

## Culture

# Reply Réponse

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# Reply / Réponse

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We thank the reviewers, who have provided helpful and constructive comments on our manuscript. At the outset, we would also like to reiterate the main goals of this analysis, which may have been obscured by the length of our presentation, and to emphasize some of the things that we did not try to do.

First, because the Grimaldi statuettes constitute the largest and best preserved sample of Upper Palaeolithic female sculptures from Western Europe, we believe that they offer a unique opportunity to identify behavioural patterning because the possible effects of geographical variation are minimized. Our analysis is concerned solely with these specimens, and we make no claim that our hypothesis provides a universally applicable explanation of the meaning of Upper Palaeolithic female images. Although a few other sculptures from Western Europe, most notably Savignano from Italy (Graziosi 1923) and Monpazier (Clottes and Cerou 1970) from the Périgord, share the pregnancy related features that dominate the Grimaldi collection, many do not (see Delporte 1993). These images undoubtedly were part of a complex and multi-faceted discourse about, and probably by, women.

In this article, we explore one aspect of this discourse as it is reflected in objects produced over time by a single cultural tradition, the Epi-Gravettian. It is therefore to be expected that the complex of traits discussed here is not evident on other figurines. Although most are of uncertain date, a majority of the other European specimens are probably Gravettian in age and thus significantly older. Their widespread spatial distribution also increases the chance of variable meanings. Because many of the other specimens are isolated finds, they simply do not offer the interpretive potential of the Grimaldi pieces. We therefore argue that critiques of our hypothesis that centre on the characteristics of other figurines, particularly the lengthy comment by Duhard, are somewhat off the mark. We are making no claims for a universal explanation of Upper Palaeolithic female imagery. There is no *a-priori* reason why Grimaldi

must correspond to the other French figurines in either iconography or meaning.

In addition, we want to emphasize that there are certainly multiple meanings reflected in the Grimaldi collection. In this article we concentrated on the elements shared by most or all of the statuettes, and concluded that they referred to the final stages of pregnancy. The variability within this collection is equally interesting, but space prevented us from discussing it at length, and in any case our analysis of that aspect is ongoing. The presence or absence of facial features, duplicate heads or faces, combinations of human and animal features on two specimens, and body markings on others all suggest multivocality, but these less patterned attributes may reflect a complex combination of change over time in cultural meaning of iconographic elements, with the individual creative choices (i.e. idiosyncratic variation) of individual sculptors. Although it is likely that many of these attributes had cultural significance, interpreting them will be much more difficult.

Our article also explores only one aspect of the probable use-life of the figurines. It is clear that these objects were occasionally modified after their initial manufacture. The removal of the face and the chiselling of the throat of the female image on the Double Figurine is the most spectacular, but not the only example. Legs, apparently broken in antiquity, occur on the "Brown Ivory Figurine", the "Femme au goitre", and perhaps the "Ivory Figurine with Red Ochre". Elsewhere, Soffer et al. (1993) have noted the intentional destruction of sculptures by fire at the Gravettian site of Dolni Vestonice in the Czech Republic, and described that destruction as an important part of their use-life. In addition to use-life modification, disposal patterns are also clues to meaning. Poor provenance hampers our interpretations in these cases, but, with Dobres (1992b) we consider the analysis of these sculptures as a process as well as a product, to be an important avenue of future research.

As to the specific comments of reviewers, Duhard criticizes us mildly for not citing more French literature, yet one of the authors we reput-

edly ignore (Pales) is cited, and the theoretical positions of the others are not significantly different from the many authors we do consider. In any case, our article was not meant to be an exhaustive bibliographic essay on interpretations of female figurines. We simply wanted to present both the historically dominant as well as more recent interpretations, and show that in the Grimaldi case a more plausible hypothesis was available.

Duhard also takes us to task for not having personally inspected some of the specimens in the M.A.N., and thus having omitted some details about the “figurine non décrite”. He is correct that some details of that statuette were not discussed, but our point is that the front of the abdomen and genitals are missing due to breakage, so this figurine could not be used to either support or reject our hypothesis. We also agree that it is preferable to have first-hand experience with the collection, but argue that published descriptions and photographs were adequate for this analysis. A request was made to the M.A.N. to inspect the statuettes a year prior to the submission of this paper, but the specimens were not available for study.

We are happy to agree with Duhard that there is great diversity in the representation of the female body in the overall Western European “Gravettian” sample. However, this diversity does not solely represent accurate pictorial representation of female bodies. We assume that there is a significant symbolic component to their morphology, because in the Grimaldi case there is unambiguous patterning in the exaggeration of certain features. Given the worldwide ethnographic record for the importance of symbolism in human depiction, our assumption has a greater prior probability than Duhard’s hypothesis of symbolically meaningless depiction.

