a moderate level and where categories are clearly distinguishable from one another (Rosch 1978, cited in Turner 1994: 120).

The use of categories is facilitated by the fact that people are able to clearly conceptualise a familiar example of this category, namely the example that most satisfactorily fulfils the attributes deemed necessary for an object to fall within a certain category (Turner 1994: 120-1). This "familiar example" is known as the "proto-typical" member of that category (Rosch 1978: 36, cited in Turner 1994: 121), and this member then forms a central "core" around which other members of the category will be arranged according to their degree of similarity or difference. As a result, a degree of flexibility will be allowed in the composition of the category as the only requirement for the inclusion of a new member is the recognition that something is closer to the prototype of one category than it is to another (Turner 1994: 121). Rather than "a fixed set of defining properties", all

that is needed is "a sufficient family resemblance to the prototype" (Johnson and Lakoff 1980: 123, cited in Turner 1994: 121).

It is my intention to determine whether Rosch's proposal is relevant to the operation of Venus figurines as a category in the archaeological literature. The terminology and notion of the "proto-typical" figure outlined above informs a number of questions in the textual analysis (see p. 16, Questions 10-16), and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Hodder raises one further issue concerning the wider practice of classification that should be considered in the particular instance of the Venus figurines, suggesting that the practice of classification leads to the separation of certain classes of objects from their wider context for consideration in isolation (Hodder 1999: 91-92). Sørensen's (1997) paper presents a hypothetical discussion between Scandinavian archaeologists Müller and Malmer as a means of exploring *how* archaeologists generate typologies. A disputed point between the two is the role of the find-context in the construction of a typology; "Müller" argues that the find-context predetermines the typology, and "Malmer" replies, "Typology can be made for anything independent of its context – in fact, the type itself can be considered a context" (Sørensen 1997: 186). This suggests that if the type can be identified, the archaeological context is unnecessary. I have noted above that problems exist with the archaeological context for a number of the Venus figurines, and in this respect the notion that the type may effectively serve *as* a context is interesting. The labelling of the Venus figurines as a class or type will be discussed in Chapter 2; their archaeological context and the attribution of certain figures to the class on the grounds of stylistic similarity will be discussed in Chapter 3, where the notion of the stylistically similar type serving as a substitute for archaeological context will be considered.

Analysis of the archaeological literature
To answer and address these issues, a close examination of the archaeological literature – the texts that represent the archaeological material – was undertaken by means of a detailed textual analysis of 131 published works. The texts analysed are listed in order of publication at the end of this chapter. This is not

14

intended to be an exhaustive list of all publications dealing with the Venus figurines, and it is regretted that time constraints limit those included to predominantly English and French language texts. The final list was arrived at by the following methods. Preliminary reading of the literature indicated a number of works frequently cited by later authors, for example Leroi-Gourhan (1968) and Gamble (1982). These were identified as 'core' or 'key' texts in the presentation and development of the Venus figurines as an archaeological category. Along with a number of texts referred to in Dobres' articles (1992a and b), these texts were actively sought for inclusion. In this respect, the body of literature for study grew in a somewhat organic manner, as paths were traced through the literature and chains of reference followed. However, as it became apparent that questions of archaeological context were of importance, effort was also made specifically to locate a number of texts with information relevant to the discovery and early publication of the Venus figurines, for example Reinach (1898) and de Saint-Périer (1922). For comparative purposes, it was an intention to include texts from all periods throughout the twentieth century, to represent developments within archaeology and the changing approaches to the archaeological material, and to allow evaluation of the development of the category through time. In addition to this, a number of general works were selected at random. These include broad ranging studies of the Palaeolithic period or its art, for example Powell (1966) and Clark (1967), and also histories of art containing reference to the Venus figurines, for example Honour and Fleming (1982) and Nead (1993). Finally, a number of works were passed to me by colleagues aware of my interest in the subject. This method accounts for the inclusion of such texts as Kogan (1994), whose reference to the Venus figurines was initially drawn to my attention by Professor John Bintliff. While it was not my intention to exclude or overlook relevant works, the necessity of approaching an expansive and *expanding* body of literature as my raw data caused certain logistical problems, particularly in relation to the constraints of time. It is regretted that as an object for study such data are not finite, and this has undoubtedly led to the omission of some works with which the reader may be familiar.

To structure the information drawn from this analysis of the literature, and to focus attention on the specific areas of the presentation of the archaeological material outlined above, a standard set of questions were considered in relation to each text. These are listed below:

1. What is the context of this approach to the archaeological material?
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?
3. What terminology is used to introduce and to subsequently define the material, and to what effect?
4. How is the category of material defined? To what does the label refer?
5. Is a general characterisation of the material provided? How is the material characterised?
6. Does the author accept or adopt groups as previously established, or are new groups created?
7. How is the credibility of the material established?
8. Are details of archaeological context or dating discussed?
9. What is the total number of examples given for the material? How many are actually referred to or used as a database?
10. Are specific examples and individual figures discussed?
11. Does the piece discuss a range of examples, or are generalisations made from a limited number of examples or prototypes?
12. In what depth are the figurines discussed or described?
13. Do the individual descriptions concur with the generalised characterisation given?
14. What figures are selected for illustration and what is the effect of the illustrations?
15. Are there indications of any criteria in the selection of figures for discussion or illustration?
16. What comparisons are made between examples? Are these connections, stylistic, contextual, etc? What is the purpose of the comparison?
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?

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

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

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

Discussion of the results of the textual analysis is divided into separate chapters: Chapter 2 will discuss terminology and labelling; Chapter 3 will discuss chronology and the chronological attribution of certain figures by stylistic similarity; Chapter 4 will discuss homogeneity and diversity; Chapter 5 will discuss techniques of presentation including the role of particular figures as prototypes; Chapter 6 will present three Case Studies to draw together and elaborate certain of the points made. A section presenting the conclusions of the textual analysis will follow the Case Studies.

Length precludes the full presentation of the results derived from each of the 131 articles, and for this reason a proportion of the texts have been selected to present the data in complete form. The results of these analyses are given in full in Appendix B.

World Wide Web analysis

The investigation of the World Wide Web (WWW) sites consisted of three stages. In the preliminary stage of this analysis, sites referring to this material were located through searches employing the Venus terminology, with a view to assessing the quantity of sites involved and the impact of the figurines in popular culture, and to investigate the potential emergence of prototype figures. The second stage of the analysis involves a detailed examination of these sites to identify the various types of site and the contexts in which the figures appear, the purposes for which they are employed, and the manner in which meaning is attributed to them. The third stage of this analysis sought to provide comparative material against which it could be determined if trends identified in

stages one and two are common to other forms of archaeological material appearing in this medium. A similar search was therefore conducted to locate sites connected with the archaeological category of Stone Circles. The results of these analyses are presented and discussed in Chapter Seven. The role of the Venus figurines in both archaeological approaches and contemporary culture will then be discussed.

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CHAPTER 2

TERMINOLOGY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CATEGORY

Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine the production of archaeological 'facts' and the processes contributing to the formation and categorisation of material culture into classes or types, to make explicit the effects of archaeological discourse on the characterisation of the material culture under investigation. This chapter will identify major points relating to the classification of the Venus figurines through an examination of the labelling and naming of this archaeological material. I will trace the usage and meanings of the Venus terminology in the literature, noting how this relates to definitions of the class and exploring the relationship of such definition to subsequent interpretation.

A cursory inspection of over a century of archaeological publications demonstrates the frequent use of the term Venus figurines or Venuses, alongside a continuing interest in the archaeological material that these labels are deemed to identify.

However, what the label is assumed to represent and the precise referent – what the label does represent – may vary from author to author. This is clearly demonstrated by the variety of numerical totals put forward for this archaeological material. In her discussion of possible interpretations of "Mother Goddesses or Venus figurines", Ehrenberg notes that there are "over sixty" "Palaeolithic female figurines" (Ehrenberg 1989: 66). Forty years prior to this, Absolon had discussed 91 "Venus statuettes" (Absolon 1949: 201), while Rice later utilised a database of "188 Venuses" that included sculpture, relief and two-dimensional engravings from throughout the Palaeolithic period (Rice 1981: 403). Taylor claimed around 200 "Ice Age statuettes of women", "collectively... termed "Venus" figurines" (Taylor 1996: 116), while McDermott recognised approximately forty "intact or mostly intact figures in the PKG style", with twice that number known as fragments (McDermott 1996:

232). Soffer *et al* refer to "Palaeolithic depictions of women" that "by now number well over 200 examples for the Gravettian period alone" (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514-5), and Pfeiffer simply states that the "Venus figurines" appeared "in quantity" (Pfeiffer 1982: 202). The terminology applied is of obvious importance in the definition of a class of archaeological material, and it can be seen that there is a lack of definition and specificity of nomenclature with regard to these figurines. This situation is perhaps consistent with an assessment that described nude female figurines as being "indiscriminately labelled 'Venuses'" (Sandars 1968: 29). On this basis, precisely what the term refers to and what it is assumed to stand for (and the relationship between this perception and the archaeological material itself), is sufficiently unclear to warrant investigation.

Early uses of Venus terminology

A number of authors discuss reasons for the initial naming of the figurines as Venus. Some see the term deriving from Venus, the Roman goddess of love (Taylor 1996: 116; Ehrenberg 1989: 66) and others relate the designation to interpretations of the figures as representations of an erotic or aesthetic ideal (Maringer 1956: 110). Ucko suggests that the initial use of the term should be seen in the context of the traditions operating at the time of the first discoveries (Ucko 1968: 411). Initial finds of Palaeolithic human representations roughly coincided with those of later prehistoric representations in Crete, Greece, the Cyclades and the Near East, and such circumstances allowed that the Palaeolithic material was viewed in the same terms as the later figures (*ibid*: 411), perhaps initiating a long-standing association with theories of 'Mother Goddess' worship. Attention is drawn to several factors as influential in the application of the term to a figurine discovered in 1864 at Laugerie-Basse (Figure 2.1): Conkey states that this figurine was named the "*Vénus impudique*" (the shameless or immodest Venus) by its discover the Marquis de Vibraye, on the basis of a perceived vulvar mark and the lack of clothing (Conkey 1997: 185); others cite the correspondence of the slender form with the canons of female beauty current in classical archaeology (Bisson and White 1996: 8), noting that the engraved *femme au renne* (Figure 2.2) discovered at the same site three years later, and the figure from Trou Magrite (Figure 2.3) received no such nomenclature (*ibid*: 8).

A view of the material as perceived and judged in such classical terms can be seen in Pales' (1972) analysis of the use of the term Venus, where the usage of the term is geared towards a classical derivation and application. He draws attention to this meaning of Venus by commenting that "in the strict sense of the term" if any representation of a Venus deserves such a name, it is Willendorf (Figure 2.4) (Pales 1972: 218). This meaning is reiterated when he refers to the generous use of "this evocation of the Roman goddess of Beauty" (*ibid*: 219), stating that such use is excessive and often "without justification" except in certain instances as at Angles-sur-l'Anglin (Figure 2.5) or La Magdeleine (Figure 2.6). Confirming this association, he concludes by suggesting that it could be used to acknowledge some instances of the skill of the sculptors of ivory, limestone or steatite, "without worry for the classical statuary of antiquity" (*ibid*: 219).

Beyond this usage, Pales further suggests that in certain cases a derisory intention can be seen in the application of the term Venus (Pales 1972: 219). This is related to a further factor identified as relevant to both the labelling of the figurines as Venuses and much of their subsequent interpretation. Alongside the *Venus de Milo*, Conkey sees the predecessor of the *Vénus impudique* label as the so-called "Hottentot Venus", Saartjie Baartman (Conkey 1997: 185), who had been brought to Europe from Africa and placed on public display, for the most part due to interest in her steatopygic buttocks and enlarged genitalia (Figure 2.7). Interest was such that after her death her genitalia were preserved and placed, once again, on display (Gilman 1985: 88). Bisson and White draw attention to a nuanced application of the term Venus; noting Baartman's "facial ugliness and grotesquely proportioned body", they suggest that this corresponds well with Piette's application of the term to only *la poire* (Figure 2.8), which they term the "most obese" of the Brassempouy finds (Bisson and White 1996: 8).

It is also possible that the label Venus sprang from comments in several of the early works in which attention is drawn to the *mont de Vénus* on certain of the statuettes. Piette writes of *la poire*; "Le mont de Vénus est vaste, triangulaire,

peu saillant" (Piette 1895: 144), a description later reiterated as a characteristic of the "adipose race" identified by Piette (Piette 1895: 147). Attention is also drawn to the depiction of "short hatching", taken as denoting hair on the *mont de Vénus* of the *femme au renne* (Figure 2.2) (*ibid*: 145). The *mont de Vénus* of *la figurine à la ceinture* from Brassempouy (Figure 2.9) is also identified by Piette (after some discussion with colleagues) as an exaggerated projection ending in a hidden vulva (*ibid*: 148). Similarly, Reinach draws attention to this feature in his presentation of the Grimaldi *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Figure 2.10), noting that there is similarity between the two figures then repeating that the *mont de Vénus* is accentuated and projecting (Reinach 1898: 30). This meaning also ties in with the name given to the naked figure from Laugerie Basse – the *Vénus impudique* – which has been interpreted as having a vulva marked by a line (Figure 2.1). This view is supported by an analysis of Mortillet, who uses the Venus label only in reference to this find, commenting that this figure was so characterised by the development of its genital parts that Vibraye named her the *Vénus impudique* (de Mortillet 1898: 147). It therefore could be suggested that the label Venus is a response to a perception of the figurines as crude, on the basis of what was perceived as explicit genital depiction.

Development of the term Venus

Since these early examples, the term Venus has remained in use, and is regularly applied to a number of specific images (Conkey 1997: 183-4). Laguna used the term in connection with the figurines of Lespugue (Figure 2.11) and Willendorf) (Figure 2.4), and it is these figures that were termed "the most typical of the Aurignacian figures" (Laguna 1932: 494). This seems to indicate the most common use of the term in connection with the most 'typical' examples. This use indicates the role of these figures as prototypes, and this use will be discussed in Chapter 5. Bahn and Vertut see the continued use of the Venus term as attached for the most part to obese statuettes (Bahn and Vertut 1997: 160), and this concurs with the 'popular' impression of Venus figurines encapsulated in a comment by McBurney, who characterised the figurines as "obese naked figurines of women sculptured in the round" sufficiently well

known to require no further description (McBurney 1961: 110, cited in Hole and Heizer 1973: 409).

However, my analysis would suggest that the usage of Venus term has been, and continues to be, more nuanced than Bahn and Vertut's comment suggests. The terms Venus figurines or Venuses enjoy almost continuous use throughout the texts selected for study, and it can be suggested that the term Venus is applied in a number of different ways. These can be identified as follows: there are specified figures named as "the Venus of"; a "Venus" identifies a specific type of figure, allowing certain figures to be designated a "Venus figurine". In addition, there is a body of material referred to by the generic label "Venus figurines" without further specification.

Individually named Venuses

From the earliest finds the term Venus has been associated with certain individual discoveries. It has been noted that the term Venus was first applied in 1864 to the *Vénus impudique* (Figure 2.1), and that only one figure amongst Piette's collection – the first presentation of a group of statuettes – is specifically named a Venus – *la Vénus de Brassempouy*, although this figure was originally named *la poire* (Figure 2.8) by its discoverers due to the shape and size of the thigh (Piette 1895: 143).

While Pales has claimed that individual discoveries following Willendorf – Laussel (Figure 2.12), Lespugue (Figure 2.11), Savignano (Figure 2.13) – were not made known by their discoverers or commentators as Venus (Pales 1972: 218), Saint-Périer's presentation of the Lespugue statuette introduces the figure as a "statuette of a steatopygous woman", yet in the conclusion names it the "Venus of Lespugue" (Saint-Périer 1923: 379).

With the increase in number of both the figures themselves and the number of collective analyses presenting them, the term becomes applied more frequently to a range of figures. There is an increased application of the term Venus to individual figures in Sollas (1911). While there is no reference to Venus in the main text, captions accompanying the illustrations refer to "The Venus of

Willendorf", the "*Vénus Impudica*", "*La Vénus de Brassempouy*" [*la poire*], and "*la Vénus innominata*" [Brassempouy *le torse*] (Sollas 1911: Fig.160*a* and *b*) (Figures 2.4, 2.1, 2.8 and 2.14).

Luquet refers to the "Venus of Lespugue" (Luquet 1934: 437) (Figure 2.11), the "Venus of Sireuil" (*ibid*: 443) (Figure 2.15) and the "Venus of Willendorf" (*ibid*: 440, 444). Burkitt refers to a number figures named as Venus; the "Venus of Brassempouy" (Burkitt 1934: 117), in reference to *la tête à la capuche* (Figure 2.16) rather than *la poire* as designated in Piette (1895), the "famous late Aurignacian Venus" (Willendorf) (*ibid*: 119-120), and the "late Aurignacian Venus of Dolní Věstonice" (*ibid*: 119, 121) (Figure 2.17). Strong designation and presentation of the Venus epithet occurs in the caption accompanying photographs of Lespugue, Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice Venus I which are shown side by side (*ibid*: Fig.2), and where each is individually specified as "The Venus of ..." (*ibid*: 116), indicating strong naming linked with a standardised presentation of the figures (Figure 5.21). It could be suggested that the earliest named Venuses tend to be those that are the most frequently named throughout, and the association of Willendorf, Lespugue and Dolní Věstonice will persist, with these figures already emerging as potential prototypes (See Chapter 5).

Graziosi's use indicates that the term has become particularly associated with certain examples. He refers to "the famous, highly interesting "Venus" of Lespugue" (Graziosi 1960: 48) (Figure 2.11), and "the famous Savignano "Venus"" (*ibid*: 50, 51) (Figure 2.13). Indeed, the predominant name applied to this figure is "the Savignano Venus" (*ibid*: 50-52, also 60). The figure from Chiozza is similarly termed "the Chiozza Venus", and this name is again predominant in its description (*ibid*: 53-54) (Figure 2.18). The latter two examples are also referred to in their respective discussions simply as "the Venus". In some instances, Graziosi will use inverted commas for the label Venus, although not in the cases of the Savignano and Chiozza examples after their introduction. The "Willendorf Venus" is mentioned (*ibid*: 56, 58), also as "the Austrian Venus" (*ibid*: 58), and there is reference to "the celebrated "Venus"" from Dolní Věstonice (*ibid*: 56) (Figure 2.17).

The work of Absolon (1949) features the strongest labelling of particular figures as Venus. This is clearest in the attribution of the term to each of the Dolní Věstonice figures, from Venus I to Venus XV (Figures 2.17 and 2.19-27). A number of additional figures are also named as a Venus, including the "long Venus" of Gagarino (Absolon 1949: 215) (Figure 2.28), "Venus III of Kostenki" (*ibid*: 218) (Figure 2.29), and the "Venus of Lespugue" (*ibid*: 205) (Figure 2.11). More importantly, Absolon's language indicates a number of reasons for why these particular figures have achieved such an attribution, writing of "the most beautiful ivory Venus statuette" [la poire] (*ibid*: 202) (Figure 2.8), "the classical Venus of Vestonice" [Venus I] (*ibid*: 202-3) (Figure 2.17), "the greatest of the Palaeolithic Venuses [*la poire*], like the Willendorf Venus" (*ibid*: 204-5), and the "famous obese Venus" [Willendorf] (*ibid*: 204) (Figure 2.4). These plaudits perhaps indicate why these figures are emerging as the predominant Venuses; it is apparent that aesthetic factors are important, as is celebrity. The identification of the fame of the statuettes is perhaps the strongest factor in the naming of the figures above; Absolon also mentions "the famous six partly steatopygic Venus statuettes of the Mentone Barma Grande cave" [Grimaldi] (*ibid*: 201) (Figure 2.10 and 2.30-34). It can be seen that of those examples specifically referred to as a Venus, accompanying phrases indicate that they are either well-known or the *most* well-known.

This is particularly apparent in the case of Willendorf (Figure 2.4). Burkitt refers to Willendorf as the "famous late Aurignacian Venus" (Burkitt 1934: 119-120). In Maringer, only one Venus is so-named in the main text, where it is stated that "the famous Austrian 'Venus of Willendorf' eclipses all others" (Maringer 1956: 109). Harding also notes "the famous 'Venus' of Willendorf", referring to only one other Venus – "the Lespugue 'Venus'" (Harding 1976: 271) (Figure 2.11). Soffer refers to "the well-known Venus of Willendorf" (Soffer *et al* 2000: 517).

Graziosi indicates the 'fame' of several figures, referring to "the famous, highly interesting "Venus" of Lespugue" (Graziosi 1960: 48), "the famous Savignano "Venus"" (*ibid*: 50, 51) (Figure 2.13), and "the celebrated "Venus" from Dolní

Věstonice" (*ibid*: 56) (Figure 2.17). This element of celebrity in respect of certain figures can be linked to their naming, repeated promotion, and emergence as representatives of the class of material. It is also perhaps important that authors repeatedly stress this aspect, drawing attention to it on numerous occasions. In certain of the above examples, the fame of the figure in question effectively becomes a descriptive term, pre-empting the need for further elaboration.

The occurrence of specifically named Venuses is also common in works where a limited number of examples are cited. When only a few figures are utilised for a hypothesis, they tend to be clearly identified as Venuses. In Eisenbud, each figure is referred to as a Venus, beginning with the introduction of "the so-called Venus of Lespugue" (Eisenbud 1964: 145) (Figure 2.11) and continuing with reference to "other Venuses, notably those of Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice" (*ibid*: 146) (Figures 2.4 and 2.17). The term is repeated for each figure in captions accompanying their respective illustrations (*ibid*: Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9).

Whether or not these named Venuses can be defined as the 'real' Venus figurines, they are at least clearly specified as such in the texts, and they contrast with the naming of an unspecified group of figures as Venuses. Following on from this, the frequent use of certain examples, particularly Willendorf and Lespugue, gives an indication of which figures an author (or reader) is most likely to be thinking of when employing (or reading) the unspecified term Venuses.

It is also apparent that a number of figures are rarely or never named as Venuses, and the status of some of these figures is ambiguous. Absolon notes a find from Trou Magrite (Figure 2.3) as the "first anthropomorphic statuette", yet specifically refers to subsequent statuettes found at Grimaldi as Venuses (Figures 2.10 and 2.30-34), and *la poire* (Figure 2.8) also as a Venus statuette (Absolon 1949: 201), while still including Trou Magrite in his list of 21 sites where Venuses are stated to occur. In Graziosi, the figure from Trasimeno is introduced as "the so-called "Trasimeno Venus"" (Graziosi 1960: 54) (Figure

2.35). Only the "so-called "*Vénus impudique*"" (Figure 2.1) is similarly labelled in Graziosi's work (*ibid*: 88). By stressing that this term refers to a label applied by others, he creates the impression of distance between himself and the information he is presenting. This is important in the case of Trasimeno (Figure 2.35), as this figure not only lacks context but also displays stylistic differences, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. Similarly, Leroi-Gourhan utilises inverted commas in the instance of the Trasimeno figure, further noting that it "has been dubbed "the Venus of Trasimeno"" (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 95). This clearly distances the author himself from the term, allowing him to indicate that he is *only* repeating a term used by others, while his language indicates that he does not necessarily agree with it. Having said that, it should also be noted that this figure is not discounted from his analysis.

Venus as a type

Following from specifically named Venus figures is the identification of a less well-specified Venus 'type', in works where the labelling indicates this application of the Venus terminology to denote a specific type of figure. This is particularly clear in a reference to "twelve Venuses" found at Brassempouy, of which it is stated that many are of the "familiar type" specified as featuring exaggerated breasts and buttocks (Burkitt 1934: 117) (Figures 2.8, 2.9, 2.14, 2.16 and 2.36-2.40 are the *nine* figures known at the time of Burkitt's publication).

