THE SWISS MAGDALENIAN PORTABLE ART
AND SUPRA-REGIONAL PARALLELS

ABSTRACT

There are about fifty Magdalenian sites known in Switzerland. Most of these sites were discovered and excavated at the end of the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century. Consequently, it is not always possible today to establish clear research contexts and dating is often based on typo-chronological statements. The Swiss Magdalenian portable art can be divided into two main groups: engravings and figurative sculptures. Engravings mostly appear on reindeer antlers, bones, and rarely on stone or jet. They are more common than figurative sculptures. The majority of engravings are on everyday objects such as perforated batons and projectile points. They are mainly signs and other ornamental motifs. In addition, there are also figurative subjects such as animals and a animal-human representation. The term “figurative sculptures” refers to partially sculptured objects, such as decorated spear thrower ends and stylized female figurines. With the exception of a musk ox head no other evident animal sculptures have been found in Switzerland. Some of the Magdalenian portable art objects found in Switzerland show supra-regional parallels with finds from other parts of Europe. The aim of this article is to present the most important Swiss finds in a broader European geographical context.

Key words: Switzerland, Upper Palaeolithic, Magdalenian, portable art, supra-regional parallels.

THE MAGDALENIAN IN SWITZERLAND

Around 50 Magdalenian sites are known in Switzerland (fig. 1). These are, in particular, cave and rock shelter sites in the Jura region and open-air sites, mainly in the Central Plateau (Mittelland). Large concentrations of sites are found in the regions of Basel, Olten, and Schaffhausen. The reason for these concentrations is certainly that the area of the Central Plateau could only be settled after the retreat of the alpine glaciers during the Late Glacial Maximum. At that time large parts of Switzerland were in fact covered by ice, with the exception of the northern Jura region, north-western Switzerland, the Napf region, and parts of the Randen in the canton of Schaffhausen. Another reason for this may also be that at the beginning of Palaeolithic research in Switzerland at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century the focus was mainly on caves and rock shelters, as found in the Jura region. The majority of the rock shelter and cave sites were already discovered during this period and excavated using the methods of the time. Therefore, today it is not always possible to make clear find connections and dating is based on typo-chronological statements [Höneisen et al. 1993; Leesch et al. 2019].

THE SWISS MAGDALENIAN PORTABLE ART

The Swiss Magdalenian portable art can be divided into two main groups: engravings and figural sculptures (according to: [Höneisen 1993b]). The engravings are mainly on reindeer antlers, but also on bone and occasionally on stone or jet. They are more common than the figural sculptures. The majority of the engravings are found on everyday objects such as perforated batons, projectile points (fig. 2: 1) and other tools. Apart from figurative subjects such as animals and a possible animal-human representation, they are mainly signs and other ornamental patterns. Reindeer and horses, typical representatives of the Ice Age animal world, dominate among the engravings [Bosinski 1982; Braun 2005; Braun 2006; Braun 2009; Braun 2019; Höneisen 1993b]. The term “figural sculptures” refers to sculptured objects such as decorated spear thrower ends, so-called spindle-shaped sculptures (fig. 2: 2), and stylized female figurines [Höneisen 1993b]. Apart from a musk ox head from the Kesslerloch, no other evident animal sculptures have been found in Switzerland to date.

In the following, the sites in Switzerland that provide portable art are presented with the most important objects listed.

Kesslerloch

This most important Magdalenian site (fig. 4) with portable art in Thayngen in the canton of Schaffhausen (fig. 1: 1) was already discovered in 1873 by K. Merk. It was excavated several times between 1874 and 1903 [Heierli 1907; Merk 1875; Nüesch
Fig. 1. Distribution of the Swiss Magdalenian sites: ● — Cave or rock shelter site, ▼ — Open–air site. Drawing N. Spichtig, © Swiss Federal Office of Topography