In his thoughtful commentary, Clermont agrees that we present a plausible hypothesis, but remains unconvinced for four reasons. His first two concentrate on the “opulence of form” shared not only by the freestanding sculptures but also engravings such as those of Laussel, and the many animal sculptures from Central and Eastern Europe. These varied representations suggest to him a contradiction with our view that the Grimaldi figurines served as amulets related to pregnancy and childbirth. The images he cites, however, are not similar to the Grimaldi collection in genital morphology. The dilated, and often greatly exaggerated vulva is critical to our inter-

pretation. The lack of this feature on many of his examples renders the comparison inappropriate. His third and fourth points likewise address important issues of the degree to which the Grimaldi figurines correspond to the formal geometrical relationships first noted by Leroi-Gourhan (1965). However this is also a peripheral issue. The presence or absence of common overall conventions of depiction are not essential to our argument, which relies only on the common possession of specific reproductive traits. We suspect that at least some of the geometrical relationships recognized by Leroi-Gourhan are more a consequence of the inherent proportions of the subject matter, the female human body, rather than a universal “system of visual representation”.

Delporte does not comment extensively on our interpretation, but does provide some helpful background information on the nomenclature applied to figurines early in this century. He also points out some important problems that remain in determining the precise provenance and dates of many of the Grimaldi specimens. Although these are indeed serious problems, we believe there is solid forensic evidence for the authenticity of the Montreal collection.

In responding to the comments by Dobres, a brief summary of the genesis of this paper is necessary. CULTURE first contacted us with a request for a history and description of the newly discovered Grimaldi sculptures, but we instead thought that a larger interpretive work covering the entire collection would be appropriate as a first publication in Canada. Thus the paper is primarily a description and analysis of this specific collection of female images, exactly as the title states. As part of the background for our hypothesis, we thought it useful to summarize the most important previous interpretations of Upper Paleolithic female sculptures, mainly to demonstrate in which respects our ideas are novel, and show where they build on earlier ideas. Since a tremendous amount of literature exists on this topic, our intent was to offer a basic summary of the literature and to place it within the broader context of the history of archaeological interpretation. This broader background was also mandated by Grimaldi’s early and seminal role in the formation of interpretations of Paleolithic female imagery. Although the comment by Dobres concentrates on this literature review, it was not the essence of the paper.

At times, our summary took on a critical tone, and Dobres was far from the only one criticized. Shortly after the manuscript was circulated for comment we heard rumors that Dobres felt that her ideas had been misrepresented in our paper. In fairness to her, we sought, through mutual acquaintances, a list of specific examples so that we might correct any such misrepresentations. This request was renewed three times without response (except for a brief note focusing on referencing and editorial issues), the last via the editors of *CULTURE*. Finally, we practiced some mild diplomacy by revising a couple of areas where we ourselves thought our comments might be construed as inappropriately harsh. Although a response from Dobres would have been helpful in avoiding a certain amount of vitriol, we do not accept that we have significantly misrepresented her work. Her papers are an important contribution to the literature. They are more readily available in Canada than elsewhere, and we encourage readers to judge for themselves.

Dobres' opening comments on "simple matters" are hypersensitive or reflect what are essentially minor differences in definition. Our footnote on the Institut de Paléontologie Humaine facade spoke directly to the pervasive racial assumptions underlying interpretation in early 20th century European prehistory. Our reference to Josephine Baker was merely to recognize that broader currents in European society were implicated, notably the appropriation, transformation, and reconfiguration of things African. We believed in writing this footnote that a recognition of this broader social context had eluded Dobres' admittedly useful analysis. We also believe that the ambiguity of the **broken** statuette from Brassempouy has been much overplayed. It must be remembered that Piette had virtually no comparative material available to him to aid in reconstructing what this fragment might have looked like whole.

Dobres is correct in pointing out that it was Kehoe, not she, who was responsible for interpreting the "baton à seins" from Dolni Vestonice as a phallus with testicles. We regret the error. Her comments about the variability of statuettes referred to as female by earlier authors are also correct, but entirely off the subject of our article, in which we describe the variability of the Grimaldi collection at length, and explicitly state why we consider the two potentially ambiguous cases, the "Hermaphrodite" and the "Flattened Figurine", to be female.

Dobres notes that our definition of Eurocentrism is not hers. In fact, we had difficulty characterizing Dobres' position because in those of her writings where she proposes a less Eurocentric approach by focusing more heavily on the Russian figurines, she seems not to recognize that the Russian figurines are Eastern European (Dobres 1992:245)! We danced around this by diplomatically characterizing her view of Eurocentrism as, in fact, Western European-centrism.

