



Engraved rocks of La Ferrassie style

by Emmanuel Anati*

INTRODUCTION

Among the expressions of palaeolithic visual art in Western Europe there is a group of engravings on small stone blocks in the region around Les Eyzies de Tayac in Dordogne, which have already been carefully studied. They are about seventy items, of various styles, most of them engraved, some painted, some painted and engraved, dating back to the Aurignacian period. They are considered the most ancient works of art of the European continent and are about 30,000 years old. The first description of these rocks was made in the beginning of the 20th century by Denis Peyrony, who discovered them, in excavation reports, monographs and articles. A basic publication on this topic is that by Gastonne Lalanne and Jean Bouysonie about the site of Laussel (*L'Anthropologie*, vol 60, 1946). A careful description was offered in 1978 by Gilles and Brigitte Delluc (*Gallia Préhistorique*, vol. 21/1-2).

These stone blocks have attracted the attention of the main protagonists of the European prehistory, such as Henri Breuil, Louis Capitan, Henri Delpont and André Leroi-Gourant. They have discussed about their chronology and typology, but little about their meaning. About twenty of them are cup mark stones, and one at least, found at La Ferrassie, has been described as part of a "Musterian" burial site more than 40,000 years old (fig.1). Several have animal figures and appear to constitute a separate typology. Some have human figures that are mainly female, others have abstract signs, others again carry the dominant theme of the vulvar symbol.

Most findings were obtained from old excavations, but often the operators also identified the cultural level, mostly Aurignacian, at which they were found. One should point out that when stratigraphy is valid the cultural level of the finding represents a terminus, i.e. it indicates the age of the last usage of the object or that its abandonment, not necessarily that of its making. However, in the vast majority of cases the *terminus ante quem* is the stratigraphic context. Such a diversified association of findings has been considered as characteristic of Aurignacian iconography. The first question to be faced is the cultural definition. In fact, it is not clear whether these diverse iconographic expressions on stone blocks all belong to the same cultural horizon, as one has often taken for granted, or whether they belong to different periods or ethnic groups. From the conceptual point of view, some diversity would imply a different vision of life and interests, which beg the question whether they can coexist in the same cultural context. The next question is the function of such blocks. One is wondering, in fact, what was the reason for making those engravings and whether they can provide some answer about it.

Among these diverse graphic representations, in this study we deal with of the particular typology of engraved block that have figure normally defined as "vulvar" with repetitive symbol. Some of them are just fragments and provides only partial elements of syntactic association and typology. However, the vulvar signs are associated with other graphemes and these associations repeat themselves. We define as vulvar signs or symbols U-shaped, circular or semicircular engravings that sometime, but not always, have a medial fissure. The iconography of the stone block in question includes up marks, i.e cup-shaped engravings, and *baton-*

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nets, i.e. linear stick-shaped engravings. There also are diagrams of animal themes, mostly traces of snouts, such that one can identify the species of them.

It is worth noting that among the seventy stone block known up to now, only part of them, usually those having only cup mark engraving, can be considered unbroken. Many block represent fragments of the original. Most of the times, the lines of fragmentation are ancient and intentional. Subdivision seems to be part of the process associated with their usage, perhaps the very last act that was completing their function. The blocks with vulvar symbols are nineteen, they come from six sites, and are all concentrated in a region of a diameter of 20 kilometre around the township of Les Eyzies in Dordogne. The 19 blocks were found at (in alphabetical order): Abri Blanchard (4 specimens), Abri Castanet (2), Abri Collier (3), La Ferrassie (5), Laussel (4), Abri Poisson (1).

These blocks were concentrated in a limited area, they had a theme limited to practically four repeated graphemes and a particular logical associational syntax. From this one can deduce that they had a specific function in the society that produced them. With only one exception, each excavation site had a number of specimens. All stone blocks were originally found in what the discoverers defined as levels of living quarters.

We follow the numbering system of the blocks as first established by Delluc. We will call "block" a stone with a thickness more than 20 cm, and "slate" those with a lesser thickness. For this study we have benefited of very good slides that were made available in part by National Museum of Les Eyzies and in part by the Museum d'Aquitaine in Bordeaux. We are grateful to both of these museums. Some of the stones have been studied from original black and white photographs. Although I have seen in the past a good number of these specimens and I have examined some of them again recently, the present study has mainly been carried from photographic documentation.

DESCRIPTION OF INDIVIDUAL SPECIMENS

1. ABRI BLANCHARD, BLOCK 6 (FIG. 3A)

Fragment of limestone block 0.85 x 0.78 m, maximum thickness 0.47 m. The original form of the block cannot be reconstruct. There are three engraved signs, two of them are vulvar symbols, the third one is a circular engraving with a cup mark at the centre, itself probably a vulvar sign. Its surface was prepared by polishing. The contour of the block had been shaped.

2. ABRI BLANCHARD, BLOCK 8 (FIG. 3B)

Fragment of limestone block 0.73 x 0.35 m, maximum thickness 0.47 m. The thickness of 0.10 m is the result of an apparently recent cut, as at the origin it must have been thicker. Part of the surface, about 35 cm in length, looks as if it was polished by human intervention. Its extremity, originally shaped as an animal snout, was intentionally polished and shaped at the edges. A partially natural dip was enhanced by hand, apparently to outline the eye of this animal snout. The surviving part of the edge was shaped by human hand. It is possible that the shape itself of the rock is part of the conceptual syntax of the specimen. This seems to be a recurrent phenomenon that occur even more clearly in other stone blocks. On the polished surface there are two vulvar symbols and other minor engravings. According to the discoverer M. Castanet the specimen was at the level E of the shelter, which can be attributed to the typical Aurignacian period (B. G. Delluc, p. 240).

3. ABRI BLANCHARD, BLOCK 9 (FIG. 4)

Fragment of limestone block with a surface of 0.54 x 0.28 m, a thickness of 0.55 m, partially polished by human hand, on which it appears a deeply engraved vulvar symbol. From a careful observation of the photograph, one can recognise superficial almost invisible engravings, which outline the shape of an animal head, probably a feline species. This had been partially cancelled by a polishing action before making the vulvar sign. The making of the two engravings, the deep and clear vulvar sign (phase B) and the vague, elusive and superficial animal shape (phase A), seem to suggest their functions, as if one of the figures had to be obvious and the other one hidden.

This specimen was found outside a stratigraphic context (Delluc, p. 244).

