(Re)defining our terms: An updated regional and chronological synthesis of the Aurignacian technocomplex in South-Western France

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Résumé

It has become a truism to say that the Aurignacian (lato sensu) is synonymous with the arrival of modern humans in Europe, despite the fact that evidence is accumulating to

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question this idea. Putting the role of the different transitional industries aside for the time being, there exists significant debate concerning "which Aurignacians?", "when?", and most notoriously "where first?". These simple questions have complex answers, around which many models have been proposed to explain how modern humans expanded throughout Europe. Yet multiple traditions of research, crossed with competing models, have resulted in disagreements on what constitutes an Aurignacian assemblage, and whether internal variation is synchronic or diachronic. Our aim here is to weigh in on the debate regarding our definitions of the Aurignacian and its internal variability; if we are not in agreement as to what constitutes the phenomenon itself, it cannot be used effectively in any discussion, regardless of the argument one is trying to make.

Two facts must be established before we can discuss the Aurignacian’s internal variability. First, it is, at least at some moments in its chronology, a Pan-European phenomenon extending into limited regions of South-Western Asia. Second, it lasts, in some regions, nearly ten thousand years. These two assertions mean that regional and chronological variability is to be expected. As such, we should not be surprised if regional chronologies show both similarities and differences; the Aurignacian is neither monolithic in time nor space. Such variation is, in fact, expected under Clark’s (1978) original definition of a technocomplex.

Here we will present an updated synthesis of chronological variability in the Aurignacian technocomplex as viewed through its regionalized manifestations in South-Western France. This synthesis will integrate recent work linking lithic and osseous technical systems, as well as data on faunal and territory exploitation throughout the Protoaurignacian, Early Aurignacian, and Recent Aurignacian. We will conclude with a brief discussion on what differing regional chronological sequences possibly represent.


Mots-Clés: Aurignacian, South, Western France, Chronology, Regional perspectives, technical systems