

of humans and animals became less common, while diverse ornament became widespread. Almost no anthropomorphic or zoomorphic representations from the last phase of the Upper Palaeolithic have been discovered, yet the number of known ornaments originating in the same period is quite large. Very few Mesolithic miniature sculptures comparable in artistic technique with Palaeolithic creation have been found as well. A unique exception here are the magnificent horn and bone artefacts from the Mesolithic Oleni Island burial ground of Lake Onega (Stolyar 2000).

## **MAJOR SITES OF PREHISTORIC ART**

Palaeolithic figurative art of Siberia, Eastern and Central Europe is largely represented by miniature sculptures and engravings, but also by cave paintings discovered in two caves in the Southern Urals. Other forms of prehistoric art discovered in this area are ornamentation and jewellery. The most important sites of Central Europe are situated in the area what is now the territory of Austria and the Czech Republic. In Eastern Europe the sites are situated on the rivers running through the Ukrainian and Central-Russian plateaux. The Siberian sites are located in the Yenisei-Angara watershed and the surroundings of Lake Baikal.

### **Central-Europe**

In Central Europe the area richest in prehistoric art is Moravia with major locations in Dolní Věstonice, Pavlov, Předmostí, Petřkovice, Pekárna and Brno. Prehistoric settlements of Willendorf and Galgenberg on the central Danube belong to the same region.

The village of **Willendorf** is best known for a limestone figurine called Venus of Willendorf, a meticulously elaborated female figure with ample shape, which originally was painted red. The main focus is on exaggerated rolls of fat and large breasts that support disproportionately small arms. The figure's face has been omitted but the whole head is covered with plentiful curled hair (Figure 5). The figurine was unearthed during the Wachau railway construction in 1908 and since then all female figures found in Upper Palaeolithic cultures have been called Palaeolithic venuses. Venus of Willendorf is generally dated to about 25 millennia ago and is one

Figure 5. *Venus of Willendorf*  
(Stoliar 1985: 224).

of the most publicised prehistoric art objects from the Gravettian phase. A man-sized replica of this 4 inches (10.3 cm) tall statuette has been erected on site of discovery (Neugebauer-Maresch 1993). Two more anthropomorphic figurines carved in ivory (one 22.5 cm and the other 9 cm tall) have been found in Willendorf. Both have been strongly stylised and can tentatively be called feminine figures.



The site of **Galgenberg** lies northeast of Willendorf, in the vicinity of a small town-ship called Krems. A highly unique stone female figurine from the Aurignacian phase,



which differs considerably from Venus of Willendorf, has been found there. The only characteristic common in these two figures is the omission of facial features. Venus of Galgenberg has a slender body and asymmetrical posture, emphasised by tilted head, bent knee, arm raised high up in the air and ample bosom (Figure 6). The flat 72 cm tall statuette has been restored from eight discovered fragments. What looks like a modern sculptural work is actually the oldest stone female figurine in the world (Neugebauer-Maresch 1993).

Figure 6. *The woman of Galgenberg* (Neugebauer-Maresch 1993).

Examples of Palaeolithic art have also been discovered on the lower course of the Danube in Romania; one of these, for example, is a 8 cm tall bone pendant with a zigzag ornament (Peunesku 1999).

The best known location in Czech Republic is **Dolní Věstonice**, which is situated on the fork of the Svartka and Dyje rivers in southern Moravia. The location is dated to the Gravettian phase and is approximately 25 millennia old. The miniature sculptures, jewelry, ornaments and bone engravings discovered in Dolní Věstonice have become world-famous. Preliminary excavations in the settlement of prehistoric mammoth hunters were conducted during 1924–1938 and were continued in the post-war period. The main bulk of the large number of discovered findings collected in the course of prewar excavations were preserved in the castle of Mikulov, which was burnt down by the retreating German troops during the second World War. The only artefacts that survived destruction were those preserved in the Moravian Museum of Brno.

The best known example of miniature plastic art discovered in Dolní Věstonice is an 11.5 cm tall burnt clay statuette of a female figure, also known as Venus of Dolní Věstonice. While Palaeolithic human figures have generally no faces, Venus of Dolní Věstonice, and particularly a small female head carved in mammoth ivory found in the same area refute this notion. This unique 4.8 cm tall work of art may be considered a highly characteristic and also the most beautiful female face among the Palaeolithic finds (Figure 7). Most female figurines are fragmentary (having no head or upper body) or schematic. These figures were most likely used as pendants. A unique example of female symbolism is a necklace of beads stylised in the shape of woman's breasts and carved from mammoth tusk. Jewellery is mainly represented by necklaces of snail shells, ivory beads and fangs of arctic fox. Other items of jewellery and ornamented objects can be found among the prehistoric artefacts of Dolní Věstonice, too.



*Figure 7. Female head carved in ivory (Forman et al 1956: Abbr. 12).*

Figure 8 (right). Ceramic lioness head (Forman et al 1956: Abbr. 14).



Figure 9 (left). A cudgel-like ornamented artefact in mammoth ivory from Předmostí (Yelinek 1982: 464).

More than 2,000 shards of burnt clay, ceramic figures and fragments have been found during the excavations conducted in Dolní Věstonice. The extant ceramic figures are mostly zoomorphic: bear (7.5 cm), bear head (4.7 cm), rhinoceros head (4.2 cm), lioness head (4.5 cm) (Figure 8), horse head (8 cm), reindeer head (3.8 cm) and two miniature mammoth figures.