4. ABRI BLANCHARD, BLOCK 10 (FIG. 5)

Three fragments of a limestone slate of 0.65 x 0.44 m, maximum thickness of 9 cm. One of the fractures is recent, the other one looks bruised and ancient.

The dominant and deeply engraved figures are three well defined vulvar signs and some *batonnets* whose grooves are less precise and engraved with a more coarse pecking tool.

The shape of the contour at one extremity of the specimen has been modified by human hand and looks like the head of a Ruminant. A small round emergence seems to represent the eye, while the profile itself of

the slate runs slightly curved in the shape of a horn. The natural shape of the edge was modified by human intervention, which indicates intentionality.

The animal figure is not obvious; it is intentionally elusive, but it is part of the shape of the slate itself and perhaps the very reason why this rock was chosen.

Three different types of engravings can be found on the available surface of this slate. The more marked one is that of the vulvar symbols. The linear grooves, crossing a vulvar sign in one case at least, may have been engraved at a later time than the vulvae, as if was an act of confirmation or verification. The elusive shape of animal head is part of the structure of the slate itself and it may have pre-existed the engravings.

We attempt of recognising therefore three phases of execution. A: preparation of the surface and of the edges of the slate, the elusive animal head included. B: engraving of the three vulvar signs. C: engraving of the *batonnets*, which were made with different tools, different sizes and probably added at different subsequent times.

In order to suggest that the shape of the slate and its surface was important for the aim of the composition, one should consider the following. The vulvar signs were added on a surface that was prepared for it and had a significance; the *batonnets* were added later and at different times. The execution and fruition of this work had therefore different phases: preparation of the supporting structure, engraving of main symbols, and secondary additions. The slate was arguably broken at an ancient time, as one can notice in the majority of blocks analysed that were broken intentionally. The fourth phase would therefore be the cracking of the slate as the completion of its function. Each block has its own story and this story often is repeated in various blocks.

5. ABRI CASTENET, BLOCK 2 (FIG. 6)

Two fragments of a limestone slate with surfaces of 23 x 27 cm and 35 x 35 respectively and a thickness of 14 cm. The surface of one of the fragments was polished smoother than the other one, whose surface reveals signs of pecking. The whole surface was prepared by levelling the stone.

The iconography involves two vulvar symbols with two semicircular signs at the medial fissure, two additional curved lines that could be sectors of a circle, and one *batonnet*. There is also evidence of precedent engraving that were cancelled when polishing the surface. The same surface had therefore been used for earlier engravings – a few traces are still there – which were then cancelled by polishing and scratching.

The sides of one the fragments have been smoothed with time probably by erosion. It is not clear whether the original contours are still present in both fragments. Traces of hits suggest that the fragmentation was probably intentional. One can therefore propose that, once the function of the object had come to fruition, the slate was intentionally broken.

According to the discoverer D. Peyrony, this stone block belongs to level C of Abri Castanet, a level that was attributed to the Aurignacian period (Delluc, p. 267).

6. ABRI CASTENET, BLOCK 25 (FIG. 7)

A limestone slate with surfaces of about 40 x 30 cm and a thickness of 18 cm, with a pecked surface that was partially polished. There are two engravings of vulvar symbols. A number of natural grooves seem to have been enhanced by human hand. The shape of the slate itself looks like the profile of the snout of a wolf or another Canid species. If the shape of a canine snout was intentional, as it probably was, its making necessarily preceded the engraving of the vulvar signs. The site of discovery only has typical Aurignacian levels.

7. ABRI CELLIER, BLOCK 2 (FIG. 8A-B)

A fragment of limestone slate of 48 x 26 cm with an average thickness of 11 cm. The surface appears prepared by levelling and polishing. The angle of the superior part of the profile had been rounded by hand before engraving the slate. Below at the centre there is a large and deep cup mark, only two thirds of which was preserved. The surface has traces of red and yellow colour. Some traces of painting seem to have been added recently.

The most clear engravings are those of an animal head, probably an Equine species, and a vulvar sign that are probably contemporary. The association of these two graphemes seems to be intentional. Some cup marks and a few lines, as well as a semicircular line at the upper left side, were engraved more lightly. There also are a few short line engraved on the upper region of the surface. Although the style is different from previously described specimens, the syntactic association includes, here as well, the vulvar sign, the animal figure, cup marks and *batonnets*. This repetitive association looks like the phrase of a repeated language. In upper left side are traces of a fragment of circle, which was largely cancelled by the polishing. We assume it is the vulvar sign of a preceding phase. At the base of the right edges, there also are five



parallel notches that are finely engraved and almost hidden. Just like similar signs, it appears to be a numerical indication or keeping account or a way of memorising.

8. ABRI CELLIER, BLOCK 3 (FIG. 9A-B)

A limestone slate of 74 x 31 cm with a thickness of 14 cm. The slate is fissured at the centre, but it appears to be complete except a worn-out strip in the upper part of the relief. The surface was prepared and polished before engraving and the edges have been shaped and smoothed. The intended shape seems to be explained on the lower right extremity of the stone, where it an animal figure is hinted. One can see a snout with a flat nose and an eye obtained from deepening a natural fissure. The species cannot be recognised, even though it could be a seal or a marine mammal. Along the upper part of the slate there are three vulvar signs. There are traces of cancelled engravings after polishing out a previous phase. On the right hand side a large cup mark appears of having been recently pecked, although it was present when the rock was removed from its geological level in 1927. Along the lower edge is a numerical group of eight *batonnets*.

9. Abri Cellier, Block 6 (fig. 10A-b)

An heavy limestone block with a size of 60 x 45 cm and a thickness of 60 cm. It is fragment showing signs of recent, angular breakages, included traces of a heavy tool strikes. From the slides provided by the National Museum of Les Eyzies, the surface preserving ancient engravings is about 45 x 30 cm, with a corner of difficult interpretation on the right hand side extremity of the relief. The engravings that are clear and more or less complete are four vulvar signs with central fissure, four *batonnets* which can considered as a series of three cup marks. There are also some small, aligned signs, four of which are clear, that could be numerical grapheme. Some remnants of curved lines seem to indicate preceding vulvar signs that became partially cancelled during polishing. One can identify at least four signs partially eliminated. On this surface one can therefore identify two phases of execution, the first being cancelled and covered by the second one. This suggest a continuous use of the same surface.

On the right hand side extremity of the surface, in an area that appears being consumed, are three cup marks that have been at least partially outlined by human hand. The protuberance on which they are located has the shape, probably a natural feature of the rock, of a grotesque face, with two cup marks where the eyes should be. It is not excluded that this protuberance can be associated with the elusive animals already identified in other blocks. If it is an animal figure, the specie is not easily recognisable.

