

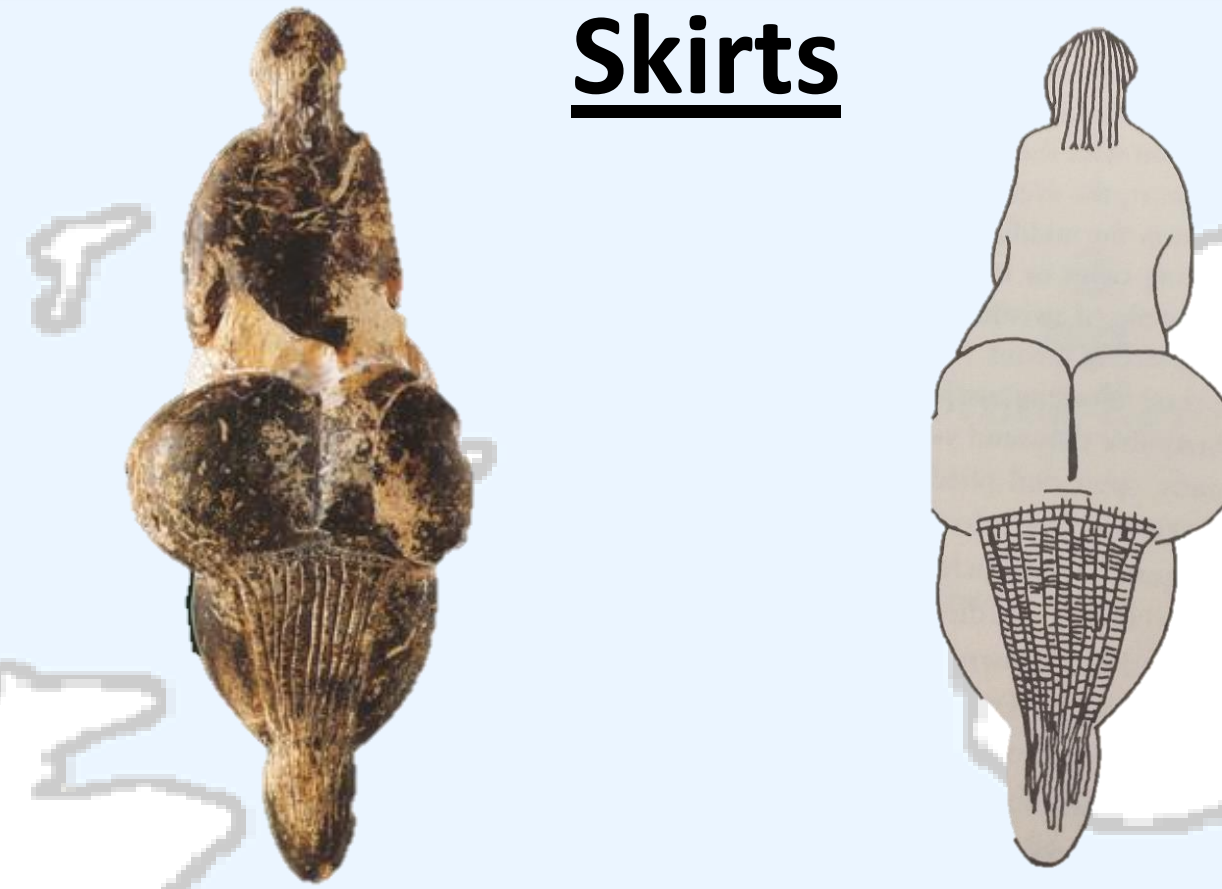
Aims:

- To identify ornamentation marks on Venus figurines and research how archaeologists have interpreted them
- To search the archaeological record to see if similar articles of clothing / jewellery have been found, particularly in burial contexts
- To see if there are any alternate interpretations to the markings, particularly in cases where nothing is left in the archaeological record

Headwear



Skirts



Jewellery / Accessories



Coats



Case Study : Venus of Willendorf:

The Venus of Willendorf is one of the most famous 'Venus' figurines, dating back to 28,000-25,000BCE. She can be seen with a hat or hairstyle that slopes to the back of the neck. If it is a hat, it is likely to be made of beads or shells. Whereas hair would not be found in the archaeological record, beads have been. The figure itself has also been covered in red ochre for decoration, which is also seen on bones.

Case Study: Venus of Brassempouy:

The Venus of Brassempouy survives only as a head, with geometric wig/hood/hairstyle. This design could have been depicted with beads or could be showing a style similar to braids.

Burial Evidence: The Tomb of Sungir

Although a male burial, the tomb of Sungir demonstrates that beads were used as ornamentation including headbands of bone beads and ivory bracelets.

Burial Evidence: The Red Lady of Paviland

This male burial dating back to 33,000BP, shows evidence of bones being dyed in red ochre, while the site is from an earlier period than the Venus of Willendorf, the cave in which the body was found was still being used in the Gravettian period. This can also be seen in sites such as Dolní Věstonice II

Case Study: Venus of Lespugue

The Venus of Lespugue is one of many figurines shown with skirts, and dates back to 20,000BC and is carved from bone. The ornamentation shown is one of the most significant, as the skirt suggests that weaving like technology was available. Barber (1994) notes the details of the skirt, stating that it is twisted string suspending from a hip band, which frays at the end, suggesting a deliberate design, although there are still debates about the interpretation of these markings

Burial Evidence: Egtved, Denmark

The skirt below is from a female burial, and made of string. It would initially have reached the knees, and would have been much shorter than the Venus of Lespugue's 'skirt'. While this from a later time period, there is evidence of string technology from as early as 15,000BC in Lascaux, France

Case Study: Venus of Kostienki

The Venus figurines from Kostienki are limestone women from around the year 20,000BCE. They appear to be wearing various types of accessories, including 'diadems', collars and bracelets (which are sometimes identified as handcuffs). Like the Venus of Willendorf, red ochre has been added to some suggesting a deliberate attempt to change the colour of the figurine, which has also been seen on bone

Burial Evidence for Jewellery : Grotto of Children, Grimaldi – The male in the image below is wearing a shell headdress and the woman two bracelets on the wrist and elbow, showing that jewellery was worn by men and women in the Gravettian period.

Non-Burial evidence – At the site of Kostienki 1, some 'belts' made of mammoth ivory have been recovered, possibly what is depicted in the above figurines, however it is important to note that the depicted clothing could have been leather, meaning that it would not have survived for archaeologists to recover.

Case Study: Venus figurines from Mal'ta, Siberia

The 29 Venus figurines from Mal'ta are very different to the other more well know Gravettian figurines, as many are fully clothed! This would make logical sense due to the dramatic change in climate. Many, such as the one seen above, appear to have been designed in order to be worn as pendants. This would make them ornamentation themselves. They also are much thinner than the other figurines presented, suggesting they may not be symbols of pregnancy or childbirth, which is likely with the others. Many also show geometric and parallel patterns, suggesting there was more of an idealistic focus than on other figurines.

Conclusion:

- The archaeological evidence shows a clear link between ornamentation depicted on the Venus figurines and artefacts found in the archaeological record
- A link can be seen between the ornamentation depicted and the site in which the figurine was found, seen clearly in case studies such as the Venus figurines of Willendorf and Kostienki
- Care must be take when studying ornamentation, as most of the clothing from burial contexts, such as garments made of leather or string, are unlikely to have survived. This can also be seen when looking at burial evidence, as many are men, who may have worn different clothing compared to women in the Gravettian period



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