

RHINOS AND HORSES: ON PLATE 167 FROM GÖNNERSDORF (LKR. NEUWIED)

The slate plates from Gönnersdorf (Lkr. Neuwied/D) with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations, published so admirably by Gerhard Bosinski and his collaborators, are an enduring source for the study of Magdalenian engraving (Bosinski/Fischer 1974; 1980; Bosinski/d'Errico/Schiller 2001; Bosinski 2008). The process of engraving the depictions with multiple episodes of executing the figurative and geometric patterns, ultimately resulted in a perplexing tangle of engraved lines, earning them the name of palimpsests. Unraveling this welter of patterns researchers arrived at many different interpretations of the content of these representations, detecting new engravings which previously had escaped notice. In the present article I propose to re-examine yet again the representation on plate 167 from Gönnersdorf, recognized originally as a depiction of two horses and a rhinoceros, and additionally some geometric engravings of different generations.

PLATE 167

Plate 167 was refitted from several fragments recovered from Concentration I. Originally, the representation was interpreted as a depiction of at least three animals (Bosinski 2008, 39 pl. 45). Two of the partly preserved figures G. Bosinski identified tentatively as images of horses(?). The animals were depicted in a scene where one is walking behind the other (fig. 1). Between them, in a position reversed by 180°, is an image of a rhinoceros (fig. 2). The artist drew its smaller posterior horn, the area of the forehead covered with hair, the nasal ridges and the line of its back. According to G. Bosinski, this line continues as far as the hind limbs of the »horse« found on the left side of the plate.

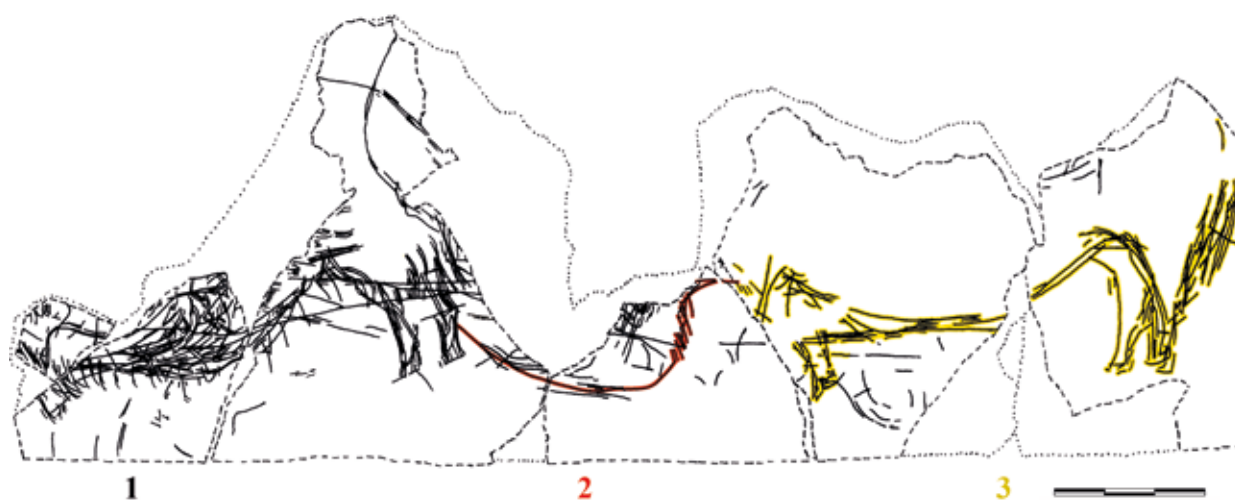


Fig. 1 Gönnersdorf (Lkr. Neuwied/D), plate 167. – (After Bosinski 2008, pl. 45).