In what are described as more serious issues, Dobres highlights a topic that was a peripheral part of the paper, our lumping together different feminist perspectives under the same heading. Had this been the topic of our paper this would have been wrong, but in this context, Dobres' response is an over-reaction. It should also be noted that we are castigated for not bothering to read a 1995 essay by Conkey and Tringham, yet our manuscript was submitted in 1995, before that essay became available to us! Had we seen a pre-publication copy, we might indeed have toned down our "unnecessarily negative rhetoric". In any case, we do not contend that "feminist archaeological research is less than empirical". Much of the research tradition that we glossed as "feminist" has employed creative and valuable approaches to the empirical record. What we do criticize as less empirical is the concentration on deconstruction to the exclusion of the empirical record.

Likewise, nowhere do we state that politically inspired research **cannot** be good science. Science is ultimately the testing of hypotheses about the empirical world through the application of appropriate method and theory. If these criteria are met, then science is "good" whatever its political inspiration.

In reading Dobres' comment, we are struck by the fact that there is no actual discussion of our hypothesis itself, and no constructive suggestions of how to link the theoretical with the material. This brings us to the heart of the matter, the description and analysis of the objects, the veracity of the ethnographic and ecological observations used to formulate our hypothesis, and the logical connections between them. Rather than directly challenging the hypothesis, she makes some methodological criticisms of how the *chaîne opératoire* is used, but these do not seem to take into account the fact that we are working with a collection for which provenance information is sadly lacking. How, for example, could we adequately

determine on-site or off-site production if the site contents are undocumented and the debris produced by the manufacture of the stone specimens would consist of a fine white dust that would be archaeologically invisible even with the best modern data recovery techniques.

It is always frustrating to deal with collections recovered by previous generations of archaeologists. Their problem-orientations and their excavation techniques were not ours. We chose to structure our analysis around a substantially revised version of Mauss's/Leroi-Gourhan's chaîne opératoire, all the while recognizing that certain observations would be rendered impossible by the quality of Jullien's excavations. Indeed, our lengthy discussion of the context in which the Grimaldi pieces were recovered was in large part to make these limitations clear. To have proceeded to discussions of, for example, on-site versus off-site production, would have been poor science by anyone's definition. We feel strongly that the chaîne opératoire model and methodology as articulated here will produce important insights when applied to modern, rigorously documented collections. To this end, one of us (RW) is currently applying this approach to more than 100 figurines and fragments from Avdevo and Kostienki.

Dobres also takes us to task for using "questionable and mostly out-of-date" ethnographies. Our use of some earlier, descriptively oriented, ethnographies (Czaplicka 1914; Rasmussen 1931), as well as survey volumes (Greyburn and Strong 1973) was both intentional and appropriate for the information that we were seeking. The earlier volumes are relevant because we believe that they are more likely to present a picture of the prevalence of shamanic practices before the distorting effects of modern culture. To adequately critique our sources she would have to show that the statements we drew from them were factually incorrect. Does she contend that shamanism was unimportant in circumpolar societies, or that far from being excluded, many women were fully functioning shamans? Can she offer evidence that women were not involved in the production of amulets? Were we incorrect in stating that the explicit function of many amulets is the control of dangerous or unpredictable events? Is it unreasonable for us to conclude that women would be concerned with and try to actively control their own bodily processes? These are very general points that did not require padding our bibliography to demon-

strate. Are the connections we drew between these points illogical? Dobres implies that they are, but never actually confronts the argument other than to characterize it as "source-side".

There were potentially productive avenues of debate which are ignored by Dobres. Her sole mention of our data presentation is to note its length. In fact, it is impossible to separate description from interpretation. An alternative proposal to our identification of some of the morphological features of these figurines as depicting pregnancy and/or childbirth would have been both welcome and stimulating. As it is, Dobres chooses to ignore our proposed link between the morphology of the figurines and the ethnographic observations of female involvement in shamanism. Our hypothesis that most of the Grimaldi figurines are amulets concerned with pregnancy or childbirth and that they probably represent a symbolic discourse by and about women controlling their own bodies to ensure their own safety is not refuted.

In her conclusion, Dobres points out that we engaged in a deconstruction of prior hypotheses that was fundamentally similar to her own writings, and thus we are unjustified in criticizing her. We do indeed agree on almost all points dealing with earlier proposals, but we have fundamental differences with the emphasis she gives to the analysis of text over data. Dobres' comment illustrates our point better than we ourselves could have done. If archaeologists are reduced solely to arguing about the texts of other archaeologists rather than trying to understand the material remains of ancient behavior, then our discipline will stagnate. Do we really want to become modern Scholastics, embroiled in furious debates, but irrelevant outside of our ivory towers?

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