

Re-evaluation of the principal diagnostic criteria of the Aurignacian: the example from Grotte XVI (Cénac-et-Saint-Julien, Dordogne)

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ABSTRACT The goal of this paper is to launch a reflection about the use of some criteria for the recognition of the Aurignacian. I will study Aurignacian stone tools found in Dordogne, probably a little different from the ones found in the Near East or anywhere else. It is indeed generally accepted that the Aurignacian technocomplex is geographically and

chronologically variable. We also have to bear in mind that the definition of the Aurignacian, based on the bone and the lithic industries, is typological, and that technological studies are now obligatory for any lithic analysis. Do we need, as a result, to modify our definition of the Aurignacian? As will be discussed, caution is in order.

Introduction

The Aurignacian is considered by some authors (Kozłowski, 1993) as the only real supra-regional entity from the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic (between 45 000 and 25 000 years ago) with a regional distribution across Europe. In other respects, it is admitted that Aurignacian technocomplexes are variable both geographically and chronologically: indeed, the Dordogne Aurignacian is somehow quite different from that of central Europe or the Near East.

These two viewpoints, apparently contradictory, in fact reveal a complex archeological reality. The Aurignacian industry, while having certain general features in common, can also have features more specific to one chronological period or region. For example, the presence of carinated pieces, of bladelets and of a relatively abundant bone industry constitutes a permanent feature of the Aurignacian culture. In addition to this common group of tools, it is possible to observe objects which are specific to some regions, like the Caminade endscrapers in the Périgord (Rigaud, 1993) (Fig. 1), or the thinning of the Kostienki type encountered in the eponymous site in eastern Europe (Sinitsyn, 1993).

The aim is then to reflect upon the use of certain criteria for defining the Aurignacian, in particular the lithic tools. Until recently, the definition of the Aurignacian, based on the bone and the lithic industry, was essentially of a typological order. With the advancement of technological studies, should we or could we, change or modify our definition of the Aurignacian? As we are going to see, caution is necessary.

Within the bone industries, the different types of Aurignacian points seem to be good cultural markers: points with a split base for the Early Aurignacian and points with a simple base for the most recent Aurignacian. While these bone objects are very reliable diagnostically, there remains a problem of preservation (for example, Thèmes, Yonne — Le Brun-Ricalens and Brou, 2003). The bone points then cannot be the only criteria for defining the Aurignacian.

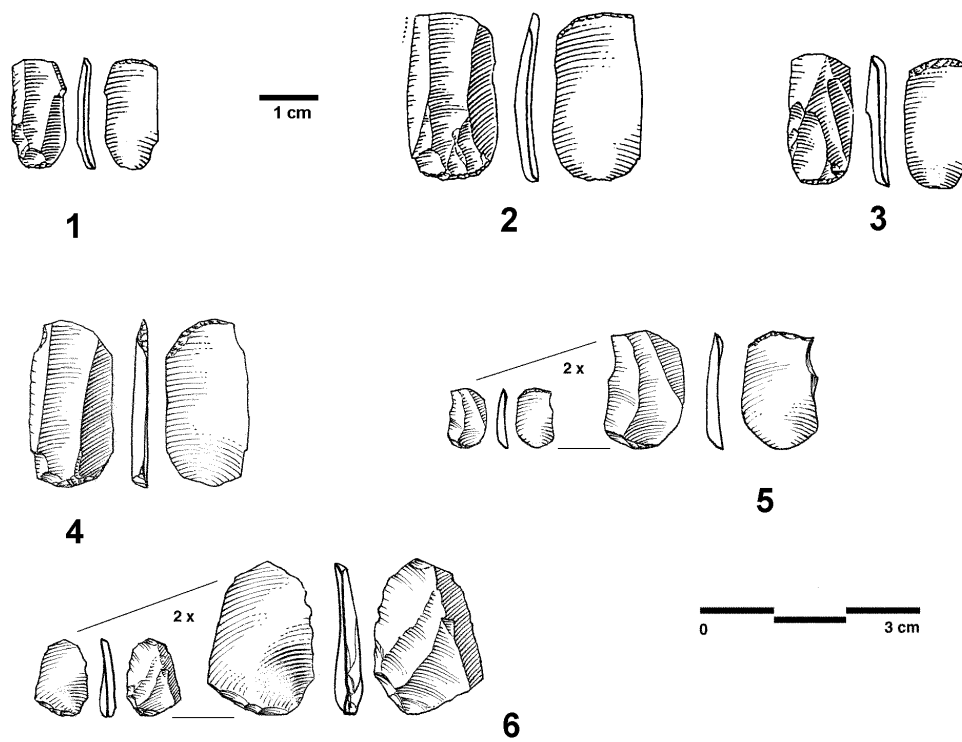


FIG. 1 – Caminade endscrapers: 1-3. Le Flageolet I, level IX (after Rigaud, 1982); 4-6 Cave XVI, level Abb (drawings by J.-G. Marcillaud).