Absolon's work contains one of the strongest uses the identification of the Venus as a specific type of figure. Examples named include Pekárna's "hyperstylized Venus statuette" (Absolon 1949: 203) (Figure 2.41), the "Venus statuettes" of Dolní Věstonice (*ibid*: 203, 212) (Figures 2.17 and 2.19-27), "diluvial Venus statuettes" (*ibid*: 220), "Siberian Venus statuettes" (*ibid*: 207) (Figures 2.42-45), and "the famous six partly steatopygic Venus statuettes of the Mentone Barma Grande cave" [Grimaldi] (*ibid*: 201) Figures 2.10 and 2.30-34). In a more specific application, the label for the type is also applied to the discoveries from Dolní Věstonice, with each named as Venus and referred to as a sequence from Venus I to Venus XV (Figures 2.17 and 2.19-27). The Dolní Věstonice finds are described as fifteen figures including "naturalistic, tattooed,

stylised, hyperstylised, sexual-biological, *pars-pro-toto*, expressionistic" and other types (*ibid*: 204). There is a major implication in this use. This description itself indicates that there are a variety of types and styles, yet the classification of the figures is established first and foremost as Venuses and as being of the Venus type.

Belief in the existence of this type allows the Venus term to become shorthand for a particular type of figure, seen in later references to "the Venus tradition" (Gamble 1982: 98), the "'Venus' type" (Powell 1966: 18), the "Venus convention" (Sieveking 1979: 90), a "Venus pattern" (*ibid*: 80) and a "Venus zone" (Pfeiffer 1982: 202).

The emergence of Venus as a generic label

We have seen that, in early works, only specific figures are referred to as Venuses. The initial works bringing together groups of statuettes (Piette 1895 and 1902) make little reference to the term Venus. With the exception of the specific attribution to *la poire* (Figure 2.8), in both works the material is merely mentioned as statuettes or figurines.

Labels for the body of material can be seen emerging in Sollas, where there is one mention of "the steatopygous statuettes" (Sollas 1911: 265), and the caption headings accompanying the illustrations label the figures "Aurignacian figurines" (*ibid*: Figs. 160, 161, 162, 163). There is also indication that the material is viewed as a distinct class. Saint-Périer identifies a "homogeneous group" comprising statuettes from Brassempouy (Figures 2.8, 2.9, 2.14, 2.16 and 2.36-2.40), Grimaldi (Figures 2.10 and 2.30-34), Willendorf (Figure 2.4) and the Laussel bas-reliefs (Figures 2.12 and 2.46-49), to which Lespugue belongs (Saint-Périer 1923: 371), although there is no use of the Venus label to describe the group.

The term Venus finds a more common usage in the works of the 1930's where it becomes more frequently applied to a wider number of individual figures. A major change is that it is now also used as a label to refer to a body of material. Pales sees this development as being linked with a development within the

literature itself, claiming that although the term had been in common use in both conversation and the literature for some time, for the latter this was only when female representations were the object of a collective analysis (Pales 1972: 219). The works of this period show the first common usage of the term Venus as a generic label often linked with chronological periods, as an unspecified label, and as an identification of a type (see previous section). These remaining uses will be discussed below; chronological labelling will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Amongst the other uses in Burkitt, the Venus term is used as a generic label alongside a clear referent for the material; "the "Venuses", the famous statuettes representing the female form which occur in the Aurignacian levels in Western Europe..." (Burkitt 1934: 115). This collective label identifies the archaeological material and also indicates the acknowledgement of an existing, recognised and well-known class of material. Such use of Venus as a generic label for the figures has increased through time, and appears strongly in a number of recent works.

This is seen in Taylor (1996), where Venus is the strongest generic term or label used for the material. The figures are first mentioned as ""Venus" figurines", where the term is associated with "fleshy, naked women" (Taylor 1996: 8), and having specified that "Ice Age statuettes of women" are "collectively... termed "Venus" figurines" (*ibid*: 116), the latter term is the generic label employed throughout, also appearing in the section sub-heading "The Venus figurines" (*ibid*: 115). The term is employed repeatedly without the use of inverted commas (*ibid*: 115 ff.)

The application of the Venus label to bas-reliefs and parietal images
A number of bas-reliefs and parietal images are often included within this generic grouping and are also specifically named as Venus.

This is particularly relevant to the bas-reliefs at Laussel (Figures 2.12 and 2.46-49). Burkitt (1934) discusses the bas-reliefs without the use of the term Venus, implying that it applies only to the figurines. Clark (1967) discusses parietal

images of women separately from the figurines, and once more the term Venus is not used, again implying that the Venus label is specifically linked to the figurines. However, Graziosi describes *la femme à la corne* at Laussel (Figure 2.12) as "the Laussel Venus", noting points of similarity with the "Aurignacian-Perigordian Venuses" (Graziosi 1960: 142), and Marshack also refers to the "Laussel 'Venus'" (Marshack 1991: 18). Although Rice does not discuss specific examples in the text itself, it is apparent from a portion of her analysis shown in her Table 2 that the bas-relief figures of Angles-sur-l'Anglin (Figure 2.5) are included in "the Venuses" (as she designates them) (Rice 1981: 404). Maringer illustrates a parietal example at La Magdeleine as "the Magdalenian Venus" (Maringer 1956: Plate 35) (Figure 2.6).

The status of the Laussel bas-reliefs (Figures 2.12 and 2.46-49) and other parietal images as Venuses is therefore ambiguous. The implication of this is that the type transcends media. The type is not restricted to figurines, but may also include *appropriate* representations in other forms, regardless of media and chronology. Few authors see this as problematic, and perhaps only Dobres (1992a) stresses a distinction between mobiliary and parietal examples.

Venus as a label used without specification

Certain examples fall between specific and individual use, and the further employment of the Venus term as an unspecified generic label. Clark refers to "the French 'Venuses'" (Clarke 1967: 57; Figs 38-43), and Marshack to the "west European 'Venuses' of France, the southern 'Venuses' of Italy and the eastern 'Venuses' of the Russian Plain and Siberia" (Marshack 1991: 18).

Graziosi includes unspecified references to "the group of "Venuses"" (Graziosi 1960: 53), the "exuberant adipose Venuses" (*ibid*: 88), and "the Italian Venuses" (*ibid*: 49). Leroi-Gourhan uses the unspecified reference "the Italian "Venuses"", and Taylor refers to "the Ice Age Venuses" (Taylor 1996: 119).

Rice (1981) designates an unspecified range of material as Venuses. While the term "statuettes" is occasionally used, the term "Venuses" predominates. There are references to "the entire collection of Venuses", "pregnant Venuses", "188

Venuses" (Rice 1981: 403), and also "56 Venuses" (*ibid*: 413), without further reference to which figures may comprise these groupings.

In later texts, the Venus terminology begins to be employed in a less specific and more casual way. This occurs in Taylor, where the Venus terminology appears paraphrased in the chapter heading "Venus in Furs" (Taylor 1996: 115), a contemporary reference more immediately identified with the title of a song by cult sixties band The Velvet Underground and the late nineteenth century gothic erotic story of the same name by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, from whom the term masochism is derived.

The Venus term achieves an almost slang usage in Soffer *et al*'s references to "the Venus bodies" (Soffer *et al* 2000: 516), "The Dressed Venus" (*ibid*: 517), "clad Venuses" (*ibid*: 525), "Western Venus attire", "Venus-wear" (*ibid*: 522), and mention of "what the well-dressed Venus wore" (*ibid*: 521).

Unspecified use of the term – or generalised use of the term without specification of a referent – indicates belief in, a perception of, and indeed reliance on knowledge of the Venus type previously noted. Such use is only successful if the reader is familiar with the type that is being referred to.

The use of Venus as a pre-existing name

Part of the continued use of Venus as a generic label comes from authors making explicit that they are making use of a name applied in previous literature. The authors indicate that they are utilising the established naming of the material in a number of ways; through specific acknowledgement, the use of inverted commas, and the insertion of the phrase "so-called". Each indicates that the author is repeating the term used in previous works and applying the accepted terminology.

In addition to these uses, a number of works specifically approach the material as it has been defined and named by previous authors. The title of Passemard's study of the figures refers to "*Les Statuettes Féminines paléolithiques dites Vénus Stéatopyges*" (Passemard 1938), and this work is the beginning of the

trend of collective analyses that Pales identifies with the emergence of Venus as the generic name for the material (Pales 1972: 219). In Pales, the acknowledgement of the material as a group previously defined in the literature and known by specific terminology is made clear – the Palaeolithic female statuettes "called the steatopygous Venuses". Utilising the term in his title in a similar way to Passemard, Pales considers of the use of the term Venus as part of a critique of the category (Pales 1972). Nelson (1993) refers to "Upper Palaeolithic "Venus" Figurines" in the title of her work. As a textual analysis itself, this paper similarly utilises the terminology predominant in the texts she studies, employing the terms "Upper Palaeolithic "Venus" figurines" and "the Venus figurines" (Nelson 1993: 51).

Leroi-Gourhan makes explicit the link between the label Venus and its use in the previous literature, stating that "there is copious literature on the so-called Stone Age Venuses or Aurignacian Venuses", and continuing that "they are sometimes called "steatopygous Venuses" or even "fat Venuses", terms rather more accurate though less flattering than "Aurignacian Venuses"" (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 90). This is placed at the beginning of his analysis, thereby immediately emphasising a term that the reader will recognise and associate with this material.

The utilisation of a name previously designated in the literature is made explicit in other works. Kogan states that "Pfeiffer has described the discovery of a serious of what have been called "Venus figurines" by the British archaeologist Clive Gamble" (Kogan 1994: 150). The use of inverted commas makes clear that the name is the repetition of a previous designation (*ibid*: 153).

A number of works state that the material has been previously named as Venus. These references will either be placed as a means of introducing the material, or later in the work after definition has taken place. The reference indicates the use of the established terminology by which the material is known (Absolon 1949: 201; Maringer 1956: 110; Graziosi 1960: 47; Eisenbud 1964: 145; Clark 1967: 55; Rice 1981: 403; Gamble 1982: 92; Faris 1983: 116; Ehrenberg 1989: 66;

Taylor 1996: 116; Davidson 1997: 143; Mussi *et al* 2000: 108; Soffer *et al* 2000: 514).

In this vein, McDermott states that "the so-called Venus figurines" "... are among the most widely known of all Palaeolithic objects. As a group they have frequently been described in the professional and popular literature" (McDermott 1996: 228). This is an explicit reference to the previous literature as a means of introducing and establishing not only the background of research, but also (in effect) the 'pedigree' of the archaeological material.

It seems generally accepted throughout the literature that the term Venus retains a popular rather than an academic basis, and it is often qualified when used, usually in the form of references to "the so-called Venus figurines" (e.g. Absolon 1949: 201; Collins and Onians 1978: 2). Soffer identifies the term as "emotively coloured" (Soffer 1987: 5) and implicitly linked to ideas and ideals of physical attractiveness. This tone emerges in less objective and more judgemental references to small figurines of women "sometimes referred to flatteringly as 'Venuses'" (Clark 1967: 55), "rather generously called Venus figurines"(Sieveking 1979: 8), and "collectively – and perhaps misleadingly – termed "Venus" figurines""(Taylor 1996: 116). However, it should be noted that use of such a 'disclaimer' does not prevent authors from continuing to use the term (Taylor 1996), or from occasionally using the term without qualification or inverted commas (e.g. Rice 1981).

There are implications and consequences of this use and repetition of the term. An important point is that using the term in such a way necessarily reproduces and consolidates an impression of the figures as a clear, coherent and established category. Passemard (1938) and Pales' (1972) use identifies the strong morphological element in previous works, and links this with the naming of the statuettes. It could be suggested that in utilising such a title to designate the subject matter, Passemard actually consolidates the impression of the group given in the title, and thus affirms the characterisation of the group. The morphological element is also strong in Leroi-Gourhan's (1968) use, again re-emphasising the material as fat and steatopygic through reference to the material

being previously designated as such. As noted above, Taylor (1996) suggests the term Venus is misleading, yet continues to utilise it throughout. In accepting the term, and continuing to utilise it, the texts effectively validate it, and its continued use inevitably leads to its perpetuation. The examples noted above also begin to indicate that the texts employing the term strongly perpetuate not only the term itself but also a 'popular impression' of the material that is associated with it. The link between the label, interpretation and popular impression is made explicit in Koenigswald, who states; "As the name "Venus Figurines" indicates, the little statuettes with the big breasts and fat belly are generally regarded as being connected with love and fertility, as "Urmutter" and "Stamm-Mutter", as the first female goddess, or the mother of creation" (Koenigswald 1971: 137).

This process of perpetuation operates in conjunction with, and is to a certain extent dependent on, an assumed knowledge on the part of the reader. I will show that this assumed knowledge is itself related to the 'popular impression' of the material created by the texts, and that this practice is a major way of creating a generalised impression of the Venus figurines as coherent class of material.

Conclusions

In this section, I have examined the way in which archaeologists have utilised a process of labelling in the construction of the category of Venus figurines, and outlined the development and consolidation of this terminology through time.

The manner in which the category has been named has led to the creation of a body of material that is both accepted and universally recognised, as although the various uses of the Venus terminology are often imprecise, they serve to emphasise the existence of the figurines as a body of archaeological material.

It is apparent that using the well-known term facilitates reference to this material culture. The label Venus works because it is perceived by the reader in terms of a popular impression of the material, one that needs little additional investigation or explanation, as it is virtually assumed that everyone will know what a Venus is. However, a problem is that this process of naming also

predetermines perceptions of any and all examples by associating them with the established Venus label. The most important implication of the term is this homogenising effect. Labelling standardises the material, forcing all examples to become a homogenised type. This is particularly clear in works such as Absolon (1949), where the process of labelling strongly characterises the figures, confirms a group identity for diverse examples, and effectively renders them all the same. The provision of a tag or generic label focuses and cements the material together as a class or type, without allowance for any variability that may occur within it. The problem occurs in identifying precisely which figures truly adhere to this type. This theme of homogeneity and diversity will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

In the next chapter I will examine the impact of this terminology when contextual and chronological factors are taken into consideration.

CHAPTER 3
CHRONOLOGY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CATEGORY

Introduction

The attribution of examples to a specific chronological period is important in the formation and definition of any grouping of archaeological material, and as a foundational feature supporting subsequent interpretation. This chapter will examine the naming and labelling of the Venus figurines with specific reference to the chronological attribution of the figures. The previous chapter has demonstrated the contribution of labelling in establishing perceptions of the figurines as an established body of material. This chapter will show how this material is then strongly associated with a particular time period. However, I will then demonstrate that the reliability of this chronological attribution is substantially diminished when we consider the information presented in the texts regarding the find locations and circumstances of discovery of the figurines. Following on from this, I will discuss the importance of style in the consolidation of the class of Venus figurines, with particular reference to the use of stylistic similarity as means of including in the category those examples where a secure archaeological context is seen to be lacking. In the light of the evidence I will present regarding problems in attribution by both chronological and stylistic methods, I will close this chapter will a brief review of how the credibility of the category has been maintained in the literature throughout.

Chronological attribution and the generic label

As a generic label, the Venus terminology is often linked with a chronological attribution. The chronological associations of the term Venus have been varied, being repeatedly adapted in deference to and reflecting the accepted chronologies of the time and as our construction of these chronologies has changed, with the result that the term may be applied to differing periods. In such usage, therefore, while the labels themselves may vary, it remains that the Venus figurines are usually attributed and associated with one specific period, which then becomes part of the definition of the category.

Graziosi (1960) provides one of the clearest examples of the strength of such chronological labelling. He introduces the material as "anthropomorphic Aurignacian-Perigordian statuettes", noting at the end of his introduction that "the Palaeolithic statuettes were called "Venuses" by early palaethnologists" (Graziosi 1960: 47). Graziosi utilises a number of terms to refer to the material; "Aurignacian-Perigordian statuettes" is used along with the more specific "Aurignacian-Perigordian female statuettes" (*ibid*: 49). Notably, he identifies and distinguishes several less chronologically secure examples as being of "statuettes of the Aurignacian-Perigordian *type*" (*ibid*: 49, emphasis in original text). There is also mention of "the great family of Aurignacian-Perigordian female sculptures" (*ibid*: 58). The terms are combined with Venus terminology to form "Aurignacian-Perigordian "Venuses"" (*ibid*: 49, 53) and "Palaeolithic Venuses" (*ibid*: 49, 53). That each has a similar referent is made clear when Graziosi combines the terms in the phrase "the various Venuses of the Aurignacian-Perigordian type" (*ibid*: 60).

Both Burkitt and Harding use chronological terms strongly in defining their material. Burkitt identifies "the "Venuses"" with the Aurignacian (Burkitt 1934: 115). Harding specifies that the subject of his work is "Certain Upper Palaeolithic 'Venus' statuettes'" in the title, and the term is later specified as "Gravetto-Solutrian 'Venus' statuettes" (Harding 1976: 271). In Luquet (1934), there is an initial blurring of chronological labels. Luquet's paper – *'Les Vénus paléolithiques'* – initially presents the term applied to a wide and less specified chronological period. However, with the exception of the *Vénus impudique* (Figure 2.1), examples attributed to the Magdalenian in the text are not referred to as Venuses, and the strongest use of the term is reserved for the "Aurignacian Venuses" (Luquet 1934: 434 ff.)

However, other authors use an unspecified chronological designation such as "Palaeolithic", allowing a wider inclusion of figures. Absolon does not specify whether the term Venus has a chronological referent beyond "dilivial". He makes reference to "Palaeolithic female statuettes" (Absolon 1949: 212) and "no other Palaeolithic Venus" (Absolon 1949: 218). Soffer *et al* state that

Palaeolithic depictions of women are known as "Venuses", yet narrow the field of enquiry for their own study by noting that these Palaeolithic depictions of women "by now number well over 200 examples for the Gravettian period alone" (Soffer *et al* 2000: 514-5). It is the latter that they choose to focus on, and while this defines their category, it indicates that they recognise that the term has been more widely applied in previous works. Similarly, White critically notes the previous use of the term Venus for female representations from both the Gravettian and Magdalenian (White 1997: 108), arguing that this is incorrect as there are stylistic differences between figures from the two periods.

The analysis of Rice includes sculpture, relief and two-dimensional engravings from throughout the Palaeolithic period (Rice 1981). All are termed "Venuses", and her chronological designations simply consist of "Prehistoric Venuses" and "Upper Palaeolithic Venus figurines" (Rice 1981: 403). Having stated that in chronological terms "the female figurines are almost entirely Aurignacian'" (Maringer 1956: 110), along with reference in an illustration caption to "three Aurignacian 'Venuses'' from Mentone" [Grimaldi] (Maringer 1956: Plate 29, 30 and 31), Maringer also illustrates "the Magdalenian Venus" at La Magdeleine (Maringer 1956: Plate 35). These examples indicate that the *type* is more important than the chronology. This wider referent allows the inclusion of figures from throughout the entire period, particularly the Magdalenian.

The strong chronological labelling of the figures is the more remarkable when contrasted with an actual lack of archaeological context in some cases, and these instances will now be considered.

Information provided in the texts indicating contextual uncertainty
Pales (1972) has summarised a number of problems of provenance for the figurines by classifying them into four groups: the first consists of those whose geographic, stratigraphic and topographic position are unknown (Grimaldi, Sireuil, Savignano, Trasimeno, and Chiozza); the second where the topographic position is defined, but the stratigraphic position is uncertain (Brassempouy); the third has the topographic position defined, with the stratigraphy indecisive

but nevertheless probable (Lespugue, Abri Pataud); the final group features a topographic position and defined stratigraphy (Laussel, Tursac) (Pales 1972: 255). This provides a useful outline for the following analysis; I will show, however, that the situation is somewhat more complex and far-reaching than Pales' summary indicates.

Accounts dealing with the circumstances of discovery of certain figures provide information indicating the uncertainty of their archaeological context. I will first discuss this issue through a detailed analysis of the evidence presented for the sites of Brassempouy and Grimaldi, and I will then broaden this discussion to include a number of other sites. The status of Brassempouy and Grimaldi is fundamental to the construction of the category – as they were the earliest groups of finds to be discovered they are crucial in the formation of initial conceptualisations of the class of Venus figurines. These two groups of figures initially form the category, effectively constituting a 'group identity' in relation to which later finds are defined and subsequently placed. In other words, it is their characteristics that form the basic criteria governing attribution of the figures to the early Upper Palaeolithic, and form the basis for the inclusion of later finds in the developing category. However, the lack of conclusive evidence regarding the initial excavation of these two sites is such that there is still uncertainty surrounding even such a basic question as which statuettes were actually discovered first.

Case Study 1: Brassempouy

The initial discovery of two human statuettes at Brassempouy – *la poire* (Figure 3.1) and *l'ébauche* (Figure 3.2) – took place in 1892, in a scene described as a virtually spontaneous 'excavation' undertaken by members attending the Congress of the French Association for the Advancement of Science. According to one of the participants – Magitot – the proceedings were akin to a "prehistoric raid", in which each member chose a corner and worked with improvised tools (Delporte 1993*a*: 21; Pales 1972: 236). As a result, the stratigraphic position of the two statuettes is unknown and the situation confused; indeed, one statuette was not initially revealed to the overseer of the work at the time, and a further possible figure – fragmentary and difficult to

identify – was discarded by the workers, being later recovered by the Comte de Poudeux (Chollot 1964: 427; Pales 1972: 236). Piette situated the two figurines found in 1892 in the right part of the cave (Pales 1972: 237).

The subsequent excavations of Piette and Laportie, from 1894 until 1897, therefore took place on a site already disturbed (Niedhorn 1993: 16). It is reported that the first two 'campaigns' recovered three statuettes; *la figurine à la ceinture* (Figure 3.3) and *la figurine à la pèlerine* (Figure 3.4) came from the right side of the avenue, near the entrance (Pales 1972: 236); *la tête à la capuche* (Figure 3.5) was also discovered in 1894, on the left side of the avenue (Piette 1895: 149; Chollot 1964: 413). Piette stated that *la fillette* (Figure 3.6) and *le manche de poignard* (Figure 3.7) came from the left side of the avenue, although it is noted that there are "certain contradictions" in this instance (Pales 236). *Le torse* (Figure 3.8) was discovered on the last day of the excavations in 1896 (Chollot 1964: 417). The place and date of finding of *l'ébauche de poupée* (Figure 3.9) are unknown (Delporte 1993*a*: 29).

Attempts at reconstructing the stratigraphy of the site are complicated for a number of reasons (Delporte 1993*a*: 22). At a time when the very 'science' of stratigraphy was merely developing, the stratigraphic record produced by Piette was altered from year to year, with the result that a layer numbered '1' in 1895 is not the same as the layer numbered '1' in 1896, and a layer termed 'above the statuettes' in one year, becomes 'the middle layer' in the next. This leads not only to difficulties in synchronising the diverse stratigraphies, but more specifically in knowing when or where the statuettes were found (*ibid*: 22). Working prior to the institution of the standard terminology with which we are now familiar, Piette also invented numerous names for industries, which he subsequently abandoned or modified in content (*ibid*: 22), rendering many of his early publications "obscure" (*ibid*: 23). With regard to the excavation itself, site notebooks, if they were kept at all, have not survived, and Piette himself was not always present on the site, leaving the workers under the instruction of a foreman (*ibid*: 23). Despite noting these difficulties, and additional (although unspecified) problems involved in studying the Piette Collection in the Musée des Antiquitiés Nationales, Delporte maintains that a precise enough

stratigraphy can be presented, and follows Piette's indication that the statuettes came from Layer *E*, which contained an Upper Perigordian or Gravettian industry characterised by numerous burins and Gravette points (*ibid*: 23). Having said that, Delporte himself can only conclude that the provenance of the statuettes is not certain, sentiments similarly expressed in Leroi-Gourhan who, despite claiming their association with "notched arrows" and "Solutrean leaves" corresponding to the Late Solutrean (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 90), concedes that their "exact stratigraphic determination remains unsatisfactory" (*ibid* 1968: 90).

