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THE FEMALE FIGURINES IN FLAKED FLINT FROM THE MAGDALENIAN SITE OF WILCZYCE 10 (SANDOMIERZ DISTRICT, POLAND)

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Magdalenian artifacts representing human figures (parietal engravings and statuettes) are rare in Poland. While figurines (in hematite) have already been discovered at Dzierżysław 35, the site of Wilczyce has thus far yielded the greatest number of them. These are doubly interesting since most of them are made from flint (50 versus 4 in bone) and were “sculpted” by retouching the flint pieces.

Located on the Sandomierz Plateau (southern Poland), Wilczyce was discovered in 1994 during a survey conducted by the Polish Academy of Sciences. The site is situated on a slope overlooking the valley of the Opatówka River. The excavation started in 1998 (director J. Fiedorczuk) showed that Magdalenian artifacts were present only in the fill of ice wedges. The results of ¹⁴C analyses situate the Wilczyce occupations in the upper horizon of the Magdalenian, during the period of transition between the earliest Dryas and the Bölling.

Flint figurines

Thus far, 50 flint objects have been identified as figurines. Thirty-one complete or fragmentary ones can be considered as finished objects (outline and profile achieved), 19 are either in the process of manufacturing (first roughouts were identified) or are discards following flaking or shaping accidents (figure). The *in situ* presence of pieces representing different manufacturing stages indicates that these objects were made at the site.

Most of the figurines were made from flakes (39), and less often from blades. The presence or absence of cortex does not seem to have played a role in the selection of particular supports, nor does the orientation of the support during the debitage phase – on the pieces, the bulb of percussion is located on the distal (feet), proximal (head) or lateral (near the buttocks) part of the figurine.

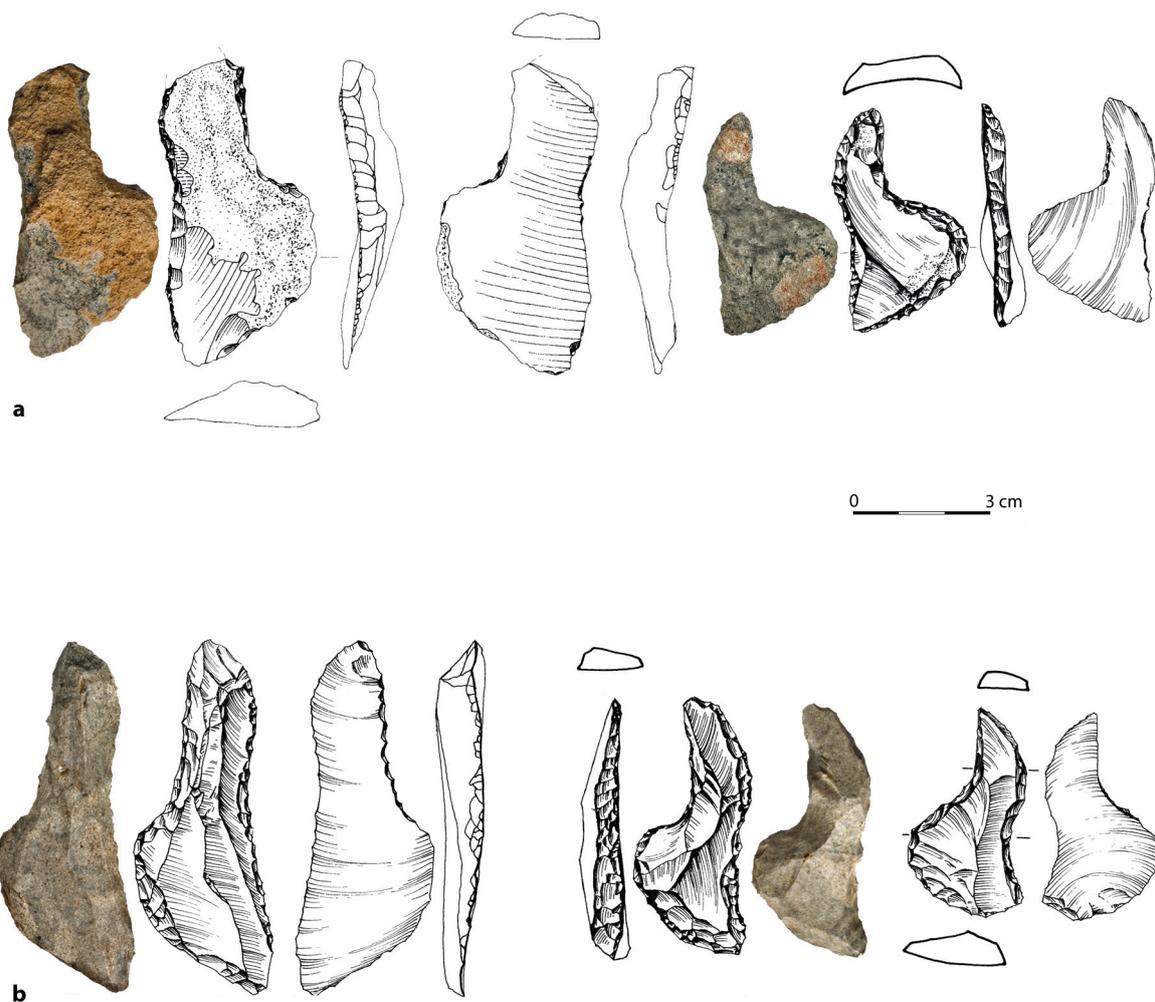
The use of retouch to “sculpt” these figurines is the most striking technical feature of this assemblage. On these pieces, we observe abrupt, semi-abrupt, and even flat retouch (on the upper face). The shaping by retouch can be total and invasive or partial. In the latter case, the retouch is used to correct faults in the initial morphology of the selected support. In all cases, we observe that the part most carefully worked is the buttocks. The base of the body is rounded or tapered, the thighs never being represented.

