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Symbolic territories in pre-Magdalenian art?

Stephane Petrognani a, *, Eric Robert b

a UMR 7041 ArcAn, Ethnologie Préhistorique, Maison de l’Archéologie et de l’Ethnologie, Nanterre, France
b Department of Prehistory, Museum national d’Histoire naturelle, Musée de l’Homme, 17, place du Trocadéro et du 11 novembre 75116, Paris, France

Abstract

The legacy of specialists in Upper Paleolithic art shows a common point: a more or less clear separation between Magdalenian art and earlier symbolic manifestations. One of principal difficulty is due to little data firmly dated in the chronology for the “ancient” periods, even if recent studies precise chronological framework. There is a variability of the symbolic traditions from the advent of monumental art in Europe, and there are graphic elements crossing regional limits and asking the question of real symbolic existence. The different thematic choices also allows to raise territorial kinships between various caves and various regions.

The object of this paper is to define where these rich and varied symbolic records appear, and how graphic traditions are distributed in the Western European Paleolithic area, throughout these 15 000 years. To provide some elements of response to this question, we will draw on the one hand, on the formal approaches in the figures, and on the other - on the thematic range used by Paleolithics.

1. Introduction

The legacy of specialists in Upper Paleolithic art shows a common point, because they all highlight a more or less clear separation between Magdalenian art and earlier symbolic manifestations.

While the authors do not always characterize in exactly the same way the iconographic content of the stages of their model, a point of reference is found in the chronological breakdown - that of the Lascaux cave. This site, dating between the end of the Solutrean and early Magdalenian (according to Aujoulat, 2004; Delluc and Delluc, 2003; Leroi-Gourhan, 1965 …), acts as a reference to embody the main separation between two distinct worlds of form in Franco-Libian rock art: a pre-Magdalenian and a Magdalenian world.

The idea of a steady evolution of the graphic productions during the Paleolithic has been widely discussed and even questioned, particularly since the 90s, following the discoveries of Cosquer, Chauvet, Cussac, La Garma, la Grande grotte d’Arcy … the richness and diversity of whose productions did not correspond to the framework established until then (Moro and Garate, 2010). But this critical rereading has existed since the 80s. Notably Peter Ucko calls into question the notion of progress in Upper Paleolithic graphic manifestations, on the one hand based on too little data at that time firmly dated in the chronology for the “ancient” periods; and, on the other hand, on the neither coarse nor clumsy character of Aurignacian portable art (Ucko, 1987).

In addition, the author mentions the possible existence of different approaches at an early moment of the chronology, which was particularly highlighted by the decorated caves, discovered from the 90s. This clearly visible diversity, and its degree of significance seem likely to be one of the determining criteria in the evolution of graphic productions during these ancient phases (Petrognani, 2013).

In term of chronology, this art of the pre-Magdalenian periods is more and more accurately dated. Thanks to the studies of sites like Chauvet (Clottes, 2001), Aldene (Ambert et al., 2005), Baume Latrone (Azéma et al., 2012), but also Mayenne-Sciences (Pigeaud, 2004), Margot (Pigeaud et al., 2010), Candamo (Corchón et al., 2011), or Altxerri (Ruiz-Redondo et al., 2015).

The progress of the radiocarbon datings, specially for the presence of modern carbon contamination in the pigment specimen, has lately allowed to reconsidered the chronology of Cosquer. Datings on 12 animal figures (32 000–19 000 cal. BP) obtained by using the IntCal 13 curve (Reimer et al., 2013) and OxCal v4.2 software (Bronk Ramsey, 2009). These new datings introduce an intermediate period of decoration towards 27 000 cal. BP and...
underlines that the oldest figures of Cosquer Cave, falls in the same time range as the Chauvet Cave’s latest occupation dated, between 31 000 and 29 000 cal. BP (Valladas et al., 2017).

Within the spaces where these rich and varied symbolic records appear, can this new chronological data also help delineate symbolic territories? How are graphic traditions distributed in the Western European Paleolithic area, throughout these 15 000 years?

