

The neolithic steles of la Bastidonne in Trets (Bouches-du-Rhône, France)

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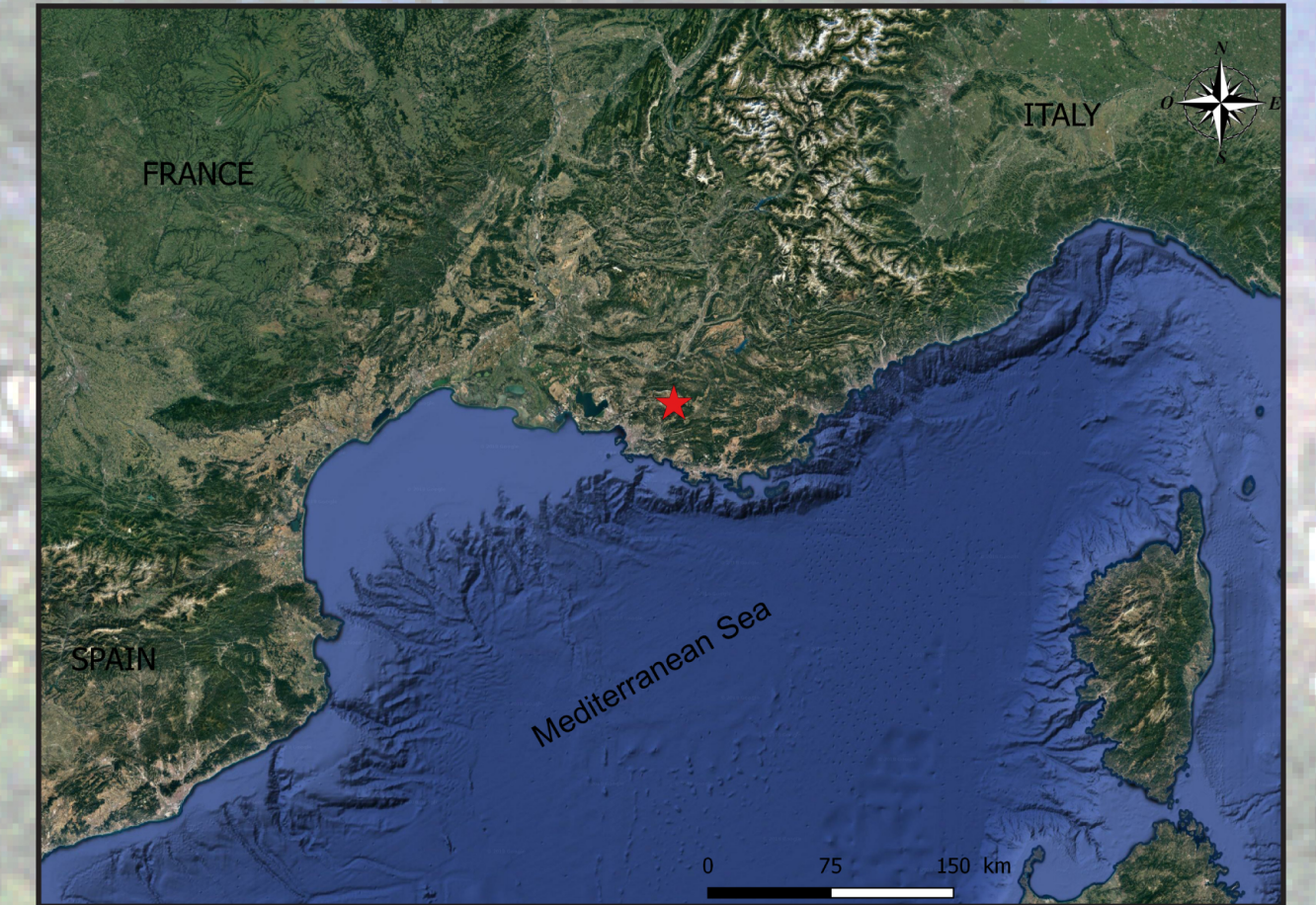
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The site of la Bastidonne has delivered since the last quarter of the 19th century at least twenty-one steles and fragments of engraved steles in association with furniture from a incineration necropolis destroyed by plowing (Chaillan 1893). Eleven have been kept at the Musée d'Archéologie nationale of Saint-Germain-en-Laye since 1959. In addition to this remarkable collection, various small fragments were collected later, by Max Escalon de Fonton during site excavations in 1961 and by one of us (ADA) during surface surveys and a small rescue excavation operation in 1978.

