



PROCEEDINGS OF THE IFRAO CONGRESS
September 2010

2013 # 5

<http://www.palethnologie.org>
ISSN 2108-6532

directed by
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PLEISTOCENE ART OF THE WORLD

Short articles



ROCK SCULPTURE AND SYMBOLIC GEOGRAPHY IN THE MIDDLE MAGDALENIAN

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My PhD research investigates the spatio-temporal structuring of the Middle Magdalenian, from a rock art angle. How is this graphic / symbolic expression involved in the double process of unification and/or regionalization that characterizes this chrono-cultural entity? To ensure the archaeological context of the images, I decided to study decorated and occupied sites, with a focus on sculpted sites. I worked on a corpus of four rock-shelters: Roc-aux-Sorciers (Angles-sur-l'Anglin, Vienne), Chaire-à-Calvin (Mouthiers-sur-Boëme, Charente), Reverdit (Sergeac, Dordogne) and Cap Blanc (Marquay, Dordogne). My work is based on a comparative techno-stylistic analysis, that takes into account several criteria concerning techniques, themes, formal conventions and composition. The selected variables were analysed both in the qualitative and quantitative modes, with the help of simple statistics tools (elementary statistics, factorial analyses).

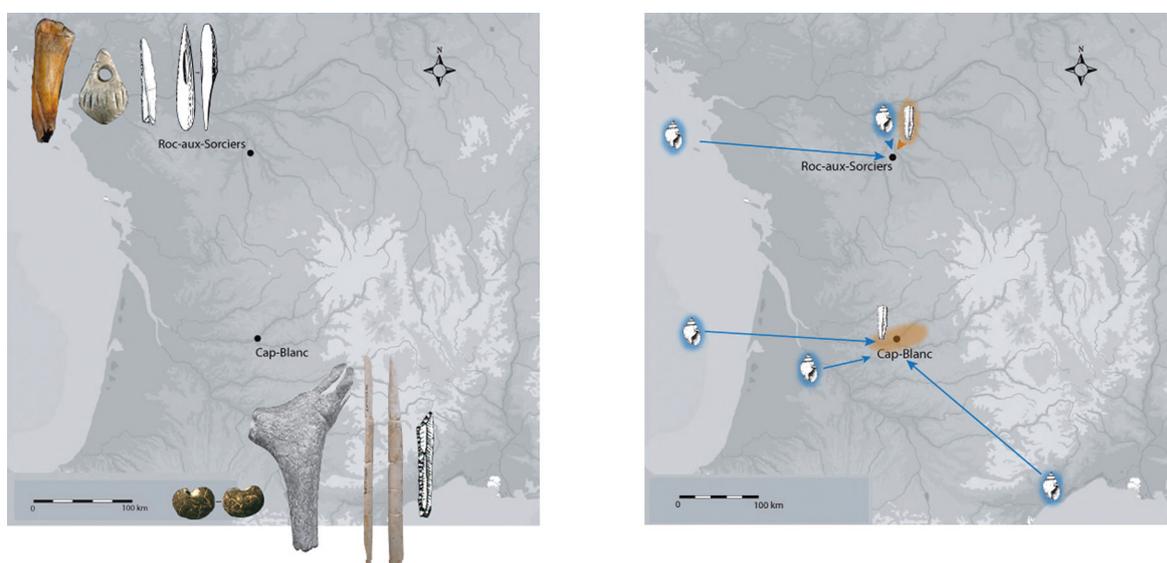
This study shows a rock sculpture tradition in the Middle Magdalenian. The technique is completely mastered, with the highlighting of certain anatomical elements (head, chest, buttock). The designs are monumental, strictly figurative. Abstract patterns, painted and/or engraved, are associated in Roc-aux-Sorciers, Reverdit and Cap Blanc (?). The representation fits two essential formal concepts: a realistic trend (complete, well proportioned and shapely outlines; profusion of internal details) and the assertion of the animal strength (emphasis of the chest; reproduction of the muscular volumes, modelled or stylised). These sculpted sets are structured in friezes, made of one or two figurative sets separated by rings which precise role remains indeterminate. They show renewals aiming at thematic changes with the introduction of a new taxon (horse in Chaire-à-Calvin and Cap Blanc, ibex in Roc-aux-Sorciers) and/or the redistribution of the themes (bison in Cap Blanc).

Inside this tradition, a graphic / symbolic group gathers Roc-aux-Sorciers and Chaire-à-Calvin friezes as well as a part of Reverdit rock art. Their thin relieves are very detailed, with the precise and refined mention of the main organs, the osseous and the muscular volumes. The animals are very dynamic, drawn in stereotyped attitudes. The ibex has a major place. Inside this group, Chaire-à-Calvin and Roc-aux-Sorciers sculptures have such strong similarities that it arises the question of their(s) author(s). Cap Blanc rock art stands out with its very thick sculptures, showing a more schematic trend: linear and incomplete outlines with few internal details (no mane, no sexual attribute) that go well with the fixity of the animals.

This research modifies and complicates our vision of rock art geography in the Middle Magdalenian, connecting Vienne, Charente and Périgord in a large regional symbolic group. Until then, Vienne decorated sites seemed to form an isolated group, closed to the Southern influences. This study yields evidence of a symbolic community extending as far as Périgord. But for all that, particularities still individualize local identities (the realistic human representation in Vienne, the cupuled designs in Reverdit). Reverdit is at the interface with this group and Cap Blanc

which seems to illustrate another group. The chronological relations of these two groups are still problematic. In a synchronic hypothesis, was Reverdit a meeting place, or was it alternatively occupied by different populations? In a diachronic hypothesis, two graphic / symbolic groups followed one another during the Middle Magdalenian.

This differentiation between Roc-aux-Sorciers and Cap Blanc rock art also occurs in the archaeological material. The symbolic and technical artefacts as well as the origins of the raw materials reveal that Roc-aux-Sorciers and Cap Blanc could have been part of different socio-economic networks, organized on a North-South main road (Vienne-Périgord) for Roc-aux-Sorciers and on an East-West main road (Corrèze-Gironde) for Cap Blanc (figure). Could the two symbolic groups illustrated by the rock friezes correspond to two socio-economic groups? From this hypothesis, the study of the chrono-spatial dynamics of rock art could give the opportunity to tackle more generally the chrono-spatial dynamics of the Middle Magdalenian.



Differentiation between the technical and symbolic artefacts of Roc-aux-Sorciers and Cap Blanc, and their supply territories. (Roc-aux-Sorciers: figure in Mazière 2009; Chehmana, Beyries 2010; Sacchi 1986 – Cap Blanc: photo: C. Bourdier, J.-M. Pétilon; figure in Rousot 1994).





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