10. LA FERRASSIE, BLOCK 2 (FIG. 11)

A limestone slate with a surface of 0.48 x 0.29 m and a thickness of 18 cm. Engravings are located on its main surface and continue on a side. The specimen includes two vulvar symbols and a few engraved lines, some of which go over natural grooves of the surface. This has been pecked and levelled before engraving. On the left side the shape of the rock is oblique and it seems to imitate an animal snout. There are three engraved lines that could represent the jaws or the fangs. Two cup marks are were one would expect to find the eye and the nostril. The elusive animal that is almost hidden in the shape of the rock itself seems to be a repetitive element. For the present specimen as well the general shape of the rock precedes the engraving of vulvae. It should be noted that the whole stone block appears having been shaped and modelled with its sides being irregular because of erosion. This is one of the rare case in which the block was preserved in its integrity. According to the discoverer D. Peyrony, this block was located in the archaeological layer H that was recognised as a Aurignacian II period.

11. LA FERRASSIE, BLOCK 6 (FIG. 12A-B)

A limestone block with a size of 0.56 x 0.40 m and a maximum thickness of 20 cm. The surface was prepared and polished. The general shape of the block is partially natural, with modifications in some parts by human hand with the aid of pecking and polishing tools. The specimen was therefore intentionally planned.

According to D. Peyrony this block was excavated in the layer H that was recognised as of the Aurignacian III period.

The clearest engravings are two vulvar signs with central fissure, one with a cup mark and a transversal line, the other one with two cup marks that appears as the eye of an upset face, a kind of anthropomorphised vulva, which also have a protuberance below the two cup marks as if it had a nose. Several cup marks are located in different parts of the surface. The seven cup marks are lined up on the upper part of the relief probably have a numerical significance as well.

In addition to the above main engravings, the surface is filled with other signs. A round-shaped engraving on the upper right hand side of the relief could be the remnant of a vulvar sign of a precedent phase. There also are several lightly engraved signs mainly on the lower left hand side. Some of them have been interpreted by D. Peyrony as representations of two Ruminants. After observing the specimen and its

photographs available to us, we cannot confirm this interpretation. One particular group of these signs, made of four parallel lines, continue and complete the natural profile of the block, which on its lower left hand side seems to represent the snout of a bison. This shape has been corrected and completed by the human hand in order to render the whole shape of the block similar to the body of a bison. We have again the presence of an “elusive animal” almost hidden, which seems in various cases to provide an identity for the stone block. This praxis seems to be a reference point for those involved with these objects, perhaps a way of referring to single objects as the “bison block” or the “feline block”. On the lower left side one can observe the presence of ancient breakages. One could hypothesise three stages of execution of this specimen. During the first phase the preparation of the surface, then the modelling of the edges, the shaping of the bison body, and probably the finely engraved signs. The second phase would involve the production of the two deep vulvar signs. The third phase would represent the execution of the cup marks that surround these signs without touching them and the series of the seven aligned cup marks. This process, which is analogous to that of other blocks, reveals an intentionality and praxis that underline the canons of a specific conceptualisation. This begs again the question about the reason of being and the motivation for making these blocks and their functions.

12. LA FERRASSIE, BLOCK 7 (FIG 13A-B)

Fragment of limestone block with a size of 52 x 46 cm and a thickness of 22 cm. At the centre of the fragment is a vulvar figure. Peyrony has located the block at the level H of the Aurignacian III. The rough preparation of the surface leaves a protuberance and various engravings in the lower part of the relief that seem the setting up a work not finished. There indications of at least two phases of engravings. If this is correct, the artist had in mind an unfinished figure of a size similar or superior to that of the vulvar sign. The initial intention was probably that of carrying out an animal illustration, the head of which would have been at the main protuberance. Arguably the project was to realise an image in relief. The block is a fragment with traces of ancient breakages.

13. LA FERRASSIE, BLOCK 8 (FIG. 14A-B)

A small limestone slate with a surface of 17.5 x 12.5 cm and a thickness of 8.5 cm. The main engraved face is convex with sloping sides. On it is deeply engraved a vulvar sign with a medial fissure. The second side has some engraved signs that Peyrony saw as the sketch of a human face. It is probably an initial sketch for a vulvar sign never completed.

The edges of the convex side with the central vulvar figure have been shaped by the human hand. On the lower left hand side one may recognise the modelling of a bovine snout, with a hint of horns and an engraving that could be the eye. On this surface one can also see a few cup marks and *batonnets* on the lower part of the relief and on the sides of the vulvar sign. The praxis of the three elements already observed is repeated: the modelling of the supporting base inspired to animal forms, the vulvar sign and the added *batonnets* and cup marks.

14. LA FERRASSIE, BLOCK 16 (FIG. 15A-A)

A limestone block with the size of 62 x 37 cm and the thickness of 25 cm. The shape of the engraved surface is a roundish lozenge similar to the Australian *churinga*. It is partially modelled, as shown by the polishing and remnants of the pecking in both the lower and upper part of the relief. The central part of the surface shows traces of preparation by pecking and polishing.

According to Peyrony the pecking on the upper part of the relief would witness of an intentional defacing of the image in ancient time. The iconography would therefore have been broken and cancelled, as the last phase of its palaeolithic history. According to Peyrony, this block was excavated below the medium-final Aurignacian level and should be located in the Aurignacian III or IV period.

The iconography includes a vulvar sign at the centre of the surface, the sketchy profile of a four-legged animal that Peyrony defines as a feline, but it could be an equine species, cup marks and *batonnets*. The cup marks are aligned in horizontal series and in groups of two, three, five and seven. They are often associated with a *batonnets*, which sometime is near or above the cup mark and sometime penetrates it. This combined syntax is complex; it seems to have been planned and the number of cup marks in each series was arguably not fortuitous. The similarity of this composition with that of an Australian wall engraving has stimulated much debating (E. Anati, 2002, *La struttura elementare dell'arte*, pp. 18-19).