In an attempt to support the ascription of the Brassempouy figures to the Gravettian, Delporte refers to continued excavation at the site by a team from the M.A.N. (the Musée des Antiquités Nationales), which has established an abundant Gravettian industry. A fragment of "a possible human statuette" was recovered in the Gravettian layer and a figure described by Delporte as "clearly anthropomorphic" was also recovered. This piece – one of the two 'fitting' pieces named the *Berceau* – is described as being similar to the pieces originally found by Piette, although Delporte admits that it does not carry decisive traces of working (Delporte 1993*a*: 31) (Figure 3.10).

The original reports of the excavation reviewed above by Delporte similarly form part of a hypothesis put forward by the sculptor Niedhorn (1993) to explain the creation of these figures. Niedhorn's approach to the Venus figurines differs radically from those previously discussed. His analysis focuses on identifying such criteria as material utilised, techniques of manufacture and iconography and composition, to suggest that *la tête à la capuche* (Figure 3.5) and Piette's "svelte" group of statuettes (Piette 1895) (*l'ébauche* [Figure 3.2], *la figurine à la ceinture* [Figure 3.3], *la figurine à la pèlerine* [Figure 3.4], and *la fillette* [Figure 3.6]) are recently carved forgeries utilising fossil ivory (Niedhorn 1993: 9). He begins from the basic premise that at a site left largely unsupervised, Piette noted that raw fossil ivory was available in some quantities (*ibid*: 20), and he pointedly observes that freshly recovered fossil ivory is soft and may be easily carved at this stage if not allowed to dry out (*ibid*: 18). Niedhorn's examination of the surface texture, traces of carving and state of preservation of the *la tête à la capuche* leads him to raise a number of points

(*ibid*: 13). His chief concern with the *tête* is the excellent state of preservation, which he views as unrealistic. From the examination of photographs, he questions the length of time that the carved *tête* was submerged at the site, claiming that it should feature deposits of calcite at its surface and the diffusion of limonite into its pores – yet he can identify no surface corrosion and no deposits, adding that no such indications have been described by other authors (*ibid*: 21).

Niedhorn examines a fissure that runs along the right cheek of the *tête*, believing that the breadth of the fissure indicates a change of volume by the absorption of water and subsequent dehydration. If the fissure opened after shaping, the curvature of the surface would be displaced while the edges would remain intact (*ibid*: 29 and Fig. 1*h*). However, if the fissure existed before the statuette was carved, the general form would be unimpaired, and the edges of the fissure damaged (*ibid*: 29 and Fig. 1*g*). As the form of the cheek is unaffected by the fissure, Niedhorn argues that it existed before the piece was carved (*ibid*: 22). He further observes that water has impaired the surface ivory but not its sculpted surfaces, again indicating that they were carved after the piece was originally embedded at the site (*ibid*: 21). In support of this argument, Niedhorn claims to identify visible traces of a 8mm gouge on a large and unfinished piece of ivory found at the site. This, therefore, is interpreted as a work abandoned by the forger, although Niedhorn was unable to establish the whereabouts of this piece, as the M.A.N. reported to him that it must be "lost" (*ibid*: 30).

On the basis that Piette described *la tête à la capuche* as well preserved, as were "all those found in the ochreous earth not mixed with ashes" (Piette 1895: 149), Niedhorn expands his analysis to suggest that all pieces from the ochreous earth are fraudulent (Niedhorn 1993: 22). Previous claims that *la figurine à la pèlerine* (Figure 3.4) and *la figurine à la ceinture* (Figure 3.3) should be combined to form one male figure on the basis that the grain of the ivory is the same at one of the fractures on each piece, are dismissed (*ibid*: 51). Rather, Niedhorn sees the identification of the 'belt' on *la figurine à la ceinture* as incorrect, as it is occurs at the height of the breast, not the waist as usually

56

claimed, meaning that only the head and shoulders are missing. *La figurine à la pèlerine* is similarly interpreted as the mid-section of the trunk, with the *pèlerine* seen as a skirt instead of a cape, an identification perhaps supported by the position of (what has been interpreted as) an arm. Niedhorn's conclusion is that if the grain does correspond, it is because the two pieces were carved as fragments from the same piece of ivory, which had been broken apart for use (*ibid* 1993: 51).

Whether or not this analysis is correct, its utilisation of material drawn from Piette's original reports identifies that the evidence provided in these texts is not conclusive and may be interpreted in a number of different ways.

Case Study 2: Grimaldi

A recent work by Randall White (1997) utilises the 15 statuettes of Grimaldi as a sample, and includes a summarised version of the circumstances of their discovery. He states that they were found by Jullien between the years of 1883 and 1895, and regarding their context he writes; "the Grimaldi specimens were found (to the best of our knowledge) carefully placed in an area peripheral to intense human occupation. They come from two sites, the Grotte du Prince and the Barma Grande. While those from the Barma Grande were recovered from occupational horizons, those from the Grotte du Prince were found in a small niche adjacent to the main cave" (White 1997: 115). However, this represents only one possible version of the activities of the antique dealer Jullien, whose failure to provide clear information concerning the circumstances of discovery has caused a question mark to remain over the entire enterprise. For the most part this is because, it seems, the initial finds of Jullien were kept secret for some twelve years, and also because his later excavations were apparently conducted clandestinely, leading to uncertainty regarding not only the stratigraphic layers that produced the figures, but even which cave or caves they are from. The alleged sequence of events of the discovery of the statuettes, the circumstances of their sale and publication, and also the disappearance and eventual re-discovery of a number of specimens retained by Jullien, have all contributed to doubts concerning their authenticity.

Information detailing these events is provided by a number of sources. Firstly is the account of Reinach (1898), who purchased and published the *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Figure 3.12). There are also five letters exchanged between Piette, Jullien and Jullien's son from 1896 to 1903, concerning the purchase of a further group of figures, which included a stratigraphic section and commentary from Jullien on his excavations in the Barma Grande (1883-1884) and the Grotte du Prince (1892-1895). Finally, there are letters exchanged by the Abbé Dupaigne and Breuil in 1914, concerning the existence and publication of additional statuettes (Breuil 1928). This literature has been analysed in detail by Pales (1972) in an attempt to specify, or at least clarify, the provenance of the statuettes.

The first systematic excavations of the Barma Grande were conducted by Riviere, and commenced in 1872. He reached a depth of one metre, yet gave up as he was disappointed by mediocre results and attracted by the prospect of neighbouring caves (Pales 1972: 239). Jullien had made the acquaintance of Bonfils, who was concerned with picking up the work abandoned by Riviere, in the winter of 1883 (*ibid*: 239), and consequently excavated in two areas of the cave (*ibid*: 270). Jullien stated that between the 18th and 23rd of December, two statuettes were found by workers in previously unexcavated layers some 4.5 m below the excavations abandoned by Riviere. The stratigraphy of the site has been reconstructed from Jullien's letters, which indicate a number of layers proceeding from a depth of 2 metres removed by Riviere and others, to reach a total depth of 9.43 metres. The first layer was 1m in depth, and produced bladelets, burins, shells, bones, deer canine pendants and ashes. *La femme au goître* (Figure 3.11) was found in the 2nd layer, which was 1.2 m deep and also produced perforated shells, a fragment of steatite 'pendoloque', a wolf skeleton, small backed points, scrapers, and flint and jasper bladelet cores. The *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Figure 3.12) was in the layer below, which was 0.5m thick and consisted of a sandy reddish soil, containing a fragment of sculpted blue clay, endscrapers, notched bones, and ashes (Pales 1972: 241; Bisson, Tisnerat and White 1996: 159 and Fig. 2).

The first find to be published was the *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Reinach 1898). Reinach's account states that Jullien excavated for between five and six months in 1884 in the Barma Grande cave, and that the statuette was discovered in a band of earth 3-4 metres thick, which had not previously been excavated (Reinach 1898: 28). Reinach also illustrates two incised objects in steatite and schist said to be found with the statuette (*ibid*: 28-29). Reinach explains that, on discovery, Jullien showed the statuette to a single colleague who recommended that it should not be made known in case it made "the caves look younger". Because of this, Jullien simply retained the collection from the Barma Grande "without attaching too much importance to it" (*ibid*: 29), and it was not until 1896 that he showed the statuette to the author and M. de Villenoisy during a visit to Paris. Regarding the authenticity of the statuette, Reinach asserts "there could not be less doubt on the subject", as Jullien's colleague confirmed Jullien's· information on every point. Reinach pointedly concludes that the authenticity of the statuette could only be questioned by someone unfamiliar with prehistoric archaeology (*ibid*: 29).

Several points are apparent. Firstly, there is no mention of the bone statuette (*la femme au goître* [Figure 3.11]) found at the same time, nor of any other statuettes that subsequent letters exchanged with Piette claim had been recovered by this time. Secondly, the confidante of Jullien is not named, yet their evidence is taken as conclusive proof of authenticity, creating something of an air of secrecy around events. As the first statuette was not offered for sale until 1896, Jullien had maintained his silence for some 12 years, presumably for the reason given by Reinach, although it is also reported that he feared people would not believe that the statuettes were Palaeolithic as there was nothing to compare them to, and he therefore only revealed them after the publication of the Brassempouy finds. Niedhorn again proposes an alternative reading of this situation, dismissing Jullien's claim that he had not attached any importance to the statuette as a "psychological trick" to arouse Reinach's interest (Niedhorn 1993: 82).

Piette and Jullien were subsequently in contact between 1896 and 1902, and at an unknown point Piette purchased *la femme au goître* (Figure 3.11) and four

steatite statuettes (Figures 3.13-16). Jullien stated (in his letter dated 20th June 1896) that stone statuettes bringing his total to fifteen were found during the summer of 1895 in the Grotte du Tunnel, later known as the Grotte du Prince, where he had operated clandestinely prior to the official excavations of Villeneuve (1895-1902) having been refused permission from the railway company to excavate in case the debris blocked the track at the foot of the cave (Pales 1972: 243). His letter of 11th May 1903 describes the earth as reddish, blackish and containing carbon and ashes. The excavations of Villeneuve found only Mousterian layers (*ibid*: 244-5). In 1902, Piette published descriptions of five figures – *la tête négroide* (Figure 3.13), *l'hermaphrodite* (Figure 3.14), *la polichinelle* (Figure 3.15), *le losange* (Figure 3.16), and *la femme au goître* (Figure 3.11) (Piette 1902: 773-776).

Letters exchanged between Piette, Jullien, and Jullien's son in March, April and May of 1903 show the negotiations for the purchase of a further statuette from Grimaldi, that known as the *statuette non décrite* (Pales 1972: 246-247) (Figure 3.17). A number of statuettes again remained unpublished and even unacknowledged until it was recognised that some finds had remained in Jullien's hands. Thus, in 1914 Breuil contacted Jullien in Canada, where he had moved some years previously. The correspondence at that time provided details for publication of the *Bust* (Figure 3.19) and the *Janus* (Figure 3.18) (Breuil 1928). The remaining statuettes (Figures 3.20-25) remained in the possession of Jullien's family, and were not published until their 're-discovery' and exhibition in the 1990's (Bisson and Bolduc 1994). However, the group of figures had been offered to the American Museum of Natural History in 1939, although when H. L. Movius was consulted he recommended only the purchase of the *Janus*, which suggests to Bahn and Vertut that Movius "smelt a rat" (Bahn and Vertut 1997: 216).

It is apparent that the provenance of these figures remains conjectural, as there are notable inconsistencies, if not contradictions, in the statements made by Jullien. Having initially revealed only the one statuette from the Barma Grande, followed by *la femme au goître*, Jullien later indicated that the *Janus* was also found there, at a depth of 6m (Pales 1972: 247). Pales notes that this attribution

was not mentioned the initial correspondence with Piette, and expresses reservations on the origins of the *Janus*, believing it came from a neighbouring cave (Pales 1972: 248; Bisson, Tisnerat and White 1996: 158). The correspondence of 1914 further clouds the picture, as at this time Jullien refused to provide Dupaigne with provenance for the retained statuettes (Bisson and Bolduc 1994: 467), and stated that although he did not remember the exact number of statuettes, it was not fifteen, which Pales points out was the very number previously stated by him (Pales 1972: 248). Delporte puts forward three hypotheses for the origin of the statuettes from the Grotte du Prince: firstly that, as in other caves, the Mousterian level in the Grotte du Prince was covered by Upper Palaeolithic layers, which were completely removed by Jullien; secondly, that Jullien found the figures in another cave but masked their origin for some reason; and thirdly, that Jullien got them from another excavator who deceived him as to their origin (Delporte 1993a: 99). Opinion on this remains divided, with Bisson and White suggesting that figurines may also have been found in a test trench dug at an unknown date by Jullien in the Jardin d'Abbo, to the west of the Barma Grande cave (Bisson and White 1996: 21). On the evidence available, some might suggest that many of these suppositions are somewhat generous. Bearing in mind that the evidence we have is to the greater extent derived from the word of a man who was actively engaged in the process of encouraging prospective buyers, Jullien had an obvious motive for misrepresentation. Niedhorn dismisses the opinion expressed by Breuil – that he could not see why Jullien should have made the figures and that he did not attach a commercial value to them – (Niedhorn 1993: 84), and in such circumstances this opinion seems somewhat naïve.

The work of Reinach was the subject of a fierce critique by G. de Mortillet, who challenged Reinach's assertion that the authenticity of the statuette could not be contested by retorting that it was a fake (Mortillet 1898: 150). As evidence, it is claimed that the Barma Grande cave was well known for producing forgeries, with a collection bought by Bruining for the Museum of Riga cited as an example (Riviere, in Mortillet 1898: 152). Indeed, Riviere states that he himself witnessed forgeries being sold as prehistoric artifacts at the entrance to the caves in 1892, and pointedly notes that the five years of his own excavations in

the Barma Grande had not produced any engraved or sculpted item amongst the excavated pieces (Riviere, in Mortillet 1898: 152).

A number of arguments for and against the authenticity of the statuettes are presented in the literature. Characterising Palaeolithic art as "realistic, intelligent and naïve", Mortillet declared that the *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Figure 3.12) was instead "formless, thin and obscene", with the sexual parts hidden for fear of offending contemporary standards of modesty that would not have existed in the Palaeolithic (Mortillet 1898: 150), an undoubtedly subjective assessment perhaps based only on notions of aestheticism. Only in the last paragraph of his initial presentation of the further group of statuettes does Piette refer to the issue of authenticity, where he states that although he did not find the statuettes himself, he considers their authenticity "as certain" (Piette 1902: 776). The basis for his belief is that they present the same characteristics as those of Brassempouy, and Capitan also claimed similarities in the general character of their technique and method of manufacture (*ibid*: 777). Reinach saw the pubic area of the *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Figure 3.12) as jutting out in the same way as the protruding lozenge on *la figurine à la ceinture* (Figure 3.3) (Reinach 1898: 30). Rather than seeing similarities *with* the Brassempouy figurines, Niedhorn (1993) sees a number of aspects of the Grimaldi figures as being *inspired* by them. Having suggesting that the depiction of the 'hood' of *la tête à la capuche* (Figure 3.5) is itself influenced by the style of an Egyptian 'peri-wig', he sees a clear parallel between the chequered hair of *la tête à la capuche* and the Grimaldi *tête négroid* (Figure 3.13) (Niedhorn 1993: 81). Piette's suggestion of female contours and a male stomach on *la figurine à la ceinture* are seen as features that re-appear in *l'hermaphrodite* (Figure 3.14) (Niedhorn 1993: 81).

To expand this line of enquiry somewhat, it is interesting that Piette's work pointed out four specific analogies between the Grimaldi figures and those of historical periods: the appearance of a coiffure later adopted by the Pharaohs; the use of a 'suspensory' for men (identified on *l'hermaphrodite*); the presence of a hermaphrodite statuette; and the arrangement of the hair as in certain Greek statues (Piette 1902: 774; cf. Reinach 1898: 30, who makes a similar

comparison; see also discussion in "The use of style in chronological attribution"). These features may be interpreted in several ways. On the one hand, they could indicate the anachronistic interpretations of authors who can only view the Palaeolithic in the terms of later art, and who seek to demonstrate links between the Palaeolithic and later historical periods. On the other hand, they could represent the influences on and models for a forger.

The argument of later authors is that the statuettes feature characteristics appearing in (presumably genuine) Palaeolithic figurines discovered afterwards, that could not have been anticipated by a forger. These include the featureless bent forward head, barely sketched arms, and adipose masses (with accentuated stomach and breasts) of the *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Figure 3.12) and the absence of facial features, shape of the head, pointed legs and missing feet of *la polichinelle* (Figure 3.15), although the adipose masses of the latter are only visible in profile (Graziosi 1960: 50). Delporte sees these features as confirmation of those figures now retained at the M.A.N. (Figures 3.11-17), although he remains concerned by the dates of the discoveries, particularly that finds were kept secret until after those of Brassempouy were revealed; he suggests that Jullien's success with the initial group of figures could have prompted him to have a second set made, namely those retained and taken to Canada (Delporte 1993a: 107). Pales notes that the style of the *statuette en stéatite jaune* can be compared with that of the figure from Lespugue (Figure 3.29) found a quarter of a century later, seeing a "family" morphology and attitude above all in the posture of the head, leading him to conclude that if the former was a forgery, it demonstrates an extraordinary coincidence (Pales 1972: 249). However, the argument of anticipation of the Gravettian style supports only the first two Barma Grande specimens (if indeed they were found in 1883), for it has been noted that Jullien was actually living in France at least as late as 1894 and would therefore have been aware of the discoveries made at Brassempouy in 1892 and 1894 (Bisson and Bolduc 1994: 467), thus negating Breuil's claim that his only model would have been the *Vénus impudique* (Niedhorn 1993: 84) (Figure 2.1). Against this, it has been claimed that many of the rediscovered figurines are not merely copies of those found at Brassempouy or Grimaldi (Bisson and Bolduc 1994: 467). However, the merit of this point is

perhaps debatable. Is this the reason that Jullien retained them? Does their difference prove that they are authentic, their unusual features leading Jullien to retain them as he feared they would be dismissed as forgeries, or were they simply attempts that did not come up to scratch? It should be noted at this stage that if the re-discovered figures are authentic, this in itself has important implications for any stylistic canon, as their difference undoubtedly broadens and challenges the characteristics traditionally claimed for the wider class of Venus Figurines. This point will be discussed further below.

I would suggest that a further point should be considered apart from the resemblance between the figurines themselves. The characteristics depicted in these statuettes include one of the few identifications of steatopygia (on which most authors agree), clearly depicted female genitalia, and a head invariably described as 'negroid'. This strongly echoes the characterisation of the "adipose race" provided by Piette (1895 and 1902). The clear characteristics of race created in these works would seem to be duplicated in the Grimaldi statuettes. Indeed, that the appearance of figures could be interpreted in terms of such strong racial characteristics can be viewed in terms of progressivist racial thinking current at that time. Such thinking emphasised the primitive and thereby prehistoric nature of such things as steatopygia and negroid features (e.g. Sollas 1911). I have already noted the interest that attended the arrival of Saartjie Baartman in Europe in the early 19th century, and the continued exhibition of her genitalia after her death. The equation made between prehistoric and living races is frequently noted with regard to the interpretation of these figurines, and his been the subject of more recent critique (e.g. Conkey 1997). Should the figures prove to be fraudulent, I would suggest that this equation could also be a factor in their creation and in the physical features they display. It can certainly be suggested that in the context of late 19th century intellectual trends, both the actual discovery of the figurines at that particular time, and the specific form of their anatomical attributes are entirely appropriate.

Certain texts present evidence supporting the authenticity of the Grimaldi figures. On the one hand, Mortillet had claimed that steatite was a material not

used in Palaeolithic times, as its softness allows it to be easily cut with a knife, thus making it a positive quality for a forger but a flaw for an artist wishing to make a durable work (Mortillet 1898: 151). On the other hand, support for the authenticity of the figurines came from Villeneuve's discovery in 1900 of a piece of steatite showing signs of working, recovered from Layer *H* of the Grotte des Enfants. The small blueish steatite piece was covered with striations, and featured a cleft interpreted as being intended to divide it (Pales 1972: 248-9). Cartailhac and Breuil compared the piece with the incised stones and the statuettes purchased by Reinach and Piette, concluding that the scraped surfaces appeared identical, and the dimensions corresponded, indicating that steatite was worked in the caves in Palaeolithic times. The steatite was recovered from a layer termed 'Aurignacian', and this attribution was also applied to the figurines (*ibid*: 249).

Several authors cite the evidence of sediments appearing on the statuettes as evidence for their authenticity. From the early reports of Riviere, beds of iron peroxide were noted in the cave (Piette 1902: 776), and the visible presence in the hollows of the statuettes of traces of a "ferruginous" deposit was seen as confirmation of contact between the two (*ibid*: 777), with Capitan adding that these deposits of iron hydroxide are consistent with those found on objects recovered near hearths (Piette 1902: 777). Of those figurines held in the Musée des Antiquités Nationales, the deposits visible on the *statuette en stéatite jaune* were also described as "ferruginous" (Delporte 1993*a*: 101) (Figure 3.12). Ferruginous concretions are noted by Delporte in the hollow parts of *la polichinelle* (Figure 3.15); the depressions of *le losange* (Figure 3.16) feature those of a "reddish or greyish" colour and "concretions" are stated to occur in the hollow parts of *l'hermaphrodite* (Figure 3.14) (no colour is given, although Delporte suggests that this statuette is probably from the same place as *le losange* and the *la polichinelle*). The surface of the *statuette non décrite* (Figure 3.17) is described as fibrous, with the appearance affected by being placed in a layer of iron peroxide (hydroxide), and the surface is encrusted with concretions (Delporte 1993*a*: 103-4 and 106). Marshack's assessment of the *Janus* (Figure 3.18) in the Peabody Museum includes a microscopic analysis showing the presence of reddish and ferruginous granules in the lines incised between the

legs (Marshack 1986: 808), which correspondes with the comments of Piette and Capitan regarding the other statuettes. He further notes that this deposit of reddish iron peroxide is also found on the skeletons and accompanying funerary objects found at Grimaldi (*ibid*: 808).

The argument of sedimentary evidence is particularly relevant to the rediscovered figurines and a detailed analysis has been published (Bisson and Bolduc 1994). The *Bust* (Figure 3.19) had been both cleaned and lacquered by Jullien, and although apparently free of sediment in some areas, sediment taken from underneath the lacquer shows that the matrix from which it came was a light-grey sand, and grooves on the piece yield traces of red ochre under the sand (Bisson and Bolduc 1994: 461). Although Breuil (1928) attributed this piece to the Grotte du Prince, none of the other statuettes attributed there exhibit a similar light-grey sediment. The original label attached to the piece by Jullien reads "Barma Grande, Caviliari, Mentone", and grey sand is found on some Barma Grande lithics and bones (Bisson and Bolduc 1994: 461).

The Flattened Figurine (Figure 3.21) was thoroughly cleaned by Jullien, and no adhering sediment survives. While microscopic analysis shows that the incisions on it preserve a patina consisting of hematite particles, it is not possible to specify whether the patina is the remains of a coating of red ochre, or of a polishing agent (Randall White, personal communication, cited in Bisson and Bolduc 1994: 461).

The Brown Ivory Figurine (Figure 3.22) received a thick coat of varnish from Jullien as a preservative, giving it a red to yellowish colour. This varnish has discoloured with age, so it is not possible to tell if there were traces of red ochre on the surface. Shrinkage cracks on the head, back and lower legs are filled with a dark sediment (Bisson and Bolduc 1994: 462). The Red Ochre Figurine (Figure 3.23), although extremely friable and having had a preservative applied, shows, as the name suggests, that the head and torso were originally covered with a very thick layer of red ochre (*ibid*: 463). The Double Figurine (Figure 3.24) was thoroughly again cleaned by Jullien, which removed almost all traces of sediment. However, traces of hematite were observed under a microscope,

and minute quantities of fine-grained light coloured sand were found in the crease at the back of the knees. A discolouration occurring at the bottom of some of the incisions is identified as the manganese staining commonly occurring in karstic deposits (Bisson and Bolduc 1994: 463).

