

## A FIGURINE OF THE GÖNNERSDORF TYPE FROM THE MAGDALENIAN OPEN-AIR SITE WALDSTETTEN-SCHLATT AND BI-GENDERED REPRESENTATIONS IN PALAEOLITHIC ART

### *Abstract*

Besides more than 2,000 lithic artefacts, a female figurine of the Gönnersdorf type, made of an imported quartzite pebble was discovered at the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic open-air site Waldstetten-Schlatt. The figurine was found in a Magdalenian find concentration. Its anthropogenic impression is emphasized by several partly circumferential engravings. This is the first time a figurine of the Gönnersdorf type was identified in the context of a Palaeolithic open-air site in Southwest Germany. The general shape of the piece as well as a conspicuously engraved constriction at its end has given reason to consider this figurine to be of two sexes.

### *Keywords*

Female figurine, Gönnersdorf type female depiction, Magdalenian, poly-gendered representations

## INTRODUCTION

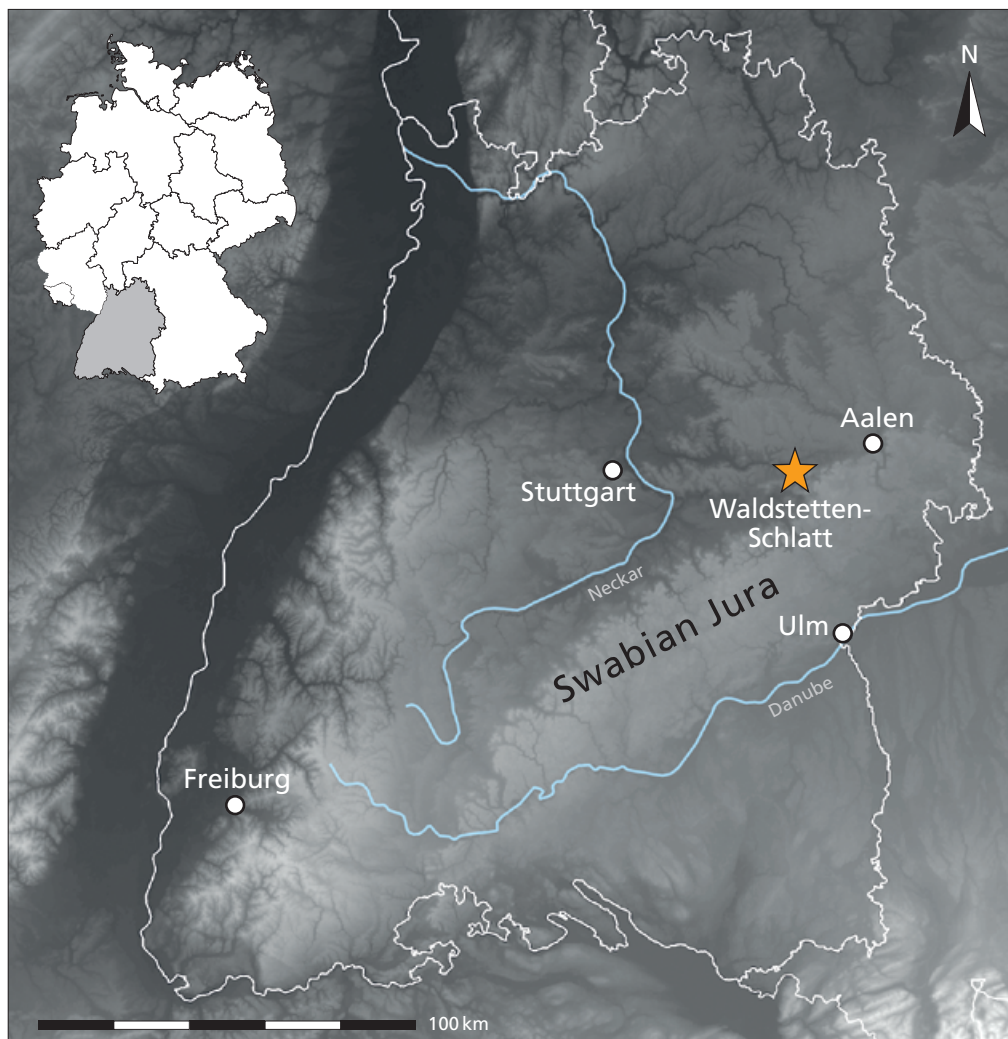
Waldstetten is located in the Ostalbkreis, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, about 2 km south of Schwäbisch Gmünd and situated between the Rems valley and the Swabian Jura (**Fig. 1**). Southeast of Waldstetten lie extensive fields. The so-called Schlattäcker (416 m a.s.l.) is topographically considered to be a plateau (**Fig. 2**), preceding the north-westerly edge of the Swabian Jura. The site forms a spur with a wide view over the Alb foothills and the Rems valley. The Waldstetter Bach to the west and the Bettringer Bach to the east are two river valleys that divide the area into several plateaus. Geologically, a loess-bearing colluvium overlays lower Jurassic sandstone formations (Black Jura  $\alpha$  2-3; Kind, 2012).

