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Original article

Gravettian tear-drop-shaped beads

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Abstract

The two regions southwestern Germany and southwestern France have yielded Gravettian personal ornaments in form of tear-drop-shaped beads. We present updated numbers of these artefacts, because during the recent excavations since 2002 in Hohle Fels cave near the city of Ulm, Southwest Germany, additional beads were found. The present paper proposes for the first time a typo-technological study of the tear-drop-shaped beads.

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Keywords: Tear-drop-shaped beads; Personal ornaments; Gravettian; Southwestern Germany; South Western France; Production sequence

Résumé

Deux régions, le sud-ouest de l'Allemagne et le sud-ouest de la France, ont livré des éléments de parure gravettiens connus comme « perles en forme de larme ». Les dernières découvertes de perles faites lors des fouilles menées depuis 2002 à Hohle Fels, près d'Ulm dans le sud-ouest de l'Allemagne, ont été l'occasion de mettre à jour les décomptes de ces pièces et de proposer une étude typo-technologique inédite de ce corpus.

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Mots clés : Perles en forme de larme ; Éléments de parure ; Gravettien ; Sud-ouest de l'Allemagne ; Sud-ouest de la France ; Chaîne opératoire

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1. Introduction

The type of body ornament generally called « tear-drop-shaped bead » corresponds with an oval-shaped pendant, showing a flat section and a perforation at the narrower and thinner end, therefore designated as the proximal one. Since all the pendants examined by us and those described in literature are relatively small and seem very similar in shape, we noticed some variations in size and form. Therefore we could not speak about standardisation for this type of pendant.

2. Previous researches

In Germany, Gustav Riek led systematic excavations at Brillenhöhle, where he found 33 tear-drop-shaped beads that he first described as a Swabian bead form (Riek, 1973; Fig. 1). Joachim Hahn conducted excavations in the Geißenklösterle Cave between 1974 and 1991 and found 65 more pieces in archaeological levels Is to In (Hahn, 1988; Scheer, 1985). Moreover, the Gravettian levels of Hohle Fels (IIb, IIc and IIe) already yielded 44 personal ornaments. The excavations began in this cave in 1977 and are still ongoing today. Anne Scheer (1985, 1995, 2000) carried out an exhaustive study of the beads from the Ach Valley cave sites Geißenklösterle, Hohle Fels and Brillenhöhle (Swabian Jura, Southwestern Germany; e.g. Hahn, 1988; Conard et al., 2004; Riek, 1973; Fig. 2). She considered this type of bead as “characteristic for this period [Gravettian] and especially for this region” (Scheer, 2000, p. 261). Bettina Hiller did a completion of the Hohle Fels beads (Hiller, 2002).

But, no comparison was made with similar pendants from Southwestern France. Here pieces are not so numerous, but look very similar in shape with the German artefacts. The oldest discovery of body adornments, which could be attributed to this bead type, was that of Cro Magnon (Les Eyzies-de-Tayac, Dordogne; Figs. 2 and 3.1). In this rock shelter, Louis Lartet discovered three pendants made from ivory in 1868 (Lartet and Christy, 1865–1875; Henry-Gambier et al., 2013); two of them can be considered as tear-drop-shaped beads (Lartet and Christy, 1865–1875, B. PL. XI. 2 & 3). At La Gravette (Bayac, Dordogne; Figs. 2 and 3.2), Fernand Lacorre mentioned, for the archaeological level called “Gravétien”, “*toute une série de petites breloques en os de formes plus ou moins ovoïdes (n° 36 à 39 et 41 à 44), avec une plus grande, de la forme d’un grain de citrouille, très mince et qui devait être munie d’un bouton, actuellement fracturé, pour se prêter à une ligature (n° 40)*” (Lacorre, 1960, p. 339). Eight of the pendants, which compose the necklace figured by Lacorre (1960, p. 340, fig. 23, n° 36–41, 43 & 44), seem to fit into the variability of the tear-drop-shaped beads morphology and size. Among the osseous artefacts from La Gravette, Nejma Goutas (2004 a, b) counted eleven ivory beads, among which three rough-outs, some of the beads are similar to the Early Gravettian ivory pendants from the Abri Pataud (Les Eyzies-de-Tayac, Dordogne; Fig. 2). At this last site, “bones pendants” with a “squash seed shape” (as described in Movius excavation archives; Bricker, 1995, p. 163, fig. 57 j & l: *pendeloques en os de style “pépin de citrouille”*; Vercoutère, 2004; Vercoutère et al., 2008) were discovered in 1959 and 1961 by the Hallam L. Movius team within the archaeological level 5 (Early Gravettian; Fig. 4). Eleven pendants made on ivory (and ivory or bone) fall in the category of tear-drop-shaped beads, to which we add 1 non-perforated pendant (Fig. 4.2) and 1 ivory rod (Fig. 4.1) (Vercoutère, 2004; Vercoutère et al., 2008). Both could be considered respectively as a rough-out and a blank within the “*chaîne opératoire*” for the manufacturing of the tear-drop-shaped beads (Goutas, 2004a, b; Vercoutère, 2004). It appears that the three French sites provided ivory tear-drop-

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