Jullien also cleaned the Two-Headed Figurine (Figure 3.25), although traces of red ochre remain visible in a number of incisions. Microscopic analysis reveals a trace of brown manganese staining adhering to the abdomen, enclosing a fine-grained, grey-yellow sand (*ibid*: 465). Likewise, the *Mask* (Figure 3.20) has also been thoroughly cleaned, but minute traces of fine-grained yellow sandy sediment were apparent in one nostril, and a number of incisions preserve microscopic traces of red ochre and a coarse red sediment (*ibid*: 465).

While Bisson and Bolduc's argument is convincing, it remains to match these traces with the layers at particular caves, and several suggestions have been forthcoming to explain these sediments. Mortillet suggested that the patina or polish seen on the *statuette en stéatite jaune* could be obtained by keeping it in the pocket of some item of clothing, which would effectively weather it by blunting the angles, shining the surface, and removing any traces of the knife (Mortillet 1898: 151). Niedhorn suggests a process of applying iron oxide to account for the reddish colourations and brownish deposits previously identified on the *statuette en stéatite jaune* as concretions of iron hydroxide. Although the iron oxide does not produce concretions, it adheres to the irregularities of a hard surface, a feature he identifies on *la polichinelle* (Figure 3.15). Niedhorn is suspicious of several other features apparent in this example. First, he notes that the fractured part of the left buttock has a sharp contour, which it would not have if soluble matter had diffused over time in the fissure (Niedhorn 1993: 88). Secondly, on the basis of an enlarged colour photograph, he believes he can identify the use of an Italian sculptor's rasp used for marble sculpture and preparing the hewn surfaces for polishing. An equidistant series of scratches and saddle shaped, curved surfaces, produced by the tool, are claimed to be visible on *la polichinelle* (*ibid*: 88).

Setting the question of authenticity aside, if these figures are indeed genuine, a further factor remains to be discussed that has implications for the chronological integrity of the Venus figurines category as a whole. Attention has been drawn to problems with the stone tool typology of Grimaldi by Bisson, White and Tisnerat (1996), in a study discussing the results of AMS dating on three mammal bones excavated by Jullien from the Barma Grande cave. They see the collections of the original excavators as subject to a number of biases. The first is that there is a lack of recognition of certain tool types, as 19th century collectors kept only formal tools, which are not statistically representative; the second is that certain types such as Gravette points cross-cut time periods (Bisson, Tisnerat and White 1996: 159-160). It is therefore pointed out that Gravette points and other Gravettian markers are common in the Jullien collection, but are also common in Epi-Gravettian assemblages. Furthermore, the Perigordian Vc is characterised by Noailles burins, yet none occur in the collection, and the authors conclude that there is no unambiguous evidence for a Perigordian Vc component in the Barma Grande (Bisson, Tisnerat and White 1996: 160).

Bisson, Tisnerat and White accept that at least three statuettes come from the excavations in the Barma Grande between November 1883 and February 1884. Following the description provided by Jullien, they attribute *la femme au goître* (Figure 3.11) to a layer between 3 and 4.2 metres deep, the *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Figure 3.12) to the layer immediately below it consisting of reddish soil and reaching from 4.2 to 4.7 metres deep, and the *Janus* to a layer termed only as "archaeological", at a depth of around 6m (*ibid*: 158). The dated material consists of a large piece of red deer antler from an estimated depth of 7m (Sample A 95073), dated to 19 280 ± 220 BP, a rodent femur (Sample A 95072), which was accompanied in the collection by a card giving its depth as 6-6.5m, dated at 17 200 ± 180 BP (which corresponds to the early Epi-Gravettian), and Sample A 95074, an ungulate long bone, which was not labelled but displayed a light yellow-grey sand matching the sediment on tools believed to belong to the Final Epi-Gravettian, consistent with the date of 14 110 ±110 BP (*ibid*: 160).

The authors deduce that the Upper Palaeolithic of the Barma Grande cave was not therefore Gravettian, but primarily Epi-Gravettian. Based on the depths of discovery for the statuettes provided by Jullien, these dates mean that the *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Figure 3.12), often described as 'typically Gravettian', must be less than 17 200 ± 180 years old, and *la femme au goître* (Figure 3.11) must be less than 16 000 and perhaps as little as 14 000 years old (Bisson, Tisnerat and White 1996: 162). Again, one must point out that this remains based on the word of Jullien and refers to only a few of the statuettes, although there are obviously considerable implications for those claims based on the stylistic similarity of or to the *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Figure 3.12). Indeed, Bisson, Tisnerat and White claim that the results demonstrate that "female sculptures from this site are significantly more recent than anticipated, and this calls into question the commonly accepted chronology for so-called Venus figurines in Western Europe and their explanation as a unitary phenomenon" (Bisson, Tisnerat and White 1996: 157).

In conclusion, it appears that whether authentic or fraudulent, the Grimaldi figures are problematic for the construction of the wider category. If they are fraudulent, their role as core figures in the development of the group is misplaced, and their removal from the group significantly impacts upon the 'stylistic canon' of which they have formed a key element. However, if they are authentic, it appears that at least some of them do not belong to the Gravettian period. This also has implications for the restricted chronological occurrence of the figures that is so strongly linked with their claimed stylistic features.

Figures without archaeological context: Other examples

A number of additional figures are noted in the archaeological texts as being poorly provenanced. The examples they identify and the information presented for them is reviewed below.

Sireuil

The Sireuil figurine (Figure 3.26) was found in a rut on an exit path from a small quarry – the head having been smashed by a wheel – and subsequently given to Peyrony, who published the figure some 30 years later with Breuil

(Pales 1972: 250). Although the area of the discovery was examined, and mid-Aurignacian flints found, this did not take place until 1901, a year after the find itself was made. Peyrony and Breuil considered this basis sufficient to conclude that it was mid-Aurignacian, and near contemporaneous with Brassempouy (Pales 1972: 250). The attribution of this figure to the Palaeolithic is therefore based for the most part on its stylistic characteristics (Graziosi 1960: 49) and this argument will be discussed in "The use of style in chronological attribution" later in this chapter. Graziosi concludes by terming the piece as a "rather dubious work" of a date "totally unknown" (*ibid* 1960: 49).

Savignano

The Savignano figure (Figure 3.27) was discovered by workmen digging the foundations of a farmhouse, and subsequently brought to the attention of Paolo Graziosi's father. Its attribution to the Palaeolithic rests on morphological characteristics, despite some initial discussion of whether the features were Palaeolithic or Neolithic (Graziosi 1960: 52).

Chiozza

The Chiozza figure (Figure 3.28) was discovered in a pile of stones that had been removed from a brick pit. However, excavation of the area from which the statuette was thought to have come raises a question mark over this attribution, as only Late Neolithic traces were discovered. Graziosi addresses this problem by suggesting that even if the figure did come from that deposit, it "does not authorise us, if we wish to maintain a scrupulous scientific objectivity, to draw conclusions about chronology and assign the statuette to the same age as the layers from which it came" (Graziosi 1960: 54). This effectively represents the sweeping aside of a certain degree of stratigraphic evidence, and the principles of stratigraphy themselves. Although he identifies similarities with the Lespugue (Figure 3.29) and Willendorf (Figure 3.30) examples, his admission that if the figure did not belong to this group, "we do not know where else it could belong" (*ibid*: 53), is perhaps an important factor influencing the chronological attribution of the figure.

Trasimeno

The Trasimeno figure (Figure 3.31) is ambiguous in both morphology and chronology. Discovered in 1938 amongst a 19th century collection gathered from Lake Trasimeno, it was again attributed to the Aurignacian-Perigordian on "morphological grounds alone" (Graziosi 1960: 54-55).

Monpazier

The initial publication of the Monpazier figure (Figure 3.32) provides a detailed account of the discovery of the statuette and its acquisition by the authors (Clottes and Cerou: 1970). It was discovered in a ploughed field in April 1970 by the jeweller Cerou, during the collection of flints. Finds from several periods were discovered, of which a certain number were attributed to the Gravettian (Delporte 1993a: 73). On July 19th 1970 the statuette was noticed by Clottes and Carriere, who had entered Cerou's shop and examined his collection. After examination by experts including Bordes and Mme Sonnerville-Bordes, the piece was attributed to the Upper Palaeolithic (Clottes and Cerou 1970: 435). Clottes and Cerou state that if the figure is a fake, it is the work of someone sufficiently informed of the characteristics of Palaeolithic art to sculpt a figure at the same time comparable to those of Grimaldi (Figures 3.11-3.19 were those known at the time), featuring similar characteristics, yet also containing original elements, such as the unique vulva, facial details and marked feet (*ibid*: 435-436). Microscopic analysis showed the same patina found on the inside of the incisions as on the displayed parts of the piece, and Delporte accepts the statuette as authentic on the basis of this alone (Clottes and Cerou 1970: 436; Delporte 1993a: 75).

Moravany

The Moravany statuette (Figure 3.33) was noted by Zotz as part of a collection assembled on the site of Podkovica by a policeman (Delporte 1993a: 154). Delporte admits that the history of the statuette is badly known, but that it was discovered in the course of work in 1938 and was sent to Paris to be examined by Breuil (Delporte 1993a: 154). He gives no other details. However, he notes that the site of Moravany is comprised of numerous stations producing diverse industries, and that the industry of Podkovica is itself poorly known (Delporte

1993a: 153) although the blades and flakes recall those of Willendorf, and are seen as roughly corresponding to the time of the Pavlovian in Moravia (Delporte 1993a: 154).

Péchialet

In Gamble's analysis the Péchialet figure (Figure 3.34) is attributed to the Upper Perigordian alongside a question mark (Gamble 1982: 95). Other authors indicate that the statuette was discovered amongst debris at the site (Burkitt 1934: 117), and Delporte writes that the piece was collected in the cave without any stratigraphic reference and that it is therefore impossible to date, although Breuil visited the cave and identified an industry typical of the Gravettian or Perigordian Vc (Delporte 1993a: 76).

Minevskii Iar

This figure is also included in the list of Venus figurines provided by Gamble (Gamble 1982: 95). As with the Péchialat example above, he attributes this figure with a question mark, citing Delporte (1979) as a reference for the information. However, this edition of Delporte's work gives no other details beyond that it is schematic but resembles the general form of Kostenki statuettes (Delporte 1979: 181). No illustration is provided. The later edition of Delporte indicates that this statuette actually disappeared during the Second World War (Delporte 1993a: 181).

Figures without precise chronological attribution

The sites of Lespugue, Mainz-Linsenberg and Abri Pataud are generally accepted as Gravettian or Upper Perigordian. Although Gamble associates these examples with an unambiguously attributed industry (Gamble 1982: 95, Table I), other texts indicate that there are varying degrees of ambiguity regarding the precise attribution of each figure. This may also be the case for the figures from Parabita, included in McDermott's (1996) analysis.

Lespugue

Excavations at Lespugue were begun in 1911 and subsequently abandoned, resuming after the war. The archaeological layer was exposed by removing

some fallen rocks, and the statuette (Figure 3.29) was discovered by a worker under the rocks and in a hearth at a depth of about 15cm. The statuette had been smashed by the worker's mattock, and an immediate search produced the lower half in the black earth of the hearth (Saint-Périer 1922: 363-364). Screening of the surrounding earth produced a further nine fragments, although the statuette could not be reconstituted in full and its condition was so fragile that flakes of ivory were detached from the surface by the least contact (*ibid*: 364). Originally attributed to the early Magdalenian, the industry of the site was re-assessed at this point by Saint-Périer, who emphasised similarities with the 'Aurignacian' industries of Brassempouy, Grimaldi, Gargas and Isturitz (Saint-Périer 1922: 378; Pales 1972: 251). However, while Leroi-Gourhan notes the attribution by Saint-Périer to "within the limits of the Gravettian and the Solutrean periods", he adds that "no small object accompanied this figurine" (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 90).

Mainz-Linsenberg

Gamble includes the Mainz-Linsenberg fragments (Figure 3.35) as Gravettian (Gamble 1982: 95, Table I), yet Graziosi admits that the attribution of the layer from which they came is hard to establish, cautiously including them as being "possibly of Aurignacian type" while admitting that "from an artistic point of view" they reveal nothing in common with Aurignacian-Perigordian sculpture (Graziosi 1960: 55). Delporte indicates that opinion is divided between the Gravettian and Magdalenian periods, as the accompanying industry is hard to define (Delporte 1993*a*: 100).

Abri Pataud

Although a bas-relief, Gamble includes the Abri Pataud figure (Figure 3.36) in his analysis, not only as associated with an Upper Perigordian VI industry, but also with an radiocarbon date of 23 010 (Gamble 1982: 95, Table I). The site has been described as the most extensively dated Upper Palaeolithic site – by both conventional and radio-carbon techniques – in Europe, and 16 AMS dates have been added to the 34 provided by the Groningen laboratory, with the accelerator dating results showing a clear correspondence in many cases with the previous dates, although in some cases slightly older (Mellars and Bricker

73

1986: 73-75). The site contains 14 levels of Upper Palaeolithic occupation spanning the earlier Aurignacian (c. 34 000 BP) to the early Solutrean (c. 20 000 BP), including levels of the Middle Perigordian (Perigordian IV), Noaillian (Perigordian Vc) and Final Perigordian (Perigordian VI), and was specifically chosen for AMS testing because of "the exceptionally detailed information available on the stratigraphic provenance and associations of the samples" (Mellars and Bricker 1986: 73). The dates for the Final Perigordian (VI), to which the statuette is attributed, range from 21 740 ± 450 BP to 24 500 ± 600 BP, with that of 23 180 ± 670 BP often cited. It is ironic therefore, that despite the modern excavation and dating undertaken at Abri Pataud, the discovery of the figurine itself is once again ambiguous. Delporte reports that flattish stones were collected from Square F in Trench 2, but remained unexamined as a heavy storm interrupted work. Work resumed three days later when the site had dried out (August 21st 1958), and only then was one of the stones turned over to reveal a human figure sculpted in relief. An immediate examination was made and it was noted that there were fragments of sediment identical to those of the Perigordian VI layer still adhering to the stone, and the figure has therefore been attributed to that level (Delporte 1993a: 65).

The radiocarbon and AMS dates for the site, therefore, do not alleviate the more specific problem of the provenance of the statuette. The figure has been the subject of tales concerning student pranks, although Movius, one of the excavators, believes there has been some confusion between the 'real' figure and a second one that was indeed made as a prank (Bahn and Vertut 1997: 78). As the stone working itself cannot be dated, opinion remains divided, with some rejecting the carving, and others admitting that a judgment cannot be made regarding its authenticity (ibid: 78). Such information introduces doubts regarding both the relevance of the dates provided for the figure, and its actual authenticity.

Parabita

Delporte's (1993) account of the discovery of the Parabita figures (Figure 3.37) indicates that the two bone finds were located in a zone disrupted by a Bronze Age burial, and it is impossible to indicate which level they were from

originally. Their origin was determined by traces of sediment, which were compared with the layers observed in the area of the cave that had not been disrupted (Delporte 1993a: 112). Delporte concludes that they could belong to the Upper Palaeolithic, and according to the excavator Radmilli, who sees the figures as being relatively close to those of Kostenki, probably to the ancient Epi-Gravettian (Delporte 1993a: 112-3).

Established Frauds

In addition to the figures without provenance discussed above, there are several other examples whose authenticity has been rejected outright.

Modrany

The statuette from Modrany (Figure 3.38) was allegedly found in 1963 in a sand quarry, and although Delporte notes it as displaying a certain "family resemblance" to the Petřkovice statuette (Figure 3.54), it was declared a forgery after a study by Fridrich and Kukla (Delporte 1979: 156 and Fig. 103; Delporte 1993a: 154).

La Mouthe

Randall White, who noticed the unfamiliar figure from La Mouthe in a publication by Dickson (1990), undertook a detailed examination of this bas-relief (Figure 3.39) and the circumstances of its discovery (White 1992; cf. Delporte 1993a: 66-7). The origin of the piece remains imprecise. White pieces together a chain of events that begins with an unknown individual who claimed to have found the bas-relief in a small layer above and not far from the cave of La Mouthe. It was sold on to "an Italian", and eventually sold to the Minneapolis Institute of Art in 1972 by a New York art dealer who had acquired the piece from the collection of a K. J. Hewitt of London. The art dealer claimed that it had been found in 1964 in the cave of La Mouthe (White 1992: 283 and 286). However, there were no official excavations at the site between the turn of the century and the acquisition of the statuette in 1972, and while clandestine excavations cannot be ruled out, local prehistorians confirmed to White that they had heard no such rumours regarding this site (ibid: 287).

White's examination of the figurine leads to his reservations on a number of counts. Its similarity to the Abri Pataud bas-relief (Figure 3.36) and the lined head of *la femme à la tête quadrillée* of Laussel (Figure 3.47) are stated to be striking, yet unlike *la femme à la corne* from the same site (Figure 3.44), the relief carries no traces of lithic tools (*ibid*: 287). White is also concerned by the inclusions that appear on the limestone block; not only do they not correspond to samples collected from the neighbourhood of the cave, but they have also been reduced by polishing to the same level as the surface limestone, yet without displaying streaks of polishing or traces of rubbing with ochre that would produce such a result (*ibid*: 287). White claims that there are no traces of "true" sediment even under microscopic analysis (*ibid*: 287). What does appear is the application of a "patina" or "yellowish varnish", which White identifies as a technique of forgers to disguise fresh incisions in the limestone (*ibid*: 287). On this basis, White states that he is "90%" certain that the figure is a forgery, fabricated by someone who knew little about the utilisation of lithic tools (*ibid*: 288). Despite the publication of this paper in 1992, this figure is still included in McDermott's later analysis (1996).

Dolní Věstonice: Venus II

The Venus II of Dolní Věstonice (Figure 3.40) was described in an early work as being of dubious origin and authenticity (Luquet 1934: 433), with its features noted as being at odds with those of other Palaeolithic statuettes. For instance, the head is turned to the right and the left ear is marked, as is the nose and mouth (Delporte 1993*a*: Fig. 148). While the breasts are described as characteristically "pendent" (*ibid*: 143), this term seems to be used somewhat indiscriminately with regard to female figurines, regardless of the actual morphology of the breasts depicted (See discussion of breasts in Chapter 4). Delporte notes that the figure was allegedly found during the digging of a well between 1923 and 1926, and after the Director of the Prehistoric section of the Museum of Natural History in Vienna refused to buy the statuette in 1927, a quarrel over its authenticity between Czech and German authorities continued for several years until the fraud was admitted by the 'discoverer' of the statuette (*ibid*: 143-144).

Niedhorn's argument for the forgery of a number of the Brassempouy figures has been discussed in Case Study 1, and the appearance in the late 1980's of a figure from Dolní Věstonice (Figure 3.41) indicates that it may not only be possible to produce a recent carving utilising fossil ivory, but also demonstrates how willingly a spectacular new specimen is accepted, albeit one entirely devoid of archaeological context. This ivory head, identified as male, is described in detail by Delporte and accorded a full-page illustration even though the possibility of forgery is mentioned (Delporte 1993*a*: 144 and Fig. 149). Indeed, the piece was illustrated on the cover of the October 1988 issue of the *National Geographic* magazine, where it was announced as the portrait of an Ice Age ancestor. Only at the insistence of the author involved (Marshack) was a question mark appended to the statement (Bahn and Vertut 1997: 79). Apparently, the piece was discovered around 1890, in a field near Vestonice, and was retained by a Czech family then living in Australia. The figure is unique for the amount of facial detail realistically depicted, featuring eyebrows, eyes with pupil, iris and eyelids, a mouth with chiselled lips, hair falling to the shoulder, and incisions on the chin marking a beard (Delporte 1993*a*: 144). Delporte sees the nearest comparison amongst known Palaeolithic examples as *la tête à la capuche* from Brassempouy (Figure 3.5), which is perhaps ironic in view of the uncertain circumstances of discovery previously presented in the Brassempouy Case Study. Delporte presents the results of tests undertaken by Marshack, the Peabody Museum, and the University of Kansas, and they create a favourable impression. Microscopic analysis revealed fissures filled with manganese and an iron oxide, responsible for colouring the piece brown. X-ray diffraction and spectrum analyses indicated the presence of an accumulation of uranium (which Delporte points out would not occur slowly) agreeing with the natural geochemistry of the terrain, to suggest a date of around 24 000 BC (Delporte 1993*a*: 144). However, it appears that when the figure was offered to the British Museum in 1948, evidence was found that it was made only recently from ancient ivory (Cook, in McDermott 1996: 251), although the precise nature of this evidence is not elaborated. Although techniques can only date the age of the ivory rather than the working of the material, it has been claimed more recently that tests have now shown that the ivory is so "enormously

ancient" that the carving must be fraudulent (Schuster and Carpenter 1988: 1363, cited in Bahn and Vertut 1997: 79). Few additional details are provided to confirm this claim in the original text cited by Bahn and Vertut, although Schuster and Carpenter do reveal that the source of the test results was Marshack himself, and that the figure only remained in their work as his communication arrived after their manuscript had been sent to press (Schuster and Carpenter 1988: 1363).

Conclusions

To conclude this section of the analysis, I should note that the examples given above have focused purely on those figures with problems with regard to their context. This should not be construed as a claim that all the Venus figurines have contextual problems; Table 1 provides this information for the relevant examples. However, my intention in focusing on those without a secure context rather than those with, has been to highlight that a number of individual figures underpinning the 'stylistic canon' of the group are questionable to a greater or lesser extent. If these examples were to be discounted, not only do the constituent elements of the class change substantially, but also the existence of the 'stylistic canon' in Western Europe is considerably weakened. Indeed, the only Western European figure with an undeniable provenance *and* radiocarbon date seems to be the Tursac figurine (Figure 3.42), a figure that is far from stylistically 'typical' of the group of figures as a whole.

Despite some awareness of these details, the tendency nevertheless remains in the literature to present or discuss the group as a coherent chronological whole. In order to do this, the authors must resort to one of two alternatives. The first is to downplay the problem or pass over it altogether. The second is to utilise the argument for the stylistic similarity of the figures as a support for their chronological attribution. This will be discussed in the following section.

The first example, of authors who adhere to the first of these alternatives, may be illustrated by reference to Dobres' comments noted in my Introduction, where she dismisses concerns regarding contextual problems as "positivistic assertions of verifiability" (Dobres 1992*a*: 249). McDermott's approach is

simply to gloss over the issues by stating; "In spite of many difficulties in dating, especially among finds from France and Italy, a consensus is emerging that the vast majority of these images were created in the mid Upper Palaeolithic and are stylistically different from those of the later Magdalenian" (McDermott 1996: 231). However, a final example of this approach indicates a deeper problem concerning the value of contextual evidence itself. Replying to critiques of their paper, Soffer *et al* (2000) state that they must "respectfully disagree" with Mussi and Hadu's suggestion of a re-evaluation of contextual information for the figurines, their argument being that "We simply have no contextual data other than the site names for the figurines recovered in Europe at the beginning of this century" and that for Eastern Europe, where archaeological provenance is confirmed, that "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: 534-5). While this statement has some merit, it is also a rejection of the relevance of archaeological context for the Venus figurines themselves, and a negation of the fundamental value of an archaeological context for the practice of interpretation itself.

The use of the argument of stylistic similarity to overcome contextual problems

This section will discuss the importance of style in the formation of the group, with particular reference to its use to reinforce the chronological category.

I will first discuss the importance of style in determining those figures included in the group, regardless of their chronological associations. I will then discuss style and stylistic similarity with specific reference to chronological attribution.