Since 1988 the site has been regularly surveyed by Adolf Regen of the *Arbeitskreis Steinzeit Schwäbisch Gmünd*. Consequently, more than 2,000 prehistoric finds have been recovered from the site's surface. For visualization of the find distribution the location of each artefact was mapped. Waldstetten is relevant to our project on Palaeolithic open-air sites in Baden-Württemberg, as it constitutes the richest Palaeolithic open-air site in the region. The Magdalenian find concentration in the southwestern part of the site (**Fig. 2**) yielded an outstanding object discovered by Adolf Regen, in the form of a figurine of the Gönnersdorf type (Regen et al., 2019), which is the subject of this contribution.

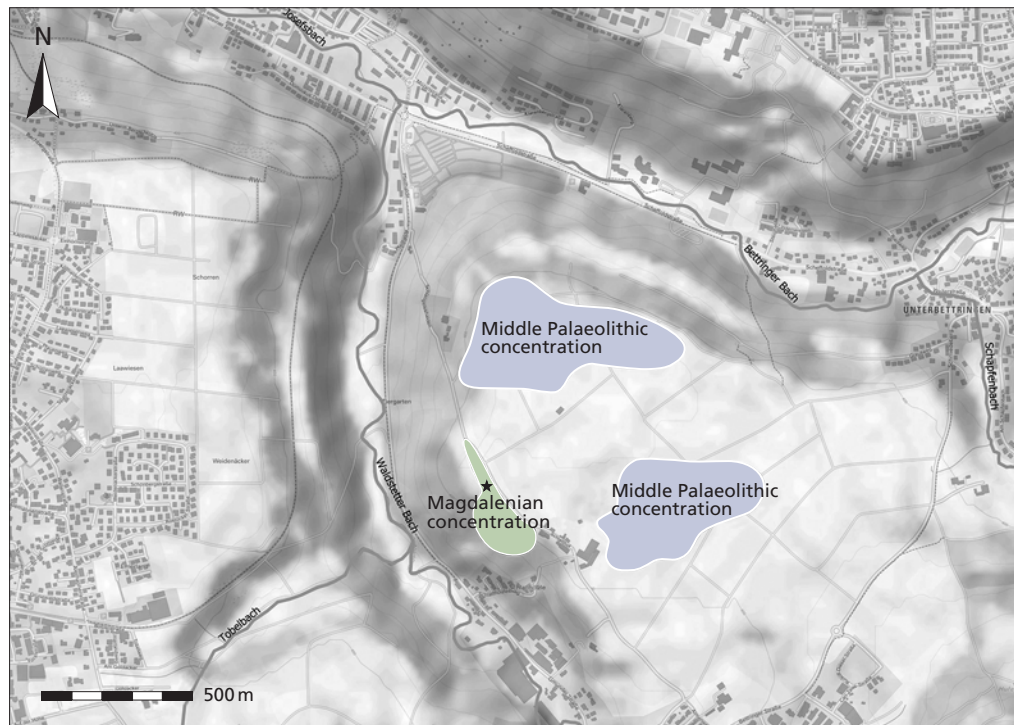
## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The surface scatter at Waldstetten comprises finds from post-glacial periods, which are spatially separated from Palaeolithic finds. These lithics differ in the raw materials used, their general technological features, and the degree of patination. As far as the Palaeolithic discoveries are concerned, the Middle Palaeolithic and Magdalenian periods are particularly relevant in terms of quantity and diversity.

