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PLEISTOCENE ART OF THE WORLD

Short articles



## THOUGHTS ON TECHNOLOGICAL CHOICES AND PALEOLITHIC PORTABLE ART MADE FROM BONE MATERIALS:

First Data from the Sites of Plantade, Lafaye,  
Courbet and Montastruc (Aveyron Valley)

Lise AURIÈRE

Since the 1980's-1990's, techniques have been developed in the field of prehistoric art to identify individual choices, address the techno-economic context of Paleolithic groups and propose social and cultural models.

Studies of portable art have resulted in the identification of the tools, and more broadly, the processes associated with realization of the pieces. This information has improved our understanding of the succession of actions of the artists, thus enabling us to perceive the person behind the technique. Following this work, a study of the technical processes involved in obtaining the osseous supports on which portable art objects are made, from their acquisition from the animal until their engraving, seemed necessary to complete the information on the technical system and to document the support/decoration complementarity. Our goal is thus to gather information on the acquisition and storage of raw materials, while asking if they were worked fresh or after they were dry, and if it was necessary to preserve them in specific conditions to maintain their plastic, esthetic and mechanical properties. It will also be useful to determine whether the technical investment was the same on the different pieces. If there is an observable difference, we will attempt to understand why: is it related to the way the piece was to be used, or to its subsequent engraving?

Our first objective is to reconstruct the different actions carried out on the raw material to realize a decorated support. We will then analyze the role of the decoration in the *chaîne opératoire* of the object in order to identify possible variations in the technical choices of this production. In addition, through a modeling of the processes of the *chaîne opératoire*, we will seek to understand the distinction between portable art and bone tools. Is the presence or absence of decoration sufficient to make such a distinction in analyses and in the eyes of the researchers?

Our methodology draws on studies of bone industries carried out since the 1970's by H. Camps-Fabrer and A. Averbouh, and of portable art by F. D'Errico, C. Fritz, D. Dupuy and O. Rivero. Through experimentation, we were able to create and observe a corpus of traces permitting the study of a selected archaeological assemblage. Our corpus is composed of pieces from the Magdalenian sites of the Aveyron Valley (Lafaye, Plantade, Montastruc and Courbet), which are conserved at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle in Montauban and the British Museum.



Locations of the sites of the Aveyron Valley: Plantade, Lafaye, Montastruc and Courbet.

Our first observations indicate that the “engraving phase” is not always the final element of the *chaîne opératoire* since the presence of decoration does not prohibit the use or re-use of the piece, sometimes to the detriment of the ornamentation. Through a consideration of both the selection and use of a support, it is also possible to perceive the functions and the motivations underlying the object and the different productions within that which we call “portable art”.





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