15. LAUSSEL, BLOCK 1 (FIG. 16)

A limestone slate with a surface of 50 x 26 cm and a thickness of 11 cm. The two extant fragments make up for the original whole slate. The traces of heavy hits and the associated erosion show that the separation is ancient and that the slate was broken intentionally. The numerous remnants of engravings could belong



to different phases and some of them could be recent. One can also see many traces of lines that we have omitted from the schematic reproduction to outline only the main signs. One can distinguish two different tendencies, both of them ancient. One is that of vulvar symbols. Four of them are clear and without cancellations. At least four more are only partial because cancelled by polishing, both intentionally or effect of erosion. This allows us to establish that there are at least two phases in these tendencies. The other tendency is that of providing a shape for the slate. It also has two phases. The first one concerns the determination of the contour. The second one introduce an alternative contour by engraving it with a clear line that shows the body of a four-legged animal, probably a bovine species. The elusive animal is reproduced twice, probably in association with two phases of vulvar signs. This suggests that the original contour had the same purpose of identifying the slate with a animal profile. In this case the elusive animal is the slate itself. It is possible that the two phases of vulvar signs and animal profile are equivalent. In both cases the general shape of surfaces seems to anticipate the the engraving of vulvar signs. What does it mean? One could suggest a relationship between the shape of the surface and what is going to be engraved upon it. There must also be a relationship between the elusive animal and vulvar figures. These associations are clearly not fortuitous and intend send a message. Arguably, the vulvar symbol, which is repeated on each block of this repertoire, provides a specific attribute on the basis of the elusive animal of the surface upon which it is engraved.

16. LAUSSEL, BLOCK 3 (FIG. 17)

Small limestone slate with a surface of 33 x 28 cm and a thickness of 11 cm. In 1978 Delluc identifies three clear vulvar signs and one partially superimposed and cancelled. One finds at least four cup marks and a series of four small notches with a probable numerical meaning. The numerous superimposed engravings indicate the presence of three phases of subsequent works.

The surface is affected by polishing and its engravings are difficult to read. There are traces of ancient polishing and breakages.

17. LAUSSEL, BLOCK 4 (FIG. 18A-B)

A limestone slate with a surface of 40 x 34 cm and a thickness of about 7 cm, with two engraved sides. The corners are rounded and along the edges one can see evidence of heavy hits of a pecking tool that have established the current shape of the slate. It is a rare case of engraving of a slate on both sides. The engraving on the two sides are different. On one side there are two complete vulvar signs and one incomplete or more likely deteriorated. Anyhow, they are rather cumbersome engravings. On the same surface there are also fine linear engravings, among which a sketchy animal figure, but its association with the same context is debatable and is therefore viewed with doubts.

On the other side of the slate there are cup marks, some of them organised in circles around a larger cup mark. The composition is also completed by many lines or *batonnets*. They represent two different typologies of engraved surfaces that may have had two different functions and were not contemporary. Anyhow, whoever carried out the later engraving must have seen the previous one. This side also has traces of fine engravings that are probably out of context. On both sides the fine engravings do not seem to fit into the same conceptual context and syntax of the stronger engravings. In view of the different typology, this second surface with cup marks is being excluded *pro tempore* from the present analysis. The linear engravings are also not considered for the same reason.

18. LAUSSEL, BLOCK 5 (FIG. 19)

A limestone slate with a subtriangular shape, a surface of 40 x 27 cm and a thickness of 10 cm. The surface was levelled and polished by the human hand and a composition was engraved at the centre of which are two deep cup marks, one larger than the other, surrounded by lines that seem to form a common composition. This typology is different from the other specimen described so far, but it seems to fit into the same conceptual context, with a vulvar symbol at the centre of the composition.

According to the discoverer G. Lalanne, this slate was located in a layer defined as "superior Aurignacian", while B. and S. Delluc allocate it to the superior Perigordian. The discoverers and subsequently the Dellucs saw in this composition a phallic image that ends with the large cup mark, from which outward lines emanate. Another interpretation saw the large cup mark as a vulvar symbol toward which various *batonnets* converge. A third possible interpretation considers the large cup mark a vulva, which in the composition is penetrated by a phallus that is represented by two long parallel lines. In between of these two lines appears the second cup mark that is penetrated by the *batonnet* or emanates a *batonnet*. One has also suggested that this last figure would represent the sperm on his way out of the phallus. These various interpretations agree on the fact that it concerns a sexual composition involving penetration. Such a content

makes this specimen conceptually different from the others, where metaphoric concepts not actions were represented. Both location and chronology of this specimen remain to be determined.

19. ABRI DU POISSON. BLOCK 4 (FIG. 20)

The rocky shelter excavated by D. Peyrony contained layers with Perigordian and Aurignacian material. This engraved rock is attributed by Peyrony to Aurignacian levels.

This limestone block is a fragment, has one engraved surface that was pecked and polished and has a size of 53 x 40 cm and a thickness of 20 cm and more. Several traces of heavy hits with a pecking tool around the edges indicate that its shape was intentional.

The dominant figure is a large vulvar sign. Around it are cup marks and *batonnets*. On the surface are various other signs that seem to be remnants of preceding phases cancelled by polishing. Among these one can recognise at least two vulvar signs, two fish-bone signs and more unidentified traces. It gives the impression of a surface that has been used at subsequent stages. On the lower left hand side there could be the trace of an elusive animal, signalled by a neck line and two cup marks as eyes. Due to the state of conservation this hypothesis remain doubtful.

CONCLUSION

This preliminary analysis of a group of engraved blocks, defined as Aurignacian and belonging in any case to the initial period of the Upper Palaeolithic, and excavated within a small region of Dordogne, has outlined some basic factors.

About twenty blocks excavated in six different prehistoric sites demonstrate abstract, symbolic compositions and have an extremely limited grammar: the vulvar sign, the zoomorphic profile, cup marks and *batonnets*. The syntactic associations are repetitive, which suggest that these objects had a specific function.

The shape of stone blocks was intentional and the engraved surface was prepared and polished. The shape itself and its contour was planned and in almost all specimens it was found the presence of the elusive animal that was part of the shape of the block. In some specimens the animal is less elusive and is engraved near the vulvar symbol. The table below shows the elementary characteristics of specimens. In the basis of data analysed here, out of the 19 specimens, 5 had only one phase of engraving, 11 have two phases and 3 have three phases. All specimens had their surface polished and prepared before engraving. At least in 16 cases out of 19 the contour of specimens had been modelled. In at least 12 cases out of 19 one can recognise the zoomorphic grapheme, while in 9 cases it was represented by the very shape of specimens. In at least 11 cases out of 19 the specimen had been intentionally broken before being abandoned in the state in which it was found.

Vulva and animal are two fundamental theme that are related to each other. They are associated with cup marks and *batonnets*, as well as in 5 cases with small groups of aligned notches that had possible numerical meanings.

