New female figurines from the site Khotylevo 2

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to a stylistic analysis of the new figurines excavated in the Gravettian site of Khotylevo 2–V in July, 2009. They include a double female figurine and a schematic figure, carved out of chalk. The first statuette represents the image of two naked female figures that have been cut on a small chalk-slab. The figures are trapezium-shaped and designed in a realistic manner, which is usual for the Eastern Gravettian. The back of the slab is smoothed and divided by a longitudinal groove into two halves corresponding to female figures. Their image is not realistic from the back. The women stand shoulder by shoulder, and their heads, hands and feet were not carved. This composition of female images is unique in Palaeolithic portable art. The analogy to this composition is a bas-relief of women from Angles-sur-l’Anglin (Roc-aux-Sorciers). The second figure is flattened and trapezium-shaped also. Its front-side is divided by a horizontal groove into two parts. The back side is flat. We interpret this artifact as a schematic image of woman. If our assumption is correct, we suppose that the schematic woman’s torso, found during the excavations of the Dolní Věstonice site in Moravia, could be compared with figure 2.

The site of Khotylevo 2 is located 25km north-west of Bryansk in Central Russia on the right bank of the Desna River. Topographically the place is a cape, formed by two ancient dry valleys, overlooking the river valley at their mouths. The promontory faces north and is divided into separate areas by small gullies. The cultural layer of Khotylevo 2 is found at four locations. These points were marked by the letters of the Russian alphabet from A to G (Fig. 1). The site was first excavated by F.M. Zavernyayev in 1968, who directed the excavations from 1969 to 1981 (Zavernyayev 1974). Fieldwork there was resumed by the Department of Stone Age Archaeology (Institute of Archaeology RAS) in 1993.

Fig. 1. A view of Khotylevo 2 site from the side of the Desna River: 1. point A; 2. point B; 3. point V; 4. point G.

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Khotylevo 2 is a specific type of Eastern Gravettian settlement in the Russian Plain. Its originality is manifest in the typological characteristics of both its flint and bone implements (Gavrilo 2008).

Anthropomorphic portable sculptures found during the excavations of Khotylevo 2 are divided into the following groups: a) realistic female figures (Fig. 2: 1-2, 4-7), b) schematic figures, symbolizing the female image (Fig. 2: 8-9), c) a schematic anthropomorphic figurine (Fig. 2: 3). The first group consists of three figurines of obese, more likely, pregnant women, as well as fragments of female statuettes – "hair" and legs. Schematic female figures are represented by two biconical artifacts. The last schematic anthropomorphic sculpture is rod-like. We conclude that this object represents a male image because of its sturdy torso and narrow hips. All figurines are made of ivory.

![Fig. 2. Khotylevo 2, point A. Anthropomorphic sculpture from F.-M Zavernyaev collection: 1-2, 4-7. realistic female figures; 8-9. schematic female figures; 3. schematic «male» figure (1-2, 5-6: from Zavernyayev 1978; 3-4, 7-9: from Khlopatchev 2006).](image)

The Khotylevo 2 female figurines were classified by M.D. Gvozdover as a culturally specific type and differed from the ones characteristic of Kostenki I (layer 1) and Avdeyevo (Gvozdover 1995). The difference between the Khotylevo and Kostenki-Avdeyevo types are now confirmed both by the shape of the figures and by their technologies (Khlopatchev 2006).

In 2006 we began to excavate Khotylevo 2, point V, located at some distance from the edge of the high right bank of the river Desna uphill plateau. The stratigraphy of the sediments over, around and under the cultural layer is usual for this site. It is quite similar to the stratigraphic position of points A and B. Thus, all points of the site are in accordance with geology and are dated to post-Bryansk times. Point V has no
radiocarbon dating yet. However, points A and B, along the edge of the coastal cliff, have radiocarbon ages from 24 to 21 ka BP.

The cultural layer of the new location has so far been studied over 45m². It proved very rich in flint artifacts, ivory and bone tools, faunal remains, as well as zones of concentration of bone charcoal and ocher, pits and others. Among them are accumulations of mammoth bones, deliberately arranged in a certain order. These objects are of particular interest. Typically, these accumulations consist of one or two skulls, together with pelvic bones, shoulder-blades and lower jaws. In addition, especially broken bones of mammoth, were found vertical or oblique in the ground. Two different sets of objects existed in the investigated area. One of them is mainly characterized by specially arranged accumulations of mammoth bones. The second one by pits, together with vertically standing bones located around the zone of concentrations of bone charcoal, ocher, chipped flint and broken bones of animals. We suggest that these complexes existed at different times. The first one did not function at the time of the formation of the second complex.

In 2009 a few archaeological discoveries were made within this second complex. They included: a) pits, receiving serial numbers 4, 5 and 6 in the north-western, central and north-eastern sector of excavation unit B, respectively; b) the accumulation of bone charcoal at sq. V/1’, localized to the south of pit #5; c) the accumulations of bone charcoal, chipped flint and ocher to the west and east of pit #6 (sq. B-V/4’and sq. D/4’), d) concentrations of ocher and chipped flint (sq. G-D/3’); e) vertical and inclined facing mammoth bones deliberately dug by the inhabitants of the site; f) large accumulations of mammoth bones in the south-western and south-eastern sector of the excavation.