The use of local raw materials characterises the Palaeolithic assemblages from Waldstetten. Keuper chert is exposed on the slopes of the Waldstetter Bach, (e.g., Burkert, 2012: 72) and most of the lithics collected by A. Regen – especially those originating from Middle Palaeolithic contexts – are made from local Keuper chert. The spectrum of raw materials in the Magdalenian context is more diversified. While local raw materials are still present, exogenous material such as tabular chert from Bavaria, probably originating from the Abensberg region is documented, as is Tertiary chert, most likely from the Randeck Maar. This chert also characterizes the raw material spectra of other Palaeolithic sites in the region, e.g., Hohle Fels (Taller, 2014), the Kleine Scheuer in the Rosenstein massif (Wettengl, 2013), in the Burkhardtshöhle (Simon, 1993), and the open-air site Sand near Heubach (Wettengl, 2016; Floss et al., 2017).



**Fig. 1** Geographic situation of Waldstetten. – (Map: S. Fröhle, S. Wettengl).



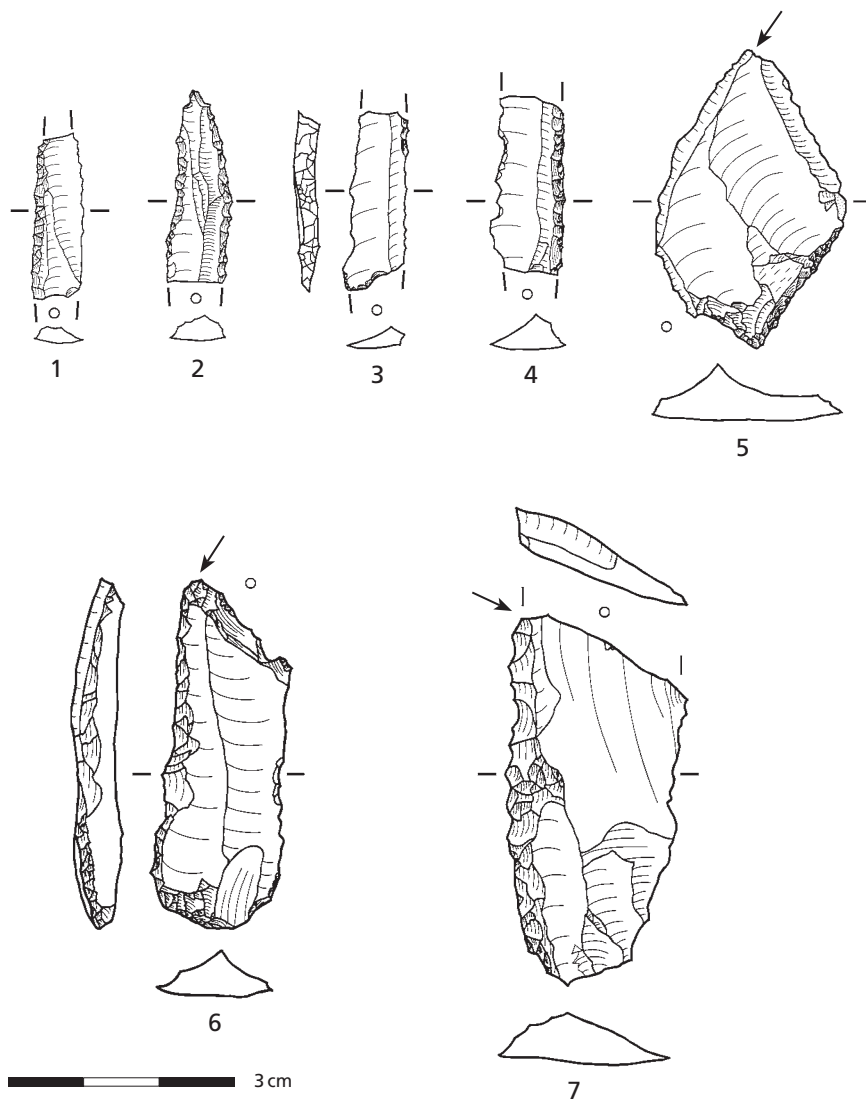
**Fig. 2** Overview of the open-air site Waldstetten-Schlattäcker. Marked in blue are the Middle Palaeolithic surface find concentrations, in green, the Magdalenian concentration with the provenance of the figurine (black star). West of the spur, in the small valley of the Waldstetter Bach, a Keuper chert outcrop is situated. – (Map: S. Fröhle, S. Wettengl).