The importance of style in the construction of the category

I have previously indicated the importance of stylistic factors, and their bearing on the formation of the group. In certain works (e.g. Graziosi 1960), style is shown to be *the* chief factor in the formation of the group as, in the absence of archaeological context in many instances, the criteria for the definition and

characterisation of the category of figurines are restricted to the purely stylistic.

Style plays a definitive role in determining those figures included in the group of figurines. While the perception of the Venus figurines as a distinct category remains strong, the examples actually included in the group may vary from author to author. In effect, although the Venus figurines are presented as a concrete class of material, the figurines and examples included in and deemed relevant to the class are not constant. Not all authors give reasons for the choice of figures included or excluded in the group. Of those that do, it is apparent that the concept of the stylistic canon and the belief in the strong similarity of the group are factors governing the choice of figures included in an author's database.

Gamble (1982) gives reasons for excluding a number of figures from his analysis. The Trou Magrite figure (Figure 3.43a), eleven carvings and a stylistic engraving from Předmosti (Figure 3.43b, c), and the fragmentary human torso from Brno (Figure 3.43d, e) are excluded on the grounds of "design differences" (Gamble 1982: 94). Style is therefore a criterion with bearing on his formulation of the group. Although the latter examples may belong to the relevant period, they do not resemble the standard figures, and Gamble excludes them, rather than re-evaluating the group on the basis of their inclusion. In the manner of the self-perpetuating myth, this practice serves to strengthen claims of homogeneity, as the group is presented as being strongly similar, and any dissimilar figures are simply excluded on the grounds that they do not resemble the 'group' members.

The figurines from Mal'ta (Figure 3.43f) and Bouret' (Figure 3.43g, h, i) are dismissed by Gamble on the grounds of "stylistic incompatibility and age" (Gamble 1982: 94), and similarly excluded by McDermott as "geographically removed, stylistically different in form and content, and chronologically later" (McDermott 1996: 232). Many are quick to note that these statuettes appear clothed, and it could be suggested that this factor also leads to their exclusion from a category promoted as one of naked figurines. However, it has generally been accepted that the Siberian statuettes are a separate phenomenon to the

European examples, particularly as they occur in a cultural context devoid of Gravettian elements (Kozlowski 1986: 182), although more recent re-evaluation has led to their inclusion in a number of analyses (e.g. Delporte 1993*b*; Gvozdover 1989; Taylor 1996; Mussi *et al*: 2000). It could be suggested that those authors who include them in the group do so for a particular reason, and a factor as important as chronology would seem to be whether their style, or more particularly, the identification of their gender as female, provides suitable support for the hypothesis. In this vein, one could suggest that their inclusion extends Delporte's "female statuette zone" considerably, providing a second group of 'homogeneous' figures and thereby strengthening the impression of a distinct geographical groupings (Delporte 1993*b*).

As noted in Chapter 2, bas-relief and parietal images occupy an ambiguous position in relation to the Venus figurines, and are included in certain analyses. Graziosi (1960) stresses the similarity of the Laussel examples (Figure 3.44-48) to the statuettes, and Sieveking sees them as conforming to "the Venus pattern", although acknowledging that they have individual peculiarities in that the "blob" feet and position of the left hand on the stomach of *la femme à la corne* are unique (Figure 3.44), and that at least two if not three of the figures are holding an object (Sieveking 1979: 78-80) (Figures 3.44 and 3.48). McDermott includes bas-reliefs figures at Laussel (Figure 3.49*a*), La Mouthe (Figure 3.49*b*), Abri Pataud (Figure 3.49*c*) and Terme Pialat (Figure 3.49*d*) although their two-dimensional appearance, and lack of a rear view, might seem to be at odds with his general proposal that the figures represent a woman's perception of her own body (McDermott 1996: 231). Faris includes the Laussel female sculptures as they feature the relevant "reproductive" features of the statuettes (Faris 1983: 108), and he also includes the parietal works at Angles-sur-l'Anglin (Figure 3.49*e*) and La Magdeleine (Figure 3.49*f, g*), interpreting them as explicitly sexual (*ibid*: Figs. 7.19 and 7.20).

Such an inclusion, particularly in the latter example, prioritises anatomical traits and takes no account of differential medium and chronology, merging earlier figurines with cave art usually attributed to the Magdalenian. Style is again the controlling factor governing inclusion in the group. Reasons for inclusion and

exclusion are concerned with stylistic compatibility, and serve to strengthen an author's database and hypothesis while confirming the promoted stereotype.

This section has discussed examples where stylistic similarity overrides chronological considerations in certain instances. Ucko and Rosenfeld (1972) stress in their typology that figures without context must be excluded from analysis, yet it is can be shown that this is not always a factor in the formulation of the group in the texts studied. Many texts overcome this problem by utilising style to confirm chronological attribution and therefore include figures in the group.

The use of style in chronological attribution

Previous sections in this chapter have highlighted problems concerning the archaeological context and subsequent chronological attribution of certain figurines. I have also shown that such issues are often only briefly acknowledged in the literature, and that they occasionally remain unacknowledged or dismissed. This section will show the importance of stylistic similarity as the major factor in the attribution of material found without archaeological context.

I will now discuss the role of style in the attribution of certain figures to the class of Venus figurines. Utilising the argument of stylistic similarity allows a figure to be attributed to the period or the class on the basis of its similarity to those already attributed. In the case of the Venus figurines, the use of stylistic similarity becomes crucial in the cases of many Western European figurines without archaeological context, and this similarity is accepted as a sufficiently strong factor to allow inclusion in the class without additional or external evidence. Such attributions are particularly relevant to Sørensen's suggestion (noted in Chapter 1) that the 'type' may fulfil the role of a 'context' (Sørensen 1997: 186).

Despite its fundamental importance in the formation of the category, few works have examined the principles of stylistic attribution. Ucko and Rosenfeld found that the accepted criteria for attribution to the Palaeolithic varied from author to

author (Ucko and Rosenfeld 1972: 168). The lack of clarity in the texts was such that they commented that their own attempt to focus on the characteristics most typical of securely dated figures was less easy to do from the literature than they had expected (*ibid*: 168). My own analysis of the texts confirms this observation, and a number of inconsistencies in the process of stylistic ascription can be demonstrated.

The belief in a strong stylistic similarity amongst group members is clearly stated by Leroi-Gourhan:

> "No matter where found - Brassempouy, Lespugue, Abri Pataud, Willendorf, Dolní Věstonice, Gagarino, Kostienki – they are practically interchangeable, apart from their proportions. The most complete figures have the same treatment of the head, the same small arms folded over the breasts or pointing toward the belly, the same low breasts drooping like sacks to far below the waist, and the same legs ending in miniscule or nonexistent feet" (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 96).

This similarity is taken to indicate that "if there is any time difference between the western and eastern figures it cannot be very great" (*ibid* 1968: 95). This is a reiteration of his definition of the major features of the figurines, and in naming a number of sites for which he may provide secure chronological details (although see previous discussions of Brassempouy and Abri Pataud), he emphasises the shared characteristics as a chronological indicator. This process achieves the merging of chronology with stylistic factors to present a coherent group of female figures with a strong stylistic identity and a restricted chronological occurrence. Although he admits that only four of the western examples have an archaeological context, this argument allows the few available chronological details to be extended to a wider group of figures.

This is an indication that when contextual information is insufficient, authors must rely on the argument of stylistic similarity to maintain the chronological coherence of the class. Significantly, the extent of their dependence on this argument is not always made explicit in their presentation. For example,

83

McDermott states that "PKG-style images" occur at 24 Upper Palaeolithic sites "on the basis of either stratigraphy or stylistic analysis" (McDermott 1996: 232). He presents a list of these sites under the heading "Pavlovian, Kostenkian, and Gravettian sites with stylistically related female figurines" (*ibid*: 232, Table I). It therefore remains unclear precisely which sites are included on the basis of stratigraphy and which on the basis of stylistic analysis, and the distinction is further eroded in the heading used by McDermott, which binds a stylistically linked group of figures with specific chronological labels.

Chronological attributions are often made without substantiation or explanation of the underlying reasoning. Luquet (1934) provides a chronological outline for the figurines including instances where stratigraphic or contextual information is not provided, and those figures with an archaeological context are not distinguished from those without. In this manner, the Brassempouy figures (Figures 3.1-9 are those published at the time of Luquet's work) are attributed to the earliest Aurignacian, with the Sireuil figure (Figure 3.26) inserted immediately after them, although it is acknowledged that it lacks archaeological context. There is no mention of circumstances of discovery of the Grimaldi figures (Figures 3.11-19 published at that time), and they are merely deemed to be contemporaneous with the bas-reliefs of Laussel (Figure 3.44-48). The chance find at Savignano (Figure 3.27) is seen as "probably" belonging to the same epoch. In the cases of Sireuil and Savignano, there is no mention of how the attributions have been decided, and while their attribution is presumably influenced by stylistic factors, Luquet does not discuss the characteristics on which such an attribution could be based (Luquet 1934: 430-432).

Burkitt admits that the Péchialet figure (Figure 3.34) was discovered among the site debris and displays no "characteristic" exaggeration of form, yet still maintains that the figure is "doubtless" of Aurignacian date (Burkitt 1934: 117). Similarly, Leroi-Gourhan comments that the Sireuil figure "may well be Palaeolithic", yet does not discuss on what grounds this "may" be the case (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 95).

While characteristics are frequently claimed and stated, only Graziosi (1960) indicates that the procedure involved in identifying such characteristics is anything but straightforward. His utilisation of style is therefore worthy of a more detailed analysis.

Graziosi's introductory discussion of the Aurignacian-Perigordian statuettes contains two crucial paragraphs revealing factors that undermine the basis on which the identification of characteristics is made. The first states his belief that the material forms a distinct and identifiable group:

> "All the pieces of Aurignacian-Perigordian sculpture so far brought to light have some morphological details in common; in each specimen the same taste, the same aesthetic sense are evident. In other words, the statuettes we are dealing with here have a well-defined, unmistakable "style"" (Graziosi 1960: 45).

The second paragraph discusses the nature of this material:

> "Approximately sixty statuettes or fragments of statuettes have so far been brought to light; of these, however, only a few are in a condition which allows us to distinguish clearly the stylistic characteristics we are about to discuss. In many cases the fragments are so small and in so poor a state of preservation, or the pieces of sculpture at so early a stage of elaboration, that it is impossible to establish their morphology" (Graziosi 1960: 46).

Therefore, Graziosi states initially that there is a clear and recognisable style, with common characteristics. Yet he then states that many of the statuettes do not actually display these characteristics, to the extent that their very morphology is uncertain. Not only does this indicate that the difficulties of establishing features from so many poorly preserved examples are great, but it throws into doubt the possible existence of any shared style. This admission must also cast doubt on the full extent of the occurrence of the traits that he later promotes as characteristic, prompting one to question precisely how many examples the resulting characterisation is based on, and how applicable it may

be to the wider range of figures. It is also apparent that this process is not objective, it requires both identification and evaluation.

In contrast to many authors, Graziosi is quite explicit in detailing the poor stratigraphic context of a number of the figures, and he acknowledges that in the cases of Sireuil (Figure 3.26), Savignano (Figure 3.27) and Trasimeno (Figure 3.31), attribution to the group is based purely on stylistic or morphological characteristics. I will examine his assessment of these figures in detail. His discussion of the characteristics of the Sireuil figure is far from conclusive. While he sees similarities in the lower part of the body, and in such ambiguous criteria as "plastic sensitivity" and "sense of humour" (Graziosi 1960: 49), he notes a number of specific features that deviate from the standard – the flattened shape of the piece, the short, rigid (but nevertheless clearly marked) arms, the backward projecting buttocks, and breasts less well developed than usual (*ibid*: 49).

The Savignano figure (Figure 3.27) is said to feature legs joined together and ending in a point, "puny" arms with "barely indicated" forearms folded over the breasts, and a featureless face. These are termed "undeniable" Aurignacian-Perigordian characteristics (*ibid*: 52). However, he suggests that the figure is perhaps proportioned more slenderly than most, and states that the conical shape of the head is unique in Palaeolithic art (*ibid*: 52). It seems that 'core' features are identified allowing attribution to the group to take place, yet it is also apparent that individual and divergent features occur.

The morphology of the Trasimeno figure (Figure 3.31) is no less ambiguous than its chronology, and Graziosi admits that its features are less clearly depicted than on the other statuettes; indeed, the identification of features is problematic to the extent that he suggests two possible interpretations, depending on which way up the figure is held. Thus, the cylindrical part could either represent the head or the legs, with the masses displaced to the sides depicting *either* the breasts or buttocks (*ibid* 1960: 55).

Graziosi puts forward a strong case for the inclusion of the Chiozza statuette (Figure 3.28), specifying features and indicating their occurrence amongst accepted members of the class. Graziosi sees its resemblance to the Aurignacian-Perigordian statuettes in a bulbous head, which is featureless and tilted forward (a feature he also identifies at Grimaldi [Figures 3.11-19 are those published at this time], Lespugue [Figure 3.29] and Willendorf [Figure 3.30]), rounded shoulders (seen also at Willendorf), pendulous breasts resting on the stomach, and neglected arms (Graziosi 1960: 53). However, divergent features are also noted, including a flattened stomach, hips, buttocks and thighs, and a deep indentation around the knees. Despite this divergence, Graziosi maintains that, "it is without doubt one of the more characteristic of this particular type" (*ibid*: 54). These examples recall the suggested operation of the category noted in my Introduction, particularly that all that is required for inclusion in the category is a sufficient "family resemblance" to the prototype (p. 13-14). It is apparent from Graziosi's work that despite the claims for the existence of a clear stylistic canon, the criteria for inclusion are flexible and may be easily manipulated. It has also been seen that an author's adherence to them may be equally variable.

Graziosi admits that the chronological attribution of the "Italian Venuses" – Grimaldi (Figures 3.11-19 are those published at the time), Savignano (Figure 3.27), Trasimeno (Figure 3.31) and Chiozza (Figure 3.28) – has been based on a simple stylistic diagnosis and "a few dubious and inconclusive observations", and his assessment of these figures reflects this poor foundation. While declaring that "the form and character of these statuettes is such that they can only be placed in the same group as the Aurignacian-Perigordian ones" he also comments that "it would be daring to attribute them all to that period" (*ibid*: 49-50). This lack of certainty leads him to make a subtle distinction in their classification, designating them "of the Aurignacian-Perigordian *type*" (*ibid*: 49, emphasis in original text). This term is also applied to the Mainz-Linsenberg fragments (Figure 3.35), which are even more cautiously noted as being "possibly of Aurignacian-Perigordian type". Here, Graziosi comments that "from an artistic point of view" they reveal nothing in common with Aurignacian-Perigordian sculpture (*ibid*: 55). Several points need to be made.

Graziosi obviously has reservations regarding the attribution of at least some of the Italian Venuses, and the addition of the term "type" may perhaps demonstrate an unwillingness to commit completely, although they are still featured prominently in his group of Aurignacian-Perigordian statuettes. His comment on the Mainz-Linsenberg fragments is more revealing as it demonstrates that, although they *may* belong to the 'correct' time period and do have an archaeological context (see p. 73), they do not share stylistic similarities with the other members of the class.

Graziosi's process of attribution by means of a stylistic canon rests on the identification of features shared with accepted members of the group, yet this involves an issue that is rarely acknowledged, namely that a number of the comparative examples will have been themselves attributed mainly on the basis of stylistic similarity. This point is not considered when Graziosi refers to the "repertory" of statuettes formed by 1925 as being of sufficient size to allow characteristics to be deduced, thereby permitting the inclusion of the Savignano piece (Graziosi 1960: 51) (Figure 3.27). This "repertory" may be identified by reference to Table 1, where the figures are presented in order of discovery.

Piette asserts that he considers the authenticity of the Grimaldi statuettes (Figures 3.11-16 are those known at the time of Piette's work) to be certain, partly on the basis that "they present the same characteristics as those of Brassempouy" (Piette 1902: 776) (Figures 3.1-9 at that time). Publishing the Lespugue statuette (Figure 3.29), Saint-Periér sees the find fitting into a "homogeneous group" formed by the statuettes of Brassempouy, Grimaldi, Willendorf (Figure 3.30) and Laussel (Figures 3.44-48) (Saint-Periér 1922: 371). Saint-Périer notes that the stratigraphy of Brassempouy is not precise, but states that several of these statuettes show a "remarkable similarity" to the Lespugue figure, with similarities of detail identified in *la figurine à la ceinture*, *l'ébauche*, and *la figurine à la pèlerine* (Figure 3.50*a*), and the greatest similarity occurring in *la poire*, *le* torse and *le manche de poignard* (Figure 3.50*b*). Saint-Périer also notes that the industry accompanying the Grimaldi statuettes is not known, yet the discovery of a piece of worked steatite is taken as indication of an 'Aurignacian' provenance of the statuettes (Saint-Périer

1922: 397). It is stated that the *statuette en stéatite jaune*, despite its reduced dimensions, offers a "striking similarity" to the Lespugue figure (*ibid*: 372-3) (Figure 3.50c), displaying "the same ovoid head, stylised, without details indicated, in the same attitude, demi-flexed on the thorax. The voluminous breasts, the stomach projecting in front, the falling shoulders, the enlarged buttocks are also of the same style" (*ibid*: 373). Saint-Périer sees this similarity as enough to rule out previously held opinions that the statuette from Griamldi was not authentic (*ibid*: 373), adding that the same general outline – symmetrical and lozenge-shaped – is shared by *le losange* (Figure 3.50c). Of those figures with a more definite archaeological context, the Laussel bas-reliefs (Figures 3.44-48) are viewed as being very similar to Lespugue, with voluminous and pendent breasts and very marked "steatotrochanteria" (*ibid*: 373), while the Willendorf statuette (Figure 3.30) is stated to be of a different character to that of Lespugue (Figure 3.29), sharing only steatopygia, obesity, and the flexed arm resting on the breast (a feature also identified on *la figurine à la pèlerine* (Figure 3.4) (*ibid*: 373). The strongest parallels are therefore drawn with those figures with the least certain provenance.

In their initial description of the Monpazier statuette (Figure 3.51a), a surface-find without archaeological context, the authors present a number of correspondences with "known" figurines (Clottes and Cerou 1970: 441-3). The strongest resemblances are stated to be with the Grimaldi figures (Figures 3.11-19 are those known at that time), and while the authors do note the "fog" surrounding the circumstances of discovery of the Grimaldi statuettes (*ibid*: 441), adding that this is "all the more regrettable" as one of them – *la polichinelle* (Figure 3.51b) – is very similar to the Monpazier statuette, they continue to present a detailed comparison. Correspondences are stated to occur in relative size, with the Monpazier figure measuring 5.5 cm, *la polichinelle* 6.1 cm and *le losange* 6.3 cm (*ibid*: 441). The "exceptional" vulva of Monpazier is compared to *le losange* (Figure 3.51c) and in particular to *la polichinelle* (Figure 3.51b) (*ibid*: 443). The general resemblance between the latter and Monpazier is termed "striking", with *la polichinelle* described as featuring in frontal view, a slender appearance and elongated lower limbs, and in profile, a prominent stomach and strongly projecting buttocks (*ibid*: 442).

However, Clottes and Cerou do note several differential elements; that the head of *la polichinelle* is elongated and the legs are longer, tapered, and end in a point without feet (*ibid*: 442). However, the authors maintain that the two statuettes have an unquestionable "air de famille" (*ibid*: 442).

These analogies are based on comparison with statuettes whose own provenance is not proven, and Clottes and Cerou cite additional figurines without certain provenance in a list of further correspondences. It is stated that the eyes of the Monpazier statuette (Figure 3.52*a*) are marked, and facial features are thus noted on *la tête à la capuche* from Brassempouy (Figure 3.52*b*) and *la tête négroide* from Grimaldi (Figure 3.52*c*). The large face is compared to that of Chiozza (Figure 3.52*d*) and the short neck to the Péchialet figure (Figure 3.52*e*), with the neck marked only by a line identified as a feature also occurring on *la fillette* from Brassempouy (Figure 3.52*f*) (*ibid* 442).

Clottes and Cerou then compare the relationship between the Monpazier and Grimaldi statuettes discussed above (Figure 3.51) to the frequently drawn parallels between Sireuil and Tursac (Figure 3.53), and those between Lespugue and the *statuette en stéatite jaune* from Grimaldi (Figure 3.50*c*, left and centre). The latter instances provide examples of a find without provenance being 'authenticated' on the basis of its stylistic similarity to a later discovery found *in situ*. The Tursac figure has been cited to retrospectively confirm the authenticity of Sireuil, on the basis of their adjudged similarity (Pales 1972: 254) and Duhard's (1993*c*) comparison of the two statuettes goes so far as to suggest that were made by the same artist. His parallels are based on a number of factors, not all of them stylistic. These include: the proximity of the find spots (some 4 km apart), the shared material – amber calcite – in which no other figurines are known; the posture and flexed position of the lower limbs, again unknown in other figurines; and the proportions of the body (Duhard 1993*c*: 286-289) (Figure 3.53). Similarly, characteristics seen in the Lespugue statuette have been cited as proof of the authenticity of the *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Saint-Périer 1922 373) (Figure 3.50*c*, left and centre), with Pales also seeing a particular similarity in attitude and the posture of the head (Pales 1972: 249).

A further problem with stylistic attribution involves the features selected as characteristic of a period. The identification of diagnostic characteristics has been deemed faulty by Ucko and Rosenfeld, who claim that many past authorities had little idea of the characteristics of post-Palaeolithic anthropomorphic representation, with the result that many traits isolated as diagnostic of the Palaeolithic are actually common to human representations from diverse periods (Ucko and Rosenfeld 1972: 167). Thus, they deem parallels drawn on the basis of obesity, the relative size of breasts and buttocks, or the absence of facial details as unsatisfactory (*ibid*: 170). The initial discussion of whether the Savignano statuette (Figure 3.27) was Neolithic or Palaeolithic, and the possible Late Neolithic context for the Chiozza statuette (Figure 3.28) have been noted in the Chronology section (p. 70).

Piette's analogies between the figures from Grimaldi and later historical figures (Piette 1902) have been noted (p. 62-63). Niedhorn (1993) sees such stylistic anomalies occurring in a number of other figures, particularly, the Petřkovice and Willendorf figurines, although it should be noted that these figures were both found in excavations, albeit early in the century. Niedhorn comments that Petřkovice figure (Figure 3.54) is made of a soft material (hematite), making it easy to cut. Stylistically, Niedhorn identifies in the posture of the statuette, a distinct shift of the chest in relation to the pelvis, which he sees as a mode of composition that did not occur prior to the Greek classics (Niedhorn 1993: 89-90). Interestingly, Sandars stresses the "naturalism" and "truth" of this figure, and noting the position of the statuette with the weight on the right leg, sees a similarity in pose and proportions with the classical canon represented by the Three Graces (Sandars 1968: 11 and Fig. 2) (Figure 3.55). Similarly classical, Baroque, or Rubin-esque compositional elements are also identified in *le torse* from Brassempouy (Niedhorn 1993: 72) (Figure 3.56). The circles of hair depicted on the Willendorf figurine (Figure 3.30) are compared with three Egyptian sculptures of male heads which had been displayed a Viennese museum, featuring a similar concentric ring of "square" patches, although flat rather than rounded (*ibid*: 91). One of the heads was carved from reddish stone, which Niedhorn sees as influencing the colour applied to the Willendorf figure

(*ibid*: 93). He suggests that bathing the statuette in diluted sulphuric acid would produce this discolouration by causes a thin deposit of gypsum at the surface. Niedhorn suggests that this would explain the holes where smashed oolithic grains have been quickly dissolved by the acid (*ibid*: 92). The depiction of distinct fingers and the differentiation of the legs into thighs, knees and shanks are also viewed with suspicion by Niedhorn, as he claims they are unique in Palaeolithic art (*ibid*: 91-92).