To provide some elements of response to this question, we will draw on the one hand, on the formal approaches in the figures, and on the other - on the thematic range used by Paleolithics. For that, we will try to distinguish the common elements of Aurignacian, Gravettian and Solutrean symbolic behaviors across the Franco-Iberian area, from those clearly more original and specific to certain areas or certain time periods.

2. The pre-Magdalénien Palaeolithic art: common ground ...

How should we consider the pre-Magdalenian cave art? The first difficulty is that of the direct chronological dating. Among the hundred sites which have been proposed for attribution to these periods, only eight sites have dating on figures, and 23 others – datings by context (Petrognani, 2013). Therefore, graphical analysis remains dominant to address the question of these decorated ensembles, notably based on comparisons with the most recently discovered sites under study as well as with new datings which regularly enrich our chronological panorama.

In terms of geography, decorated sites or collections of portable art are widely distributed with the northern sites of Mayenne-Sciences or Arcy-sur-Cure and the Andalusian sites such as Nerja or La Pileta for the southernmost area.

In terms of theme and forms, several symbolic trends are also clearly shown during this period.

In terms of shapes, three main features are present throughout the period of “ancient” rock art: the concave stomach line of mammoths, the frontal view of bison’s horns, the horses’ muzzles in the shape of a duck’s bill. These ways of drawing are already
present on the walls of the Chauvet cave, and will characterize many decorated ensembles until the dawn of the Magdalenian.

Thus horses with “duck’s bill” (less than 5% of the corpus) occupy a prominent place in all regions of our study (Fig. 1). They are present from the north of France to the south of Spain. The existence of this feature of shape in Parpallo portable art, and on the Bouil-Bleu decorated stone (Airvaux, 2001), shows that graphical rendering transcends the material.

As for the stomach line of the mammoth, the distribution is necessarily more limited, on the scale of that of the theme itself (Fig. 2). In fact, the mammoth is currently absent from Andalusian sites and occurs only rarely in the center of Spain or in the Cantabrian region. However, the Iberian mammoths of Los Casares, El Arco B, El Castillo and Pindal, all have a concave stomach line, and thus illustrate the importance of this treatment for the mammoth theme. This representation of both horse and mammoth is completely absent from Magdalenian art.

The theme of the bison is absent in the current stage of research from Andalousia and the center of Spain. There are only few occurrences in the north of France. The most northern example is nevertheless characteristic of a frontal representation of the animal’s horns. Like the mammoth’s stomach line, the bison, when it is present in a region, systematically refers to a local domination of the frontal perspective in the rendering of its horns. This shape feature will become rare or disappear in the Magdalenian period, Magdalenian artists will favor a naturalist perspective.

Through these three treatments of shape, we discern/detect strong graphic elements that have clearly crossed both periods and regions. The fact that these treatments are absent in Magdalenian art, but clearly present in the areas where the themes are depicted, shows a cultural unity of theme and image on which distances, or shape of territories have clearly no impact. No more than the groups movements, environmental changes or technical developments (see Figs. 3 and 4).

3. Aurignacian rapprochements

As for the oldest Aurignacian period, the links between Chauvet and the portable art of the Swabian Jura were rapidly highlighted by Jean Clottes (1995). Among currently confirmed Swabian figurines (Floss, 2015), the animals are mainly mammoths, lions, horses, bisons and perhaps rhinos. As for the most recent discoveries, they extend to other less common animals, such as Anatidae (ducks, geese, swans), fish and small mammals. Radiocarbon dating of the Swabian Jura sites (Higham et al., 2012) are entirely consistent and indicate an age for the lower Aurignacian art of around 42 000 years cal BP. Some of the images in the Geißenklösterle cave, for instance, originate from the same period.