From an archaeological point of view, the occupation of the Schlattäcker starts during the Middle Palaeolithic, to which more than 100 stone artefacts can be attributed. In the Levallois-oriented inventory there is a strong unifacial component with many side scrapers ( $n = 46$ ). With the Kombewa-concept a further reduction strategy was also observed. Additionally, there are several artefacts that can be assigned to the *Keilmesser* concept.

In chronological terms, a further important assemblage of the site can be attributed to the Magdalenian. It is characterized by borers, different types of burins, end scrapers and backed bladelets (Fig. 3). The majority of finds attributed to the Late Upper Palaeolithic originate from a concentration in the southwestern part of the site (Fig. 2). Compared to the Magdalenian site Heubach-Sand (Wettengl, 2016; Floss et al., 2017), situated 7 km to the north-east, blank production in Waldstetten-Schlatt is not often observed. Siliceous limestone (*Kieselkalk*), which dominates the raw-material spectrum within the Sand assemblage, is also present at Waldstetten, represented in form of a blade core. The most important Magdalenian site in the region is the Kleine Scheuer cave in the Rosenstein massif in Heubach (Wettengl, 2019).

## THE FIGURINE

The object presented here (Figs. 4-5) was found by A. Regen in the center of the Magdalenian find concentration (Fig. 2). It is made of a conspicuously naturally shaped quartzite pebble, which originates from lower Pleistocene river deposits, which can be found in a distance of at least 10 km to the east of Waldstetten. The



**Fig. 3** Magdalenian artefacts: **1, 4** simple backed bladelets; **2** bilaterally retouched, pointed backed bladelet; **3** ventrally retouched backed bladelet; **5** combination tool of burin on natural face and borer; **6** combination tool of burin on truncation and end scraper; **7** laterally retouched transversal burin (1-2 tabular chert; 3, 5-7 Jurassic chert, 4 tertiary chert). – (Drawings: S. Wettengl).

object measures 5.8cm in length, with a maximum width of 1.9cm (**Fig. 7**). The piece is 2.5cm thick and weighs 25.3gr. Apart from a few modern grooves, the surface of the object is intact.

One of the decisive factors for the object's definition as an example of portable art is its form, which can be recognized in female figurines of the Gönnersdorf type, named after the Magdalenian site Feldkirchen-Gönnersdorf on the northern edge of the Neuwied Basin (Bosinski, 1979). The fact that the object originates from the centre of the Magdalenian find concentration underlines the above attribution. Nevertheless, we are aware that the find comes from a surface scatter. Its anthropogenic character would certainly have remained doubtful without its archaeological context. Moreover, the object clearly displays anthropogenic modification in the form of engravings. The object is homogeneous in patina and surface texture, underlining the anthropic origin of the engravings which are significantly different from modern modifications or damages, an observation that strengthens our argument.

