

## THE MIDDLE PLEISTOCENE ROOTS OF ART?

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### ABSTRACT

An archaic sculptural remonstrance, probably anthropomorphic, was found in the lignite "Kardia" mine, near Ptolemais (N. Greece), at a depth of about 10 m from the surface.

It represents a standing figure, divided into three parts, the head, the body and the region of the legs, having a total height of 233 mm and a maximum width of 151 mm. It is consisted of concrete fine-grained calcitic psamite (3 Kg weight), embedding small limestones. The region corresponding to the eyes and nostrils has been possibly chased and four small stones were left inside their cavities. In the lower ventral part exists a phallus, 16 mm long and 30 mm in diameter. The sculpturing is completed by a triple (similar) attempt of piercing the rock. The first is unilateral in the wasp and 10 mm deep. The second is bilateral in the nape (deep: 22 mm to the right and 31 mm to the left). The third one is also bilateral and runs from shoulder to shoulder, forming a cylindrical hole 100 mm long. These openings are all 10-12 mm wide.

According to the above observations it is assumed that a prehistoric man found the psamite rock already presenting a familiar form and elaborated it further. The subject is named the "Protosculpture of Macedonia" and its stratigraphic position indicates an age of about 500-800.000 years.

### INTRODUCTION

An excavating and surface survey program, is being promoted by the Anthropological Association of Greece (A.A.G.) since 1968, in the extended area around the Petralona cave (Chalkidiki). This program includes the localization and preservation of the paleoanthropological finds of the Eordaia basin (W. Macedonia).

The present announcement refers to the discovery of an archaic stone remonstrance, probably anthropomorphic, 233 mm high and 3 kg in weight. It was found in 1985-6 by Mr. K. Papakonstantinou, a technician of the State Enterprise of Electricity, in the southern (inactive) lignite mine of Cardia - Ptolemais, at a depth of about 10-12 m from the surface. According to him, the object excited his curiosity, so he collected it and took it home, considering it just a strange stone. By the end of 1993 he was informed about the activity of the A.A.G. Ptolemais branch, which was reactivated under my responsibility two years earlier, and he decided to present it. During these years at the same branch many other palaeontological and palaeolithic findings of the region are deposited with the support of the Town Hall and the EU Cultural Committee. (For more details see, Poulianos A. N., 1977. Poulianos A. N. & Poulianos N. A., 1980, 1994 and Poulianos N. A., 1986, 1998a,b).



## DESCRIPTION

The object's relief has a form of a standing figure divided in approximately three equal parts. A head with eyes, nose and neck a body and the less clear region of the feet.

Its material consists of concrete fine-grained calcitic psamite with quartz admixtures and it is embedding small limestones. The whole rock piece is covered by fine yellow-gray sandy clay.

The macroscopic examination of the object suggests that the psamite rock had initially presented a familiar form, which was further elaborated by a prehistoric human. This conclusion is supported by the following observations.

The first concerns the comparison with other rock pieces of similar nature, but not elaborated, which were recovered from the same area, same depth (10-12 m) and same layer. One of them was found again by Mr. K. Papakonstantinou at the same inactive Kardia mine (30 m away from the archaic remonstrance) and two other rock pieces were found by the author at the Aminteo lignite active mine. Their outer part is covered by gray sand, while the inner one consists of white-yellow clay (similar to the color of the remonstrance). The gray covering color is mainly due to the surrounding sandy sediment of the spot of their discovery. From the above it is deduced that the mixed yellow-gray color of the item in examination is due to the fact that its surface is almost totally removed artificially (initially being covered by gray sand).

Regarding the degree of elaboration of the remonstrance, some of its areas appear more chiseled than others. For example, the rounded upper part, corresponding to the head (93 mm height, 79 mm width, 106 mm length) is mainly formed by the natural veins of the rock. The same applies to the area of the frontal part of the neck (23 mm high, 82 mm wide, 7 mm deep). On the contrary, and as the observations under the stereomicroscope support, the region of the cavities corresponding to a pair of eyes (left: 31 mm long, 25 mm high, 16 mm deep - right: 37 mm long, 26 mm high, 20 mm deep) have been chiseled out against the natural veins of the psamite. The same is observed in the region of the nostrils (diameter: 15 mm, 2-3 mm deep, appr.) which lay on a massive sticking out muzzle.

