Rare Paleolithic Phallus Discovered

By Rossella Lorenzi, Discovery News

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July 27, 2005 — German archaeologists have discovered one of the earliest representations of male sexuality — a highly polished, 7.5-inch-long and 1.4-inch-wide paleolithic stone phallus.

Pieced together from 14 fragments found in the Hohle Fels Cave near the village of Schelklingen in Swabian Jura of southwestern Germany, the phallus is made from fine-grained siltstone and has been heavily ground, polished and incised.

"The artifact has an elongated form that does not occur naturally. The clear evidence for grinding and polishing support the interpretation that the shape is man-made. One end of the siltstone phallus has several deeply incised rings, that were cut using a sharp stone tool," Nicholas Conard, the Tübingen University archaeologist who made the discovery, said in a statement.

Radiocarbon dating of the deposits where the fragments were recovered indicates that the stone phallus was sculpted about 28,000 years ago. The object "provides new insights into the symbolism and sexuality of the Gravettian period," Conard said.

Female representations of highly accentuated sexual attributes, such as the Venus of Willendorf unearthed in Austria in 1908, abound during this mid-Upper Palaeolithic age (28,000-22,000 years ago).

But masculine representations from the same period have been rarely discovered.

Several areas in the artifact show use from stone knapping, indicating that the uninhibited Ice Age makers used the phallus not only as a sex aid, but also as a hammerstone.

"These objects could be dildos, used perhaps for ritual defloration of virgins. The fact that they may also have had a spear-straightening or, in this case, a flint-knapping function does not contradict this," British archaeologist Timothy Taylor, author of the book "The Prehistory of Sex: Four Million Years of Human Sexual Culture," told Discovery News.

"It may have been a sexualized ritual power that was required in spears and projectile points, so that making them with the aid of an object that had already been successful at penetration in another context would have had a very appropriate symbolism," Taylor added.

The Swabian Jura is one of the key areas of cultural innovation after the arrival of modern humans in Europe some 40,000 years ago.

The German caves produced thousands of artifacts, including the oldest known representation of a bird, dating back 32,000 years ago, and one of the world's oldest known musical instruments — a 30,000-year-old flute finely carved from a woolly mammoth's ivory tusk.

The newly discovered stone phallus will be displayed at the Prehistory Museum in Blaubeuren in an exhibition called "Ice Art — Clearly Male" which will run until Jan. 6, 2006.