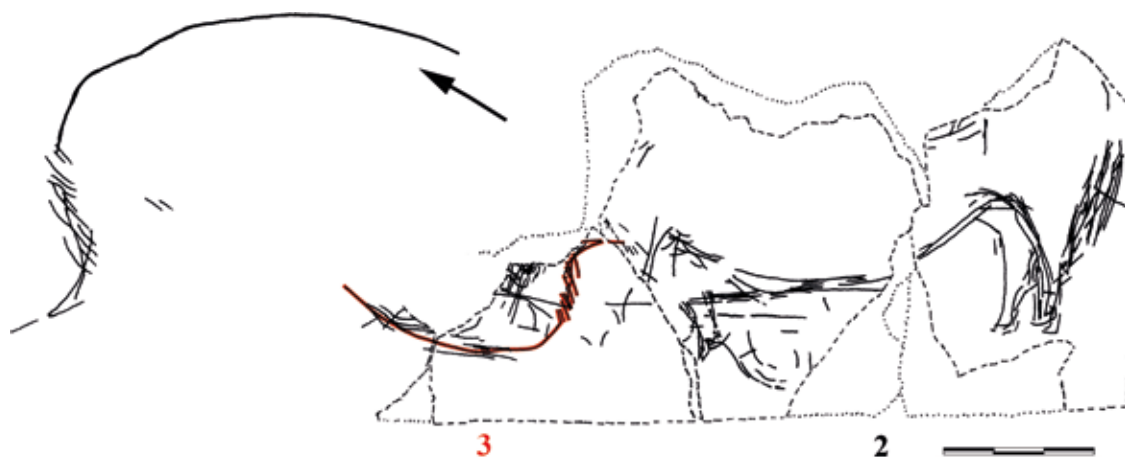


Fig. 2 Gönnersdorf (Lkr. Neuwied/D), plate 167. A fragment of the plate with a depiction interpreted by G. Bosinski as a rhinoceros. – (After Bosinski 2008, pl. 45).

Unfortunately, the piece of slate is fragmented and the images of the two alleged horses are now incomplete. However, even with the fragments that have survived there is serious doubt as to whether the species determination is correct. It is challenged by the shortness of the hind limbs as compared to the rest of the body. This is apparent especially in the animal figure 1, for which a fragment of the line of its back has survived. Also unusual for horses would be the massive body, with a greatly protruding belly. Apparently, these features must have raised doubts in G. Bosinski himself leading him to publish his species determination of these animals as horses with a question mark. In view of these reservations I decided to re-examine the depictions on plate 167. In my analysis I was assisted by the measurements of published images of rhinoceros and horses from the Palaeolithic art.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The doubts presented earlier are dispelled by a closer analysis of the representation identified by G. Bosinski as a rhinoceros, if we look at it as merely an element which is integrally linked with the image 167,2. Clearly recognizable here is the head of the rhinoceros, in an attitude characteristic for this animal (**fig. 3**). The head is dipped downward, the large horn points forward, drawn with a single line at the bottom, engraved more deeply than other, more subtly executed shorter strokes. We can also make out a fragment of the line at the top outlining the horn. Other recognizable details are the hairy coat on the lower part of the neck (by G. Bosinski interpreted as hair on the top of the neck), and possibly, a thin line which marks the snout. Unfortunately, the upper portion of the head and of the neck did not survive. If we agree to such an interpretation of the figure marked by G. Bosinski as no. 167,2, its length measured from the hindquarters to the nose would be around 11.7 cm (L_t). Unfortunately, the seriously damaged condition of the depiction does not permit calculating the ratio of the length to the height; in modern white, black, and Indian rhinoceros this ratio as a rule would be 0.4-0.47 (calculations according to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhinoceros> [25.2.2018]), in the specimen from Starunia (Ivano-Frankivsk obl./UA) it was 0.44 (Stach 1930). In this



Fig. 3 Gönnersdorf (Lkr. Neuwied/D), plate 167. Reinterpretation of figures 167,2-3. – (Illustration N. Lenkow).

site	L_p	L_t	L_p/L_t	reference
Font-de-Gaume (départ. Dordogne/F)	0.85	3.9	0.22	Serangeli 2006, 63 fig. 23, 8
Les Trois Frères (départ. Ariège/F)	0.7	3.5	0.2	Serangeli 2006, 63 fig. 23, 9
Rouffignac no. 96 (départ. Dordogne/F)	0.65	4.5	0.14	Barrière 1980, 273 fig. 7
Rouffignac no. 183 (départ. Dordogne/F)	1.1	8.7	0.13	http://donsmaps.com/images19/rouffrhinos.jpg (1.3.2018)
Rouffignac no. 184 (départ. Dordogne/F)	0.85	7.8	0.11	
Rouffignac no. 185 (départ. Dordogne/F)	1.3	9.7	0.13	
Les Combarelles II (départ. Dordogne/F)	0.6	3.7	0.16	Serangeli 2006, 63 fig. 23, 11
Chauvet no. 1 (départ. Ardèche/F)	1.0	4.1	0.24	Serangeli 2006, 63 fig. 23, 5
Chauvet no. 2 (départ. Ardèche/F)	0.7	3.6	0.19	Serangeli 2006, 63 fig. 23, 7

