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Short articles



## THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE FIRST PALEOLITHIC ANIMAL SCULPTURE IN THE ILE-DE-FRANCE:

### the Ségognole 3 Bison and its Ramifications

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This article unveils imagery that seems intended to be recognized in phases from such sites as Font-de-Gaume, Laugerie-Basse, Isturitz, Saint-Cirq-du-Bugue, and Guy-Martin, after describing the first Paleolithic sculpture of an animal reported in the Ile-de-France. These include:

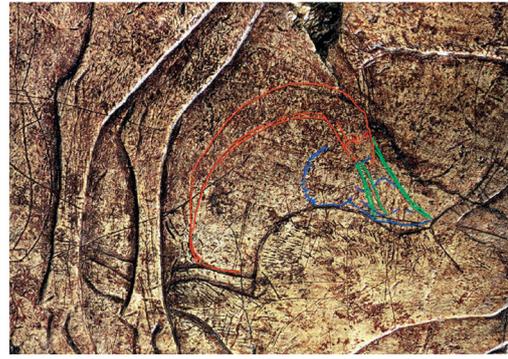
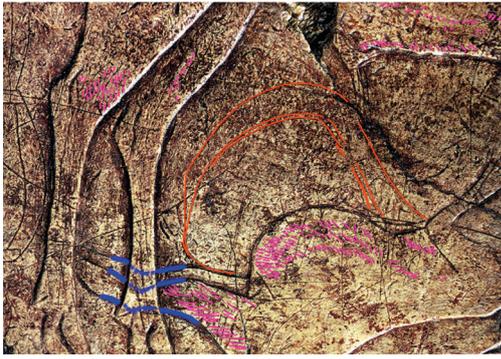
1. The extended panel of Ségognole 3. The grotto is known for a vulva between 2 faint horses, but its largest graphic element is a groove that has been explained away as a “border”. The groove is actually the caudal line of a 1.9 m-long bas-relief of a bison that has been overlooked because of the failure to apply the same conventions of the vulva – figurative realism, monumentality, and the use of natural forms – to the engraved line, although it is identical in manufacture. The wisent composed by natural relief accentuated by incising, flaking, and polishing confirms that the ensemble is Paleolithic.

2. A survey of Paleolithic parietal images whose contours are defined like the Ségognole bison by natural relief uncovered over 120 examples. This revealed that mammoths and bison were illustrated far more commonly this way than other species. Such statistical analyses of how imagery relates to rock morphology provides a new way of grouping Paleolithic art and opens another window into its makers’ intentions. It also raises the related phenomenon of imagery that played upon similarities between the contours of bison and mammoths.

3. The “mammoth” on the Grotte de Canecaude spearthrower, which has one eye above a crescent that makes it read as a tusk and another eye below the same crescent that makes it read as a bison’s horn. The sculpture is one of several images that combine mammoths and bison in some of the oldest known figure-ground illusions.

4. The art of Font-de-Gaume. Numerous paintings blend aspects of mammoths and bison, extending the theme of Paleolithic figure-ground illusions and making the relationship between the “armor-headed” herbivores the cave’s leitmotif.

5. The Roc-aux-Sorciers. The juxtaposition of the generative portion of a woman’s body with one of the two herbivores identified as having some equivalency in Magdalenian art turns out to be a re-current theme in northern France, where it is also seen at Guy-Martin and Ségognole 3. Links are established between these northern friezes and the Grotte des Fieux, Grotte du Sorcier, and Abri Reverdit.



Combined Laugerie-Basse *Femme au Renne*, hocks, fur, inflations, snake, baby and 4 parallel lines slanting from the herbivore's penal sheath to the top of the snake's head.

6. Guy-Martin's "obstetric" frieze. The panel uses a compositional technique similar to Cubism – building a "decomposed" horse, for example, out of figurative, natural and schematic elements. Another example of the panel's "interactive" technique involves a single crescent that is positioned to be read 4 ways: as one horse's tail, another horse's mane, an ibex's backward horn, and an auroch's forward horn.

7. The *Femme au Renne*. Several Magdalenian engravings of "women" are re-examined in light of such findings of polysemic density, leading to the discovery of more secondary imagery. This re-examination shows that the *Femme au Renne* contains at least 4 degrees of engraving, ranging from the pregnant female under the herbivore to such lightly incised details as hocks that transform the figure into a therianthropomorph, 2 outer "pregnancies", an umbilical snake within the over-arching external pregnancies, and even a "spectral" baby whose head is formed by a circle of light crosses.

8. Similarly, the "women" and bison on a wand from Isturitz share such traits as hooves and hackles.

9. The Grotte du Sorcier "anthropomorph". The "sorcerer" turns out to have both short hoofed and longer human legs and rounded buttocks enclosed within a herbivore's rectilinear rump. The figure can also be read as being juvenile or female, rather than just as an ithyphallic male.

These analyses coalesce into a new interpretation of the relationship between some Paleolithic feminine imagery and symbolically important prey species: a "prey-mother" hypothesis. Although the theory is based on internal evidence that "women" were repeatedly associated with herbivores through shared traits and connections, it is also in keeping with female roles in glacial subsistence systems where there is little for women to gather for much of the year and fitted clothing is essential.

Frequently, one female role in such "huntersewer" economies is to increase the chance of a hunter's success by providing him with animal qualities. Several polar cultures believe women do this while sewing clothing and camouflage by synthesizing the powers of the species whose hides compose the garments, thereby imbuing hunters with qualities needed for success. Another common role is for wives to enter trances in which they "become" prey and lull it into coming within range. A third is to reconcile hunters with animals they have killed by "feeding" dead animals like guests and inviting them upon their "departure" to return home as living creatures.

“Whale-wife-mothers” among the Koryaks and Nootka, for example, do this by initiating the regeneration of whales. All three roles involve beliefs in a woman’s maternal capacity not only to give birth to humans but also to morph into, control and generate socially important prey.

At the heart of the polysemic Paleolithic imagery examined here there probably lay equally layered beliefs concerning the relationship between women and animals. The repeated association of the generative portion of women’s bodies with large herbivores suggests that some Paleolithic societies believed that women had the capacity to generate and intercede among humans and their prey – making them the sex that spiritually controlled the food supply.





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