Contextualization of the site

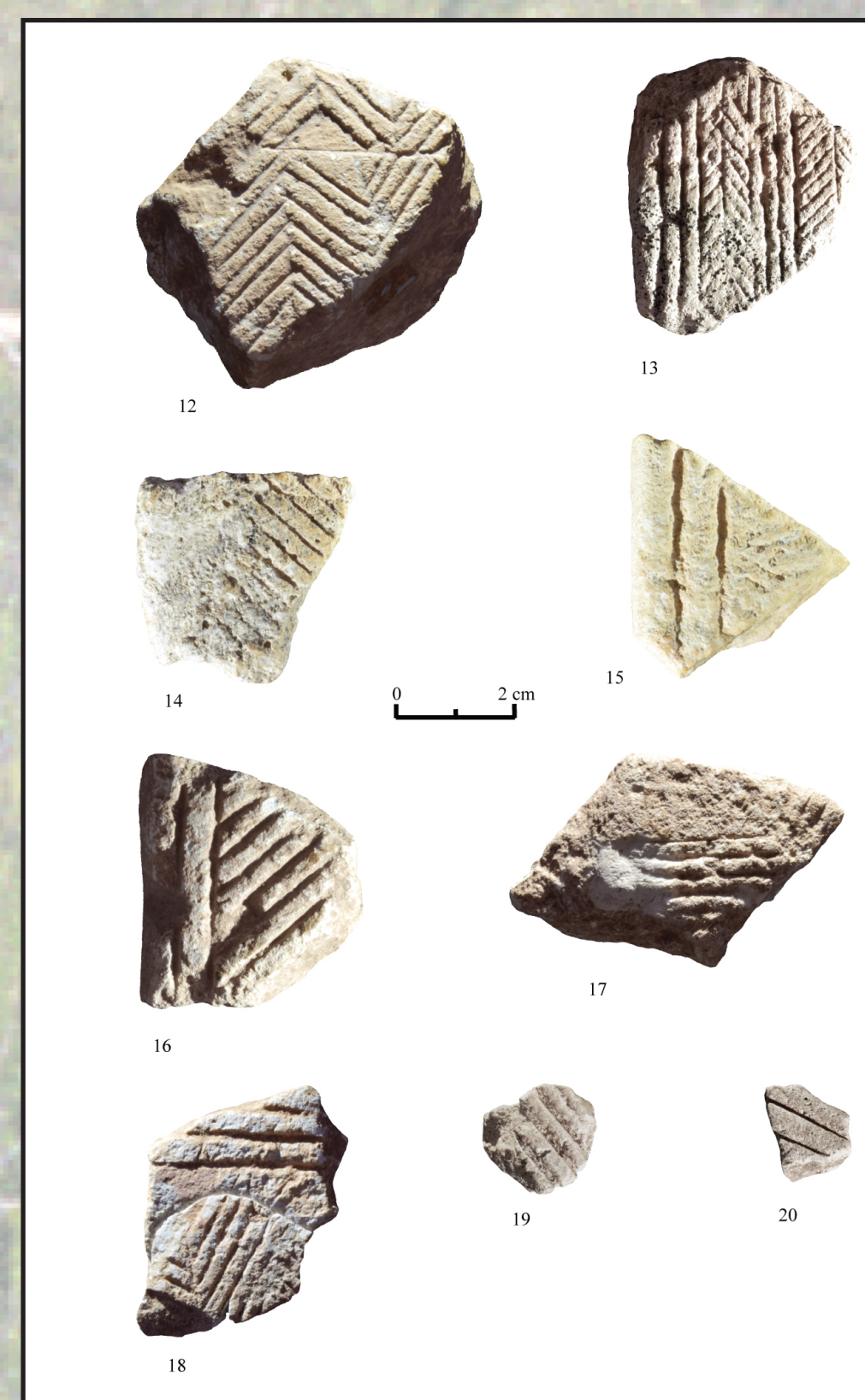
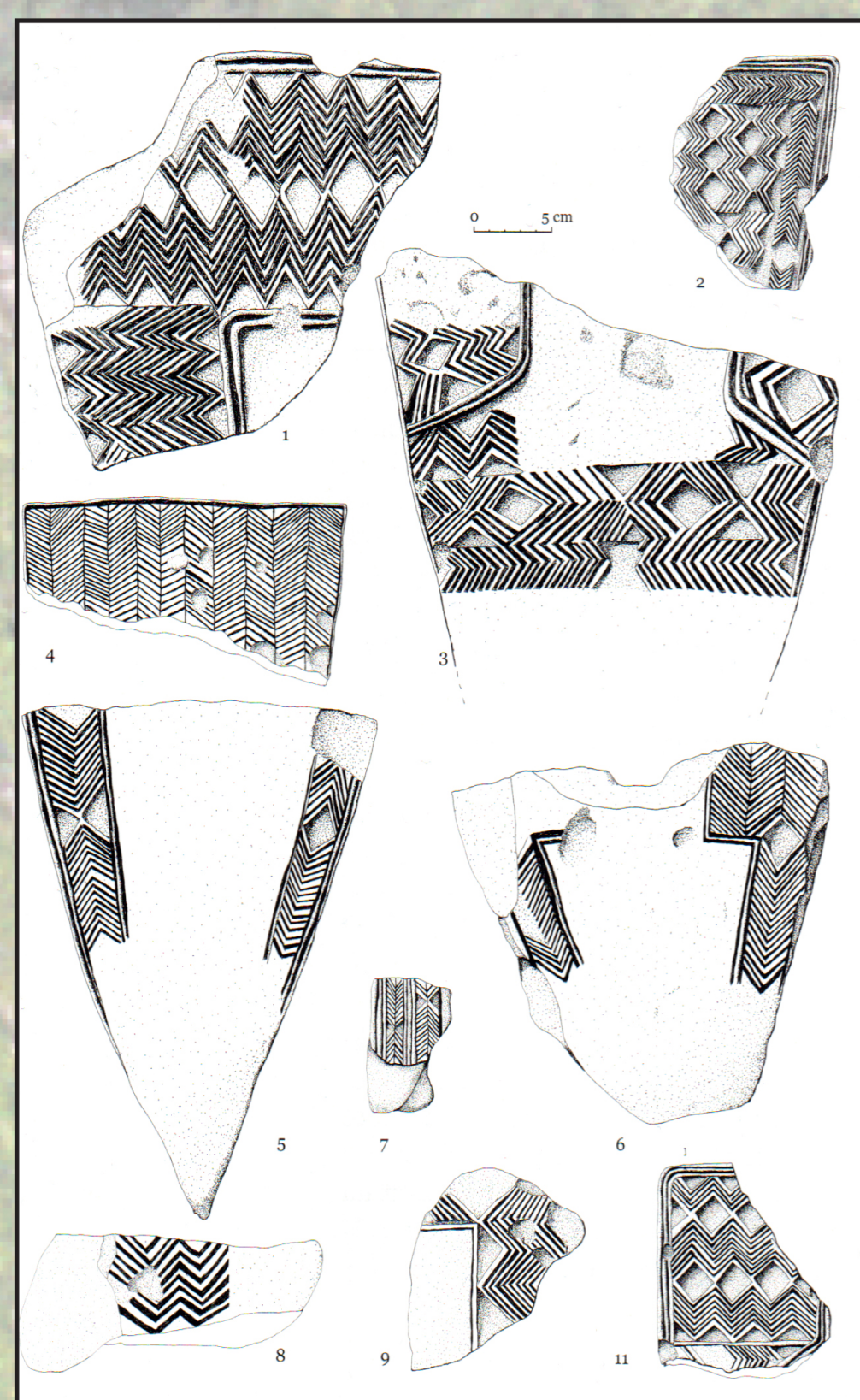
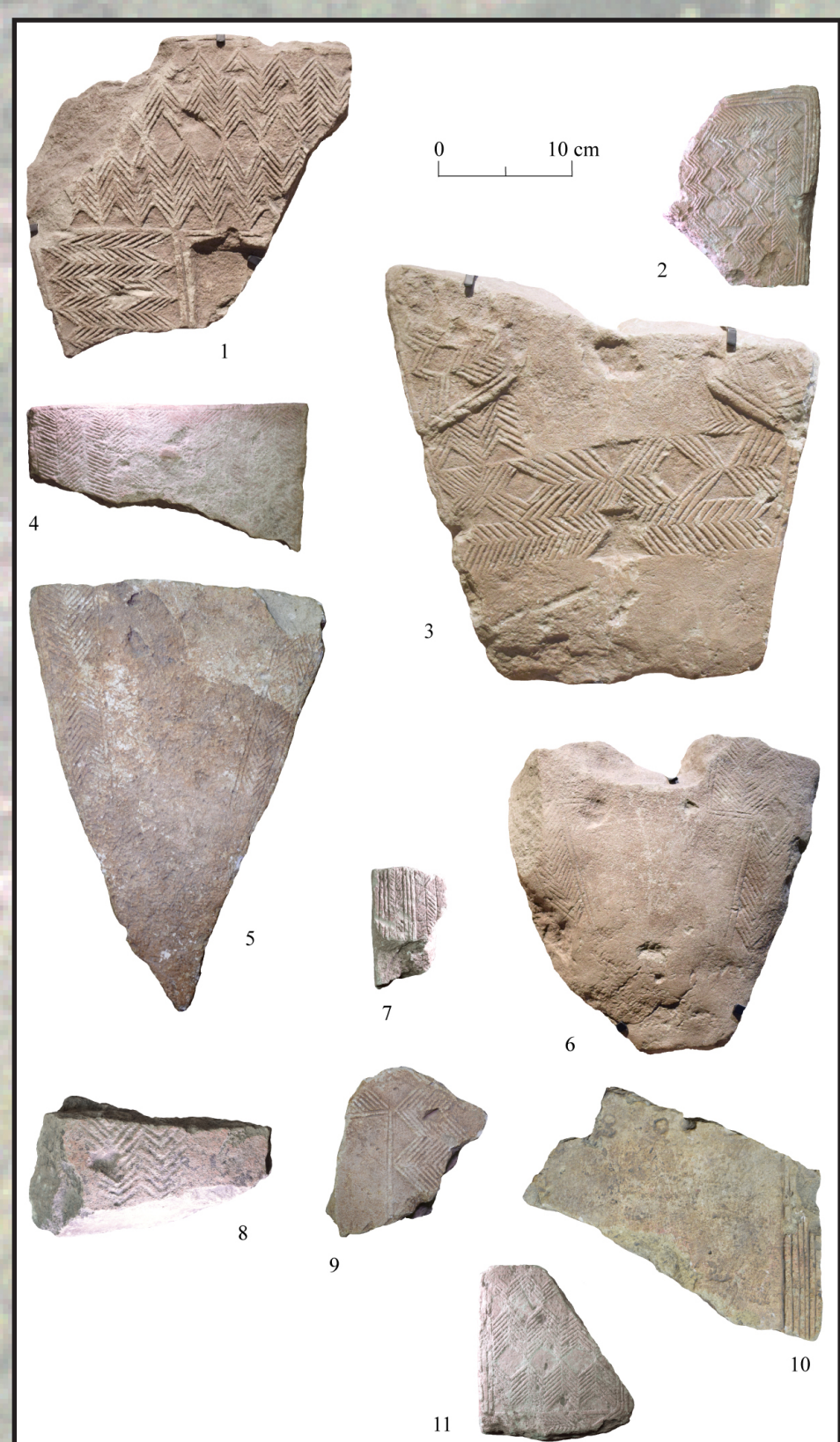
The plain of Trets is located about 30 km north-east of Marseille and about 20 km east-southeast of Aix-en-Provence, at the eastern limit of Bouches-du-Rhône. The whole of the plain contains a very large number of neolithic sites (IVth millenium). La Bastidonne is located about 3 km north-east of Trets. To the south-east of the eponymous farm, it occupies a small plateau 270 m high.