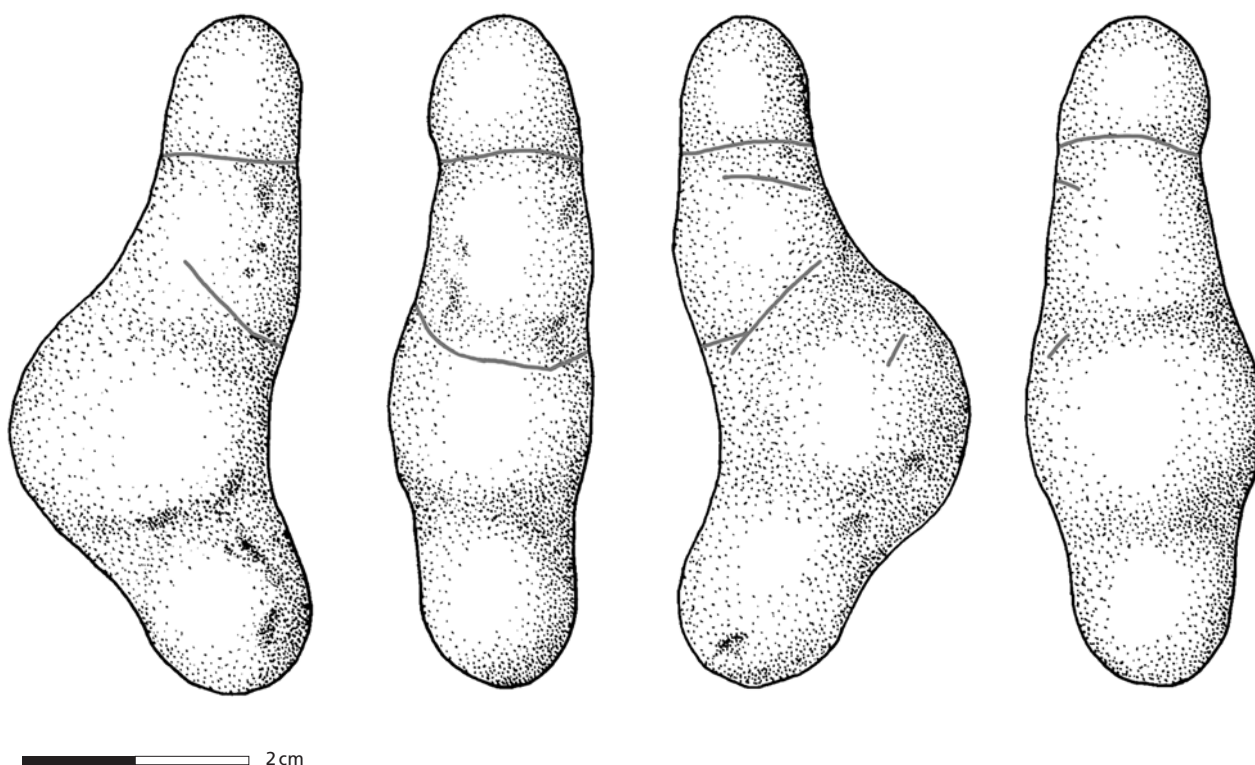




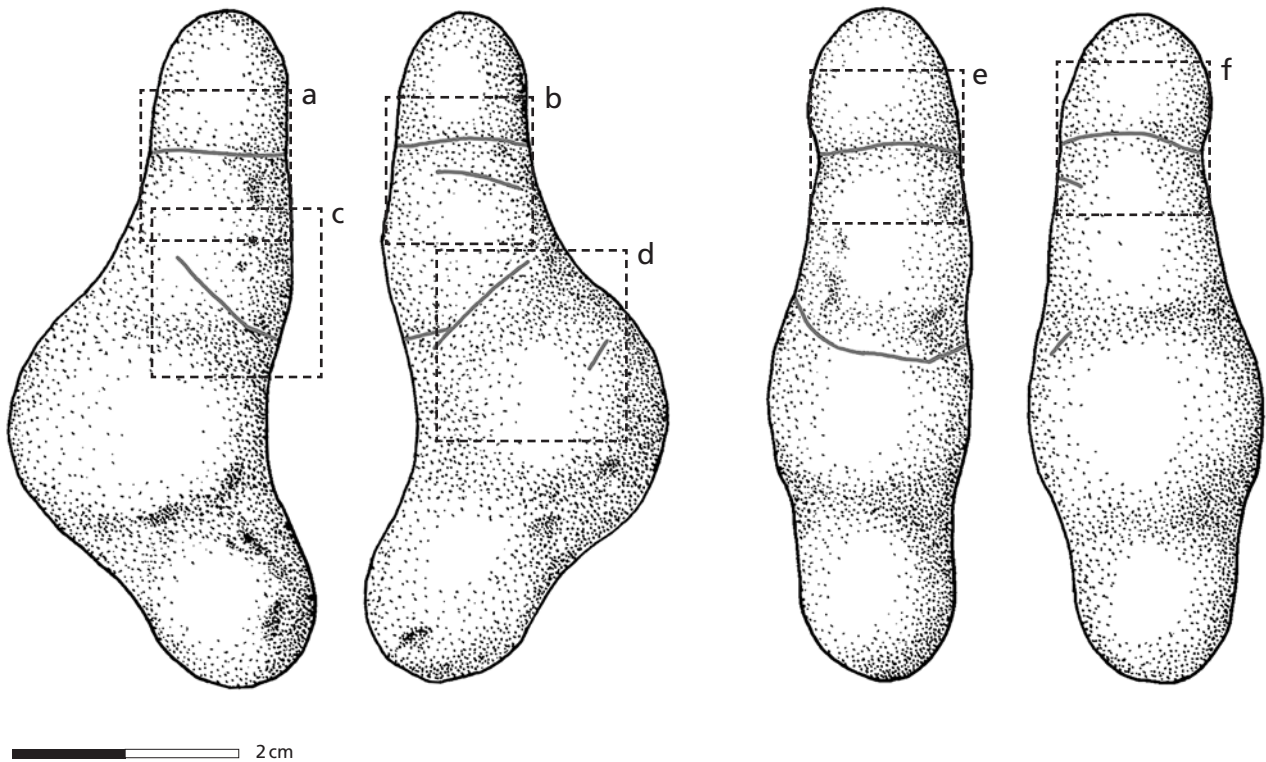
**Fig. 4** Views of the Waldstetten figurine. – (Photos: S. Fröhle).

