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# Local and inter-site organisation of graphic, plastic and corporal representations in the Aurignacian of the Vézère Valley

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## Résumé

Recent excavations at classic Aurignacian sites, combined with the study of archival records, long-forgotten museum collections and even backdirt, contribute precious new data to an understanding of chronology, geographic variation, subjects, techniques and socio-spatial context of the earliest graphic, plastic and corporal representations in SW France. The sites concerned (Castanet, Blanchard, Cellier, La Souquette) are prolific sources of EUP material representations.

Our goal is to understand the cultural logic, chronology, spatial structure and regional organization that underly the construction of meaningful forms. The chronology of material representation in the Vézère sites is conditioned by poorly understood taphonomic factors that we believe have removed much of the Aurignacian record in the period from ca. 41KY to 38ky BP (cal). Most art- and ornament-bearing Aurignacian levels are situated on bare, previously unoccupied bedrock platforms. Either there were never earlier EUP occupations in the Vézère or they were washed out of the shelters in the region prior to the art-rich Early Aurignacian installation.

We reveal important inter-site and inter-level variation in representational objects and graphic subjects. Forty-six new engraved, painted or otherwise modified limestone blocks from Castanet, Blanchard, La Souquette and Cellier alter significantly the proportions of previously known represented subjects (including three woolly mammoths from Cellier) on a site-specific and regional scale.

Images and ornaments seem to have been quotidian in context, associated with all the debris of daily life, rather than being restricted to "sanctuaries" or specialized "ritual places." The

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\*Intervenant

Early Aurignacians lived with images on the ceiling above their heads and walked on surfaces containing abandoned or lost personal ornaments and bi-products of their production. New cementum data show a strong and coherent seasonal signal (winter) for Abri Castanet and La Souquette.

Production and use of formed beads are spatially organized within sites. Unfinished production stages and whole beads cluster together adjacent to fireplaces. Moreover, the construction and use of personal ornaments rely on a highly construed economy of raw materials, often acquired from great distance: marine shells, talc, ivory and mammalian teeth.

The abundance at some of these sites of heat-treated colorants such as hematite and goethite (14kg at Abri Blanchard alone) may reflect painting activities, however they are shown to be entangled with techniques for abrasion aimed at producing lustrous surfaces on bone, ivory and soft stone objects.

**Mots-Clés:** Aurignacian, Vézère Valley, Regional organisation, Graphic representation, Personal ornaments