Situation map of la Bastidonne (© Google Satellite ; J. Masson Mourey)

Steles and fragments

All the steles and fragments were carved in a limestone soft, fine and chalky. In comparison with the other neolithic provençal steles, the anthropomorphic character of those of la Bastidonne seems indisputable. However, even on the most complete fragments, the various elements of the face do not appear, the eyes or the nose are not visible. Only the representation of the shoulders can be identified on some of them.

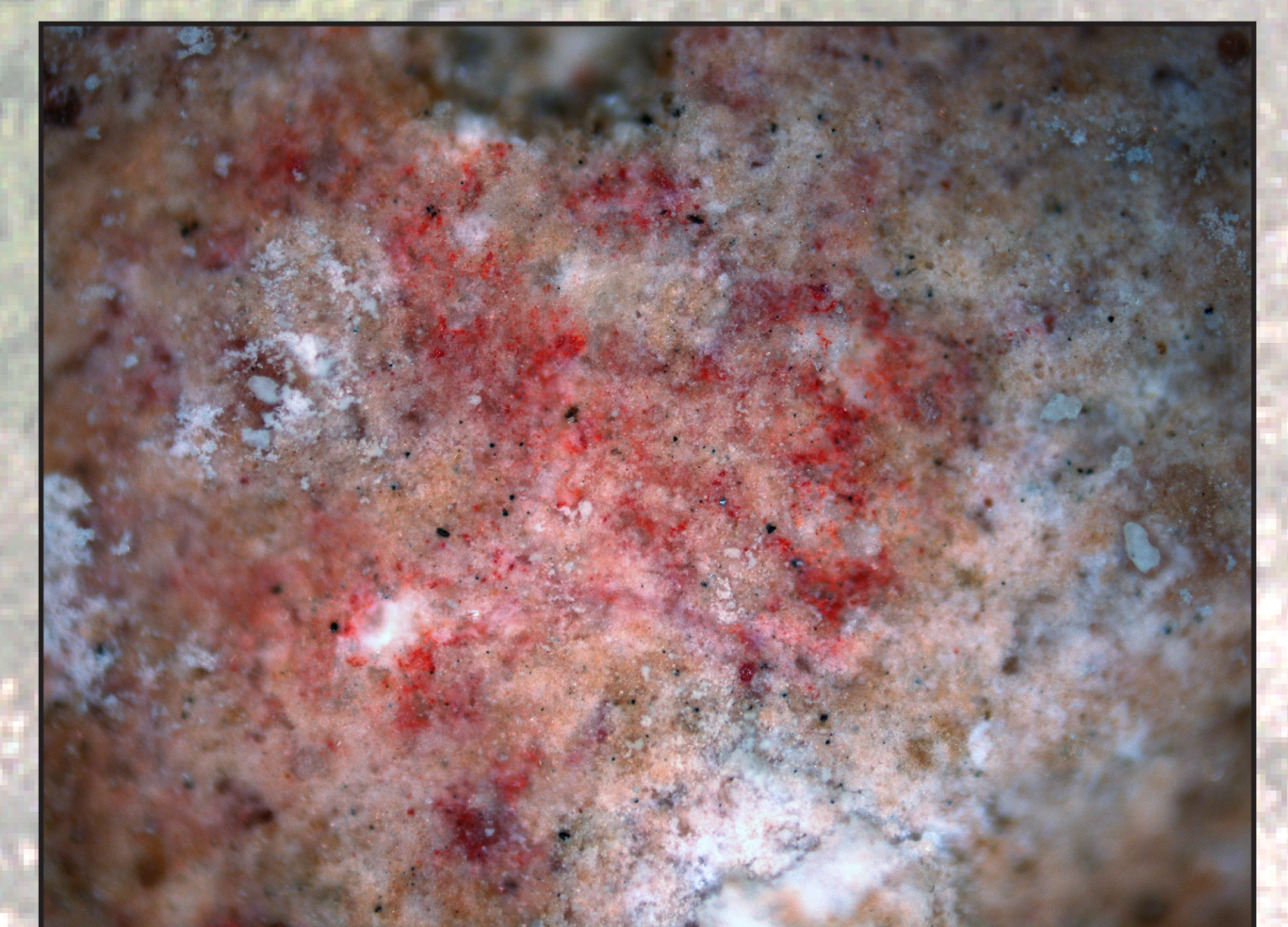


The steles of la Bastidonne have a complex engraved decoration, mainly composed of chevrons and « fish bones », which recalls the decorations observed on the menhirs statues of the group of Seró (Lleida, Spain) (López and Moya 2010).

From left to right : photographic plate of the fragments kept in the MAN, plate of drawings of the same fragments and photographic plate of the unpublished fragments collected between 1961 and 1978 (© J. Masson Mourey ; A. D'Anna).

The traces of pigment

It was very early noticed that many of the steles bore traces of red pigment accompanying the engravings. Their study (Walter *et al.* 1997) showed that the color was localized in the engraved areas and not on the smooth areas and that it could not participate to explain the anthropomorphic details (eyes, nose). It is cinnabar, mercury sulfide (HgS) relatively rare in nature and whose use in the Neolithic can be surprising. The same pigment has however been recognized on other provençal steles, at Beaucet and Gargas in the Vaucluse (D'Anna *et al.* 2015).



Microscopic view (x10) of traces of red pigment on fragment (© L. Bellot-Gurlet, MONARIS, SU/CNRS).

The site of la Bastidonne represents the largest concentration of steles and steles fragments known in Provence, for the IVth millennium. Thanks to the regrouping of these objects and some of the associated lithic furniture at the MAN, a multidisciplinary work is being published to present an updated synthesis of the data available on this site and to put them in perspective with the state of the art knowledge about provençal neolithic steles.

References

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