Tab. 1 The ratio of the partial length of the hind leg (L_p) to its total length (L_t) in rhinoceros depictions known from selected sites with rock art.

situation the best coefficient useful for describing the proportions of the rhinoceros would be the ratio of the partial length of its hind leg (L_p) to its total length (L_t). As in many Palaeolithic representations of rhinoceros, here is also the leg not represented fully, only as far as the line of the belly, thus, roughly to the area of the knee joint. In figure 167,2, the partial length of the leg is 2.5 cm, giving the L_p/L_t ratio of 0.21. In other engraved images from Central Europe the rhinoceros have even more massive bodies: on plate 89b from Gönnersdorf the ratio is c. 0.16, in the beast engraved on the object from Teufelsbrücke (Lkr. Saalfeld-Rudolstadt/D) 0.096. In the latter case this major distortion of proportions was dictated presumably by the need to abbreviate the legs to make them fit the narrow space on the pebble at this particular point. In representations of rhinoceros known from rock art, the L_p/L_t ratio is in the range of 0.11-0.24 (**tab. 1**), oscillating in most of these images around 0.2. Representations of rhinoceros from Rouffignac (départ. Dordogne/F), image 96, from »Le Grand Plafond« and the frieze with three rhinoceros in gallery G, depicted one after the other (nos 183-185), are a group with an exceptionally massive body – and the L_p/L_t ratio in the range of 0.11-0.14.



Fig. 4 Pekárna Cave (okr. Brno-venkov/CZ). The scene engraved on a side of a horse rib. – (After Klíma 1974, 72 pl. 31).

In the rhinoceros from Starunia this same ratio would be 0.24-0.28, depending on the position of the hind leg in relation to its body, thus, a little more than in the engravings on the plate from Gönnersdorf. However, it may be that this divergence is a result of deliberate stylistic treatment by some of the Palaeolithic engravers who evidently aimed to exaggerate in their depiction of these animals their massive body – this is suggested in particular by representations from the time of the existence of the Magdalenian complex. The great bulk of the rhinoceros' body evidently played a major role in the symbolism represented by this species.

However, if we supposed that figure 167,2 represents a horse, we would have to assume either an inferior skill of the artist, or a deliberate distortion of the body proportions. With such an interpretation the reconstructed L_p/L_t ratio for this figure would fit the range of 0.15-0.2 whereas judging by the measurements made using photographic images of the Przewalski's horses this ratio is 0.29-0.38. Measurements of the full figure depiction on plate 25 from Andernach (Lkr. Mayen-Koblenz/D), depending on which point was recognized as the place where the limbs join the silhouette, produced a ratio of 0.31-0.37. Consequently, it seems more likely that the figure 167,2 represents a rhinoceros.

More compatible with this interpretation of figure 167,2 is the hairy coat marked by means of oblique strokes, represented on the neck and the lower part of the head. An analogous way of representing the hair on the neck and chin is observed in engravings seen on plate 89b; figure 113,3, whereas hair on the anterior part of the body, made in any case in a completely different convention, is seen on plates 262, 269b, and possibly, on plate 266b. In this situation, figure 167,1, with a build that is similar to no. 167,2 may also be recognized as a representation of a rhinoceros, therefore the whole may represent a courtship scene, in which the male follows the female before the act of copulation, presumably similarly as observed in black and white rhinoceros in Africa (Kingdon 1979, 102. 117). In Magdalenian art we find scenes depicting different types of mating behaviour. In Central Europe similar depictions are identified at the well-known rib from Pekárna Cave (okr. Brno-venkov/CZ) and from Abri Schweizersbild (Kt. Schaffhausen/CH). From the latter comes a baton on which two horses walking one behind the other were engraved (Nüesch 1896, 307-309 pl. VII, 1; Bosinski 1982, 31 pl. 20). A more complex scene was engraved on a side of the rib of a horse found at Pekárna (Klíma 1964/1965; 1974). It shows four horses in an antithetic arrangement (**fig. 4**). One of them has its head lowered, suggesting it is grazing in a grassland; the horse opposite to it has raised its tail and is passing water (two lines), the one behind it has its head lowered and appears to be sniffing the urine. Behaviour of this sort, characteristic for a mare and a stallion, is one of the courtship rituals in horses (Aguilar Espinosa 2006, 69). The recurrence of mating scenes (motifs?) indicates its uncommon significance in the symbolic culture of the Magdalenian people. Engravings representing scenes, i. e., narrative depictions, are infrequent and the examples from Abri Schweizersbild, Pekárna Cave and Gönnersdorf described earlier were made on unique objects which possibly were significant for the whole community.