All of this corpus echoes that found in the painted caves that can be attributed to ancient times. The main difficulty is related to the small number of sites that can be attributed with certainty to the
Aurignacian. Thanks to recent datings, it is nevertheless possible to associate the caves of Baume-Latrone (Azéma et al., 2012) and l’Aldene (Ambert et al., 2005), with the Chauvet cave, the general dating of which has recently been reaffirmed and respecified (Quiles et al., 2016).

If we consider these three sites near the Rhone valley, we find the main animal themes of the Swabian Jura again: mammoth, lion, bear, rhinoceros, horse, bison. However, their ratios differ: while at Chauvet the triptic mammoth - lion - rhino quite widely dominates, respectively 75, 72 and 65 images (in fourth place - the horse with 42) (ie 212 of the 436 animal images), at La Baume Latrone the mammoth dominates (9 of 15 animals), and at l’Aldene, felines are the most numerous of the small animal corpus (2 and 5 images) (Vialou, 1979a).

The impossibility to date directly the black paintings of La Grande grotte d’Arcy-sur-Cure, because the sooty rests are too tiny, does not prevent a precise chronological centring of the cavity. Trasks of torches are dated between 26000 and 27000 BP, what corresponds to ages radiocarbon obtained on the osseous fragments and calcined wood which stage between 30160 and 24660 BP (Baffier on 2005). The thematico-stylistic comparisons between the bestiary decorated with Arcy-sur-Cure in particular the ivory statuettes of Swabian Jura or the Chauvet cave figures consolidate this chronology of Arcy (Baffier and Girard on 1998). All the advanced chronological arguments today for a membership at the beginning of this ante-Magdalenian period, constitutes, for the Yonne cavity, a strong chronological evidence.

As well as in the Cave of les Gorges, in Jura (David et al., 2014), at the crossroads of the Rhone corridor, the Swabian Jura and the Cure valley, even if the dates the dates extend between the end of the Aurignacian and the beginning of the Gravettian (30160 ± 140BP GifA 9301 to 24660 ± 330BP). Mammoths, felines, horses, rhinos, bears, megaceros, so many themes and styles like the “duck bill” that illustrate these links. The clear common feature of these sites is a dominant thematic combination, numerically as well as visually, that seems to link not only these decorated ensembles, but also the productions of portable art.

In the Cave of Bernoux, in Dordogne, we find this same combination of original animal themes which are again dominated by the mammoth. This combination of four themes (horse, mammoth, feline and rhinoceros) is also based on a diversity of shape in the depiction of mammoths, which reminds us of the observation made in Chauvet (Petrognani et al., 2014).

The Aurignacian art in Dordogne offers, for its part, other more original trends, even if they are not exclusive. Thus, the theme of the ibex in Jovelle, Belcayre, La Croze a Gontran and at the Movius - Pataud shelter, links to the Pair-non-Pair decorated device and its six images of goats. Ibex figures are a majority in the cave, notably ahead of the five horses and three mammoths.

Images of vulvas are also abundant on the decorated blocks in
Dordogne. Recent discoveries on these blocks permit their full and entire integration into the ancient chronology of the Aurignacian (White et al., 2012; Bourrillon et al., 2016) and, at the same time, highlight other thematic parallels. Given the repetition of this theme, they clearly constitute a strong marker, and at the same time present a parallel with the Chauvet cave (where the theme is also present), and also with the art of the Swabian Jura.

The female figurine of Hohle Fels, recently discovered in the oldest Aurignacian level of the site (Conard, 2009), is compatible with the engraved blocks of Castel-Merle valley (White et al., 2012) and confirms that this theme is present from the beginning of the upper Paleolithic period.

These examples show us general convergences in the themes present on the scale of the ensemble of Aurignacian culture. But they also highlight elements specific to smaller territories, up to the inside of each site.

A still greater originality appears in Fumane (Veneto, Italy) - its decorated stones present a previously unseen treatment of form. The radiometric dating of the archaeological layers suggest ages between 35 000 and 32 000 BP. It is difficult to establish real parallels between the art of the Italian Alps site and the Ardèche cave, or even with the portable art of the Swabian Jura, or with the art of the Aurignacian groups of Dordogne. Nicholas Conard mentions different “Aurignacian artistic traditions” for these symbolic concentrations scattered in area (Conard, 2009).