The discovery of remains of a kiln in the prehistoric settlement of Dolní Věstonice has refuted the speculation that Palaeolithic man had no knowledge of producing ceramicware.

**Předmostí** is the second richest location of prehistoric findings in southern Moravia. The first archaeological explorations were conducted in the area already at the end of the 19th century. The prehistoric settlement of Předmostí was active during the Aurignacian-Gravettian phase and is located about 80 km north-east of Dolní Věstonice in the fork of the Bečva and Morava rivers. During the archaeological excavations of the settlement and the nearby Palaeolithic joint burial containing 20 skeletons (that were also destroyed during the fire at the Mikulov castle) several spoon- and cudgel-like ornamented art objects of mammoth ivory were discovered (Figure 9).

Lavish ornamentation is very typical among the examples of prehistoric art discovered in Předmostí. Ornamentation can be found on pieces of mammoth tusks, bones and other items and it consists of simple parallel lines or indentations, often also of intricate patterns of combined waves, zigzags and concentric ellipses. Ornamentation created on a fragment of mammoth tusk and depicting a stylised female figure is most elaborate.

Female figurines have also been carved of mammoth phalanges. Unlike the Venuses of Dolní Věstonice these figures are in a sitting position, apparently pregnant and very stylised, though all are created in the same style. Another interesting discovery is a mammoth figurine carved in ivory (Figure 10). And even though mammoth hunting was an important source of subsistence in those days,



Figure 10. An 11.7 cm tall replica of a miniature mammoth figure from Předmostí (Forman et al 1956: Abbr. 4).

mammoths are relatively rarely depicted in Central Europe. Mammoth representations are much more common in the Palaeolithic art of Eastern Europe (especially Central Russia).

Jewellery found in Předmostí consists dominantly of pendants, necklaces, pierced stone discs, beads of animal fang and bone (Figure 11). The most unusual item is a crescent pendant made of two canines joined by their bases.



Figure 11. Items of stone, bone and ivory jewellery found in Předmostí (Yelínek 1982: 422).

Objects of prehistoric art originating in the Gravettian and Magdalenien cultures have been discovered in the cave of **Pekárna**, in the vicinity of Brno. The most interesting of these are a spoon-like object and a dagger made of horse mandible. Both items display an engraved animal representation: the head of an antelope engraved on a spoon-like object and a horse head engraved on a dagger (Figure 12). Two

other bone engravings have been discovered in this site – a bear-like representation on an elk antler staff and plant-like engraving on a horn fragment. A stylised female figurine in ivory with disproportionately large buttocks compared to its body and feet and with no head has also been found there. The number of jewellery and ornamented artefacts – a wolf’s pipe bone decorated with parallel lines, some elongated slate objects and a necklace of slate beads – is relatively small.

Other major locations in Moravia are **Brno, Pavlov** (near Brno) and **Petřkovice**, all located northeast of Dolní Věstonice. An extremely rare and unfortunately only partly preserved phallic male figurine was found during sewage constructions in Brno. The 23–25 millennia old Gravettian Moravian Palaeolithic culture has been named after the Pavlov site. The most remarkable prehistoric art object found in Pavlov is a flat figure of a leaping feline animal carved in mammoth ivory. Petřkovice, located near the city of Ostrava on the banks of the Oder river, is famous for a stone female torso. At first it may be hard to believe that this exceptionally beautiful and seemingly modern 5 cm tall figurine is an artistic work from the Palaeolithic period (Figure 13).

There are, of course, other less-known sites of Palaeolithic art in Moravia. Anthropomorphic art, for



*Figure 12. Bone engravings from the Pekárna cave: heads of an antelope and a horse-like animal (Forman et al 1956: Abbr. 19–20).*



Figure 13. Hematitic female figurine known as Venus of Petřkovice (Yelínek 1982: 410).



example, has been discovered in **Hlum, Kůlna, Podkovice, Lopatka** and **Neslavice** (Abramova 1966: 184). These sites were also occupied by members of mammoth-hunting cultures and are located in the vicinity of the sites previously mentioned.

### The Ukraine --->

Describing prehistoric miniature plastic art of the Dniester and Desna-Dnieper regions, the Central Russian plateau, the Urals and Siberia I primarily rely on the register of Palaeolithic art of the Soviet Union compiled by Abramova and on taxonomy used in this publication (Abramova 1962: 72).

**Molodova** is the best known Palaeolithic settlement of the Dniester watershed. It is located on the right bank of the Dniester, in the Chernovtsy Province, the Ukraine. Owing to its favourable geographical position the settlement has been repeatedly rehabilitated: during the Mousterian phase (43.6–33 millennia BC), the Upper Palaeolithic period (30–23 millennia BC) and continuously inhabited from the glacial maximum to the Mesolithic Period. The

Molodova collection of prehistoric findings is not very abundant but consists of rare examples. One of such rarities is a bone engraving on a fragment of mammoth scapula from the Mousterian phase (Figure 14). The engraving displays indistinct ornamentation and a primitive zoomorphic representation, which is one of the first examples of figurative art in the whole world. Obscure lines of black pigment have been painted on the same bone – the same object can thus be considered a prehistoric painting. It was estimated that the