Some of the engravings (Figs. 4-6) are completely circumferential, emphasizing the already peculiar natural form of the quartzite pebble. As described in detail by Bosinski (Bosinski et al., 2001) and Höck (1993), figurines of the Gönnersdorf type are subject to a tripartite structure of the body, representing the upper part of the body without head, the dominant middle part with buttocks and the lower part of the body, which is also shortened (Bosinski, 2011).

The medial part of the Waldstetten figurine can be read to represent chest area, abdomen-back and hips. The chest area is unmodified, though the irregular surface structure of the pebble reads in terms of breasts. There are two additional engravings on both lateral sides of the object (Figs. 5-6). The engraving on the left side extends towards the back and in a semicircle redirects towards where the abdomen would be. On the right side, only 3 mm below the circumferential incision, there is an engraved line, 6 mm in length that follows the separating neck-line. A further 6 mm below this, where the lumbar region would be assumed, a fine incision, 11 mm in length is pointing towards the abdomen. Where the pebble widens, the hip area would be located, and consequently, the lower back, belly and genitals would clearly retract, with rounded and protruding buttocks. On the left side the object shows a small incision 4 mm in length. Towards distal, the object tapers and thins out at around where the thigh area would be expected. In this reading of the object, the legs are only partially shown as would be expected considering the regular design concept of Gönnersdorf type figurines (Bosinski, 2011). Following Bosinski and Fischer (1974), defined measurements enable comparability of proportions (Fig. 7).

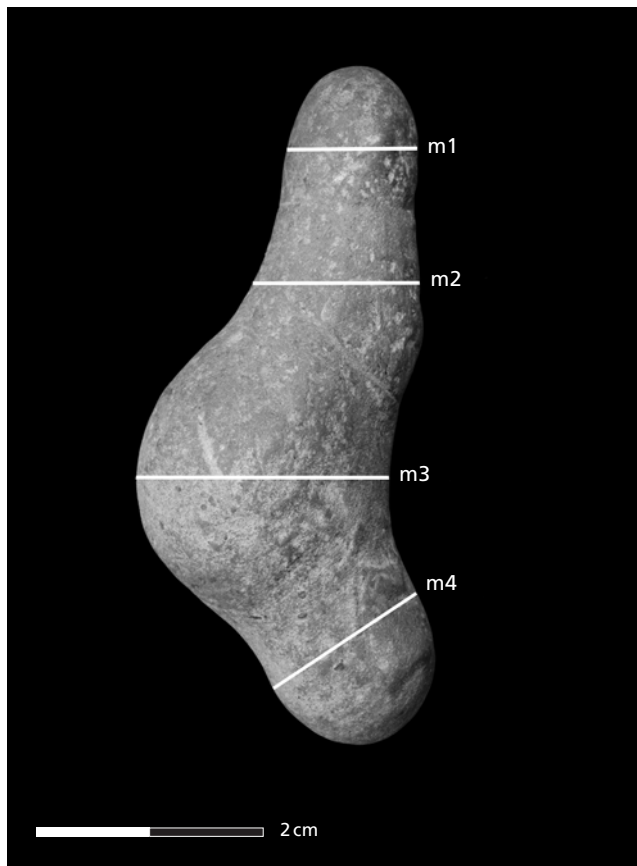


**Fig. 5** Drawing of the figurine, with the anthropogenic engravings marked in grey. – (Drawing: S. Wettengl).



**Fig. 6** Macro-Photos of the engravings. – (Photos: S. Fröhle, drawings: S. Wettengl).





**Fig. 7** Measurements of the Waldstetten figurine. Upper Body H 1.2 cm (m1: B × T = 1.3 × 1.1 cm); Torso H 3.1 cm, chest (m2: B × T = 1.4 × 1.5 cm), Buttocks, Abdomen-Waist (m3: B × T = 1.9 × 2.1 cm); Lower Body H 1.5 cm (m4: B × T = 1.3 × 1.4 cm). – (Graphic: S. Wettengl).