In contrast, the recent discovery of rhino and horse figures in the Coliboaia romanian cave (Clottes et al., 2011), where a scientific study is underway, underlines a possible even wider extension of the favored thematic composition evoked at Chauvet, Aldene or Bernoux. This is also the case of the Altxerri B wall device in the Basque Country, where feline and bear are part of the body of images, several remains of which, at the foot of the walls, have been dated between 40 000 and 33 000 cal. BP (Ruiz et al., 2015).

It is extremely difficult to summarize the Aurignacian art traditions. While trends mainly emerge through animal themes and some stylistic features, they face a variability of conventions, embodied by sites like Fumane (Fig. 5).

4. Gravettian and widely shared standards

The first decorated ensembles of the Upper Paleolithic period thus represent a form of ambivalence between quite widely shared thematic combinations, illustrating a symbolism established over large areas, and much more original constructions, possible reflections of identities, or local variations given the changes of frequency of certain themes.

The decorated Gravettian ensembles, particularly in the field of rock art, present a quite well-known and well-dated set (Jaubert, 2008), since at least fifteen sites have either direct dates (on drawings or associated archaeological remains) or blocks decorated in stratigraphy.

A form of continuity is present in the Gravettian period, at the
level of the favored presence of certain themes, and also certain graphic treatments. So the question is still posed regarding the attribution of caves such as Roucadour in Quercy. Attributed to the earliest phase of Quercy (Lorblanchet, 2010), it shows clear links with Chauvet and sites of the Rhone Valley. The links between these two regions have also been highlighted (Lorblanchet, 2004; Combier, 1991). The combined presence of mammoth, feline (what is more, with a muzzle in form of a clover), or even of megaceros, form part of these links (Fig. 5).

However, Roucadour also evokes strong affinities with other Quercy caves of the early period, which are themselves attributed to the Gravettian thanks notably to several series of dating. Megaceros are very present in Cougnac (Lorblanchet, 2010), as well as mammoths, as, in particular, in Pech-Merle. But other themes, by their frequency, strengthen those links. This is particularly the case for the signs, groups of wide punctuations, or indented circles.

These last are also found in Pech Merle and especially Roucadour, where they are engraved in series (44 counted, Lorblanchet, 2010). Absent in other ancient sites, they seem therefore to be a reflection of a local identity (Robert, 2015), perhaps extendable in Dordogne towards Roc de Vézac.

But this local record remains a relative exception. The represented themes appear quite widely shared in the Quercy sites, but not only. This is the case of the wide punctuations, which are found at Pech Merle, Cougnac, Les Merveilles (Lorblanchet, 2010), Le Moulin de Laguenay (Pigeaud and Primault, 2006; Mélard et al., 2010), le Travers de Janoye (Clottes and Lautier, 1981) or Combe Nègre (Feruglio et al., 2007). Omnipresent, they also follow the same logic of construction, based on the natural reliefs (Robert, 2007). These signs followed the same logic in Cantabria caves, they are disposed on natural reliefs in El Castillo, La Garma (intermediate gallery) or Candamo (Corchón Rodríguez et al., 2011).

Negative hands are also widely distributed: frequently present in the decorated gravettian ensembles. The most impressive series is in Gargas, with more than 250 negative hands, but also a hundred animal figures.

The bestiary of the cave is dominated by the horse/bison pair, which represents nearly 75% of the identified animal figures. This fact, as well as the absence of the rhinoceros and the feline in the cave, led Jean Clottes to speak of a “thematic change (...) in the south of France from the beginning of the Gravettian”. The seven representations of mammoths in Gargas qualify this conclusion, even if they do not dominate the body of images as in Pech Merle (twenty-seven occurrences), or in Cougnac (28% of identified animal figures) (Clottes, 1995).