FINAL REMARKS

In an age when the Magdalenian complex was flourishing in Central Europe representatives of some species of the Pleistocene megafauna, e. g. woolly rhinoceros and mammoth, were rare (Serangeli 2006). Perhaps, their extinction is reflected by the distribution of the representations of mammoth and rhinoceros at Gönnersdorf: their largest number is found in Concentration I regarded as the oldest. Four representations discovered in Concentration IIa are characterized by a perfunctory depiction of the animal's silhouette (nos 268. 403), one of the engraved animals has unrealistically long limbs (no. 262). It appears as if the inhabitants of this settlement cluster were not too familiar with rhinoceros – knowing them only partly by sight, but more often from narration. We may surmise therefore that the not too successful depiction of the two rhinoceros seen on plate 167 (1 and 2) is the work of an artist who had only a faint recollection of the appearance of this animal.

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Zusammenfassung / Summary / Résumé

Nashörner und Pferde: zur Platte 167 von Gönnersdorf (Lkr. Neuwied)

Die verzierten Schieferplatten von Gönnersdorf stellen eine unschätzbare Quelle für das Studium magdalénienzeitlicher Kunst in Mitteleuropa dar. Die Ritzung auf Platte 167 wurde in der Vergangenheit als Bild zweier Pferde(?) (Nr. 167,1-2) und eines Nashorns (Nr. 167,3) interpretiert, wobei letzteres in Relation zu den beiden anderen auf dem Kopf gestellt erscheint. Ausweislich unserer Untersuchungen der Linien, aus denen das Bild 167,3 besteht, gehört sie zu Figur 167,2. Die ganze Komposition ist vergleichbar in Form und Proportionen mit Nashorndarstellungen, wie sie von anderen Fundorten des Magdaléniens bekannt sind. Darüber hinaus beweisen Proportionen und Platzierung der Figur 167,1, dass auch hier ein Nashorn gemeint ist. Daher ist es möglich, dass es sich hier um ein Paarungsritual handelt, ein Motiv, das auch in anderen Ritzungen aus Mitteleuropa vorkommt (Schweizersbild, Pekárna). Übersetzung: M. Struck

Rhinos and Horses: on Plate 167 from Gönnersdorf (Lkr. Neuwied)

The ornamented slate plates from Gönnersdorf have been an invaluable source for the study of Magdalenian art in Central Europe. The image engraved on plate 167 was identified in the past as a representation of two horses(?) (no. 167,1-2), and a rhinoceros (no. 167,3), the latter depicted upside down (at 180°) in relation to the other two. However, in the light of our analysis of lines which build figure 167,3 it appears to actually belong to figure 167,2; the whole complies in appearance and proportions with rhinoceros depictions known from other Magdalenian sites. Moreover, the proportions and placement of figure 167,1 prove that this is also a rhinoceros. It is likely therefore that the whole is a scene of a mating ritual, a subject known from other engraved representations recovered in Central Europe (Schweizersbild, Pekárna).

Des rhinocéros et des chevaux: la plaque 167 de Gönnersdorf (Lkr. Neuwied)

Les plaques d'ardoise ornementales de Gönnersdorf ont été une source inestimable dans l'étude de l'art magdalénien en Europe centrale. L'image gravée sur la plaque 167 a été identifiée dans le passé comme une représentation de deux chevaux(?) (n° 167,1-2), et d'un rhinocéros (n° 167,3), ce dernier représenté à l'envers (à 180°) par rapport aux deux autres. Cependant, à la lumière de notre analyse des lignes qui construisent la figure 167,3, il semble appartenir en fait à la figure 167,2; l'ensemble est compatible en apparence et en proportions avec les représentations de rhinocéros connues d'autres sites magdaléniens. De plus, les proportions et l'emplacement de la figure 167,1 prouvent qu'il s'agit également d'un rhinocéros. Il est donc probable que l'ensemble représente une scène d'un rituel d'accouplement, un sujet connu d'autres représentations gravées récupérées en Europe centrale (Schweizersbild, Pekárna).

Traduction: L. Bernard

Schlüsselwörter / Keywords / Mots clés

Rheinland-Pfalz / Paläolithikum / Magdalénien / Schieferplatte / Kunst / Tierdarstellung
Rhineland-Palatinate / Palaeolithic / Magdalenian / slate plate / art / animal representation
Rhénani-Palatinat / Paléolithique / Magdalénien / plaque d'ardoise / art / représentation animal

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