Conclusions of stylistic analysis

This analysis has demonstrated three key problems with the practice of stylistic attribution. The first is that many of the examples utilised for comparison have little archaeological context, or have themselves been attributed on the basis of stylistic similarity. The second is that many of the characteristics cited for comparison are not exclusively Palaeolithic. The third is that it is not certain how many figures included in the group actually do display these characteristics, and this aspect will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Implications for the credibility of the class of Venus figurines

This chapter has demonstrated the continued belief in the chronological coherence of the statuettes, despite the problems involved in both archaeological context and stylistic attribution. It seems to be a trend of research that authors accept and present the group as a certainty, a body of material sufficiently well established to require no further thought. It is therefore interesting to examine how the credibility of the material is established in the texts, particularly in later works.

Although Piette (1895) initially divided the Brassempouy statuettes into two types – an "adipose" and a "svelte" group (Figure 3.57*a*, *b*) – Saint-Périer viewed the Lespugue discovery as fitting into a "homogeneous group", already formed by the statuettes of Brassempouy, Grimaldi, Willendorf and Laussel (Saint-Périer: 1922: 371) (Figures 3.1-9, 3.11-9 and 3.44-48), and Graziosi (1960) states that, by 1925, "the repertory of European female statuettes of the Aurignacian-Perigordian was large enough to enable us to classify the

[Savignano Venus] in that group, on the mere basis of its morphological characteristics" (Graziosi 1960: 51) (Figure 3.27).

Burkitt's references to the "familiar" type indicate that a conceptualisation of this 'homogeneous group' was well formulated by the 1930's (Burkitt 1934). Both Luquet (1934) and Burkitt refer to the Venus figurines in such a manner as to indicate that their readers will be familiar with the material under discussion, and they lay little stress on establishing the credibility of the class or the archaeological material itself. Graziosi's (1960) assessment of the figures is perhaps the frankest examination, and it is in this work that the importance of stylistic attribution is highlighted. Having revealed that there are problems with the stylistic analysis of many of the statuettes forming the group, coupled with the poor chronological evidence in numerous western examples, he is at pains to show the occurrence of characteristic features, and he therefore draws many comparisons between examples, pointing out parallels in his descriptions of the pieces, as it is through stylistic similarity that the credibility of the both individual pieces and the group of material must be established.

The acceptance of the material as a discrete category is apparent in the works of Absolon (1949) and Leroi-Gourhan (1968), and particularly so in the works of Faris (1983), Clark (1967), Gamble (1982) and Taylor (1996), who do not question or reassess the class in any way before applying their various hypotheses. Leroi-Gourhan emphasises the stylistic similarity of the pieces to show that the material forms a coherent group in the absence of full contextual information. While Absolon and Gamble both sub-divide the material into types on the basis of style and medium, only Delporte (1993*b*) re-formulates the group in any way, attacking the notion of an entirely unified body of material and proposing three distinct geographic groupings characterised by differing degrees of homogeneity and accompanying artistic context.

Later authors therefore tend to accept the class as established, treating the material as a viable subject for hypothesis testing, without any investigation of the actual basis of this assumption. Two authors who apply specific hypotheses to the material, Gamble (1982) and McDermott (1996), draw heavily on Leroi-

Gourhan (1968) to claim stylistic similarity, demonstrate group identity and argue for the existence of the stylistic canon. Neither discusses the question of chronology in any detail, and it is through reference to external authority and the arguments of others that they convince the reader that the material is a chronological and stylistic unit.

In these instances, the means by which the credibility of the material is established tends to involve citation of previous authors, rather than examination of the original archaeological material. Gamble introduces the figures by stating that, "Venus figurines are a well-known class of Palaeolithic object. They have been described on many occasions" (Gamble 1982: 92). This claim is supported by the insertion of five references: Abramova (1967); Delporte (1979); Graziosi (1960); Leroi-Gourhan (1968); Gomez-Tabernera (1978). This is a standard academic practice, an acknowledgment of the history of research, yet it also a demonstration of the acceptance and existence of the class, a means of legitimising the statement by association with external authority. Critical examination of the information presented in these sources is not undertaken. The important point is that the Venus figurines are "a well known class', identified and acknowledged as a specific category.

Similarly, McDermott establishes the credibility of the material through reference to previous studies. He states that, "... the so-called Venus figurines, constitute a recognisable stylistic class and are among the most widely known of all Palaeolithic objects. As a group they have frequently been described in the professional and popular literature", citing no less than thirty-five references (McDermott 1996: 228).

It is therefore by these means that the archaeological validity of this class is established in the absence of secure contextual evidence.

Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated problems in both the chronological and stylistic constructions of the category of Venus figurines. It has also shown that, despite these problems, the credibility of the category is maintained in the texts.

Referring back to the point made in my Introduction regarding the three claims that Dobres' identifies as being made for the figurines (Dobres1992*b*) and her own claim that the perceived female nature of the figurines was the most important factor in assessing if the material formed a single class (1992*a*), I have demonstrated that chronology and style are factors at least as important, as acknowledgement of the problematic chronology effectively breaks apart the concept of the stylistic similarity of the class.

Furthermore, I have suggested that in the texts problems of chronology are overcome through the utilisation of the argument of stylistic similarity. In respect of the Venus figurines, Sørensen's suggestion that the 'type' may act as a 'context' (Sørensen 1997: 186) is appropriate, as not only does the claimed stylistic similarity of the figures facilitate a chronological attribution in those instances without archaeological context, it also occasionally overrides contextual evidence. The stylistic similarity of the figures thus renders the archaeological context unnecessary. In the following two chapters, I will argue that the concept of a stylistically similar group of figures is itself maintained in the texts by processes of prioritisation on three levels: firstly, at a general level in the prioritisation of homogeneity over diversity; secondly, at an individual level in the prioritisation of particular figures over others; and finally, at a detailed level through the prioritisation of certain features and aspects of the figurines over others.

CHAPTER 4

HOMOGENEITY, DIVERSITY AND THE
CHARACTERISATION OF THE CATEGORY

Introduction

The key issue remaining to be addressed concerns claims of stylistic similarity and the presentation of the Venus figurines as a homogeneous body of material in the texts. Distinct aspects of this issue will be addressed in this chapter and the next. To determine whether homogeneity truly exists, or whether it is merely an impression created by such presentation, I will examine *how* the notion of homogeneity and stylistic similarity is promoted in the literature. Therefore, these two chapters will critically examine claims for the existence of the stylistic similarity of the figures through an examination of the presentation of homogeneity in the literature.

To explore the means by which homogeneity has been achieved, I will identify and discuss a number of processes apparent in the literature that serve to emphasize similarity and contribute to the formation of a standardized group identity. This chapter will discuss the presentation of generalised characterisations of the Venus figurines, and the prioritisation of certain of their features. However, to challenge the impression of homogeneity, I must also show that diversity exists and therefore this issue will also be addressed in this chapter. Through this analysis, I will challenge the validity of the standard characterisations and their representation of the Venus figurines as a single homogeneous class of material.

Chapter 5 will then present my contention that methods employed in the presentation of the Venus figurines serve to standardise this archaeological material, and that it is in part through this standardisation that the Venus figurines continue to be accepted as a coherent and stylistically similar body of material.

Characterisation of the material and the prioritisation of selected features

It is my contention that the perception of the Venus figurines as a homogeneous category is created by and maintained through a number of factors that contribute to the characterisation of this archaeological material. This process is based on the identification and presentation of characteristics that are determined to be definitive of the class and which constitute the criteria for membership within it, but which are also generalised without specification across this material. This section will now analyse the construction of these characterisations in detail.

Analysis of the texts indicates that there is a format for the discussion of the figures. It is common practice to introduce the particular generic term used, briefly noting its referent, and to outline factors such as quantity and distribution. A characterisation of the group is then presented, and only after this generalisation will discussion of individual examples take place. Examples of these characterisations are given in Table 4.1.

Clark introduces the figurines in this way: "In some respects the most notable products of the culture are the small figurines of women, sometimes referred to flatteringly as 'Venuses', that are found over a wide territory from Italy and France to South Russia and even Siberia" (Clark 1967: 55). He proceeds to provide a generalised characterisation, a format that he repeats in text accompanying his illustrations (*ibid*: 56). Graziosi presents the generalised characteristics of the "class of material", based on an examination of "the best specimens of early sculpture" (Graziosi 1960: 46). This characterisation is placed in the text prior to description of individual pieces, and the impression of similarity is therefore instituted and presented to the reader before specific pieces are discussed.

Clear characterisations of the Venus figurines are provided the majority of the texts studied, and these basic characterisations often vary only in the degree of detail provided. For example, Graziosi (1960), Clarke (1967), Leroi-Gourhan (1968), Faris (1983) and McDermott (1996) present strikingly similar descriptions, with each perhaps indicating the influence of preceding works.

McDermott's characterisation, particularly, echoes that of Leroi-Gourhan and Graziosi. Gamble's (1982) characterisation simply cites Leroi-Gourhan (1968).

Characteristics and features defining the class

The characterisations presented in Table 4.1 focus attention on a number of features which serve as the definitive characteristics of the class, and which may be presumed to occur in the individual members of the class. These may be summarised as follows, and each will be discussed in turn.

The figures represent women

As Dobres has suggested (1992*a*), there is an overwhelming focus on the category as consisting of female representations. In practice, the term Venus is interchangeable with, and equivalent to, an equally undefined category of "female figurines" (e.g. Luquet 1934; Absolon 1949).

Dobres sees the Venus figurines represented as "a class of objects typically described as representations of females" (Dobres 1992*a*: 12), and most authors characterise the group as female. Burkitt states that "the Aurignacian statuettes" are "almost entirely specimens of women" (Burkitt 1934: 117). Thirty years later, the "anthropomorphic Aurignacian-Perigordian statuettes" are still characterised as "almost exclusively female; only very exceptionally do they portray a male" (Graziosi 1960: 45). Leroi-Gourhan refers to "'the first figurines representing prehistoric man – or at least his wife" (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 90), and Taylor comments that, with only one possible exception, they all seem to represent women (Taylor 1996: 124). Even Nelson, who is critical of the characteristics and attributes selected for emphasis by many authors, states the figures "have only gender in common" (Nelson 1993: 51) and Bahn and Vertut, fully aware of the drawbacks associated with the popularisation of the Venus figurines as a category, state that apart from "a few probable males... most carvings of humans are female" (Bahn and Vertut 1997: 160).

Ehrenberg sees the female figures as considered almost to the exclusion of male (Ehrenberg 1989: 66), and this assessment seems borne out by the texts. For example, "... with the exception of the man of Brünn [Brno] [Figure 4.25*f*], and

a somewhat uncertain fragment from Brassempouy [Figure 4.25*a* or *b*], all represent women with exaggerated sexual characteristics" (Laguna 1932: 494). Using similar terminology, Leroi-Gourhan seems to de-prioritise male examples, noting the existence of male figures but stating that "they are so few that they need only be mentioned" (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 96). As in the latter example from Laguna, the 'male' examples are not identified by name.

The female nature of the category is further reinforced by the identification of a number of ambiguous examples as female, which are then subsequently included in the group. The Venus XIV (Figure 4.1*c*), Venus XII (Figure 4.1*b*) and Venus XIII (Figure 4.1*a*) from Dolní Věstonice are widely accepted as female representations. Sandars describes Venus XIV and Venus XII as "the body reduced to a mere stick supporting the breasts; while another suppresses the body altogether and represents the breasts alone" (Sandars 1968: 13). These examples are interpreted as "tool like minimum images" representing "the idea of nourishment" (*ibid* 1968: 14). Marshack also sees Venus XII and XIV as representations of the breast, and Venus XIII as a schematic female torso in which all attributes have been eliminated except for the trunk, legs, and clearly indicated vulvar line (Marshack 1991: 20). In Absolon (1949), 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" (Absolon 1949: 207). The Venus XIII is described the representation of the upper body with the *mont de Vénus* stressed by a deep groove. Absolon identifies legs on the figure, describing them as "gently bent towards each other, therefore with sexual emphasis" (*ibid*: 207). Similarly, the Venus XIV is "a sexual-biological hyperstylization", identified as being 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" (*ibid*: 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", again "proving sexual-biological motivation" (*ibid*: 209-10).

As part of his hypothesis that the Venus figurines depict the view a woman sees when she down at her own body, McDermott suggests re-alignment of approaches to the figurines to produce "... a classification system sensitive to the basics of art-historical style" (McDermott 1996: 237). In this way, 'sketches', which may range from "admittedly conjectural roughed-out "blanks" to pieces lacking only the final definition of breasts and abdomen" (*ibid*: 237), are recognised as unfinished female images rather than being judged sexually indeterminate. In this scenario, male figures become "virtually absent from the record" (*ibid* 1996: 237).

Dobres notes that the 'fact' that the category of figurines is female is made central to subsequent interpretations (Dobres 1992*b*: 252), and these examples show the close relationship between the identification as female and the subsequent interpretation. In these instances, the sexualised interpretation is both drawn from and leads to the identification of the figures as female representations.

The statuettes are steatopygeous, obese, or with exaggerated proportions
Much attention has focused on the alleged steatopygia of the figurines, an identification initially made by Piette (1895 and 1902) and related to racial traits. Although a number of authors have refuted this argument (for example, Passemard [1938] and Saccasyn-Della Santa [1949]), the figures are still frequently referred to in such terms. Faris sees the female figures as presented in "the nomenclature of storage and reproduction – in the steatopygic buttocks and bulbous breasts" (Faris 1983: 107, Figs. 7.19, 7.20). In a contemporary twist, Duhard (1991) 'diagnoses' the figures in medical terms, characterising them in terms of adiposity. Although this ostensibly focuses attention on gynecological rather than racial traits, it is interesting that many of the terms remain the same, as can be seen in the following examples:

> "The Sireuil statuette appears to be a young pregnant woman with posterior steatopygia" (Duhard 1991: 559) (Figure 4.2*a*).

"The Tursac statuette depicts a pregnant woman with posterior steatopygia" (*ibid*: 559) (Figure 4.2*b*).

"The '*statuette en stéatite jaune*' appears pregnant; it presents gynoid obesity with steatocoia and steatomeria associated with hypermastia" (*ibid*: 557) (Figure 4.2*c*).

Of the figurines of the French Gravettian that he assesses (Brassempouy, Grimaldi, Laussel, Lespugue, Monpazier, Abri Pataud, Péchialet, Sireuil, Termo-Pialat and Tursac [Figure 4.3]), only the Péchialet figure (Figure 4.3*t*), the Brassempouy *l'ébauche de poupée* (Figure 4.3*a*), and the Laussel Archer (Figure 4.3*l*) are designated as slim or without exaggeration. It should be noted that this selection by Duhard does not include certain figures from Brassempouy, for example, the "svelte" group of Piette (1895) (for illustration of this group, see Figure 3.57*b*) such as the *figurine à la ceinture*, the *figurine à la pèlerine*, *l'ébauche*, and *la fillette*, which perhaps weights his analysis.

The hips are fleshy

Many authors draw attention to the "fleshy" hips of the figurines (Laguna 1932: 494; Levy 1948: 56). They are also described as being cushioned in fat, bearing fatty deposits (Piette 1895: 146-7; Graziosi 1960: 46), or generally prominent (Macalister 1921: 443).

The buttocks are prominent and exaggerated

Along with the breasts, the buttocks are designated the chief area of exaggeration (Faris 1983: 104; Gowlett 1984: 129). As with the hips, Graziosi terms them "cushioned in fat" (Graziosi 1960: 46), and McDermott sees them as "exaggeratedly large or elevated" (McDermott 1996: 228). The posterior 'steatopygia' of the Sireuil and Tursac figures (Figure 4.2*a*, *b*) has been noted above, and Clark sees a "generous modelling of the buttocks" throughout the statuettes (Clark 1967: 56).

The figurines depict pregnancy

Several authors refer to the statuettes as pregnant (e.g. Macalister 1921: 443; James 1957: 109; Faris 1983: 106-7; McDermott 1996: 228). More specifically, Duhard asserts that 70% of the Western European Gravettian figurines are pregnant (Duhard 1990: 244). Clark emphasises through repetition that "the figurines commonly show signs of pregnancy" (Clark 1967: 56).

The identification of pregnancy is a strong characterisation, particularly associated with 'Mother Goddess' interpretations (e.g Gimbutas 1989), yet even beyond this genre it exerts a strong influence. For example, despite stating that the piece has a "flat shape", Absolon describes the Dolní Věstonice Venus V as featuring a protruding abdomen suggestive of pregnancy, maintaining that one can "clearly recognise the intent of portraying a fat, broad Venus" (Absolon 1949: 206) (Figure 4.4). This clearly shows the prioritisation of the characteristic over the actual features of the figure.

Gvozdover (1989) draws a distinction in the depiction of the abdomen of the Kostenki type figure, and links this with the representation of physiological conditions to again identify pregnancy. A keel shaped abdomen is taken to indicate a woman with a well-developed foetus, a conclusion deemed consistent with the general posture of the statuettes, and a pregnant woman's characteristic placement of her hands on the abdomen. A rounded abdomen is equated with a woman who is either not pregnant, or not past the 5th month of pregnancy (Gvozdover 1989: 57 and Fig.6) (Figure 4.5).

The breasts of the figurines are pendulous, voluminous or exaggerated

Most authors note the size of the breasts, and refer to their prominence. The breasts are described in a variety of ways, from their similarity to "over-ripe gourds" (Graziosi 1960: 48) to their frequent exaggeration (Faris 1983: 104; Gowlett 1984: 129). Recurring terms used include "pendent" (Piette 1895: 146), low hanging (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 96; Laguna 1932: 494), "huge" (Levy 1948: 56), "voluminous" and "enormous" (Graziosi 1960: 46), and "pendulous" (James 1957: 145; McDermott 1996: 228; Fagan 1998: 137). Harding sees the breasts as hypertrophic (Harding 1976: 271-2), and Absolon terms those of Lespugue "stupidly hypertrophic" (Absolon 1949: 218) (Figure 4.6a). More

generally, Duhard states that 86% of these figurines have the breasts marked (Duhard 1990: 248), and Eisenbud characterises the Venus figurines by their "breastiness"(Eisenbud 1964: 145).

The figurines are naked

The material is presented as a category of naked Venuses. The figures are "quite naked" (Laguna 1932: 494), "invariably nude" (Graziosi 1960: 46), or more coyly "invariably undraped" (Macalister 1921: 443). Nudity is often linked with obesity, and we see reference to "typically...naked, often very obese women" (Sieveking 1979: 78 and 209), and "nude women usually described as obese" (McCoid & McDermott 1996: 319). Taylor frequently refers to the nudity of the figures, which are described as "fleshy naked women" (Taylor 1996: 8), and viewed in the context of the first positive evidence for nakedness (*ibid*: 117). Suggesting that nakedness was uncommon, he concludes that the figures may also "pack an erotic punch" as he portrays the Venuses huddled around the camp fire "without their furs" (*ibid*: 122). Nudity is so important for Taylor that it forms the chief distinction between figurine types, with the variation between them characterised as some of the statuettes being "fleshy and naked, or almost naked", while others are "thinner and depicted with more substantial clothing" (Taylor 1996: 117). His discussion refers only to the 'fleshy naked' examples, again demonstrating an emphasis in presentation and a prioritisation of this feature.

The head is bent or bowed

Many characterise the figures in terms of the bowed or bent head (Laguna 1932: 494; Levy 1948: 56; Grigor'ev 1993: 57; McDermott 1996: 228). This feature is often interpreted as an indication of motherhood; Levy describes Lespugue with reference to "the featureless head, bowed as if above an unseen child" (Levy 1948: 57) (Figure 4.6*a*). Of Willendorf, Powell identifies "the characteristic pose of the head; for where but downwards does a mother look when nursing her child?" (Powell 1966: 16) (Figure 4.6*b*) Both Taylor (1996: 141) and Powell (1966: 16) link the bowed head with subjection, with the latter also equating the gesture with "resignation" and sadness.

The facial features of the figurines are not depicted

Most authors comment on the lack of facial features depicted on the figurines (Laguna 1932: 494; Levy 1948: 56; Absolon 1949: 214; Graziosi 1960: 46; Clark 1967: 56-57; Sieveking 1979: 78). Clark suggests that most of the Venus figurines are faceless, "or their faces are masked by the downward cast of the head as with the 'Venus' of Lespugue" (Clark 1967: 56) (Figure 4.6*a*). Bisson and White suggest that the faces of the Grimaldi statuettes were deliberately "blanked out" (Bisson and White 1996: 35) (e.g. Figures 3.11, 3.12, 3.15, 3.16, 3.17). For Davidson, the characteristic appearance of the figurines as "faceless" is without doubt (Davidson 1997: 144). Suggesting that the portability of the figurines is linked to their exchange, a practice reflecting the actual exchange of women, Taylor sees the absence of faces on the figurines as indicating that the type of woman who could be given was typically faceless because her identity did not count, as the important factor was that she was reproductively fit (Taylor 1996: 124).

The arms of the figurines are often ignored or poorly marked, or appear folded over the breast

Most draw attention to the arms as a feature neglected by those who made the figures (Figure 4.7). The arms are variously described as "spindling" (Laguna 1932: 494), "feeble" (Levy 1948: 56), "undersized" (Graziosi 1960: 46), and "negligently treated" (Absolon 1949: 214). For the Savignano figure (Figure 4.7*c*), Graziosi describes the "puny" arms with a "barely indicated" forearm folded over the breasts (Graziosi 1960: 52), and for Willendorf (Figures 4.7*a* and 4.6*b*) he comments on the "thin arms resting lightly and meekly on the enormous breasts" (*ibid*: 48). Taylor sees the rendering of arms on Venus figurines in terms of the "essentially objectified and passive subject matter", often leading to their being left off altogether (Taylor 1996: 130). However, his novel interpretation suggests that the arms on the Grimaldi *l'hermaphrodite* are those of a third party, inserting a dildo into the vagina of the figure (*ibid*: 130-1 and Fig 5.10) (Figure 4.7*d*).

The legs of the figurines are neglected

While Clark described the thighs of the figures as "plump", the legs are described as "tapered" (Clark 1967: 57-8), further specified by McDermott as being "oddly bent", "unnaturally short", and ending in a rounded point (McDermott 1996: 228) (Figure 4.8). Graziosi also describes the Lespugue figure (Figure 4.8c) as featuring short legs, joined together and ending in a point, stating that this is a characteristic feature of all Aurignacian-Perigordian statuettes (Graziosi 1960: 48). Others stress that the legs taper into schematised cones (Absolon 1949: 214), or "dwindle away" (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 90).

The figurines are without feet

McDermott draws attention to the "disproportionately small feet" of the "PKG" statuettes (McDermott 1996: 228), which also described as "miniscule or non-existent" by Leroi-Gourhan (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 96) (Figure 4.8). Faris stresses that the feet are deliberately not modeled (Faris 1983: 104), and Davidson sees the lack of feet as a definitive characteristic of the female figurines, the other being the lack of faces (Davidson 1997: 144).

The sexual characteristics are emphasized and the pubic triangle is prominently depicted

Attention has been focused on this aspect of the figurines since Piette's first description of Brassempouy *la poire* identified it as displaying a "vulviform appendage" (Piette: 1895: 144) (Figure 2.8). Macalister notes that the "external organs of sex are strongly marked" on the figures, although does not elaborate further on the subject (Macalister 1921: 443). Others note an accentuation of the pubic region (Graziosi 1960: 46; Sieveking 1979: 78). Maringer contrasts the accentuation of these features with the suppression of personal traits (Maringer 1956: 109).