Beyond its frequency, the regular presence of the mammoth, combined with its graphic depiction (notably the arched stomach) remains one of the factors giving evidence of a form of unification of the Gravettian period. Although rare in the Pyrenees, we find it in la Galerie des Chouettes, in the cave of Les Trois Frères, where the figure fits into a stylistic similarity with Gargas. It is also present much further north, in Mayenne-Sciences, where available C14 datings fit in to the heart of the Gravettian period (Pigeaud, 2004; Pigeaud et al., 2003). Finally, even if it’s still difficult to date the decorated ensembles, it is one of the recurring themes in the Dordogne caves like La Cavaile or Jovelle, and also in the portable art, as on the recently rediscovered engraved plates of Istruritz (Rivero and Garate, 2014), dominated again by the horse/bison pair (whose stylistic treatment ressembles that at Gargas or Cussac).

While the mammoth supports the idea of a relative thematic continuity with older sites, the negative hands fully underline this phenomenon. Their presence at Chauvet, but also in Arcy-sur-Cure - in an early phase of the chronology - anticipates their geographic and numerical explosion during the Gravettian period.

Another theme, related to an Aurignacian tradition, illustrates even more a remarkable pan-European expansion during the Gravettian period: feminine representations. These images, present through the vulva pictures on Dordogne or Chauvet decorated blocks, show a striking change.

From the walls of the caves in southwestern France to the plains in Ukraine, the Gravettian Venus pervade all the supports: rock art (Laussel), portable art in clay (Dolni Vestonice), in stone (Wilendorf) or in ivory (Lespugue). This characteristic treatment of the feminine representations underlines a symbolic unity of the continent between 22000 and 21000 BP, and highlights the close cultural relationship maintained by Gravettian groups over large distances.

The image of the woman endures in the symbolic discourse of the Gravettians, but it is the animal theme of the Central and Eastern Europe sites, that displays the most spectacular continuity with Aurignacian themes. The Pavlovian and Kostenki portable art fully illustrates this Aurignaco-gravettian continuum in symbolic bestiary of Eastern Europe.

Regarding the endurance of certain rock themes, such as the mammoth or megaceros, a relative continuity appears between Aurignacian “artistic traditions” and Gravettian themes. While we can reject the idea of a rupture between these two moments of the chronology, the omnipresence of negative hands as well as the characteristic depiction of the female image, constitute original elements that differentiate the “symbolic tradition” of the Gravettian groups between 28000 and 22000 BP in Europe, where it seems that the graphic concepts are found on the broader cultural space. So it does not seem possible to identify distinct “symbolic territories”, and even less - original provinces, as could be sensed at the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic (Fig. 7).

Only limited original creations or constructions still exist, some
of which, repeated over several sites, are perhaps the prefiguration of «local phenomena» which will truly appear around the Last Glacial Maximum.

5. The Last Glacial Maximum: emergence of local or regional graphic identities?

Between around 22000 and 17000 BP, Europe experiences an extremely cold and dry period corresponding to the Last Glacial Maximum. The hunter-gatherer groups no longer convey a strong cultural unity across the continent and the Solutrean techno-complex takes its place in a territory relatively restricted to Western Europe.

As for the artistic productions, they seem to present new graphic forms that show a clear evolution, especially through their geographical spread. On the one hand, there are series of images which evoke the legacy of previous phases, notably the Gravettian, to the point that one speaks in places of “Gravetto-Solutrean” art, especially for the Rhone valley sites (Lorblanchet, 2004; Pigeaud, 2004). It is in fact difficult, in the absence of direct dating, to distinguish which period these sites should be attributed to.