## COMPARISONS

Female figurines are a common feature in Palaeolithic art (Gaudzinski-Windheuser and Jöris, 2015). Gönnersdorf type figurines and depictions are geographically widespread and have been repeatedly reviewed in recent decades (Bosinski, 1982, 2011; Höck, 1993). This typical Magdalenian design type appears in parietal and mobile art, mainly in the form of engravings and sculptures, more rarely also in the form of paintings. Recently, two engravings of such figurines were identified in the assemblage of the Bavarian cave site of Obere Klause (Floss et al., 2015). There are figurines that have been manufactured, i. e., the typical shape exclusively results from human intervention as exemplified by ivory figurines from the Magdalenian sites of Gönnersdorf (Bosinski and Fischer, 1974), Andernach (Veil, 1982), Nebra (Mania et al., 1999) and Oelknitz (Gaudzinski-Windheuser, 2013), as well as the figurines made of jet from Petersfels (Peters, 1930; Mauser, 1970; Müller-Beck and Albrecht, 1987) and Monruz (Cattin, 2018). On the other hand, there are also a number of figurines of this type that are based on natural forms that functioned as pareidolia with only minor anthropogenic alterations. Such figurines, which are usually made of stone, are found e. g., in larger numbers in Oelknitz (Bosinski, 1982, 2011; Feustel, 1970; Gaudzinski-Windheuser, 2013).



## BI-GENDERED REPRESENTATIONS IN PALAEOLITHIC ART

Multi-sex representations are quite numerous in Palaeolithic art. A first group consists of anthropomorphic depictions, which can equally be interpreted as being phallic in character. In this context, the anthropomorphic figurine from Vogelherd or representations from La Combe, Abri Blanchard and Trou Magrite are often mentioned (Hahn, 2020: 17).

A second group are figurines with female and/or male sexual characteristics. This group includes, for example, the so-called hermaphrodite from the Balzi Rossi caves (Piette, 1902). The steatite sculpture is about 5 cm tall. The complex discussion about this figure revolves mainly around the question of how to address a distinct bulge in the genital area (Hahn, 2020: 19-21). Another figure belonging to this group is the so-called figurine à la ceinture from Brassempouy (Piette, 1895; White, 2006). This figurine was found in 1894 in the Grotte du Pape in a level of the Gravettian.

Another group of bi-gender representations are female depictions with a phallic upper body. One of these representations is the so-called Venus of Milandes, found in 1980 near the castle of Les Milandes (White, 2002). Perhaps the most famous figure in this category is the so-called Rote von Mauern, which was found in 1948 during excavations led by Lothar Zotz (Zotz, 1951, 1955; Mussi, 1997) in the Weinberghöhlen near Mauern. The figurine, made of limestone, has a size of 7.2 cm. Another figure belonging to this group is the so-called Venus of Tursac, which was found in 1959 in the Abri du Facteur in the Dordogne (Delporte, 1959). The 8 cm high figure was made of amber-colored calcite. Two other figures in this group, originating from Italy, are the so-called Venus of Savignano, which was found by chance in 1925 (Graziosi, 1925), and the figure of Trasimeno (Graziosi, 1939, 1960), which was discovered by chance in 1938 in a 19<sup>th</sup> century archaeological collection. While the Venus of Savignano is made of serpentine, the figure of Trasimeno is made of grey-green steatite. Finally, some figurines from the Ukrainian site of Mezin, which come very close to the representation principle of the Gönnersdorf type (Iakovleva, 2009), also belong to this group.