1 — Kesslerloch SH; 2 — Schweizersbild SH; 3 — Freudenthal SH; 4 — Gsang SH; 5 — Neue Höhle SH; 6 — Vorder Eichen SH; 7 — Untere Bsetzi SH; 8 — Kerzenstübli SH; 9 — Uf Wigg AG; 10 — Eremitage AG; 11 — Bruderholz BS; 12 — Rütihard BL; 13 — Birseck–Ermitage BL; 14 — Hollenbergöhle 3 BL; 15 — Büttenloch BL; 16 — Brügglohöhle BL; 17 — Kohlerhöhle BL; 18 — Lausen BL; 19 — Heidenküche SO; 20 — Kastelhöhle Nord SO; 21 — Kleine Ganghöhle SO; 22 — Höhle Thierstein SO; 23 — Liesberg BL; 24 — Chesselgraben SO; 25 — Rislisberghöhle SO; 26 — Köpfli SO; 27 — Käslöch SO; 28 — Hard I and II SO; 29 — Mühleloch SO; 30 — Sälihöhle Oben SO; 31 — Trimbach SO; 32 — Hintere Burg SO; 33 — Moosbühl BE; 34 — Champrêveyres NE; 35 — Monruz NE; 36 — Noir Bois JU; 37 — Reiden–Stumpen LU; 38 — Fischerhäusern Station 1 LU; 39 — Kottwil LU (several sites); 40 — Wauwil LU (several sites); 41 — Egozwil LU; 42 — Moos LU; 43 — Baldegg 4 LU; 44 — Hitzkirch–Seematt 4 LU; 45 — Ebikon LU; 46 — Cham–Grindel ZG; 47 — Steinhausen ZG (several sites); 48 — Einsiedeln–Langrüti SZ; 49 — Niederhasli–Mettmenhaslersee ZH; 50 — Solgen–In der Grauen ZH; 51 — Grotte du Scé VD. (Abbreviations of the names of the cantons: AG — Aargau, BE — Bern, BL — Baselland, BS — Basel–Stadt, JU — Jura, LU — Luzern, NE — Neuchâtel, SH — Schaffhausen, SO — Solothurn, SZ — Schwyz, ZG — Zug, ZH — Zürich, VD — Vaud.)

Рис. 1. Расположение мадленских памятников на территории Швейцарии: ● — пещерные стоянки, ▼ — стоянки открытого типа
1904]. However, the extremely rough excavation method limits the validity of the results. In addition to the numerous implements made of stone, bone, and antlers, the Kesslerloch provided a large number of high-quality portable art, which made the site one of the most important sites with the Magdalenian portable art in Central Europe. It is remarkable that certain objects show good parallels with the portable art of South West France. Due to the finds, especially certain portable art objects and bone and antler implements (e.g. projectile points, half round rods, and harpoons), the Kesslerloch can be dated typo-chronologically into the Middle and Upper Magdalenian. The best-known work of portable art from the Kesslerloch is the engraving of a reindeer on a perforated baton, which was described in the history of research as a “grazing reindeer” (fig. 2: 3). Behavioural research studies, however, tend to view this very detailed depiction as a male animal following the tracks of a female or as a rutting reindeer.
stag in attack position because of the erected tail, the drawn-in belly, and the swollen nostrils [Bandi 1968]. Apart from this reindeer representation, 33 perforated batons are known from the Kesslerloch [Höneisen 1985]. These are simple perforated batons or those with two or more holes. Some of them are decorated with animal engravings (fig. 2: 4) or with non-figurative patterns (fig. 2: 6). One of them bears an engraving, which (according to: [Höneisen 1985]), could represent an animal-human figure (fig. 2: 5). It has the appearance of a human silhouette with antlers on its head and can be compared to the representation of the so-called “Horned God” from the Trois-Frères cave in the French Pyrenees.
E. Müller, on the other hand, sees in this representation rather a head with a horn and a dorsal line of an ibex [Müller 1989]. However, it can be noted that he does not take into account in his interpretation the engravings of the antlers and the possible human body.