The sculptured art of Le Roc de Sers (Tymula, 2002), Le Fourneau du Diable and of l’Abri du Poisson (“Fish Rock Shelter”) (Delluc and Delluc, 1991), provides an illustration of the art of the Solutrean groups of Southwest France and of its innovations. While the sculpture technique is not new, the repetition of these productions between the Dordogne and Charentes, shows a real originality. We can also imagine these creations expanding to the Pigeonnier and Saint Front caves, near Domme, with their remarquable bas-reliefs on the walls (Delluc and Delluc, 1983). The impossibility of dating these decorated ensembles with certainty (no direct dating possible, nor direct association with an archaeological context) does not permit us to verify the expansion of the territory of Solutrean sculpted art to the southern limits of Dordogne.

In addition, Le Roc de Sers, le Fourneau du Diable and l’Abri du Poisson have some similar iconographic elements including the disproportionate silhouette of certain carved animals and the depiction of anatomical details (Aujoulat, 1984).

Some convergences are sometimes only visual as illustrated by the example of Gabillou and Lascaux. The study of fifty engraved horses at Lascaux and Gabillou, using morphological criteria (Petrognani and Sauvet, 2012), showed that significantly differentiated treatments of form were implemented in the two caves. In particular, the way of depicting the limbs is radically different.

However, this does call into question the similarities that have been regularly pointed out, but rather underlines that the two sites are complementary. The very strong visual impact of dynamism of the figures in both caves explains for the most part the given impression of kinship. The presence of the same types of partitioned rectangular signs reinforces this impression.

With regard to form, the absence of the top of the skull resulting in a gap between the antlers, ears or horns of deer, or goats
is a stylistic treatment related to Franco-Iberian ensembles of a similar chronology. Occurrences of this feature of form in the Solutrean portable art of Parpalló (Villaverde, 1994), in the Andalusian caves of Ardales, in La Pileta (Villaverde, 2005) and Nerja (Sanchidrián Torti, 1994), or even in the Cosquer cave (Clottes et al., 2005), or on the plates of the Rochefort cave (Pigeaud, 2013), show relative consistency centered on a Solutrean chronology. Its presence on the walls of La Pasiega offers another possible example, as this Cantabrian cave is partly related to the end of Pre-Magdalenian art (Balbin Behrmann and González Sainz, 1993; Corchon, 1994; González Sainz, 1999; González Sainz and Balbin Behrmann, 2002). Nevertheless, the specimens at La Pasiega significantly expand a geographic space until now related to the Mediterranean border, and demonstrate that it is very tricky to subordinate a stylistic treatment to a particular region (Fig. 8).

In general, the end of the “ancient” period sees the appearance of repeated complex geometric signs, present in several sites, which raise the question of a possible regional character (Petrognani and Robert, 2010). Beside the quadrangular shapes of Dordogne, one of the most evocative examples are the Placard signs. In this Charente caves, where they are the most numerous (10 signs), they have been dated at a period at least as old as the Solutrean (Clottes et al., 1990, 1991). The presence of signs constructed according to the same model in two Quercy caves, at Pech Merle and Cougnac (Lorblanchet, 2010), where decoration is identified between Gravettian and Magdalenian period, highlights the sharing of symbolic values over a relatively large regional scale (170 km as the crow flies) (Figs. 6 and 7). Extended even beyond, since at least another sign of the same type is identified at Cosquer (Clottes et al., 2005), for the LGM, and another in Lascaux (Aujoulat, 2004; Vialou, 1979b) underlining a limited spread, and thus illustrating a porous nature of territories. Nevertheless few datings are available for LGM.

Other signs, even more numerous, in the Cantabrians, reflect a similar trend towards the emergence of true regional symbols. In the Cantabrians, it’s quite difficult to identify the specific presence of a Solutrean art, as the works have little or no direct absolute dating. As for the animal themes, they are characterised by a regional originality: the deer and horses dominate the images with respectively 31.8% and 17.9% of animal figures. While the deer is the dominant theme in wall art, it is also present in portable art, including far from the Cantabrian coast, since we can find an engraved plaque of this theme on the Maitreaux site (Indre-et-Loire, France) (Tymula et al., 2013). The originality is even more pronounced in the abstract universe, where the signs, particularly quadrangular signs, constitute an important key to reading. Although their periphery has the same shape, they clearly differ from the Dordogne signs by their internal filling and growths observable on some of them. It is not a question of identical repetition of form, as we will see in other complex types in the Magdalenian, but of almost infinite variations in the rules of composition (Sauvet et al., 2017). Several dozen quadrangular signs

Fig. 7.
are represented on the walls of El Castillo, the Pasiega A and C or Altamira (Fig. 9). Beyond quadrangular signs alone, an almost systematic use of red pigments is observed.

