directed by
Jean CLOTTES

PLEISTOCENE ART OF THE WORLD

Short articles
THE HORSE MORPHOTYPE
IN THE MIDDLE MAGDALENIAN PORTABLE ART
OF LAS CALDAS CAVE (ASTURIAS, SPAIN):
Technical and Formal Analysis

María Soledad CORCHÓN, Olivia RIVERO

In this paper, we propose a definition of the horse morphotype in the Middle Magdalenian portable art of Las Caldas Cave based on an identification of the technical and formal features of this type of figure. With this aim, a set of 40 equid representations was analyzed from a technical and formal point of view (figure).

The technological analysis was realized on the best preserved pieces using a methodology based on experimentation and microscopic analysis of the engraved lines. The aim was to identify the manufacturing processes employed in the realization of equid representations.

A formal analysis was also applied to all of the equid figures. The data obtained were integrated with the technical information in order to identify and describe the morphotypes.

From a technical perspective, the equid figures at Las Caldas display the parameters known for figurative representations in the Middle Magdalenian. They were realized by fixed action sequences, in terms of both the direction of movement and the order of realization of the different parts of the figures. These parameters correspond to a schéma opératoire (production scheme) of figurative representations that is shared by the Cantabrian region, the Pyrenees and the Aquitaine.

We also observe that a very high number of horse figures at Las Caldas were realized with relatively simple techniques, shown by the small number of tool strokes in the engraved lines and the absence of variability in the lines.

The data resulting from the formal analysis show that the engraved horses are simple figures, being limited to a representation of the outline and the details necessary to identify the animal (mainly the mane). The sensory organs are often absent, as are the hooves and other details, such as the hock. This is the general tendency, regardless of the support employed (plaque, bone support) and the anatomical elements represented (complete animal, protome or isolated head).

These two types of information show that at Las Caldas, the horse representations were realized in a technically and formally simple manner. This tendency can be considered as characteristic of the horse representations in this cave since 65% of them were made in this way, indicating the existence of a specific morphotype at this site. Among objects decorated with horse representations, there are nonetheless more elaborate realizations as well, sometimes with features that we can consider as Pyrenean. These are specimens that are typical of the Pyrenean Middle...
Examples of the pieces studied, with horse representations, originating from the Middle Magdalenian of Las Caldas Cave (photos: S. Corchón, O. Rivero).
Magdalenian, such as *contours découpés* (contour cut-outs) representing a horse head, or sculptures on a lithic support (in-the-round). Other elements of the Pyrenean Magdalenian, such as the use of relief, seen in the cave of Bédeilhac, or the representation of isolated horse hooves (Maz d’Azil), are also found in the Las Caldas assemblage.

All of the data resulting from the analysis of the equid representations of the Middle Magdalenian of Las Caldas Cave contribute useful information on the relationships between this site and sites in the Pyrenean region. The collection studied shows that the formal, technical and stylistic concepts that circulated between the Cantabrian region, the Pyrenees and the Aquitaine during the Middle Magdalenian reached Las Caldas and were incorporated into the artistic productions of this site. Nonetheless, a specific formal model appears to have been favored for the realization of equid figures. These are simple figures, which we can consider as the characteristic morphotype of horse representations at Las Caldas.

Comparisons with the Middle Magdalenian corpus in the Pyrenees and Aquitaine will enable us to determine whether this tendency is shared by the different regions in the southwestern sector of western Europe, or if it constitutes a local or regional feature. Our method, which takes the morphological and technical variability of the figural representations as a starting point to characterize the artistic production of a site, enables us to develop new research orientations for the study of Middle Magdalenian portable art. Drawing on the cultural information inherent in this art, our objective is to obtain a better understanding of the relationships between the societies that occupied Cantabria, the Pyrenees and Aquitaine during this period.