In at least 10 cases one can observe elimination of previous compositions and reworking of the specimen, while traces of the older engraving remain in spite of polishing and scratching. The same surfaces were reused, but every time the previous engravings were cancelled. In each phases the intentional message was precise. Even when one intended represent a vulva, the previous one was cancelled and another one was engraved.

In most specimens one has observed intentional, ancient breakages. The specimen was broken once the function was fulfilled or when this act was decided for some reason. Even in the case of a cancellation of a previous phase by polishing, it looks as if the vulvar compositions had a precise function and nothing was fortuitous. The association vulva-zoomorph appears to have a totemic character or associations of individuals with their ethno-totemic identity: vulva = woman, animal = totemic identity.

The fact that there are several vulvae associated with only one animal and the presence of notches with a probable numerical value may be relevant in attempting to find a function for these findings. The animal is always one, while the vulvae vary from one to four in each composition or phase. Seven specimens have one vulva, seven have two, three have three and five have four vulvae.

In this specific case, as in other palaeolithic or later contexts, cup marks have a female value and *batonnets* have a male value. These engravings are accessories to the fundamental theme, that is the vulva-zoomorph association. The totemic animal can have different functions. It can indicate a totemic association of vulvae or it can indicate the totemic association or name of the male who claim his right over the vulvae.

In conclusion, one could propose the hypothesis that those blocks were like legal acts regulating the man-woman relationship and functioned as a behavioural code for the clan.

