

A Short Note on Paradoxes Associated with Venus Figurines

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There are some well-known paradoxes surrounding the Prehistoric Venus Figurines. The figurines depict women who are obese. But in reality, as many scholars believe, “women were fat more in male fantasy than in reality”¹. The estimate is that less than 25% of women at most were obese². Similarly, it is believed that the women in prehistoric times were relatively slender as they had very active life³. It is also said that deducing that the prehistoric women were obese by looking at the figurines is like working out the shape of the modern women through the works of Picasso^{4,5}. Then why do we have the Paleolithic Venuses representing obese females? How can we explain away this paradox? One very plausible answer is offered by the seclusion of girls at puberty. As a practice of initiation the females at puberty were secluded. For an example, via long-term isolation, eating and inactivity, they could have put on weight. One can argue that these figurines were made just as work of art like and has no other meaning. But why, then, should these artists and artisans mainly show obese women with no face and no feet? Convergence of all figurines to the above form is very likely to share a deeper meaning.

The fatness of women represented by the figurines is very widely discussed and many authors are quick to point out that the fatness represents fertility. But this poses another contradiction. As Arachige (2009) pointed out previously, the fertility can be adversely affected by fatness and this was known to historic societies at least as evidenced by the historical reference to the fact⁶. In modern medical research, it is known that increasing obesity reduce the fertility⁷. According to these authors, the obesity and the insulin resistance that usually occurs with the onset of excessive fat are associated with various issues such as menstrual dysfunction, anovulation and miscarriages⁸.

Another interesting paradox is about the locations these figurines were uncovered. According to scholars these figurines were not discovered inside

¹ P.343. Guthrie, R. D (2005) *The Nature of Paleolithic Art*, The University of Chicago Press.

² *ibid*

³ Trinkaus, E (2005) The Adiposity paradox in the middle Danubian Gravettian, *Anthropologie*, XLIII/2-3.p263-271

⁴ p111. Aczel, A. D (2009) *The Cave and The Cathedral*, John Wiley and Sons Inc, Hoboken, New Jersey

⁵ Leori-Gourhan, A (1967) *Treasures of Prehistoric Art*, Abrams, New York

⁶ For relevant references, see Arachige, D (2009) Paleolithic Venuses and The Puberty Rites, www.thelureofnoma.com

⁷ Mitchell M, Armstrong D.T, Robker R.L, Norman R.J (2005) Adipokines: implications for female fertility and obesity. *Reproduction*; 130: 583–597

⁸ See above

Paleolithic caves. They were found outside the caves and shelter walls⁹. Were they representing the ones living inside the caves? Arachige (2015) proposed that the secluded girls at puberty could be associated with the caves. Thus, if the above proposal holds some water, the Venus figurines might be representing the secluded females, perhaps, the special ones. May be they are the women with true shamanic powers or a Goddess associated with the practice of seclusion. This is not a totally ludicrous idea. Note that the analysis of burnt material from the lamps found from the Puits at Lascaux, showed Juniper charcoal and resinous conifer suggesting the early use of perfume burning¹⁰. This is a significant comment from an archaeologist of renown. Does this indicate the possibility of prolonged staying inside the caves where odour had to be minimized? However, we know that in the caves the people did not engage in daily activities such as cooking and eating¹¹. Is this an insurmountable contradiction faced by the idea linking the girls at puberty and Prehistoric Cave Paintings? It is not easy to conclude whether it is or it isn't. However, it is obvious that the paintings might have taken hours of work. There is evidence that the artists used lamps. The opinion that the artists used scaffolding, at least, at Lascaux is hinting at a long-term stay inside the caves¹². It may also be possible that the numbers inside the caves never had been large and thus, the middens were not formed. There is also the possibility that the daily refuse were collected and taken out due to hygienic reasons arising from the long-term use of the caves. Burning perfume is a good reminder about their understanding of the acceptable odours, which also indicates their sophistication. There is no reason to believe that smell of putrid food wasn't enjoyed even by these prehistoric people, especially if the place had some religious underpinning. On the other hand, we don't know whether food was consumed outside among the rest of the group even though the prolonged stays were allowed inside the caves.

However, in the light of the material discussed in Arachige (2015)¹³, the above paradoxes should not be insurmountable to ignore the possibility that the secluded girls at puberty used the caves.

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⁹ p240. Pike-Tay, A (2001) Perigordian, in *Encyclopedia of Prehistory*, Vol. 4, Europe, ed by P.N. Peregrine and M. Ember, Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Publishers, New York

¹⁰ p43. Scarre, C (1998) *Exploring Prehistoric Europe*, Oxford University Press

¹¹ p240. Pike-Tay, A. (2001)

¹² p43. Scarre, C 1998, *Exploring Prehistoric Europe*, Oxford University Press

¹³ Arachige, D (2015) Reflections on Palaeolithic Cave Art, Girls at Puberty and the origin of Religion, www.thelureofnoma.com