There are also eight sculptured spear thrower ends from the Kesslerloch (fig. 2: 7). One of them has an almost fully plastic horse head. Six other specimens were also decorated with horse heads, but they are more stylized. As already described by W. Guyan [Guyan 1944], D.A.E. Garrod [Garrod 1955], G. Bosinski [Bosinski 1982], and H.-G. Bandi and H. Delporte [Bandi, Delporte 1984], these sculptured spear throwers with rudimentary horse heads have their comparisons in the sites in South West France and along the French Pyrenees (fig. 7 and fig. 3: 1). There they are typical for the Middle Magdalenian. Apart from the Kesslerloch, this type of spear thrower is only known in Central Europe from Teufelsbrücke (fig. 3: 2) in Thuringia in Central Germany [Bosinski 1982; Braun 2012; 2018; Cattelain 2005; Feustel 1980; Stodiek 1993]. However, the object from Teufelsbrücke dates from the Upper Magdalenian [Cattelain 2005; Stodiek 1993].

The already mentioned musk ox head made of reindeer antlers (fig. 3: 3) is one of the few unambiguous representations of this animal species in the Upper Palaeolithic portable art [Braun 2016]. The eyes are engraved on both sides of the head. The ears and the horns that are typically bent forward, are carved out. This raises the question whether it is a part of a spear thrower or a fragment of an originally complete animal sculpture [Bosinski 1982; Höneisen 1993b].

Decorated half round rods from the Kesslerloch, including those with small nodular projections (fig. 3: 4), also have good parallels in the Middle Magdalenian from the French Pyrenees and South West France (fig. 8 and fig. 3: 8) [Bosinski 1982; Braun 2005; 2006; 2009; 2019]. In addition, six more disks made of bone and jet were found in the Kesslerloch. Good parallels to these disks from the Kesslerloch are known from the nearby German site of Petersfels in Baden-Württemberg [Mauser 1970; Peters 1930].

A special find from C. Merk’s excavations in the Kesslerloch is a jet plaquette with a very detailed horse head engraved on each side (fig. 5: 4). Unfortunately, it is in a very poor state of preservation today and shows strong cracks on one side.

Another jet plaquette with a complete horse engraving was found there too [Heierli 1907]. Likewise, a jet plaquette with a complete horse engraving is also known from the Petersfels (fig. 5: 1) [Bosinski 1982; Mauser 1970; Peters 1930]. Furthermore, there is also a small sculpture made of jet, with short rows of punctures and a hole in the area of the lower thick end. G. Bosinski [Bosinski 1982] interprets it as a possible representation of an insect and compares it with the figurine of a larva of the reindeer botfly from the German site Kleine Scheuer [Dingfelder 1961]. Among the jet finds from the Petersfels there is also a small pierced carving, which is interpreted as a beetle [Bosinski 1982; Mauser 1970].
The meaning of the four so-called “spindle-shaped sculptures” made of reindeer antlers (fig. 2: 2) is unclear. M. Höneisen assumes that they could represent fish sculptures [Höneisen 1993b]. Three of them show engravings.

In addition to these spectacular finds numerous other engraved bone and antler fragments — some with figurative themes — were found in the Kesslerloch. Some specimens with engravings of different geometric signs are among the more than 200...
projectile points (fig. 2: 1). The long fragment of a double-rowed harpoon bears a ribbon-like engraved decoration on both sides resembling a cord wrap (fig. 3: 5). An almost identical motif, also on both sides, is on a fragment of a perforated baton with two holes (fig. 3: 6).

Freudenthalhöhle

The Freudenthalhöhle is not far from the Kesslerloch and also in the canton of Schaffhausen (fig. 1: 3). It was discovered by H. Karsten and E. Joos in 1874 and excavated in the same year [Karsten 1874]. The inventory of the finds is very small and consists of a few stone artefacts and some bone and antler tools, including projectile points. Two undecorated half round rods were assembled by G. Bosinski [Bosinski 1978]. Some objects have very good parallels to some finds of the Kesslerloch [Bosinski 1982; Braun 2005; 2006; 2009; 2019; Höneisen, Peyer 1994; Nüesch 1902]. These are a half round rod with small nodular projections (fig. 3: 7), a spindle-shaped sculpture, and a perforated fragment of a disk made of jet. In 1973, H. Worm found a fragmented pendant made of jet and an ivory pendant with a geometric decoration in the excavation spoil [Worm 1980]. The ivory pendant of Freudenthalhöhle has parallels with pendants of a similar shape made of ivory or jet, but without decoration, from the Kesslerloch and with one specimen from Le Mas d’Azil. They are interpreted by Hannelore Bosinski as imitations of fossil sea-urchin spines. This thesis is supported by the fact that in both areas (canton of Schaffhausen and the region of Le Mas d’Azil) fossil sea-urchin spines can be found in the limestone layers [Bosinski 1980].