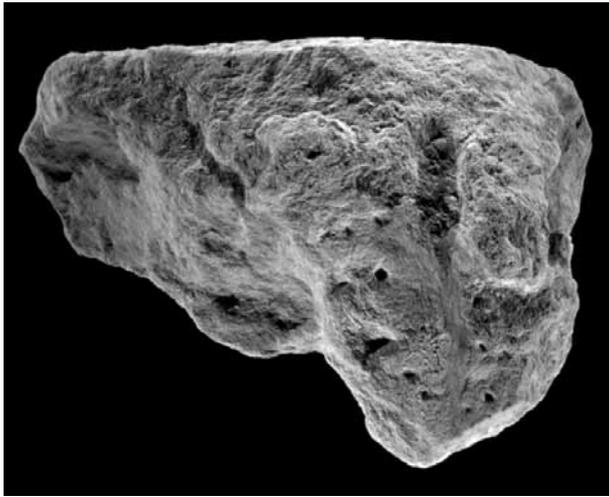


fig. 1a

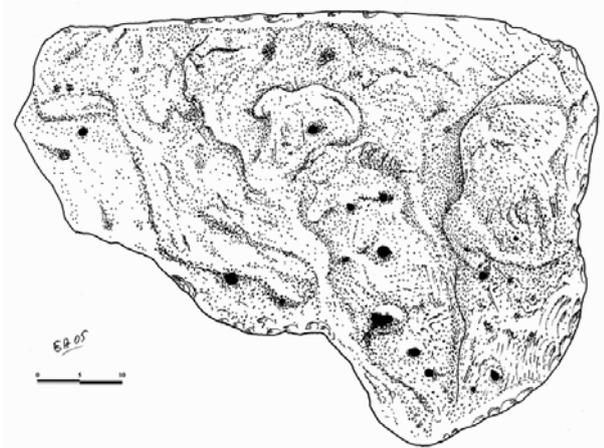


fig. 1b

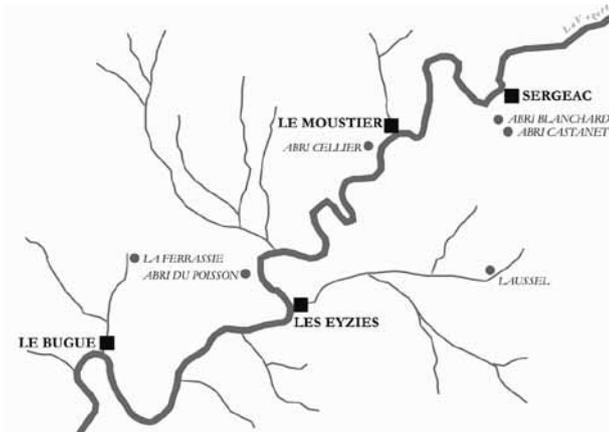


fig. 2a



fig. 2b

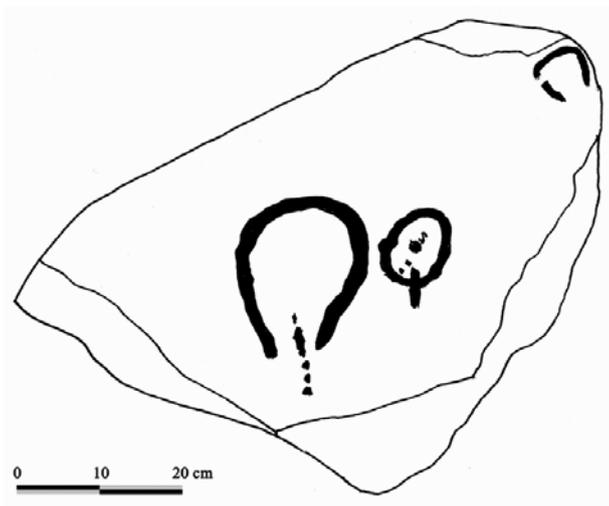


fig. 3a

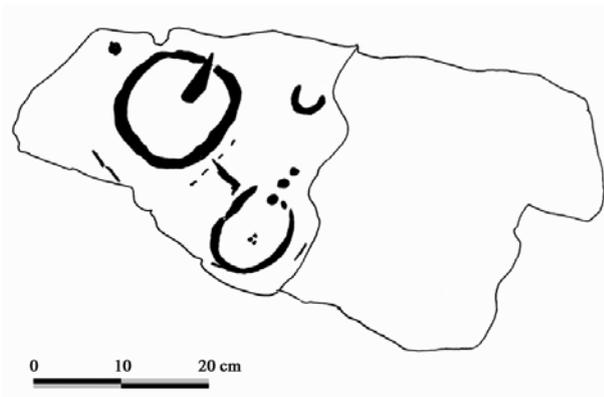


fig. 3b

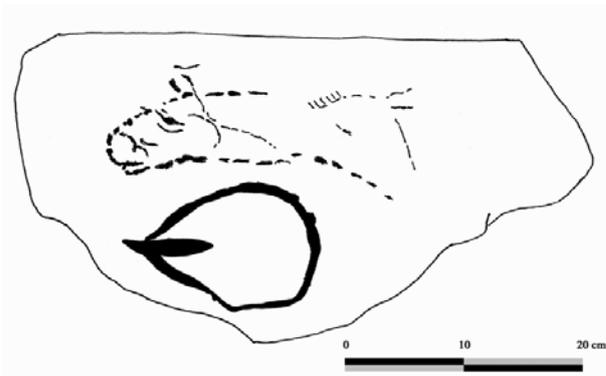


fig. 4

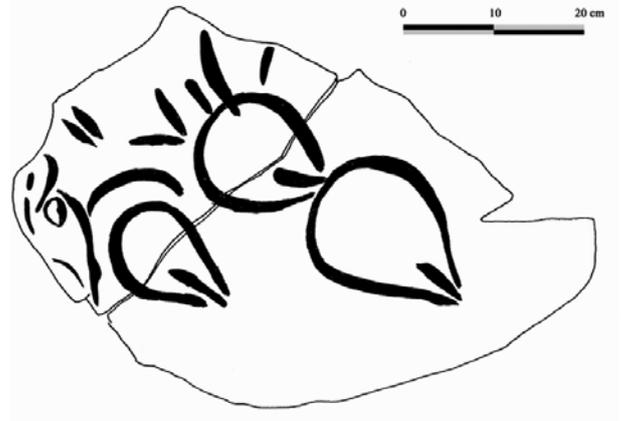


fig. 5



fig. 6

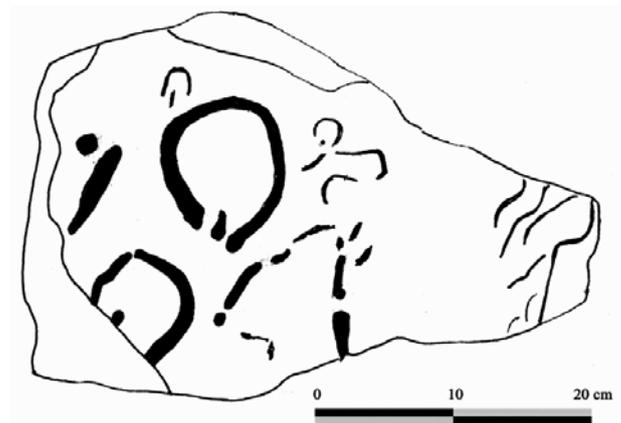


fig. 7



fig. 8a

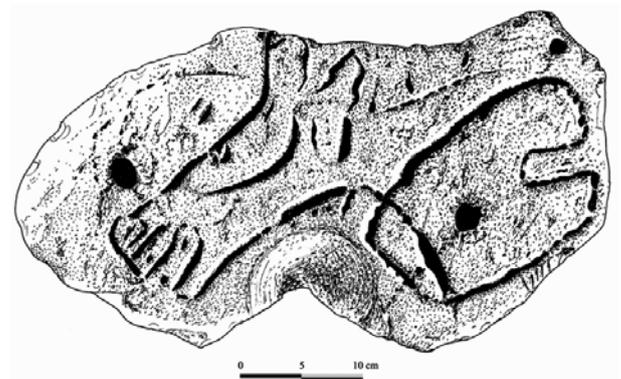


fig. 8b



fig. 9a

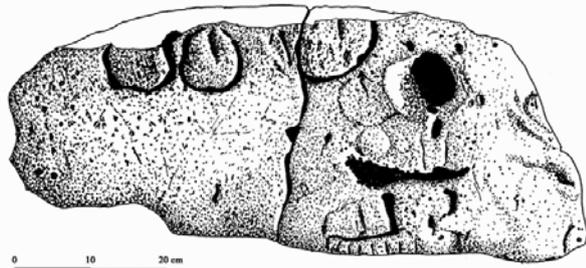


fig. 9b



fig. 10a



fig. 10b

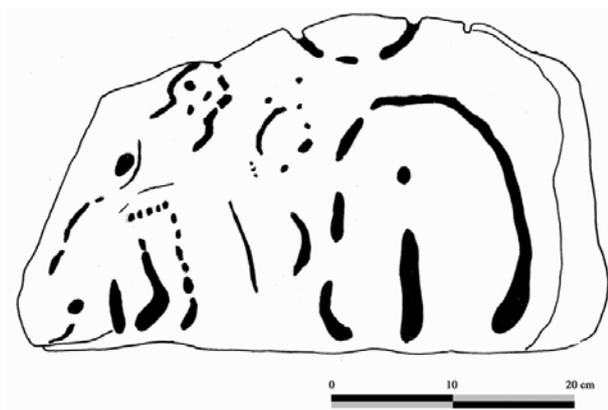


fig. 11



fig. 12a

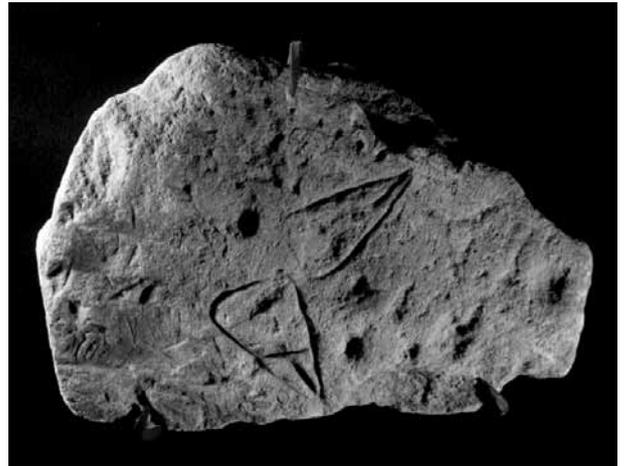


fig. 12b

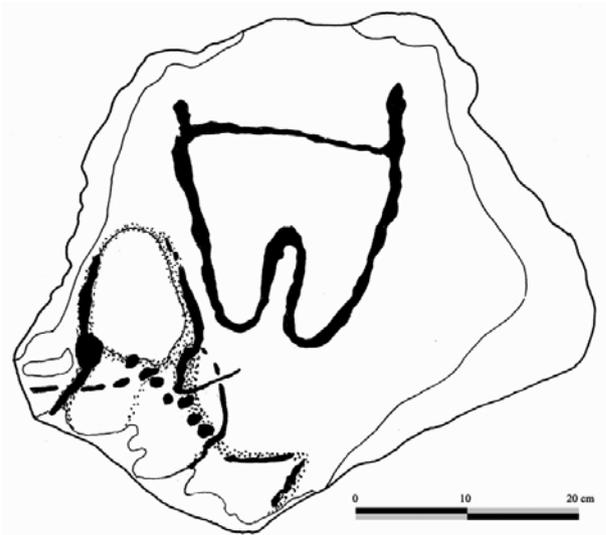


fig. 13a

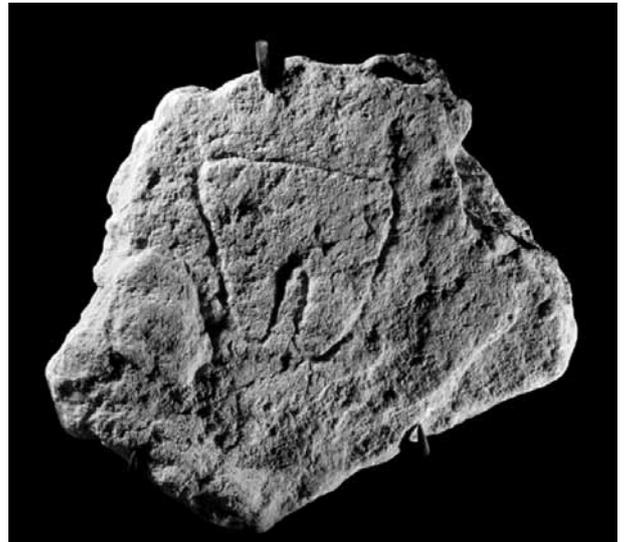


fig. 13b

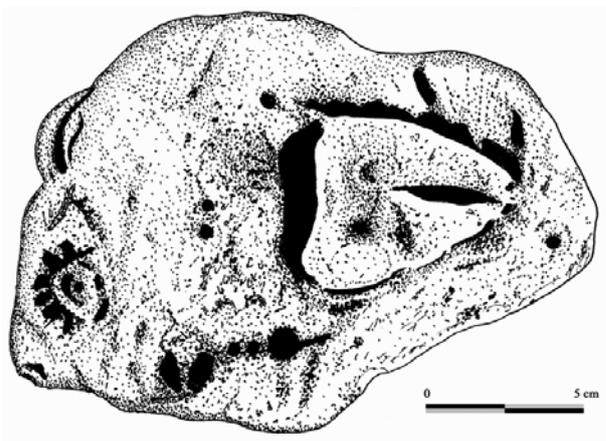


fig. 14a

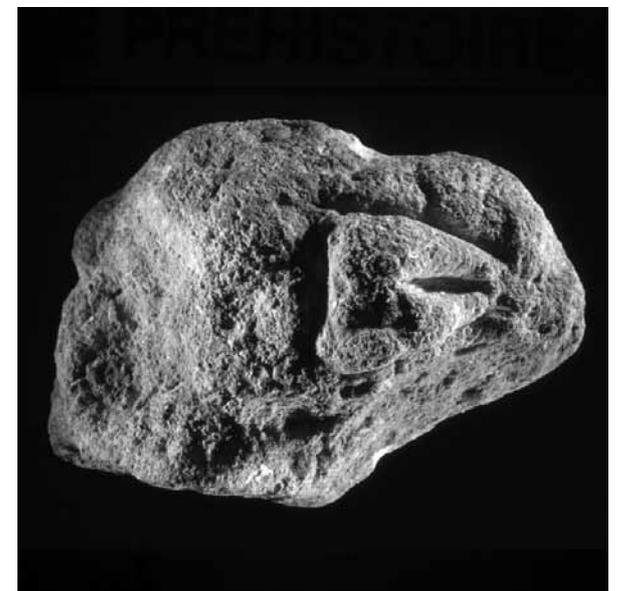


fig. 14b

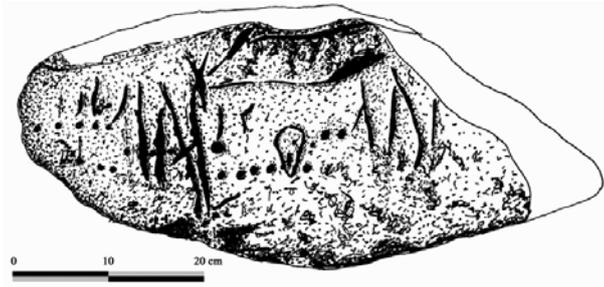


fig. 15a



fig. 15b

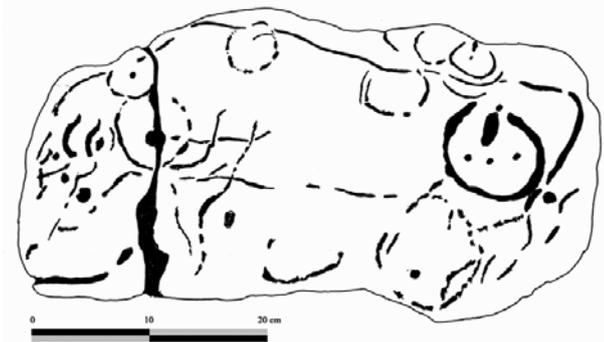


fig. 16



fig. 17

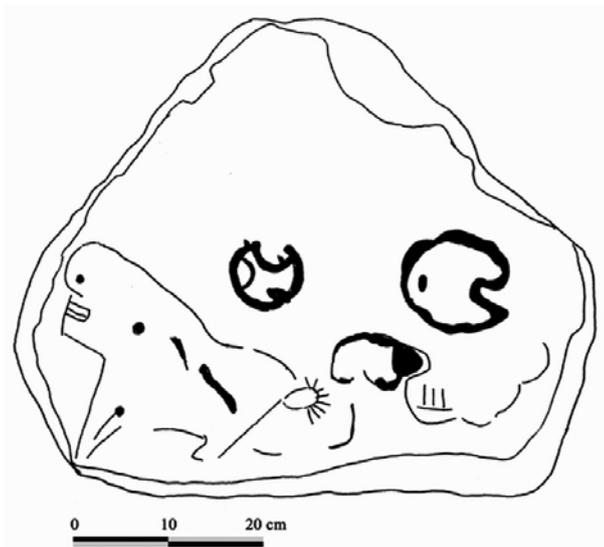


fig. 18a

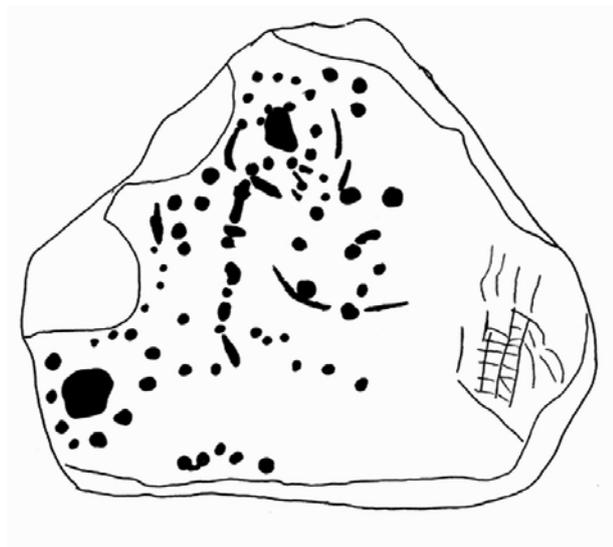


