

# STYLISTIC TRADITIONS AND CONJUNCTURAL CONSTRAINTS. THE PALAEO LITHIC FEMALE FIGURINE FROM PIATRA NEAMŢ

Marin CÂRCIUMARU

Princely Court National Museum Târgovişte, Museum of Human Evolution and Technology in the Palaeolithic, Romania;  
Valahia University of Târgovişte, Doctoral School, e-mail: mcarciumaru@yahoo.com

MOTTO:

“Through this discovery, you have put Romania on the  
map of the great archaeological discoveries of the world”  
Randall White

*This article is dedicated to the memory of Randall White*

**Key-words:** figurine, Venus, raw material, symbolism, Palaeolithic, Epigravettian

**Abstract:** The first Palaeolithic female figurine in Romania was discovered in 2019. It was found near a hearth, in a level assigned to the Early Epigravettian, in the Piatra Neamţ 1 settlement. <sup>14</sup>C dates have provided the age of 17,200 BP. The figurine was carved on a sandstone pebble collected from the alluviums of the Bistriţa River near the settlement. The flat shape of the pebble required certain stylistic restrictions specific to figurines of this age. In particular, those anatomical parts suggesting obesity, such as breasts and buttocks, could not be volumetrically represented at revealing dimensions.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** statueta, Venus, materii prime, simbolism, Paleolitic, Epigravettian

**Rezumat:** În 2019 a fost descoperită prima statueta feminină paleolitică din România. Ea a fost găsită în situl Piatra-Neamţ 1, în apropierea unei vetre din nivelul atribuit Epigravettianului vechi. Datările <sup>14</sup>C au dat vârsta de 17.200 BP. Statueta a fost sculptată într-un galet de gresie provenit din aluviunile Bistriţei din apropierea sitului. Forma plată a galetului a impus unele constrângeri stilistice, proprii statuetelor din acea epocă. Astfel, părţile anatomice care pun în evidenţă obezitatea, ca, de exemplu, sânii şi fesele, nu au putut fi reprezentate într-o manieră volumetrică specifică celorlalte statuete.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the first Palaeolithic Venus figurine in Romania, dated to 17,200 BP, was found in the settlement of Piatra Neamţ 1 (city of Piatra Neamţ, Neamţ County) (Fig. 1) (Niţu *et alii* 2023).

Palaeolithic female figurines have stimulated the specialists' imagination in the most diverse ways and the interpretation of their meaning is old and yet current. They are the appanage of *Homo sapiens* and of the Upper Palaeolithic in Eurasia. Despite all progress made in terms of knowledge related to the artistic manifestations of the archaic *Homo sapiens* in Africa (d'Errico 2003; 2007; d'Errico, Henshilwood 2011; d'Errico *et alii* 2003; 2009), we still have no evidence as to whether they created Palaeolithic anthropomorphic female sculptures at the same chronological level as those in Eurasia, although their cultural meaning is undeniable.

H. Delporte (1993) specifies five ways of interpreting the Venus figurines: 1 – realistic representations of Palaeolithic women; 2 – ideal representations of female beauty; 3 – symbols of fertility; 4 – religious meaning, as representations of “priestesses”; 5 – representations of ancestors. G. A. Bray (2004) believes that Palaeolithic figurines point to the existence of obesity in those times, given that most of them are representations of corpulent women. The definition proposed by L. Passermard (1938), *Venus steatopyge*, is thus resumed. The variability of Palaeolithic statuettes might reflect the artisans' preferences for individual styles, which may have changed from one stage to another. According to P. Russell (2006), they were men's creations. On the other hand, L. McDermott (1996) claims that Venus figurines were created by women, who carved their own image without using other models. A relatively recent opinion is that the manner of representing obese women is the consequence