Some of the previously mentioned imbedded small limestones became handy in notching the relief of the face. This mainly concerns the cavities of the eyes and the nostrils. The small limestones must have been slightly sticking out by 1-2 mm before carving, judging from some side scratches around them. Also from the fact that their outer part is dark gray for 1-2 mm (and similar to the other unused sticking out limestones). Probably after chising, the height of the sticking out part of the small limestones is increased by 1-4 mm, and its color is yellowish, forming a small "ditch" around them. In the case of the eyes they look like implanted bulbs.

The right eye includes a small stone (22x10 mm), while the left one two (each 12 mm diameter appr., 3-4 mm distance the one from the other). Each nostril entails a small stone of 11-13 mm in diameter.

The ventral area appears to be the most elaborated - being scabrous and the less smooth large body area. In its lower part the existence of a phallus (16mm long, 30mm in diameter) may be noted. Its construction is probably due to another small limestone that still lies at the base of its upper part (preventing further chiseling). On the contrary the unfinished rounded as a "snowman's" feet (each of about 55 mm in diameter and of 151 mm total width) and the back of the body seem less elaborated. The waist is rather thin and does not exceed the length of the head (106 mm).



In addition the existence of several scratches may be mentioned. They are of a low depth (1-2mm), but elongated (10-40mm): a) on the left side of the neck, b) on the outer surface of the left foot, and c) on the middle of the cavity (50mm appr.) between the feet.

The most impressive however characteristic of the object, which reconfirms even more the above remarks, must be that of a triple attempt at piercing the material of the rock. The first is done in the back, at the level of the waist, above the left foot, and it is unilateral for a depth of 10 mm. The second is bilateral and it is made in the nape, behind the eyes, for a depth of 22 mm from the right and 31 mm from the left side. The third one is also bilateral, but from shoulder to shoulder, forming a cylindrical hole, as a microtunnel, 100 mm long. All openings have almost the same diameter: 10-12 mm each, narrowing down like a cone up to 1-2 mm. This indicates that they are created in the same way. Probably by a "drill", which could have been manufactured by a soft material, but strong enough to pierce the psamite. P. ex. a tree branch or a bone used rotatively between the palms. This is supported by the fact that inside and around the holes there are just fine stripes, but no scrapings, grooves or cracks caused by a hard drill or hammer. Therefore the use of any percussive method must be excluded.

As far as the reason of these piercing attempts is concerned, several hypotheses may be done. One probable reason is that the complete microtunnel (from shoulder to shoulder) was made to be used for hanging the remonstrance (p. ex. on a tree, by leather or by plants and roots stripes), perhaps for ritual purposes. Another hypothesis is that this opening could also be used as a socket of wood or stone pieces (etc.) to represent the missing hands. As regards the two other attempts they can be considered as vacant ones, since that on the neck was almost ready to break and that on the wasp was too far from the weight center of the object.

The above descriptions (standing position, existence and place of phallus) leave less room to consider the archaic remonstrance as a zoomorphic one. In this case, the attempt of representing and/or culting himself must be included within the intentions of the prehistoric man.

In accordance to the international custom, it is proposed to name it as: "The Protosculpture of Macedonia».

## STRATIGRAPHY AND AGE

The nature and the dating of the find are a challenge for science and it is expected to lead to long research and scientific discussions. On the same matter, the biggest difficulty arises from the fact that its exact discovery site is almost totally lost. The southern lignite Kardina mine has been dug for a depth of more than 30 m and for several dozen of hectares. The crater, which was formed by the mining, has been covered by soil and planted with trees by the State Enterprise of Electricity, within a rehabilitation program. Today only the indirect stratigraphical data, the find itself and the testimony of the technician Mr. Papakonstantinou may illuminate the problem of dating.

The general stratigraphy of the Eordaia basin may be summarized as follows (Anastopoulos & Koukouzas, 1972 and Vetoulis, 1956). On the surface and for a depth of about 20-100 m a unit of Plio-Pleistocene layers of sand and argil interrupted



by marls and conglomerates is deposited. Beneath, Plio-Miocene lignite layers interrupted by sand strata are lying on Neogene and Triassic rock deposits.

The archaic remonstrance is found at a base of white marl inside a sandy layer of the upper part of the first strato-unit. The indirect age of this layer is a result of a combined study of various palaeontological and palaeolithic findings coming from the same stratigraphic unit, providing a series of datings. Above the object, and from different layers, findings of *Bos primigenius* of an age of about 100-200,000 years and an achillean quartz bifacial of about 300,000 years have been recovered. Undiagnostic bones of elephants coming from the same layer of the object provided an age of  $900 \pm 300,000$  years (Belluomini G., 1995). As an indirect reconfirmation of this age, the discovery of a skeleton of an elephant coming from about 10 m below the remonstrance has been dated at 2.4 - 3.2 million years ago (cf. above).