Applied in simple lines, large flat areas, or dotted lines, it embodies a symbolic choice of Cantabrian LGM groups in the caves of La Pasiega, El Arco, Pondra, El Pendo, or of one part of the Garma. The original red motifs (Robert, 2015) are found in Santian, El Castillo, even in Asturias (Tebellin in particular). This iconographic unit, involving technique, highlights a phenomenon of symbolic regionalization. The very cold climate can explain this phenomenon and points to a reduction of interactions and a relative isolation of Solutrean groups, put forward in studies of bone and lithic techniques.

In the caves attributed to the end of Old Upper Palaeolithic a phenomenon of regionalization appears. Red deer dominate in the Cantabres, engraved mammoths in the Rhône valley (Chabot, Huchard, Ebbou, Figuier) (Combier, 1991; Lorblanchet, 2010), and horses in Aquitaine (Gabillou) (Gaussen, 1964). Nevertheless the chronology is delicate and bound to the archaeological artefacts. Central and Eastern European portable art shows few Solutrean indications, Gravetian art endures and is directly followed by Magdalenian art, which marks a «reversal of themes» with now the domination of the horse/bison pair in the statuary.

This rupture brought by Magdalenian art appears in all the symbolic regions where LGM art was present before and is accompanied by a significant stylistic rupture. Michel Lorblanchet, Jean Combier, and César Gonzalez Sainz observe it respectively in the Lot, the Rhône valley and in the Cantabrian region. Michel Lorblanchet underlines that such a similarity in the evolution of both Rhone and Quercy artistic groups suggests the hypothesis of a strong original solutrean tradition on both sides of Massif Central which would have gradually gone out in the Magdalenian

Fig. 8.
(Lorblanchet, 1989). This solutrean thematic regionalization seems a forerunner of more complex phenomena which will be established at the heart of the Magdalenic period and of a range of graphic spaces at several levels (Fuentes et al., in the same volume).

6. Conclusion

A phenomenon of regionalization crystallizes in Middle Magdalenic, with a standardization of the naturalistic style. This specific period sees the disappearance of the «duck-bill» horses and mammoths with arched stomachs.

The examination of features of form in the depictions of different animal species has shown us that some of them were symptomatic of pre-Magdalenic art. Certain themes and certain different animal species has shown us that some of them were belonging to a pre-Magdalenic geographical areas concerned. These areas can be considered as belonging to a pre-Magdalenic "common ground" of form, while others apparently have a shorter lifetime and a more limited regional spread, or even restricted to a single site.

Specifically, beyond the continuity of certain stylistic similarities, specificities persist, and especially to the geographical and spatial scale. The aurignacian diversity (supports, technical, theatics ...) gives way to a more homogeneous universe in the Gravettian, which seems to contract territorially in the LGM, but which also sees the territorial assertion in particular with the signs, takes out of the rise of Magdalenian.

A symptomatic example of artistic traditions subordinate to a relatively confined geography is the engraved deer of the Nalon valley in Spain. We have seen how the treatment of these Asturias deer stands out from the depiction of this animal in the rest of the ancient corpus. Even if we can not propose a solid chronological framework for this appro, it demonstrates the existence of a concentration of original treatments within limited geographical areas.

The presence of a deer with the same features of form at Hornos de la Peña, in the center of Cantabria, shows (similar to the examples highlighted for bird-shaped signs) that a regional stylistic treatment can spread beyond its initial area of concentration. The symbolic territories thus remain open to a spread, although limited, of seemingly distinctive symbols.

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