Prioritisation of this feature in the texts is also demonstrated in a number of examples that present the vulva area of the figurines in close-up (Figure 4.9). Marshack describes his own "microscopic analysis" of this area and provides an illustration of the "exquisitely carved" vulva of the Willendorf figure (Marshack 1991: 18-9, Plate 2*b* and Fig. 1*b*) (Figure 4.9*a*, *b*). Duhard presents a number of illustrations of the vulvas of the Grimaldi figurines, enlarged to such a degree

that they are reproduced at the same size as the figures themselves (Duhard 1993*a*: Plates VIII-XI) (Figure 4.9*c-g*). In the initial publication of the Monpazier statuette (Figure 4.8*d*) the "exceptional" vulva is noted, and once again a close up illustration is provided (Clottes and Cerou 1970: 443 and Fig. 4.5)

These characteristics and the resulting characterisations effectively act as a 'standard' representing the whole group, and they include not only the stylistic and anatomical traits depicted in the statuettes, but also their gender, which is invariably presented as female. It is these traits that have become identified as the stylistic canon and the Venus stereotype, promoted and perpetuated through and throughout the literature to create the impression of a homogeneous group. However, in the next section, I will introduce examples from the same texts that reveal the existence of diversity within this 'homogeneous' material.

The evidence for diversity

My investigation will now focus on the evidence for diversity amongst the figurines. That this evidence is found is the same texts that promote the notion of a homogeneous body of material is significant as it indicates the internal contradiction in the texts. Through a discussion of diversity, this section will also discuss the prioritisation of the features promoted in the texts as characteristic.

Sub-division into stylistic groups

The frequent division of the Venus figurines into subsets and sub-types acknowledges that diversity does occur within the category. Davidson has noted that the variety is such that it can be sub-divided according to the priorities of research (Davidson 1997: 144), and it is interesting to compare the divisions made in the material. The sub-types formed are obviously artificial, yet this does not make the variability itself any less important, and analysis of the division into sub-types reveals a number of principles underlying the constitution of the category itself.

The most common division in the material is the identification of a second type

of figure, appearing alongside those conforming to the widely repeated stylistic canon. Figure 4.10 illustrates the division into two types made by each author. Grigor'ev states that while "all scholars have noted the expressive volume of these figurines, much less attention has been paid to the second version of female depiction..." (Grigor'ev 1993: 57). In contrast to the general consensus regarding the first group, definitions of this second group vary. For Grigor'ev, the second version features an elongated body with slim legs, and breasts either not depicted or depicted "almost graphically". Examples of both types are noted at Willendorf, Kostenki, and Avdeevo (*ibid*: 57). Piette's initial division of the two types was between the "adipose" and the "svelte" (1895) (Figures 4.10 and 3.57*a* and *b*). Taylor distinguishes the two types as naked and clothed (Taylor 1996: 117). Giedion sees two groups according to the placement of the exaggeration, with the profile view predominant in the first type (for example, Savignano and Grimaldi *la polichinelle)*, and the second type displaying most exaggeration in the frontal view (Lespugue and Abri Pataud) (Giedion 1962: 437-449) (Figure 4.10). Levy (1948) sees the distinction as one between a tall and squat type. Short-legged examples are termed obese and naturalistic in style, as in the "Venus" of Willendorf and Gagarino statuette 1 (Levy 1948: Plate 6*c*, 6*d*). The tall group are described as slender and "even elegant", and as differing from the former group in a tendency to abstraction, seen in the Lespugue figure and the Grimaldi *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Levy 1948: 57 and Plate 6*a*, 6*b*) (Figure 4.10).

Laguna defines the second group as being "made without prominent sex characteristics, or are clumsily made" (Laguna 1932: 496), with the 'clumsy type' including the "crude" figures from Předmostí and the figure from Trou Magrite. *La fillette* from Brassempouy is also placed in this group, despite Laguna's identification of "very prominent buttocks" and the claim that the figure "probably also had breasts, now broken off" (*ibid*: 496). Other examples given are the *Vénus impudique* from Laugerie-Basse, and "two fragments" from Brassempouy (Figure 4.10). Laguna concludes that, "These three female figures form a striking contrast to the fat, exaggerated women of the first group, and were perhaps intended to represent young girls" (*ibid*: 496).

Beyond this basic division, Luquet (1934) divides the figures into four anatomical types determined by the quantity and placement of adiposity (Figure 4.11). The type *académique*, is without excessive projection, with figures appearing only moderately plump and sometimes even svelte (as in Kostenki statuette 1) (Figure 4.11*a*). In the type *stéatopyge* there is accentuated projection of the buttocks (Grimaldi, *la polichinelle*) (Figure 4.11*b*), and the type *stéatomère* features projection of the hips and thighs, visible mostly from the front and back (the Lespugue statuette, Brassempouy *le torse* [Figure 4.11*c*] and *le manche de poignard*, and from Grimaldi *le losange, la femme au goître* and the *statuette en stéatite jaune*). The *obèse* type displays all over adiposity (Willendorf 1 [Figure 4.11*d*], Brassempouy *la poire*) (Luquet 1934: 442). Luquet points out that all four types are represented amongst the figurines, with diversity occurring not only amongst examples from different sites but also amongst figures from the same site as at Brassempouy, Mal'ta, Grimaldi, and Willendorf (*ibid*: 442-443).

Abramova also sees four types (Abramova 1967: 68-69) (Figure 4.12): a "classical" type portraying a woman of regular body structure with only slight exaggeration (found in the Kostenki ivory figures [Figure 4.12*a*], with analogies in the Dolní Věstonice Venus I and one of the Laussel bas-reliefs); a "lean" type, featuring elongated and slender proportions, and long legs (Avdeevo statuette 1, Gagarino statuette 3, and Eliseevichi, with parallels in the *Vénus impudique* and examples from Petřkovice [Figure 4.12*b*], Brassempouy and Grimaldi); an "obese" type (Gagarino statuettes 1 and 2, with Willendorf 1 [Figure 4.12*c*] being the nearest analogy along with the Grimaldi *statuette en stéatite jaune*, and two fragments from Brassempouy); figurines of "generalised" outlines, which "undoubtedly portray women" although the breasts and abdomen are not delineated (Kostenki I statuettes 5 and 6, and Avdeevo statuette 2 [Figure 4.12*d*]).

Absolon defines seven types for the figurines (Absolon 1949: 215 and Fig. 12) (Figure 4.13): the "Věstonice" type (comprising Dolní Věstonice Venus I, the closest to Kostenki statuette 1, and Gagarino statuette 3, the "long Venus"), which consists of "thin, steatomeric women" (Absolon 1949: 215); the

"Willendorf" type, consisting of fat, steatomeric women (Willendorf 1, Gagarino statuettes 1 and 2, an unspecified figure from Grimaldi, and Brassempouy *la poire*); the "Mal'ta" type, which is seen as geographically separated and featuring normal or only slightly steatomeric bodies, with facial details; the "Grimaldi" type, containing steatopygic examples (*la polichinelle* and two unspecified figures from Grimaldi, alongside Savignano and Sireuil) (Absolon 1949: 216); the "Předmostí" type, described as crude, sitting figures; the "Lespugue" type, which is seen as a unique stylised type; "Stylised "Posterior" silhouettes" including the Pekárna statuette (Absolon 1949: 218) (Figure 4.13).

Problems with such divisions may be highlighted through an examination of the group devised by Gamble (1982). Gamble identifies three groups, based on style and medium. The criteria for Group A are simply that they are "the classic representations" (Gamble 1982: 94) (Figure 4.14). The designation as "classic" perhaps suggests that the figures included in this group should be related to the convention and style Gamble has outlined, and no definition or explanation of what constitutes "classic" is given, although presumably 'well-known', 'typical', or 'examples to which the epithet Venus figurines is usually applied' may be equally appropriate definitions. Suffice to say, this group includes figurines from Brassempouy (Figure 4.14*a*), Lespugue (Figure 4.14*b*), Monpazier (Figure 4.14*c*), Péchialet (Figure 4.14*d*), Grimaldi (Figure 4.14*e*), Chiozza (Figure 4.14*f*), Savignano (Figure 4.14*g*), Mainz-Linsenberg (Figure 4.14*h*), Willendorf (Figure 4.14*i*), Pavlov (Figure 4.14*j*), Dolní Věstonice (Figure 4.14*k*), Kostenki (Figure 4.14*l*), Avdeevo (Figure 4.14*m*), Gagarino (Figure 4.14*n* and *o*), Khotylevo (Figure 4.14*p* and *q*), Moravany (Figure 4.14*r*), Petřkovice (Figure 4.14*s*), and Eliseevichi (Figure 4.14*t*). Uncommon features of the figures are not stated. Differences in height between the examples are presented as a "range" from 22cm to 4cm, and although there is mention of the variety of materials utilised and the unfinished nature of some examples, it would appear that no significance is attached to these differences.

Group B are differentiated from the above as they are considered to "show a different treatment of the basic design", although their "position within the

general corpus of female figurines" is established on the basis of their "exaggerated proportions of the body" (Gamble 1982: 94). The group comprises only four examples; Tursac (Figure 4.15*a*), Sireuil (Figure 4.15*b*), Trasimeno (Figure 4.15*c*), and Mauern (Figure 4.15*d*). The equation of several of these examples with specifically female figures with exaggerated proportions is perhaps ambitious when it cannot be agreed precisely *what* is represented in the case of at least one of the figures (see Chapter 3, p. 86). Gamble notes that the four examples are small, and emphasises their similarity through the use of Delporte's (1968) comment on the "close correspondence in design" between Sireuil and Tursac. Although it is not mentioned by Gamble at this point (nor later when he discusses context and dating), only the Tursac and Mauern pieces have any archaeological context. Noting a discussion of Mauern and Trasimeno in the context of later Magdalenian schematic representations (Rosenfeld 1977), Gamble states that they should "clearly be included with this earlier group" (Gamble 1982: 94). In the case of Trasimeno at least, this attribution must be a purely stylistic judgement; yet the issue is complicated further by Gamble's admission that figurines from Enval (Figure 4.16*a*) and Farincourt (Figure 4.16*b*), both associated with Magdalenian assemblages, display "affinities" with group B (*ibid*: 94). This effectively indicates that the 'typical' features continue to occur in figures beyond the stipulated time range.

Gamble's Group C consists of bas-relief carvings from Laussel (Figures 3.44-48 and 4.17*a*), Terme Pialat (Figure 4.17*b*) and Abri Pataud (Figure 4.17*c*). Although few in number, the information provided by Gamble highlights clear differences in their treatment, with the latter example mentioned by Gamble as "an outline engraving of a human figure" previously described by Graziosi as "mediocre" and "archaically treated" (Graziosi 1960: 143, cited in Gamble 1982: 94). Differences in style and size are noted by Gamble, with an example at Laussel (Figure 4.17*a*) being 42cm in height, while the Abri Pataud figure (Figure 4.17*c*) measures only 6cm high and 1.1cm at the widest point (Gamble 1982: 94). Other than the basic shared attribute of their being carved on blocks, homogeneity in these examples is only apparent within the Laussel group (Figures 3.44-48). While admitting that the Abri Pataud piece lacks the "extreme exaggeration" of the Laussel figures, Gamble maintains that, "it still

conforms to Leroi-Gourhan's lozenge design" (*ibid*: 94). This is an interesting comment, as it prioritises the 'lozenge' design, designating it as the standard criteria determining inclusion within the group, and the analytical means by which examples may be categorised and defined. The implications are that figures that do not 'fit' will be excluded, rather than being examined in their own right with a view to how and why they are different, and that 'difference' will not be considered as a reason to question the analytical viability of the construct. This perhaps explains the number of figures rejected by Gamble on the grounds of "design differences" (See discussion in Chapter 3, p.80).

Gamble's grouping into three separate types acts to draw together the most similar examples into smaller groups that serve to exaggerate their coherence and homogeneity. This coherence may be maintained in Groups B and C due to their small number, but cannot be sustained in the larger Group A, a group that merges examples from the full range of stylistic and anatomical types devised by other authors (e.g. Luquet 1934, Absolon 1949 and Abramova 1967). Thus, a range of morphological types are homogenised by their designation as "classic". Comparison of Willendorf (Figure 4.14*i*), Lespugue (Figure 4.14*b*) or Khotylevo (Figure 4.14*p* and *q*) to the Petřkovice (Figure 4.14*s*) and Monpazier (Figure 4.14*c*) statuettes highlights the obvious differences that exist. The figures noted by Gamble as "additional" figures (Gamble 1982: 95, Table I) also indicate differences within the overall group (See discussion in the Chapter 6 Case Study "The impact of inclusion"), and when variety within sites as at Gagarino (where the "classic" figures include both a squat and elongated type [Figure 4.14*n* and *o*) is also considered, distinctive features are apparent that are ignored in Gamble's presentation of the figurines. This analysis in particular brings to mind the problem with classification suggested by Shanks and Hodder, that classification "operates under a 'rule of the same'" with no means to account for variability (Shanks and Hodder 1995: 6).

Variety has been identified among the often-termed 'homogeneous' Russian statuettes, which were divided into sub-types by Gvozdover (1989). She identifies four main types, although in total she sees some fifteen types of which some contain only one member. The main types identified are shown in Table

4.2. While her analysis clearly points to differences between the figurines, the "fundamental" homogeneity (Gvozdover 1989: 64) seems at times to take priority over variability. Variant figures occur even within the four main types discerned, and discussing the Khotylevo figures (Figure 4.14*p* and *q*), she states that although the figures are different in the manner of execution, "we shall not dwell on the individual differences of these figurines" (*ibid*: 63). This is a contradiction, for if individual differences are not important, why draw attention to different 'types' at all, particularly those that contain only one figure?

Individual features compared to the generalised characterisation

I have noted the apparent contradiction that evidence of variety can be drawn from the same literature that promotes homogeneity. This can be seen in Piette's early work (1895), where his generalisation of the characteristics of the "adipose race" is not supported by his accompanying descriptions of individual figures.

This work distinguished two groups, the "adipose" (Figure 3.57*a*) and the "svelte" (Figure 3.57*b*), the first of which has achieved widespread recognition with its characteristics established as the basis of stylistic canon itself. In a summary of this group, Piette interprets 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 of the race are given as thick adipose thighs with fatty tissue, a large, triangular and prominent *mont de Vénus* featuring extended labias and a "vulviform appendage", with well developed hair marked in small strips on the stomach and chest (*ibid*: 146). These points are drawn from the features of the individual statuettes. While this generalised description ostensibly refers to the "adipose race", the observations reflect back on the statuettes, additionally serving to characterise the four figures themselves (Figure 3.57*a*). On close examination, however, the characteristics of the "adipose race" can be shown to be inconsistent, and many of the major points of this generalisation are not present across the four examples that make up the group. "Pendent", "elongated" or "hanging" breasts

are described only on the Mas d'Azil figure and Brassempouy *le manche de poignard* (*ibid*: 142 and 144), with the former distinguished by the presence of what appear to be "exaggerated teats" (*ibid*: 142). On Brassempouy *la poire*, although Piette interprets a "semi-circular notch" as an indication that the breasts (now missing) *had been* pendent (*ibid*: 143), only the lower part of the torso remains. On the engraved *femme au renne* from Laugerie-Basse, Piette concludes that the breasts are either not indicated, or marked merely by hatching. "Fatty deposits" and "huge, adipose thighs" are identified only in the Brassempouy examples, *la poire* and *le manche de poignard* (*ibid*: 145) (Figure 3.57*a*).

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 *la poire*, it is described as large, triangular and protruding, marked by the development of the labias (*ibid*: 144) (although it should be noted that this feature is not clear from reproductions of the figure). On the *femme au renne*, it is indicated only by a simple line. The marking of hair again occurs only on *la poire* and the *femme au renne*, with the arrangement of small strips occurring on the stomach in both cases. The stomach appears to be the only consistent characteristic. It is described as ample in all cases, and pendent in all but the *femme au renne*, which is, of course, depicted lying on the back (although Piette notes that this figure is also known as the *femme enceinte*, the pregnant woman [*ibid*: 145]). The race is therefore characterised from a selection of disparate elements, which appear in works of different media recovered from three separate sites (Figure 3.57*a*).

The implications of this are profound, as the characteristics of the "adipose race" have formed the basis for the early conceptualisation of the category, and have become established as representative of the Venus group. As noted in Chapter 3 dealing with chronology (p. 62), it could be suggested that many of these features, rather than occurring on the Brassempouy statuettes (Figures 3.57*a* and *b*, and 3.1-9), occur more conclusively in the first set of Grimaldi figurines, which were revealed several years later and published by Reinach

(1898) and Piette (1902) (Figures 3.11-16 show those figures initially published).

In later works, numerous descriptions of the figurines similarly provide evidence of variation from the characterisation. In Burkitt, while the Dolní Věstonice Venus I is described as possessing "pendulous" breasts, he notes that the other features are not extremely exaggerated, and that facial features are attempted (Burkitt 1934: 119) (Figure 4.18*a*, *b*). Of the 7 statuettes that Burkitt states were found at Gagarino, he notes that 2 (Figures 4.19*b*, *c*) resemble the Venus of Willendorf (Figure 4.19*a*) while another is long and thin (Figure 4.19*d*) (*ibid*: 120), and this demonstrates another example of variation not only within the class of figures as a whole, but also within a particular site. Burkitt includes discussion of 11 statuettes from Mal'ta even though they contrast with the "'familiar type", being described as conventionalised, long and narrow, with hair and arms sometimes depicted (*ibid*: 120) (Figure 4.20*a-d*).

Clark's (1967) brief discussion of the figurines is interesting for the use of selected illustrations to demonstrate those features alluded to in his characterisation. Illustrating both figures, he notes that the Dolní Věstonice Venus I (Figure 4.21*a*) exhibits the usual signs of pregnancy and generous modelling of the buttocks, although adds that the Venus XIV (Figure 4.21*b*) from the same site does not (Clarke 1967: 55). He continues that most of the Venus figurines are faceless, "or their faces are masked by the downward cast of the head as with the 'Venus' of Lespugue" (*ibid*: 56) (Figure 4.21*c*), although this page also illustrates *la tête à la capuche* from Brassempouy (Figure 4.21*d*). Despite the nature of his characterisation which emphasises pregnancy, Clark illustrates the Petřkovice statuette (Figure 4.21*e*), and also shows a stylised engraving from Předmostí (Figure 4.21*f*) (Clarke 1967: Figs. 44 and 45), noting that these examples demonstrate the various ways of presenting the female form. If anything, the examples selected for illustration by Clark draw attention to stylistic variations within the figurines. Some authors appear puzzled by examples that deviate from the canon. Powell writes that the Petřkovice figure (Figure 4.21*e*) "is in distinct contrast to the generally accepted 'Venus' type of figurine" (Powell 1966: 18). For Powell, this "naturally raises many questions

as to its purpose, or perhaps to the possibility that it had no role in the community, but was an individual expression of insight and craftsmanship" (*ibid*: 18).

Acknowledgement of heterogeneity

Despite Piette's initial division of the material into two types of figure (Figure 3.57*a* and *b*) and the numerous stylistic sub-types created by subsequent authors (Gamble 1982; Absolon 1949; Luquet 1934; Abramova 1967; see discussion in section "Sub-division into stylistic groups", Figures 4.10-17 and Table 4.2) the homogeneity of the group has been prioritised over these divisions. Only Delporte (1993*b*) and Gvozdover (1989) stress the *heterogeneity* of the Western European (Figure 4.22*a*) and Central European groups of figurine (Figure 4.22*b*) in works that re-evaluate the traditional groupings on the basis of fresh criteria. Both analyses stress the differences occurring between and within regions, and these authors see homogeneity only amongst the Russian (Figure 4.22*c*) and Siberian groups (Figure 4.22*d*).

Obviously, the acknowledgement of such considerable variety challenges the notion of the overall homogeneity of the class. Delporte's approach assesses the degree of homogeneity of the female representations within each geographic group, using this, and the artistic context that accompanies the statuettes as criteria to differentiate between these groups of sites (Delporte 1993: 246).

Delporte's characterisations differ sharply from those preceding them, and his assertion of extreme heterogeneity existing within and between the Western European and Central European groups is shared only by Gvozdover (1989). However, several drawbacks remain. Despite this overview, Delporte maintains the integrity of the figures as a single class of material through use of the term "female statuette zone", ensuring that the diverse figurines remain linked through their representation of women. It is interesting that the variability of the figures becomes a defining characteristic of certain groups of figures in this paper; in Delporte's work, heterogeneity actually becomes a characteristic that defines and holds together the Western European group in the absence of other definitive features. It does not lead to the fragmentation of this group or to

doubts regarding the viability of the wider class of figures as an archaeological category of material.

Gvozdover's separation of the Russian figures into types identifies differences in the basic homogeneity of these figures, with variation even identified within the strict Kostenki canon (Gvozdover 1989) (Table 4.2), where the face may be either downcast or turned forwards, it may be undefined or have sculpted features, and the coiffure may be diverse. The greatest variability concerns the shape of the abdomen and breasts; in addition the back may be straight or bowed, the arms feature different positions and techniques, and the position of the feet is varied, with the toes brought together or drawn apart (Gvozdover 1989: 52). While this group of figures is still acknowledged by Gvozdover to be "fundamentally similar", numerous differences between the types are apparent, and Gvozdover expands her analysis by determining that the Russian types (Figure 4.22c) are stylistically distinct from the Western or Central European examples (Figure 4.*22a* and *b* respectively) in terms of degree of accentuation and posture, and that the latter examples also differ from each other (*ibid*: 80-86). These differences will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Challenges to the stereotypical characterisation

The preceding section indicates that the widespread distribution of shared characteristics may be challenged, and I will now re-examine the separate features of the stylistic canon. The characteristic features and the claims made for them have been established in the first part of this chapter, and these will now be re-examined with the emphasis on examples of variation.

Identification of the statuettes as female

Several studies have suggested that the total number of female figurines is lower than might be expected. One such study suggested that only 33% of the total sculptures in the round can be identified as female, with sexless figures accounting for 46% (and male figures 1%) (Ucko and Rosenfeld 1972: 178). Dobre's analysis of 125 figurines identified only 47% as "unequivocally female" (Dobres 1992*b*: 255).

A number of texts indicate that certain figures cannot be clearly identified as female. Amongst his category of Palaeolithic Venuses, Luquet highlights a group of sexually ambiguous figures, which are characterised as featuring such schematisation that it is not clear if the figures were intended as male or female, with only a conjectural identification as anthropomorphic possible in extreme cases (Luquet 1934: 436) (Figure 4.23). Of this group, five figures from Předmostí (Figure 4.23a) and an unspecified "bone fragment from Moravia" are stated to present no indication of sex. The figure from Péchialet (Figure 4.23b), depicted without either breasts or phallus, is termed "asexual" (ibid 1934: 436). However, Luquet's identifications tend towards the female in most cases. Several figures are noted as featuring a "gibbosity" equated with representation of the buttocks, and this is taken to suggest a female identification for the Pekárna figure (Figure 4.23c), and a prominent posterior is also noted on the Trou Magrite example (Figure 4.23d) (ibid 1934: 437). At Mezine, male (Figure 4.23e) and female figures (Figure 4.23f) are distinguished on the grounds that the former displays less accentuation of the buttocks and a more general elongation. Other figures from the same site are identified as female on the basis of an engraved sexual triangle (ibid 1934: 438).

Various interpretations have been suggested for the figurines from Trasimeno (Figure 4.24a) and Mauern (Figure 4.23b). Graziosi acknowledges the ambiguity of the former (Graziosi 1960: 55), and both representations have been termed "bisexual" in that they represent features of both sexes (Zotz 1951). Of Trasimeno, Giedion wrote that "according to the way it is viewed, it may be considered to be of either sex" (Giedion 1962: 233 and Fig. 165), and Sandars echoes Graziosi by stating that it is "equally convincing whichever end is uppermost" (Sandars 1968: 15). Delporte suggests the Mauern figure is androgynous (Delporte 1979: 133), but Marshack sees it as a female torso in the Gravettian style, with the deep depression around the figure depicting the belt that he interprets as a recurring feature indicating the representation of "the mature fertile female" (Marshack 1991: 23).