Abri Schweizersbild

The Abri (rock shelter) Schweizersbild (fig. 1: 2 and fig. 9), also in the canton of Schaffhausen, was discovered in 1891 and excavated by J. Nüesch between 1891 and 1893 [Nüesch 1902]. More recent investigations of the Schweizersbild were carried out by M. Höneisen and S. Peyer [Höneisen, Peyer 1994]. The presence of notched backed points among the stone artefacts indicates that the settlement took place during the Late Magdalenian period. In contrast to the Kesslerloch the portable art from the Schweizersbild is not as numerous and more schematic [Bosinski 1982; Braun 2005; 2006; 2009; 2019; Höneisen, Peyer 1994; Nüesch 1902]. Two successive horses were engraved in the middle of the shaft on an almost complete perforated baton (fig. 5: 6). The end of the shaft has V-shaped symbols and around the hole there are deeply engraved lines. Another perforated baton, which is only very fragmentarily preserved, is also decorated with a horse, but only the lower part of its body is preserved.

On a fragment of reindeer antlers, which is most likely a part of a perforated baton, a pointed oval with an internal hatching is engraved (fig. 5: 5) [Bosinski 1982; Höneisen, Peyer 1994]. This motif has great similarities with the possible depictions of fish on a reindeer antler beam from the Petersfels (fig. 5: 7) [Braun 2005; 2006; 2009; 2019; Mauser 1970]. A good parallel is an engraving on a fragment of reindeer antlers from Le Placard in the department of Charente (fig. 5: 9) [Chauvet 1910]. H. Breuil and R. Saint-Périer mentioned the object from the Abri Schweizersbild in their publication among the representations of fish in Ice Age art and compared it with depictions from South West France. It can also be compared to figures of fish from the Abri de La Madeleine in the department of Dordogne in South West France (fig. 5: 8) [Breuil, Saint-Périer 1927].

A limestone plaquette engraved on both sides is of great importance for the Swiss Magdalenian portable art as it is the only engraved stone plaquette (fig. 5: 11). One side shows five superimposed depictions of animals, three of which can be recognized as horses because of their manes, and indefinable lines (fig. 5: 11, 1). The other side is also engraved with animals that are interpreted as female deer (fig. 5: 11, 2). Another fine engraving could possibly be a female representation of the Gönnersdorf-Lalinde type [Braun 2005; 2006; 2009; 2019; Bosinski 1982].

In 1954 W. Mamber found a piece of jet in the old excavation spoil (fig. 6: 1, 5). It is referred to as a female figurine, which is even more stylized than the
specimens from the Petersfels that were also made of jet (fig. 6: 1, 1). The breasts and the legs were indicated with two incised notches [Höneisen 1993b; Höneisen, Peyer 1994; Mauser 1970; Peters 1930; Schmid 1975].

As in the Kesslerloch a number of other engraved bone and antler fragments without figurative character were discovered in the Abri Schweizersbild [Höneisen, Peyer 1994].

Rislisberghöhle

After pupils had found the first stone tools in the Rislisberghöhle in Oensingen (fig. 1: 25) in the canton of Solothurn, situated at the southern part of the Jura mountains, the site was excavated by the Archaeological Service of the Canton of Solothurn in 1971 and 1973. Numerous stone artefacts and also tools made of organic material and three fireplaces
were found [Barr 1977]. The finds date to the Late Magdalenian [Barr 1977; Leesch, Müller 2012].

Though only a few portable art objects were found, one object among them is of great importance. A flat bone, on which a head and a part of the prosoma of an ibex are engraved, was discovered next to a fireplace (fig. 5: 10) [Barr 1977]. It is so far the only evident Magdalenian engraving of an ibex in Switzerland.

Fragments of five flat bone plates were also found, each of which shows engraved decorations and approximately parallel lines running along one side. Two of them could be joined together, one of which has a perforation at one end. They probably served as pendants [Leesch, Müller 2012].