A final group is represented by figurines that combine female and male primary and secondary sexual characteristics. Above all, numerous representations from Dolní Věstonice must be mentioned here, some of which are described as Venus figurines, others as pendants. These figurines combine breasts and phallic projections (Svoboda, 2008). Two objects from the Grotte du Placard in the Charente can also be assigned to this type of representation (de Mortillet, 1906).

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The discovery of the figurine from Waldstetten sheds new light on the understanding of gender in Palaeolithic societies. The meaning of gender in this context is in the broadest sense of the word. Gender is defined as “the physical and/or social condition of being male or female” (Cambridge Dictionary). In this context the meaning includes the biological gender (sex) and the existence of genders beyond “male” and “female”. Through certain features the figurine can be attributed to both the modern socially constructed categories of “male” and “female”. The androgynous and ambiguous character of the figurine questions the attribution to a binary classification of gender. In this context “androgynous” is used without connotations of modern day discussions. The definition here is solely “having both male and female features” (Cambridge Dictionary). When analyzing and interpreting Palaeolithic figurines with androgynous characteristics, background knowledge from Gender Theory and Gender Archaeology is necessary to understand to what extent our understanding of gender is socially constructed. Only then can one understand why it should not

be directly transferred to other societies. Our current understanding of gender is based on “binary binds”, which are defined by the sex/gender system as well as the “two-sex/two-gender” model (Ghisleni et al., 2016). The sex/gender system describes the division of sex, referring to the biological differences between males and females, and gender, which is a complex term, generally describing the gender role or gender identity of a person. A clear distinction of those two terms is not possible as they are dependent on each other. An important concept of gender theory regarding the sex/gender system is “Doing gender”, which points out just how much gender is socially constructed and how little it is actually based on physical or biological differences (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Furthermore, the “two-sex/two-gender” model describes the assumption of only two gender identities – either male or female – which derive from biological differences. This belief is fundamental to western society, as current binary gender roles of male and female, as well as behavior and thought patterns are perceived and described as inevitable and natural. This, among other things, is based on the inaccurate belief that the binary system is a constant characteristic of all societies and deviations from it only describe individual cases (Moen, 2019). However, there are numerous ethnological and archaeological studies showing that this binary division of sex/gender cannot be observed in all societies (Hamilton, 2000).

Another particularly important topic of gender archaeology, especially for the interpretation of androgynous representations, is intersexuality. Numerous scientists note that even in basic biology an absolute dimorphism does not exist, meaning that internal and external sexual characteristics vary more often than most people are aware of (Brandt et al., 1998; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). When examining evidence for intersexuality, transsexuality or transgender individuals, the term “third gender” is often used as an analytical category. However, this term only insufficiently shows that gender is variable and fluid and cannot be divided into rigid categories (Moral, 2016). There is considerable variation in the perception and number of gender identities throughout history (Nanda, 2014), which shows that our modern and western understanding of gender cannot be transferred to other past societies. An important point is that conclusions about gender in the respective societies are additionally difficult, as androgynous figurines only show sex characteristics, without indications of gender.

Nevertheless, the fact that sex characteristics were in fact depicted shows that they were of importance for the “artists”, or were at least consciously used as an artistic expression in order to illustrate the meaning of the object.

In summary it can be said that conclusions and presumptions about the gender of androgynous figurines from the Palaeolithic must be made very carefully. The analysis of the figurine from Waldstetten and other androgynous figurines suggests that modern binary classification of gender might not be sufficient to account for the ambiguous character of the figurines.

## CONCLUSIONS

The figurine from Waldstetten-Schlatt is the first representation of the Gönnersdorf type to be identified in southwestern Germany in the context of an open-air site. Even if one might object that the find originates from an unstratified surface context, several arguments speak for its authenticity. In addition to the absolutely typical morphology of the Gönnersdorf representation principle (Bosinski et al., 2001), the position of the figurine in the middle of a Magdalenian find concentration and the anthropogenic imprinting in the form of several engravings, speak for a Magdalenian dating of the find. The circumferential engraving in the upper part suggests an at least bi-gendered character of the figurine as a female representation and

as a phallus, as repeatedly discussed for Upper Palaeolithic female figurines. A complete presentation of the Palaeolithic finds from Waldstetten-Schlatt is part of the ongoing project "Palaeolithic open-air sites in Baden-Württemberg".

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The investigations in Waldstetten are part of our archaeological project "Palaeolithic open-air sites in Baden-Württemberg".

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