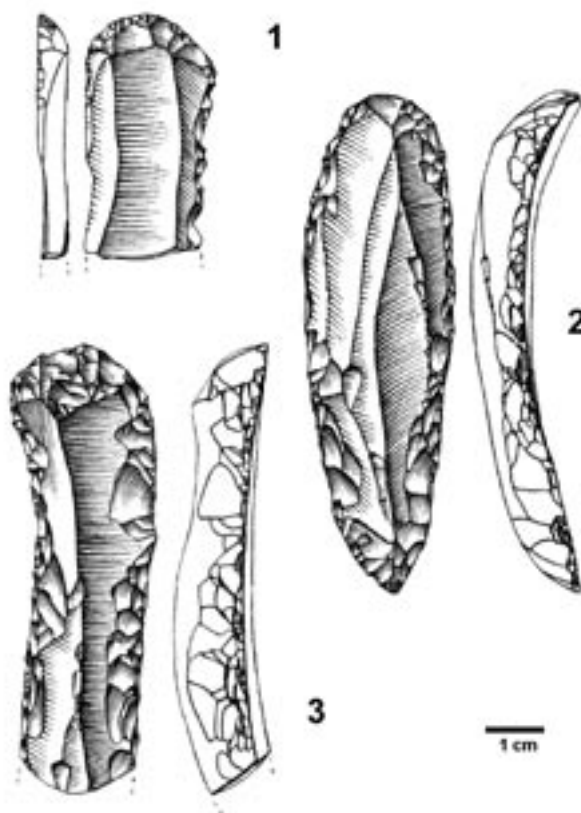


FIG. 2 – Aurignacian blades from Le Flageolet I, level XI (drawings by J.-G. Marcillaud) (after Rigaud, 1982).

A similar problem exists for lithics but for other reasons. Certain diagnostic tools are found only in specific regions, or specific chronological periods, of the Aurignacian. Therefore, the absence of Aurignacian blades in one level does not necessarily rule out “Aurignacian” as the cultural designation because these blades are rare in the Early Aurignacian (Fig. 2). In the case of Dufour bladelets there is an additional problem, their definition. The two subtypes described by Demars and Laurent (1989) have not yet resolved this problem because very different bladelets are grouped together under the same name (Fig. 3). Is one subtype more characteristic of the Aurignacian than the other? According to different studies, the Roc-de-Combe subtype (“small” Dufour) seems to be associated with carinated pieces. Are carinated pieces all characteristic of the Aurignacian?

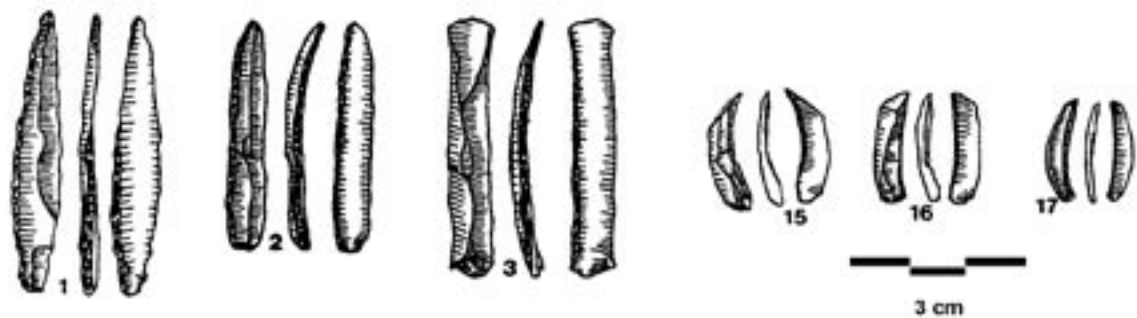


FIG. 3 – The two subtypes of Dufour bladelets: 1-3. Subtype Dufour; 15-17. sub-type Roc de Combe (extracted from Demars and Laurent, 1989).

The carinated and nosed scrapers, and the carinated and busked burins, are grouped together under the term of carinated pieces (Fig. 4). As illustrated in a number of studies (Sonneville-Bordes, 1963; Bordes, 1968; Delporte, 1968, 1984; Tixier and Inizan, 1981; Mellars and Tixier, 1989; Tixier, 1991; Aubry et al., 1995; Schmider and Perpère, 1995; Zilhão, 1995; Le Brun-Ricalens and Brou, 2003; Lucas, 1997, 2000; Chiotti, 1999; Bon, 2000; Almeida, 2000; Hays and Lucas, 2000), the position and the function in the reduction sequence of these objects, considered as typical of the Aurignacian, have been revised: the carinated pieces seem to be in fact very specific bladelet cores.

