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PLEISTOCENE ART OF THE WORLD

Short articles
CHRONOLOGY OF THE REALIZATION OF A FRIEZE OF MAMMOTHS IN ROUFFIGNAC CAVE (DORDOGNE, FRANCE)

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In the Small Frieze of mammoths 20-24 in Rouffignac Cave, several engraved lines that cross each other enable the formulation of hypotheses concerning the realization of the lines on the left part of the panel (M20-21). Its chronology depends on the realization of two snake-like forms, either almost simultaneously, or at different times.

According to the first hypothesis, two snake-like forms would have been drawn simultaneously and the body parts of mammoth 21, except for the “ear”, would have been realized at the same time:
1. mammoth 20 and the “ear” lines of mammoth 21;
2. two snake-like forms;
3. two oblique parallel lines;
4. mammoth 21 (all body parts except the “ear” and one V-shaped sign);
5. engraved retouching of the lower tusk of mammoth 20 (and a V-shaped sign).

In this hypothesis, the “ear” of mammoth 21 would have been made earlier than the rest of the body. After several other interventions, such as the realization of snake-like forms and the two oblique lines, the Paleolithic artist would have used these short lines for the “ear”. In addition, if we consider the nape of mammoth 21, the outline of the nape to the trunk was made before the dorsal line.

According to the second hypothesis, the mammoth’s head and dorsal line would have been realized as follows:
1. mammoth 20 and the head of mammoth 21 (frontal line, “ear”, eye and tusks);
2. two snake-like forms;
3. two oblique parallel lines;
4. dorsal line of mammoth 21 (and a V-shaped sign);
5. engraved retouch of the lower tusk of mammoth 20 (and a V-shaped sign).

The manner in which the mammoths are drawn in the cave would indicate a certain order to realize a figure. Two mammoths (M144 and M145) are represented with only the frontal line and the ear. They support the second hypothesis. The artist began to draw the front and the ear and then left them without continuing. To realize mammoth 21, he would have drawn the front with a single line, engraved the eye with a burin and drawn the “ear” with four fingers, and then later, he would have drawn the dorsal line to complete the figure.
According to the third hypothesis, two snake-like forms would have been drawn separately:
1. mammouth 20;
2. left snake-like sign;
3. two oblique parallel lines;
4. mammouth 21 (and a V-shaped sign);
5. right snake-like form (and a V-shaped sign);
6. engraved retouch of the lower tusk of mammoth 20 (and a V-shaped sign).

To examine these three hypotheses and the realization of the whole panel in a comparative manner, I analyzed the four types of signs: snake-like, pair of long lines, V-shaped sign and the series of vertical lines. The chronological analysis shows that the snake-like form was made after mammoths 20, 21 and, and was obliterated by mammoth 55.

The pair of long lines, consisting of two oblique parallel lines, rather distant from each other and long, are located on the tusks of mammoth 20 and under the dorsal line of mammoth 21. Similar to this pair of long lines are the vertical lines on mammoths 28 and 34, the oblique lines under mammoth 158, and the long lines on mammoth 19, though these latter are not parallel, but crossed. The posterior execution of these lines relative to the mammoth and their location on the tusks are repeated with mammoths 19 and 20, as is the posterior execution of the pairs of vertical lines and their location on the dorsal line of mammoths 28 and 34. In contrast, the anterior execution of the pairs of oblique lines relative to mammoths 21 and 158, and their location at the croup, are also repetitive.
There are only three V-shaped signs: M21, M51, and M146, always on the back of the mammoths.

The two series of vertical lines as long as the height of the body of the mammoth, of which there are only two, were always drawn after the mammoths.

I studied the mammoths in succession in the cave. On the first ones, the eye is drawn, while on the following ones it is not represented. The chronology of the mammoths in a line is not always the same. A comparison of the panels in the cave and the friezes near the Intersection shows great similarities between the panels M20-24 and M43-47.

The chronological and internal analysis of the figurative representations and the signs shows two distinct behavioral acts consisting of adding signs to an animal figure and obliterating signs with an animal figure. Perhaps the repetition of these acts corresponds to a sort of convention among the Paleolithic artists, or shows that these repetitive acts on the two panels were realized by the same artist.