Similarly, while the Tursac figure is instrumental in providing a firm chronological attribution for the Venus figurines not all see this figure (Figure

4.23c) as definitely female. Delporte states that, "The Tursac figure is without arms, breasts, or head, and there is another matter which causes some perplexity: a sort of flattened stalk, elliptical in section... inserted between the belly, legs and feet" (Delporte 1960: 243, cited in Giedion 1962: 443). Giedion states that this does not represent childbirth, suggesting that "the Venus of Tursac is more nearly related to the androgynous figures..." (*ibid*: 443). Similarly, Sandars places the figure "formally between Sireuil (with its vestigial limbs) and Trasimeno", (Figure 4.15*b* and *c* respectively) and she suggests two alternatives, that "it could be androgynous... or more probably the form was dictated by the nature of the stone and the needs of touch and portability" (Sandars 1968: 15).

The construction of the group as female rests on principles of the identification and interpretation of anatomical features, and gender traits and characteristics, and such a process is invariably subjective in practice. McDermott specifically argues against the existence of male figures to consolidate his definition of the category and validate his interpretation of the figurines (McDermott 1996: 247). For his hypothesis, a crucial feature of the group identity is that the statuettes represent women, and he consolidates his female category by discrediting suggested male examples, claiming that only one of the six figures seen as male is able to withstand "even cursory scrutiny" (*ibid*: 234-235) (Figure 4.25). The possibility of indeterminately sexed figures is not considered. Assessing two suggested male fragments at Brassempouy (Figures 4.25*a*, *b*), he argues that "on the basis of what we know regarding later, better known art historical period styles" (*ibid* 1996: 235), these figures could be unfinished examples of "PKG" female figurines (*ibid* 1996: 236) in which case such "undifferentiated protuberances" would eventually have become the generalised *mont de Vénus* or the developed vulva (McDermott 1996: 236). I would suggest that, if the statuette is unfinished, there is no reason other than preconception, why it equally might not have eventually become a penis. He sees the 'male' Archer at Laussel (Figure 4.25*c*) as devoid of primary or secondary sexual characteristics, instead likening it to Tursac and Sireuil (Figure 4.15*a*, *b*), figures he has termed "variant" PKG style statuettes (*ibid* 1996: 236). He points out that the statuette from Hohlenstein-Städel (Figure 4.25*d*) is badly deteriorated, consisting of

some 200 fragments that have been reconstructed on several occasions. McDermott identifies the piece as female, designating the suggested penis "a serendipitous silhouette" (*ibid*: 236). Again, one might suggest that such poor preservation would prevent a positive identification as female, although it seems that in the terms of McDermott's analysis, if a figure is not male, it is automatically female. He considers a suggested male figure at Dolní Věstonice (Figure 4.25*e*) "dubious even as a human, with the claimed penis nearly equal in length to one of the legs" (*ibid*: 236). In contrast, he accepts the Brno figure (Figure 4.25*f*) as male, describing it as a "muscular fragment" with a "more correctly proportioned stump of a penis" which creates a "realistic impression of masculinity" (*ibid*: 236). It is interesting that he expects correct proportions amongst the male figures while proposing a hypothesis to explain exaggerated distortions among female figures, and he rejects the Dolní Věstonice figure (Figure 4.*25e*) which by his own criteria could be an example of exaggeration, symbolic or otherwise. He concludes that only one male image can be convincingly identified, in marked contrast to the "unequivocal sexual realism and extensive stylistic membership that characterises the female figurines" (*ibid*: 236), and that this scarcity of male images is inconsistent with claims of heterogeneity (*ibid*: 236). The latter assertion seems illogical, as (in theory) there is no reason why there could not be heterogeneity amongst even purely female figurines, although this heterogeneity is consistently downplayed by McDermott.

McDermott's comments raise the question of the identification of attributes, and how one may define a male or female statuette, and the onus in the texts invariably falls on the presence of primary sexual characteristics (Ucko and Rosenfeld 1972). However, it is apparent that identification is not always controlled by rigid guidelines concerning the presence or absence of primary sexual characteristics. The intended sex depicted by certain of the Brassempouy statuettes has been discussed since their first publication (Piette 1895). *L'ébauche* (Figure 4.25*a*) and *la figurine à la ceinture* (Figure 4.25*b*) both feature a protruding 'nodule', which along with the flat stomach of the latter has suggested masculine features to some authors, although Piette offsets this against the "feminine contours" of the thighs and legs in these cases (*ibid*: 147-

148). Piette reports that he sought numerous opinions regarding the sex of *la figurine à la ceinture*, with almost all favouring a feminine identification. Piette also identifies *la figurine à la pèlerine* (Figure 4.26*a*) as female, although he also notes that as no bosom is depicted on the fragment it could be male (Piette 1895: 147-149). Of a 'figurine' from El Pendo, Giedion writes, "Only the position of its dancing, swaying hips reveals it to be a woman" (Giedion 1962: 448) (Figure 4.26*b*). The female identification rests solely on the interpretation, rather than objective identification, of the curved shapes as "hips", and an assumed link between a curvaceous body (although it is not clear that this is what is represented), and the female form. The ambiguity is confirmed by Giedion's observation that "There are no breasts, nor is there any sign of the genital area" (*ibid*: 448). Guthrie is also drawn by the shape of this figure, including it in a comparison with contemporary erotic poses and extending the missing top of the figure to create the effect of an arm placed over the head (Guthrie 1979: Fig. 20*f*) (Figure 5.26). Gvozdover distinguishes Avdeevo statuettes 2 and 75 as female and male respectively on the basis of posture, "bearing" and musculature (Gvozdover 1989: 56-58 and Fig. 9) (Figure 4.26*c* and *d*, and Table 4.2).

It can be seen that some female attributions rest on a tenuous identification of gender and sexual characteristics. In addition, male figures are either discredited, or more usually acknowledged in terms that give them little interpretive importance, and sexless figures tend to be neglected altogether when accounts of the representations are put forward, with McDermott going so far as to suggest that they are merely unfinished female figurines (McDermott 1996: 236-7). Not only does this demonstrate the strength of the construction of the female category as female, it also suggests that these figures are simply ignored when the category of Venus figurines is considered, despite their belonging to the 'correct' chronological period. Crucially, their inclusion would change the formation of the category. Similarly, the belief that this body of material consists of purely female representations leads to the identification of ambiguous forms as female, rather than their being considered in their own right. Such identifications are necessarily subjective, and it is therefore unlikely that any two researchers will independently reach the same conclusions. What is

important is that enough ambiguity is apparent in these representations to allow for such differences of opinion. This can be seen in a number of examples. Dobres reproduces a reconstruction of the body of Brassempouy *la tête à la capuche* by Champion (Delporte 1993*a*: Fig.5) (Figure 4.27*a*), also showing it placed on *la figurine à la ceinture*, a figure she interprets as "decidedly male" (Dobres 1992*a*: 255 and Fig. 2) (Figure 4.26*b*). She points out that there is actually no basis for either a male or female attribution, as the head has no discernable sexual characteristics (*ibid*: 255). Nelson cites a proposal by Kehoe that the Dolní Věstonice Venus XIV, if *suspended* as the bored hole suggests it should be, is not oriented like breasts, rather it resembles the penis and scrotum (Kehoe 1991, cited in Nelson 1997: 157) (Figure 4.26*c*).

Nudity

While the nudity of many figures cannot be disputed, what can be said is that interpretation is influenced by the identification and promotion of particular characteristics, and interpretive importance is often accorded to this feature. Soffer sees the "depiction of well-endowed naked females" as only a "superficial similarity of subject", focus on which has been allowed to overshadow clear-cut differences in the material (Soffer 1987: 336), and the general attitude to nudity is relatively clear in the texts. Referring to the 'clothed' Ma'lta statuettes (Figure 4.22*d*), Sandars writes that this "underlines the really exceptional nature of the naked figurines of which we have so many. Nakedness is itself a powerful magic" (Sandars 1968: 14). It has been claimed that in later years hypotheses present nakedness as associated with eroticism, with the depiction of breasts perceived as primarily sexual (Nelson 1993: 54). Obvious examples are Absolon's sexualised descriptions of " diluvial plastic pornography" (Absolon 1949: 208), and Collins and Onians' identification of the accentuated areas of the figurines as sexual, associating the carved figurines with the manual, tactile contact of love-making focused on breasts, buttocks and vulva (Collins & Onians 1978: 12-13).

Decoration

An emphasis on decoration in recent works indicates that in the past nudity has been prioritised at the expense of this feature. Indeed Soffer *et al* (2000) reverse

this emphasis completely by focusing on the items of clothing and adornment depicted on the figures at the expense of their nudity, further linking this feature with the high status of women.

Gvozdover's analysis highlights the use of adornment and decoration in the figurines of the Kostenki type (Table 4.2 and Figure 4.28*a*, *b*, *c*), identifying similar designs on other types of artifact (Gvozdover 1989: 47-50 and Fig. 8). She takes this to indicate that the latter are schematic and symbolic representations of women, and this possibility raises the question as to whether the adornment is actually *as* significant a feature as the nudity that in interpretation is invariably referred to prior to the decoration (*ibid*: 28-9).

Marshack draws attention to the bracelets of the Willendorf figurine (Figure 4.28*d*), seeing this as a feature rarely noted (Marshack 1991: 18, Fig 6*a* and Plate 2*a*). The same type of twined band is identified as occurring as a necklace or a bracelet (Praslov 1985, cited in Marshack 1991: 22; cf. Gvosdover 1989) and Marshack also sees belts occurring on the Russian Plain figures, where they bind the back and the chest above the breasts (Marshack 1991: 22; cf. Grozdover 1989; Soffer *et al* 2000), and at Pavlov, where a torso is identified as wearing a twined cord belt (Marshack 1991: Plate 4*a*) (Figure 4.28*e*). Marshack further identifies a deep line appearing around the hip area of certain figures as a belt or band that "cuts deeply in to the flesh", which is interpreted as an attribute of the "mature, fertile female" (*ibid*: 19). Such a 'hip belt' is noted on Dolní Věstonice Venus I and other figures from the site (*ibid*: 23-4) (Figure 4.28*f*, *g*).

Ironically, Taylor's interpretation of decoration in terms of a "standard convention of erotic or sexual dressing" (Taylor 1996: 141) reverses the trend of these analyses back towards the sexual. He sees the decoration as positioned to accentuate the nude and sexual areas of the body, particularly in the figures from Kostenki (Figure 4.28*a*, *b*, *c*). This interpretation will be discussed further in the Chapter 6 Case Study, "Ancient artifacts; contemporary meanings".

Obesity and pregnancy

Nelson (1993) disputes the obesity of the figures. Her study claimed that few statuettes represent gross obesity, although she illustrates only 3 examples of what she terms "slender" figurines (Petřkovice [Figure 4.29a], Eliseevitchi [Figure 4.29b] and Sireuil [Figure 4.29c) (Nelson 1993: Fig. 1). She cites a statistical study of the variation in body shapes of 24 figurines, which distinguished distinct groups, with 10 being obese (wide hips and thick body), 3 steatopygous, (protruding buttocks), and 11 normal. A further study claims that only 39% of these figurines could possibly represent pregnancy, 55% have pendulous breasts, 45% have broad hips, and 13% have protruding buttocks. 22% have none of these characteristics (*ibid*: 52-53).

Rice's analysis assessed the body attributes of 132 unspecified Venuses (Rice 1981). The depiction of breasts, stomachs, hips, buttocks and faces were examined and each figurine assigned to one of three age groups – young (pre-reproductive), middle (reproductive, pregnant or non-pregnant), and old (post-reproductive). 23% were termed pre-reproductive, 17% of reproductive age and pregnant, 38% of reproductive age and non-pregnant, and 22% post-childbearing (Rice 1981: 404). These results suggest to Rice that the figurines celebrate "woman-hood", women of all ages, rather than motherhood. This indicates at least some variety in the depiction of the features of the figurines, and also challenges the stereotypical presentation of the figurines as pregnant.

However, there are problems with such analyses, as any such assessment of body attributes is subjective. This subjectivity is highlighted in a response to Rice's paper by Duhard (1993b), which disputes many of the attributions made. Duhard's response in this paper exemplifies the problems implicit in making such identifications. He questions Rice's designation of the Gabillou *femme à l'anorak* (Figure 4.30a) as pregnant, querying the femininity of the figure and stating that there is no swollen abdomen, and a similar question is posed concerning Rice's female identification of the Bédeilhac figure (Duhard 1993b: 87) (Figure 4.30b). Duhard also demands; "How can she state positively that at Grimaldi there are only three pregnant women, when everyone is in agreement in seeing six?" (*ibid*: 87) (Figures 3.11, 3.12 and 3.14-17 are those relevant to this claim). He notes that the opinions of Rice's four 'judges' of the figures

often diverge, and while this is the basic dilemma facing such analyses, Duhard seems oblivious to the possibility that this dilemma may also have bearing on the relevance of his own expertise; Duhard frequently states that his expertise as a gynaecologist allows him to identify pregnancy and adiposity amongst the figurines (Duhard 1991: 553; Duhard 1993: 88; Duhard, in McDermott 1996: 255), but in reality, this gives him little true authority when dealing with *representations* of women rather than women themselves.

The interpretation of features and the identification and classification of a figurine as pregnant or obese can invariably be disputed and anatomical features may be perceived and assessed in different ways. The root of this challenge lies in the acknowledgement of the subjective nature of the identification of attributions, that they are as much subjective interpretation as objective identification. Such identifications also highlight the role of interpretation in what is often thought of as mere description.

Featureless face

The absence of the face is always interpreted as a significant feature. In Taylor's equation of the faceless figurines with women whose identity is not important (Taylor 1996: 124), the emphasis is on the face as the locus of self-identity and the identification of the individual; this reflects a specifically 20th century pre-occupation and is perhaps out of place in the context of these figurines. It should also be noted that the number of broken or fragmentary figures *without* heads necessarily bias perceptions of this feature.

Faces are occasionally depicted to various degrees, and examples are claimed at Brassempouy (*la tête à la capuche*) (Figure 4.31*a*), Dolní Věstonice (Venus XV) (Figure 4.31*b*), Grimaldi (*la tête négroide*) (Figure 4.31*c*), Monpazier (Figure 4.31*d*), Avdeevo (statuette 77-1) (Figure 4.31*e*) and Kostenki (statuette 83-2) (Figure 4.31*f*), although detailed faces occur more regularly on isolated heads than complete statuettes.

Emphasis on the fact that faces are not shown prioritises the face itself over stylised depictions of hair on such figures as Willendorf (Figure 4.31*g*), and the

variable representations of the head itself (compare, for example, the Venus I of Dolní Věstonice [Figure 4.31*h*], the shaped heads of the Grimaldi figures [Figure 4.31*i, j*], and Brassempouy *la tête à la capuche* [Figure 4.31*a*]). Marshack sees the depiction of the hair as particularly significant, believing it indicates the "mature, fertile female" (Marshack 1991: 18). He points out numerous forms of depiction - a bun at Dolní Věstonice Venus XV (Figure 4.31*b*), in tied and plaited braids on *la tête à la capuche* from Brassempouy (Figure 4.31*a*), a carefully twisted spiral at side of the head of an unspecified example from Mal'ta, and the spiralled coiffure of the Willendorf figure (Figure 4.31*g*) (*ibid*: 18). It has also been suggested that Sireuil (Figure 4.2*a*) and the Grimaldi *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Figure 4.2*c*) may also have traces of long hair hanging down the backs of the figures.

There is also an internal contradiction within the texts, whereby the variation apparent in these depictions is considered to be without significance. Koenigswald provides an example of this. It is stated that "it is striking that the head is nearly always neglected. The Venus of Lespugue [Figure 4.31*k*] has a head like an egg, no mouth or nose indicated. The Venus of Willendorf [Figure 4.31*g*] has a head shaped like a beehive. The Venus of Brassempouy [Figure 4.31*a*] has no mouth" (Koenigswald 1971: 137). Despite his intention of demonstrating neglect as a shared feature, this statement indicates that there are distinct differences in the depiction of the shape of the head and face, indicating selection and choice concerning the particular features depicted.

Bowed Heads

Bowed heads are another frequently noted and prioritised feature, yet it has also been claimed that bowed heads exist in fewer than 1 in 5 specimens (White 1996: 266). While Ucko and Rosenfeld (1972) see bent heads and rounded shoulders as generally accepted characteristics of Palaeolithic representations (e.g. Figure 4.31*g* and *k*), seeming particularly associated with the period, they note that other head positions are represented, for example, held vertically (Figure 4.31*e*), or tilted upwards, and that heads held in different positions occur on the same site (Ucko and Rosenfeld 1972: 170). It should be noted that this issue is undoubtedly complicated by the number of statuettes where the head is

missing.

Arms

Arms are a feature designated as "neglected" in many analyses, yet several studies have indicated that a variety of arm positions exist.

Gvozdover's (1989) analysis identifies regional differences in the form of their depiction. She states that in Western European figures, either the arms are not represented, or they are shown only to the elbow, occasionally folded on the upper chest or lower abdomen (Gvozdover 1989: 37) (Figure 4.32*a, b*). The Kostenki-Willendorf figures are said to display a variety of arm positions, in both symmetrical and asymmetrical form. Symmetrical forms include the arm shown only to the elbow, the forearm folded on the upper chest, and arms shown to the elbow, which then re-emerge in an undifferentiated 'chest-abdomen' area. Arms may be stretched alongside the body and drawn toward the lower abdomen, pressed against the body to lie on the upper abdomen, or the hands may be raised toward the face (Figure 4.32*c, g*). Asymmetrical representations include one arm extended along the body, with the other bent at the elbow and lying across the chest, and one arm emerging from beneath the breasts onto the lower abdomen, with the other holding the abdomen from the side (*ibid*: 37-8). Gvozdover further notes that the Siberian figures (Figure 4.22*d*) have an especially standardized position of the arms, in which they may be slightly bent at the elbow and folded on the upper abdomen below the breasts, or stretched alongside the body, pressed against it, terminating at the level of the upper abdomen (*ibid*: 37).

Duhard (1989) analyses the arm positions of 63 figurines and 12 bas-reliefs, and determines that there are a variety of positions represented. Of these, only 11 figurines and 6 bas-reliefs have no arms depicted. 18 have the arms hanging "indifferently" at the side, while 4 have the arms directed to the breasts, 28 have the arms directed to the abdomen, 2 are identified by Duhard as having arms involved in giving birth (the Grimaldi *l'hermaphrodite* [Figure 4.32*d*] and the Laussel double figure [Figure 4.32*e*]), and six have one or both arms bent up at

the elbow (Duhard 1989: 107-9). This "directed" gesture of the arms is taken as significant, as some 54% of the sample display this feature (*ibid*: 111).

The examples shown in Figure 4.32 further illustrate the variety in the depiction of the arms. Of the individual features apparent, the Lespugue statuette (Figure 4.32*f*) features a small space between the arm and the body (Saint-Perier 1923: 373-4; Giedion 1962: 447), a feature that also appears on the Galgenberg statuette (Figure 4.32*h*). The hands of Gagarino statuette 2 (Figure 4.32*g*) appear turned towards each other raised, and although broken, the Sireuil figure (Figure 4.32*i*) has the remains of arms that are clearly separated from the body and seem to be held outwards.

This variation in the depiction of the arms opposes claims such as Taylor's that the arms represent themes of passivity and subjection (Taylor 1996: 141).

Presentation of genitalia

Several authors have claimed that the sexual organs are not represented as frequently as assumed. Duhard sees the external genital organs only rarely represented, with the vulva indicated on only a third of Gravettian figurines, where it is always in association with a large stomach, which would seem to indicate a particular meaning (Duhard 1990: 245). While genitals are a feature emphasized in the texts, Bahn argues that few figurines have the pubic triangle marked, and even fewer have the median cleft (Willendorf [Figure 4.33*a*], Chiozza [Figure 4.33*b*], Grimaldi [Figure 4.33*c*, *d*]). He states that only Monpazier (Figure 4.33*e*) draws attention to the vulva, adding that this is an example found out of context (Bahn 1986: 101-102). Clottes disagrees somewhat, citing statuettes from Gagarino (Figure 4.33*f*) and Moravany (Figure 4.33*g*), and stating that four of the six Grimaldi figures have the vulva clearly indicated and in some cases stressed (Figures 3.11, 3.15, 3.16 and 3.18 are presumably those intended; see also Figure 4.9*c-g*) (Clottes, in Bahn 1986: 107). The Gagarino example Clottes cites is referenced as Pales and Tassin de St-Péreuse 1976: Fig.41, however this identification contrasts with Gvozdover's opinion of the Russian statuettes (see below).

127

Opinions differ regarding the representation and interpretation of particular statuettes. While Guthrie reconstructs the Lespugue statuette with the vulva clearly marked (Guthrie 1984: Fig. 16c) (Figure 4.33h), Duhard notes that the remains of the pubic triangle on the figurine do not allow the thought that the vulva was indicated (Duhard 1989: 108). It has been claimed that the Dolní Věstonice Venus V (Figure 4.33i) features the representation of the vulva 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" (Absolon 1949: 206-7). Marshack states that the figure has no vulva, unless the strong marking on the thighs is meant to suggest the region of the vulva (Marshack 1991: 19).

Depiction of the sexual organs may take place in a variety of ways, or they may not be marked at all, with differences again occurring within sites. Gvozdover states that genitalia are not depicted on the Kostenki type (Gvosdover 1989: 43 and 52), and this analysis indicates that a differentiating feature between the Western European and Russian statuettes is the lack of genital depiction in the latter.

I have discussed the various representations of genitalia amongst Piette's "adipose race" (Figure 3.57a), and his descriptions of the "svelte" figures also indicate differences in the depiction of sexual attributes, as well as differentiation occurring within sites. L'ébauche (Figure 4.33j), la figurine à la ceinture (Figure 4.33k) and la fillette (Figure 4.33l) all feature joined legs. According to Piette, only la fillette has the sex clearly indicated, by a line. L'ébauche and la figurine à la ceinture both feature a protruding 'nodule' (Piette 1895: 147-8). Amongst the Grimaldi figures, the pubic triangle is not indicated at all on the statuette en stéattie jaune (Figure 3.12), yet the la femme au goître (Figure 3.11), la polichinelle (Figure 3.15) and le losange (Figure 3.16) all have a marked and apparently open vulva (see also Figure 4.9c-g). Marshack describes the distinctive and "exquisitely carved bell-shaped vulva" of the Willendorf figurine (Figure 4.33a), which is depicted as part of the larger pubic region (Marshack 1991: Fig 6b and Plate 2b), and he specifies that this differentiated pubis and vulva is a detail seldom noted in the literature (ibid: 18

and 22) (Figure 4.33*a*). The Dolní Věstonice Venus I (Figure 4.33*m*), in contrast to Willendorf and (possibly) Dolní Věstonice Venus V (Figure 4.33*i*), has no vulva marked.

Feet

There are several exceptions to the characterisation of the figurines as lacking feet. On the basis of microscopic analysis, Marshack is certain that the feet of the Willendorf statuette are clearly marked (Marshack 1991: 19) (Figure 4.34*a*). Gvozdover identifies feet on numerous Russian statuettes, and they may appear in different positions, with the calves apart, the feet or toes together, the heels apart or the sole flat (Gvozdover 1989: 43 and Fig.5) (Figure 4.34*b-f*).

Conclusions

In conclusion to this section, it is apparent that there are two problems with the prioritised features and characteristics I have discussed; firstly, whether the features promoted in the standard characterisations actually appear on a given statuette, and secondly, whether the features can be accurately identified, or if such an identification will always involve a degree of subjectivity in some cases related to a preconception of the archaeological material.

I have now demonstrated considerable evidence for diversity within this range of material, yet despite the existence of such variability, the category continues to be presented as a homogeneous one. This would seem to indicate that Shanks and Hodder's claim that classificatory systems are unable to provide for the occurrence of variability within a class (Shanks and Hodder 1995: 6) is upheld in the case of the Venus figurines. Furthermore, I contend that the impression of homogeneity in this instance is created in the texts by literary methods. The next chapter will discuss the means by which this is achieved.