fig. 18b

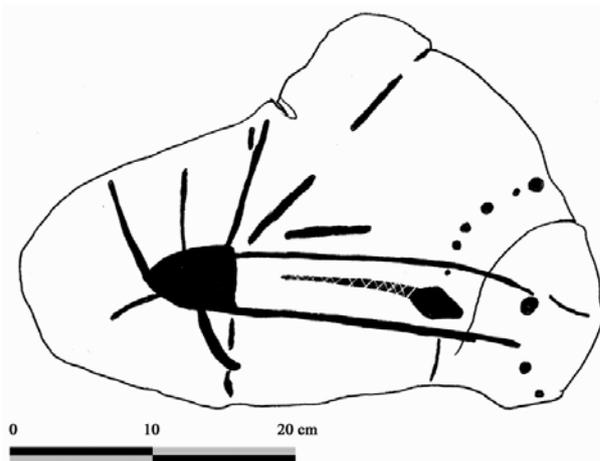


fig. 19



fig. 20

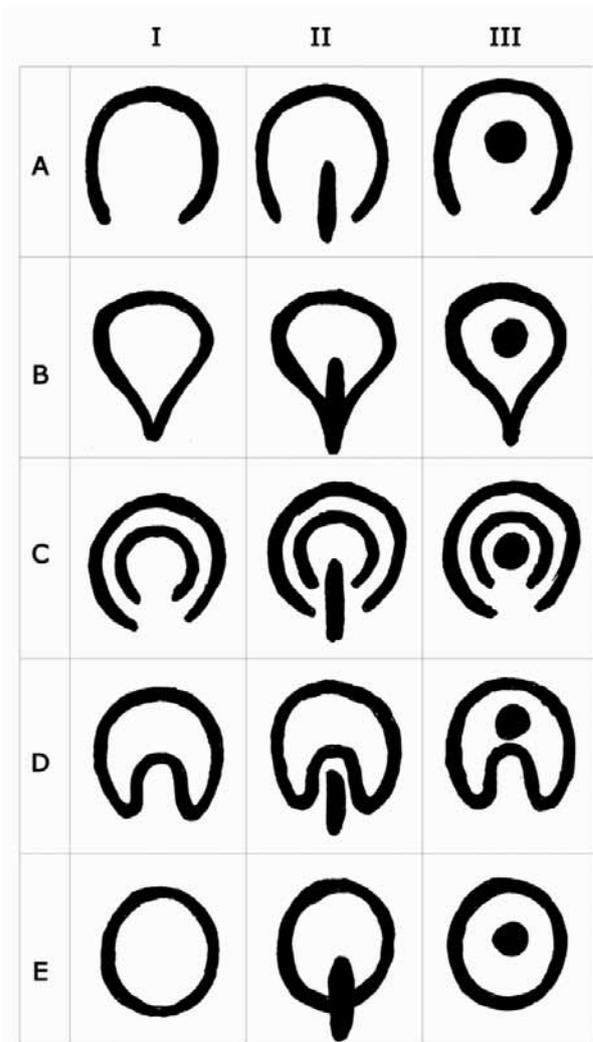


fig. 21

Fig. 1. La Ferrassie, Dordogne. Relief and photograph of the stone block with cup marks excavated by D. Peyrony above buried tomb recognised as Neanderthalian and dated as Middle Palaeolithic (WARA DIA002048; DIS000485).

Fig. 2. Distribution map of the sites around Les Eyzies, Dordogne, from where the blocks with vulvar symbols assigned to the Aurignacian period were excavated.

fig. 3 a. Abri Blanchard, Block 6 (WARA DIA000487)

fig. 3 b. Abri Blanchard, Block 8 (WARA DIA000486)

fig. 4. Abri Blanchard, Block 9 (WARA DIA000488)

fig. 5. Abri Blanchard, Block 10 (WARA DIA000489)

fig. 6. Abri Castenet, block 2 (WARA DIA001872)

fig. 7. Abri Castenet, block 25 (WARA DIS000490)

fig. 8 a-b. Abri Cellier, Block 2 (WARA DIS000491; DIA001871)

fig. 9 a-b. Abri Cellier, Block 3 (WARA DIS000492; DIA001870)

fig. 10 a-b. Abri Cellier, Block 6 (WARA DIS000493; DIA001869)

fig. 11. La Ferrassie, Block 2 (WARA DIS000494)

fig. 12 a-b. La Ferrassie, Block 6 (DIS000256; DIA001876)