A forearm bone of a raven shows several engraved short lines on the upper and the lower sides of the forearm at the points where the feathers grow [Leesch, Müller 2012].

Monruz

This very important open-air site with a well-preserved Late Magdalenian settlement remains nationally and internationally well-known (fig. 1: 35). It was discovered during the construction of the A5 motorway in the canton of Neuchâtel in 1989. The site is located near the town of Neuchâtel, not far from the shores of Lake Neuchâtel, and was excavated between 1989 and 1992 by the Archaeological Service of the Canton Neuchâtel [Affolter et al. 1994; Bullinger 2006].

Three stylized female figurines made of jet were found there (fig. 6: 1, 2–4). Two of them are complete. A perforated hole in the upper part indicates that they are pendants. Concerning form and material, there are almost identical parallels known from figurines of the Petersfels (fig. 6: 1, 1, fig. 6: 3). Apart from these female figurines, other non-figurative pendants from Monruz made of jet also have great similarities to those of the Petersfels [Affolter et al. 1994; Bullinger 2006; Egloff 1999].

It can therefore be very well assumed that the same groups of people settled in Monruz and Petersfels. The design of the stylized female figurines fits in well with the female representations of the Late Magdalenian in Europe [Braun 2005; 2006; 2009; 2019; Höck 1993; Höneisen 1993b]. A similar figurine made of ivory was found in the Pekárna cave in Moravia in Czech Republic (fig. 6: 2) [Valoch 2001: fig. 28].

Moosbühl

This open-air site in Moosseedorf in the Bernese Central Plateau was discovered in 1860 (fig. 1: 33). As Monruz and Hauterive-Champréveyres in the canton of Neuchâtel it is one of the most important Magdalenian open-air sites in Switzerland.

Only one portable art object is known from Moosbühl. It is a sculpture made of jet, which is interpreted as a stylised female figurine (fig. 6: 1:7). In comparison to those from Monruz, the Abri Schweizersbild and the Petersfels, however, it is represented in an even more abstract way. The upper and lower part of the body are separated from each other by a notch [Höneisen 1993b; Schwab 1985]. H. Schwab also considers an interpretation of the representation as a beetle in correspondence to the jet figurines from Kleine Scheuer and the Petersfels [Schwab 1985]. In this context it can also be referred to the figurine from the Grotte du Trilobite in Arcy-sur-Cure in the department of Yonne, which is interpreted as a beetle, carved in jet and also dates to the Magdalenian [Baffier, Girard 1998]. There are certain similarities between the two objects [Braun 2019].

Pearls made of jet from the Moosbühl site have their parallels to pearls from the Monruz and the Petersfels.

Hollenberghöhle 3

The Hollenberghöhle 3 is located in Arlesheim (fig. 1: 14) in the canton of Baselland and was discovered in 1950 by M. Herkert and A. Schwabe. Excavations were carried out by the discoverers, then by R. Bay in 1952, and finally by J. Sedlmeier in 1977. Stone tools, projectile points, shells, a large number of unworked fragments of reindeer antlers, pigments as hematite and other iron oxides were
Fig. 7. Distribution of sites with spear-thrower ends decorated with horse heads.
1 — Isturitz; 2 — Arudy; 4 — Gourdan; 7 — Le Mas d’Azil; 12 — Bruniquel, Abri du Château; 13 — Bruniquel, Grotte du Courbet;
15 — Laugerie-Basse; 16 — Abri de La Madeleine; 18 — Kesslerloch; 19 — Teufelsbrüke [Bosinski 1982]

Рис. 7. Расположение памятников, где встречены декорированные лошадиной головой рабочие концы копьеметалок
Fig. 8. Distribution of sites with half round rod with small nodular projections.
1 — Santimamiñe; 2 — Isturitz; 3 — Brassempouy; 4 — Arudy, Grotte des Espélingues; 5 — Lourdes, Grotte des Espélingues;
6 — Grotte d’Auresan; 7 — Gourdan; 8 — Bedeilhac; 9 — Le Mas d’Azil; 10 — Gazel; 11 — Laugerie-Basse;
12 — Abri de La Madeleine; 13 — Freudenthalhöhle; 14 — Kesslerloch [Bosinski 1982].