Fig. 3. The cultural layer of excavation unit B: the red arrow shows pit #6; the orange one, the place of figures in the accumulations of bone charcoal, chipped flint and ocher.
Pit #6 has been studied at sq. G/4' (Fig. 3). In 2009 its cultural sediment was excavated only in part, in its upper level up to 5cm. The oval pit extended west-east. Its size is 72.5 x 52.5cm. At the top, humus-loam contained fragments of bone charcoal, ocher and split flints. Its lower boundary is marked by a horizon of mammoth cranial bones, intensively colored with ocher clay loam and by an accumulation of chipped flints. On the same level in the south-eastern sector of the pit lies a mammoth rib, associated with a mammoth vertebra, possibly forming an anatomical group. The northern boundary of pit #6 was marked by fragments of long bones, as well as a mammoth tooth.

A concentration of splintered flints, small pieces of bone charcoal and indeterminate animal bones was found in the west of pit #6, on sq-s B-V/4' (Fig. 3). It is underlain by a thin discontinuous layer of ocher about 2-3mm thick. Most of the collection of flint artifacts (57%) was found there in 2009. In the north-eastern sector of sq. V/4', in the vicinity of pit #6 (Fig. 4), unique finds were made: a double female figurine (N° 1) and a schematic figure (N° 2), carved out of chalk (fig. 5-6). Figurine and figure were in the upper part of the mentioned concentration. The statuette lay face down with its feet facing to the north-east. The second figure laid with its convex surface down and was oriented north-west/south-east, its wider part to the south-east. Thus, these two artifacts were oriented perpendicularly to each other.

![Archaeological context of figures 1 and 2.](image)

**Fig. 4.** Archaeological context of figures 1 and 2.
The double female figurine (N° 1) can be described as a flat sculpture. Its dimensions are 58.5 x 44.5 x 15mm. The two female figures are shown side by side on the front of the trapezium-shaped chalk slab. They were rendered in bas-relief, in a realistic manner, characteristic of the Eastern Gravettian. Breasts, abdomen and legs down to their ankles are carved while hands and heads are missing. The back surface of the statue, worn smooth, lacks realistic details. The lower half of the back side is divided into two parts by a broad vertical groove, corresponding to the image of the two female figures on the face of the statuette. The statuette was broken into four fragments, apparently of old. One of them is an image of two women with breasts and abdomen, the second –two fragments for the legs– represents the lower part of the legs. However, one of these fragments, namely the lower part (foot) of the right figures has not yet been found. The side surfaces are smoothed. The top piece was divided into two parts after falling into the cultural layer as a result of natural post-deposition processes. Thus, the sculpture consists of four fragments.

![Fig. 5. Double female statuette (1) and schematic figure (2) carved out of chalk. (Drawing A.-V. Trusov.)](image)

![Fig. 6. Double female statuette and schematic figure carved out of chalk. (Photo D.-O. Ozherel’ev.)](image)
Figure N° 2 is 18 x 16 x 7/6mm. Both figurine and figure are close enough in their proportions, despite their difference in size. The second one is a flattened figure, also trapezium-shaped. One of its sides, perhaps its “front”, is divided by a horizontal groove into two parts. The other side, its “back”, is flat. So, the widest part of the figure, as with the statuette, would be its top. All the surfaces of the figure were smoothed. We interpret it as the schematic image of a woman. We assume that the front parts correspond to the breast (top), abdomen and legs (bottom).

Stylistically the image of women in the double statuette is analogous to the canons for female representations found at Kostenki. This similarity is emphasized by the double transverse shallow grooves crossing the left breast, rather like a bandage on statue N° 1 found during the excavation of Kostenki 1 (Efimenko 1958). But in terms of its composition, the double statuette from Khotylevo 2 has a certain analogy, in the West of Europe, with the bas-relief of the Magdalenian site of Angles-sur-l’Anglin (Roc-aux-Sorciers), with also images of three naked women, standing shoulder to shoulder (Iakovleva & Pinçon 1997, Fig. 162; also see Fig. 7). It is important that the female figures depicted in this bas-relief do not have heads either, and most of them are shown without hands. With regard to the schematic figure, we do not know any direct analogy for it. However, we suppose that the schematic woman’s torso, found during the Dolní Věstonice excavations in Moravia (Valoch & Láznicková-Galetová 2009, Fig. II.20; see also Fig. 8), could be compared with figure N° 2, if our assumption that this is a female image is correct.

New finds of portable art from Khotylevo 2 allow us to propose some preliminary conclusions. First, we defined more exactly our understanding of the variability of female images, both at this site and in the Eastern Gravettian. Secondly, despite its originality, the double statuette of Khotylevo 2 reflects the stylistic peculiarities inherent to the Gravettian sites of the Central Russian Plain. Third, this discovery allows us to include Khotylevo 2 portable art into the cultural context both of Central and Western Europe.
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