fig. 13 a-b. La Ferrassie, Block 7 (DIS000495; DIA001875)

fig. 14 a-b. La Ferrassie, Block 8 (DIS000496; DIA001877)

fig. 15 a-b. La Ferrassie, Block 16 (DIS000497; DIA001878)

fig. 16. Laussel, Block 1 (WARA DIS000498)

fig. 17. Laussel, Block 3 (WARA DIS000499)

fig. 18 a-b. Laussel, Block 4 (Archivio WARA DIS000500)

fig. 19. Laussel, Block 5 (WARA DIS000501)

fig. 20. Abri du Poisson. Block 4 (WARA DIS000502)

Fig. 21. Typology of signs defined as "vulvar" in the specimens described here.



VULVAR BLOCKS OF THE STYLE LA FERRASSIE
STRUCTURAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Blocks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Recognisable phases of engraving	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	2	2	1	2	3	2	1	2
Polishing and preparation of surface	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Modelling of contour	+	+	+	+	?	+	+	+	+	+	+	?	+	+	+	+	+	?	+
Presence of the elusive animal in the contour or in the engraving	-	+	⊖	+	-	+	⊖	+	+	+	+	?	+	⊖	+	-	?	-	?
Ancient intentional breakages	+	+	+	+	+	?	+	?	?	?	+	?	+	?	+	+	?	+	?

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