Рис. 8. Расположение памятников, где встречены стержни с полуокруглым сечением, с небольшими узелковыми выступами.
found. The finds date to the Late Magdalenian [Bay 1953; Sedlmeier 1982].

In the context of this article, four perforated undecorated disks are worth mentioning: a complete one made of jet, one made of stone, and two made of bone, which are only preserved as fragments. Those made of jet and bone have their parallels in the Kesslerloch, the Freudenthalhöhle, and the Petersfels. Disks made of stone are known from the important Late Magdalenian site of Gönnersdorf in Rhineland-Palatinate in Germany [Bosinski 1976/77].

An object made of jet from the Hollenberghöhle 3 raises questions. According to R. Bay it is a fragment of a stylized female figurine similar to those from the Petersfels [Bay 1953]. J. Sedlmeier, however, rejects this interpretation [Sedlmeier 1982]. I.M. Braun, however, considers it to be a semi-finished product of a female figurine, which already broke during the fabrication (fig. 6: 4) [Braun 2005; 2006; 2009; 2019]. A baton made of jet was also found in the Hollenberghöhle 3 [Bay 1953; Sedlmeier 1982]. It has, however, no parallels and its exact function is unclear.

**Kohlerhöhle**

In the area of the Birs valley between Basel and Delémont there are numerous Palaeolithic cave and rock shelter sites. Most of them were discovered and excavated as early as the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century [Braun 2015; Sarasin 1918; Sedlmeier 1990].

The Kohlerhöhle is located in the Kaltbrunnen Valley in the community of Birs in the canton of Baselland (fig. 1: 17). In the same valley, there are the Palaeolithic sites Heidenküche (fig. 1: 19) and Kastelhöhle (fig. 1: 20), both in the community of Himmelried in the canton Solothurn.

The Kohlerhöhle was discovered as a Paleolithic site by H. Kohler in 1934 and was excavated from 1934 to 1938 under his direction together with C. Lüdin and E. Kräuliger. Of particular importance is the upper layer, which belongs to the Late Magdalenian [Sedlmeier 1993].

The finds include a perforated piece of bone, a complete perforated hyoid bone (stylohyoid) from an aurochs, and another one, perforated too, from a horse. The latter is fractured in the area of the hyoid bone branch (fig. 6: 5). According to J. Sedlmeier, the meaning of these objects is unclear [Sedlmeier 1993]. Especially the perforated hyoid bone of a horse reminds of a possible semi-finished product of a contour découpé [Braun 2019], as they are well known from sites of the Middle Magdalenian along the French Pyrenees and often represent horse heads [Buisson et al. 1996]. This is well documented by R. Saint-Périer’s [Saint-Périer 1930] illustration of the production process of such a horse head made of the hyoid bone of a horse based on finds from the Istaritz cave in the department of Pyrénées-Atlantiques (fig. 6: 6).

**SUMMARY**

Only in seven of the about fifty Magdalenian sites known in Switzerland pieces of portable art were found. The most well-known Swiss site where portable art was found is the Kesslerloch.

The Swiss Magdalenian portable art can be divided into two groups: engravings and figurative sculp-
tures. Some of them are decorated either with signs or animal figures. The engravings are mostly on reindeer antlers, but also on bones, stone, and jet. The majority of the engravings are on objects of utility as perforated batons, spear points, and other tools. In addition to figurative themes such as animals and a possible animal-human representation, there are mainly signs and other ornamental patterns. The term “figurative sculptures” is used to describe objects of utility, some of which are sculptured, such as spear thrower ends decorated with horse heads, so-called “spindle-shaped sculptures” and very stylized female statuettes. Apart from the musk ox head from the Kesslerloch, no other animal sculptures have yet been found in Switzerland. The figurative sculptures are less frequent than the engravings. Numerous works of portable art in Switzerland are similar to works of portable art of South West France and of the French Pyrenees, as for example the sculptured spear-throwers. However, there are also characteristic features which are typical of Swiss and South German portable art, as for instance the use of jet.

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