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Reviews

Petřkovice: On Shouldered Points and Female Figurines. Jiri A. Svoboda et al., *The Dolni Vestonice Studies Vol 15*. Institute of Archaeology at Brno, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2008. 252 pages.

The Gravettian of Bohemia, Petr Sida et al., *The Dolni Vestonice Studies Vol 17*. Institute of Archaeology at Brno, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 264 pages.

Generally, middle and east European book reviews in archaeology are heavy on content description and light on analysis or critique. They tend to sketch a book's structure, describe the general findings and key conclusions, and provide some encouraging words about how it progresses the discipline. As with many things, IANSA is promoting a different approach to archaeological discourse; one that includes critique and analysis of value, and the positioning of reviewed books in the wider context of the discipline. So, while providing context, and this reviewer's perception of the value and contribution of these books, this review contains no spoilers (no summaries of the contents). Readers who desire to learn more about the content, material finds and conclusions are strongly encouraged to purchase copies of these excellent books for themselves and their libraries.

Publications are one of, if not the most important tool for international and interdisciplinary information exchange within archaeology. Monographs, books, site reports, online databases and other publishing tools allow archaeologists to share their data, findings and ideas. It is a given that archaeologists and institutions will publish. But with constant funding challenges and the high cost of production, the question of what should be published, and even more importantly what should be published in a foreign language, is ever more relevant.

Europe is a region where many countries and languages cut across historically unified areas (think Roman Empire, spanning most

of the nations of modern Europe, North Africa and the Near East). Contrast this with North America where the majority of archaeologists in all disciplines and all sub-regions across most of the continent share one language. Publication in the deeply linguistically and culturally fragmented European context is fraught with difficulty. There are problems with scale, cost, language choices and value.

Archaeologists in the former communist block are currently at a particular disadvantage, from a global perspective. The pre-history, history and archaeology of the region is relatively little known, overwhelmingly published in local languages inaccessible to the majority of the worlds (and the regions own) archaeologists, and is clearly underpublished. Vast amounts of data lie forlorn and sometimes forgotten in private repositories, university basements and in one case in an old barn that burned to the ground taking 40 years of research with it. The weight of the world's publications flow inward to the region and not outward. We can find translated archaeology books from the USA and UK in academic and even public bookstores across our region, but we cannot walk into a book store in London or Vancouver to pick up a copy of the latest archaeology book from Budapest or Warsaw.

Middle and east European archaeologists face a real challenge. If we seek to make the world aware of the enormous value and potential of the region's archaeological resource, then we must publish much more, of everything, and in more languages. We need to make everything – from site reports, databases and monographs, through to museum displays, books, journals and films- available to the world. It is a major challenge. But if we do not meet that challenge we will be overwhelmed with the perspectives, publications and knowledge of others. Our own story, from our own perspective deserves to be told. It needs to be told, and to find its place in the global story of our shared pre-history.

These two books opening a bit more of the archaeology of middle and eastern Europe to the global specialist audience, and peel

back a bit more of the barrier separating this region's archaeology from the global discipline. Both books provide a balance of historic and modern data, examine in some depth the nature and value of the material record, provide an interpretation of the finds, and deliver a synthesis of the how these materials and sites fit into the area and period studies at question.

In *Petřkovice: On Shouldered Points and Female Figurines* the Institute of Archaeology at Brno has published a collection of reports examining a settlement site that has undergone three phases of systematic archaeological investigation over the last 100 years. Providing us with a record of the later phases of the Gravettian (25,000–20,000 BP), Petřkovice is considered a reference site for the period. The find site of the "Red Venus", a burgundy coloured anthropomorphic figurine with uniquely "cubist" features, Petřkovice joins a rather short list of central European sites at which female figurines from the Gravettian have been found. Editor Jiri Svoboda has brought together reports and insights from some of the most important modern researchers working at the site, reporting on its history, geography, formation, and material remains. Readers interested in the period and region are strongly encouraged to locate this book, for an in depth examination of this fascinating site.

The Gravettian of Bohemia, edited by Petr Sida delivers a long overdue survey of Gravettian sites and finds from the Czech province of the Czech Republic (the Czech Republic is comprised of Bohemia, Moravia and Czech part of Silesia). An important reference source for those interested in the period and region, it provides a detailed explanation of the current state of research. Contributing authors explain the geology, environment and chronology of human presence in the period, and provide an exceptional catalogue of sites and finds. As the editor notes, there is a grave absence of analysis by practitioners in the field, and much remains unpublished and unavailable. Despite this, the editor and contributing authors have delivered an

important contribution to the very short list of publications for this region and time.

Unfortunately, both books also suffer the failings of the context in which they are produced. Period and regional specialists will be disappointed by the dearth, or frustrating inaccessibility, of raw supporting data, while generalists will be distracted by what data there is and dissatisfied with the style and absence of contextualising synthesis and social analysis. Readers will find that the translation does not lend itself to easy reading and may find it difficult to even discern the key findings, and are likely to miss some of the crucial social and contextual synthesis, which is in any event very much understated.

Publishing a book in English is a very costly undertaking and fraught with difficulty. Discerning what deserves publication and more importantly what deserves high-quality translation can be

difficult. This reviewer urges that many more and much shorter analyses be rapidly published in high quality translation to popularise the material for non-specialist archaeologists, while also publishing raw data through detailed site reports. This, backed up with online access to the data in multiple languages would nicely fill out the published record, and in a manner that meets all our goals: general understanding and support, international and interdisciplinary cooperation, and opening a window to the archaeology of our region through which the whole world can take a look.

Writing in English for a global audience is also a two-way channel (or two-edged sword: depending on how you look at academic interplay). While it broadcasts outward about the work in this region it also sets up a target for other archaeologists to knock down. The academic and public environment of the discipline globally is

not always kind, and there is often a very rough and tumble element to academic exchange. Publishing in English will make our work more accessible to others, to their benefit. We will benefit from the constructive feedback and critiques of our work that will appear around the world. We will all benefit when we can finally access a more substantial portion of the intellectual knowledge currently locked away in dusty archives, and languages that the majority of the world's archaeologists cannot understand.

These two books are part of a series that makes some of the best work of the region available to a global audience. This reviewer hopes that the editors, contributors and institutions involved will continue, and accelerate, their publication in English, and open the window to our region ever wider.

Robert Brukner