The archaic construction of the find, in relation to other known prehistoric sculptures found around the world, reflexes a previous stage of evolution to that of the contemporary man and the Neanderthals. This corresponds to the *Archanthropus* evolutionary stage (sensu A. Poulianos, 1977 and N. Poulianos, 1993, 1995), reconfirming the age of about 500-800,000 years of the Ptolemais remonstrance.

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Figure 1. The frontal view of "The Protosculpture of Macedonia".

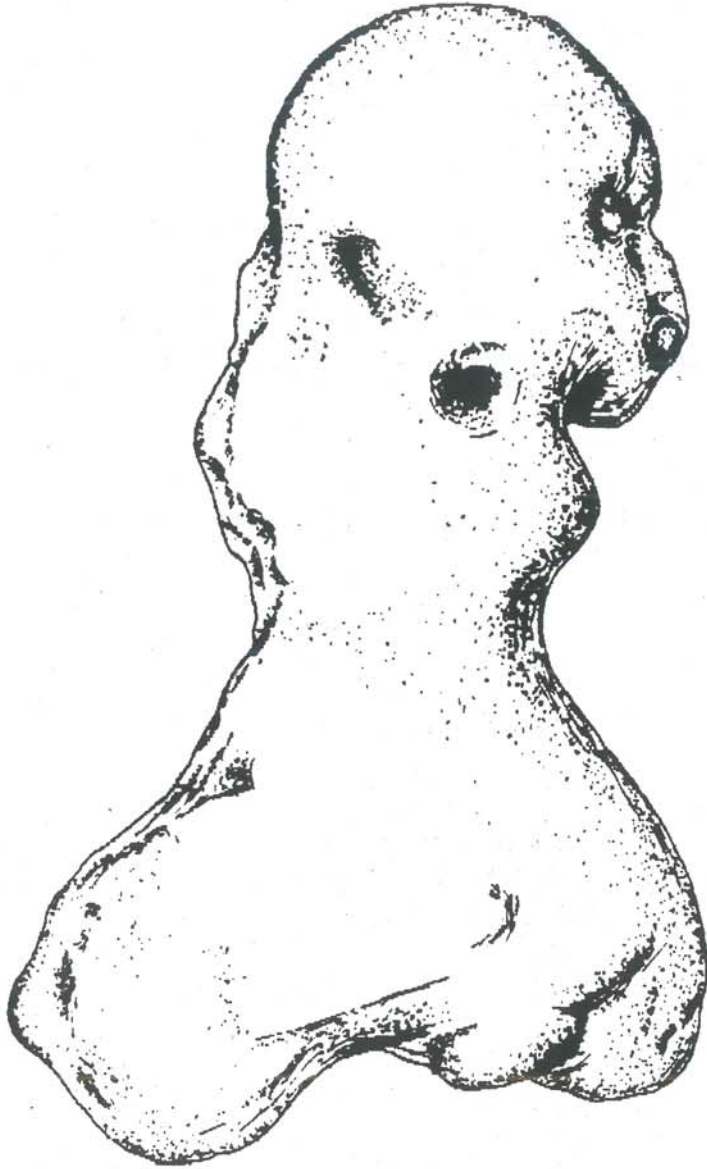


Figure 2: The right side of "The Protosculture of Macedonia". Designs made by Maria - Nella Deilaki from photos taken by Petros Vezyrtzis.

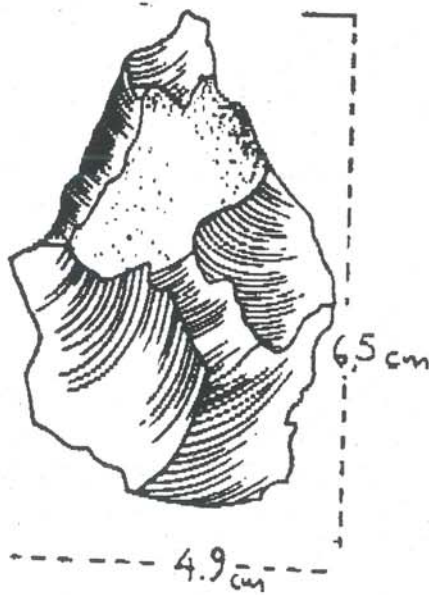


Figure 2: The Acheulian quartz bifacial referred to in the text (scale 1:1)