In general, the manufacturing process of the statuettes varies very little: the breasts are barely outlined by a nick on the upper part of the stone, the hypertrophied buttocks are accentuated in the lower part.

In terms of metrics, the flint figurines from Wilczyce are distributed in three groups: most are between 40 and 65 mm long and 23 and 44 mm wide. The second, less numerous, group is composed of finer specimens, from 70 to 83 mm long and 26 to 36 mm wide. The third, smaller, group corresponds to plaques 27 to 39 mm long and 15 to 20 mm wide.

From a morphological perspective, we distinguished the figurines based on the right or left lateralization of the buttocks. The first group (buttocks on the right) includes 27 specimens (figure a) and the second has 23 (figure b).

The figurines originate from three concentration zones in the site (north part, central part and southern part). There are nonetheless no significant stylistic differences between the three zones; all yielded figurines with buttocks to the right and left. The most numerous group was found in the central part of the site, which seems to correspond to the apogee of the Magdalenian occupation of the site if we take into account, among other things, the presence of numerous lithic and osseous artifacts.



Wilczyce 10, Morphological classification:

a. group of figurines with a right profile [buttocks to the right];

b. group of figurines with a left profile [buttocks to the left] (photos: M. Gmur; drawings: E. Gumińska).

The bone and ivory figurines

While the flint figurines are the most numerous, four specimens in osseous materials were also discovered at Wilczyce: two have the buttocks to the right, one to the left, and the other has an atypical shape that seems to represent a pregnant woman. Discovered in the central part of the site, this ivory figurine, which is the largest found at the site in this material, is probably linked to the presence in this area of a child burial. This object is even more exceptional since figures of this type are extremely rare, not only in Magdalenian art, but in Paleolithic art in general. One figurine found at the site of Kostenki XIII also appears to represent a pregnant woman.

Conclusion

The Wilczyce site is exceptional. It is the only Magdalenian site currently known where figurines of this type were made from flint. The stylistic features of the pieces from Wilczyce are similar to those of the stone figurines discovered at Gönnersdorf and Bad Kreuznach, while the bone and ivory pieces resemble the lithic and osseous figurines from Oelknitz. The presence of portable art objects at the Magdalenian site of Wilczyce supports the hypothesis that artifacts of this type exist only at long-term occupations.





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