Re-evaluation of the diagnostic role of carinated pieces

Very specific bladelet production sequences have been described by a number of prehistorians (Sonneville-Bordes, 1963; Bordes, 1968; Delporte, 1968, 1984; Tixier and Inizan, 1981; Mellars and Tixier, 1989; Tixier, 1991; Aubry et al., 1995; Schmider and Perpère, 1995; Zilhão, 1995; Le Brun-Ricalens and Brou, 2003; Lucas, 1997, 2000; Chiotti, 1999; Bon, 2000; Almeida, 2000) at different Aurignacian sites. The most common operational sequence typologically equates the core with the carinated and/or nosed scraper. Here I briefly re-examine the main points:

- Selected blanks are generally more or less cortical thick flakes, small blocks, rejuvenation core flakes or core tablets, even crested pieces in some cases.
- The striking platform is generally situated on the ventral face of the blank.
- The shaped debitage surface is narrow and arched; the shaping of a crest on the lower surface of the flake will allow the maintenance of the longitudinal convexity.

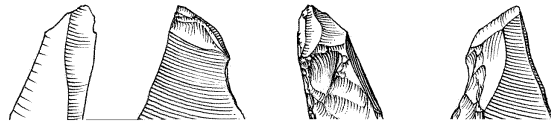


FIG. 4 – Aurignacian carinated pieces: 1, 3. busked burins; 2, 5. carinated burins; 4. carinated scraper (Cave XVI, level Abb) (drawings by J.-G. Marcillaud).

- During the debitage phase, thin bladelets are detached frontally (they will be curved) or laterally (they will be twisted) (Tixier, 1991; Aubry et al., 1995; Lucas, 1999).
- For the maintenance of the striking surface, no core tablets are removed during this bladelet production, the lower surface of the support being then preserved.
- The debitage surface is maintained in two ways:
 - by the removal of side flakes, detached from the striking surface in order to maintain the transversal convexity (Fig. 5);
 - by the removal of shaping flakes on the crest for the maintenance of the longitudinal convexity; these resharpening products are very characteristic when they are found complete (Fig. 6).

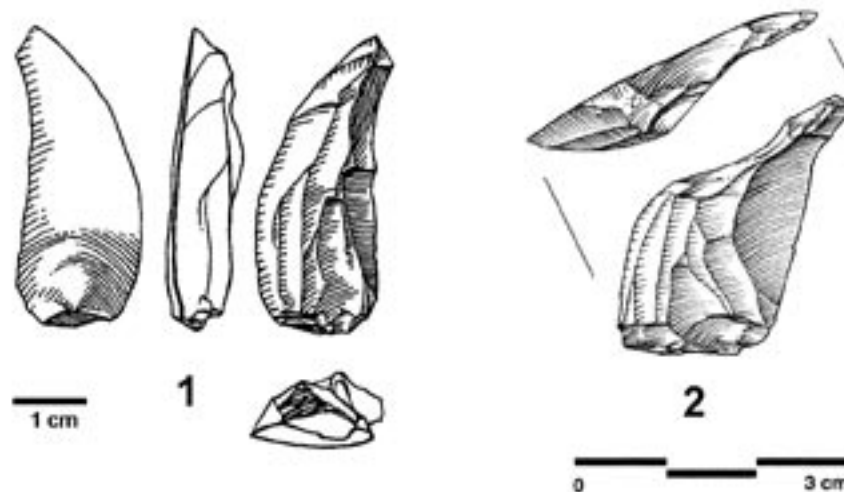


FIG. 5 – Rejuvenation flakes from lateral notches: 1. Le Flageolet I, level IX (after Lucas, 2000); 2. Cave XVI, level Abb (drawings by J.-G. Marcillaud).

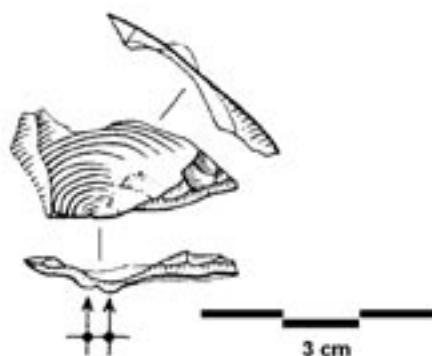


FIG. 6 – Rejuvenation flake from a crest or “opposed flake from lateral rejuvenation” (after Le Brun-Ricalens and Brou, 2003).

In spite of their specificity, these same objects (carinated and/or nosed scrapers) and these methods of bladelet production are described in other cultures: in the Protosolutrean of the Abri Casserole in the Dordogne by T. Aubry and his collaborators (1995), in the Badegoulian of Birac III and the Early Magdalenian of Saint-Germain-la Rivière in the Gironde by M. Lenoir (Lenoir, 1988; Lenoir et al., 1995) (Fig. 7). However, the bladelets issued from these cores are different from those observed in the Aurignacian in both morphology and retouch. The Aurignacian bladelets have a very peculiar torsion, not observed on the Protosolutrean or the Magdalenian bladelets (Figs. 8-9). The bladelets themselves appear more diagnostic than the core.

For the moment, these converging techniques are verified for only one type of carinated piece: the carinated and nosed scrapers. The carinated burins and the busked burins seem to be linked more specifically to the Aurignacian. These “tools” have been the subject of very precise descriptions from a technological point of view in the forthcoming publication by F. Le Brun-Ricalens (in preparation) but also partly in my doctoral dissertation (Lucas, 2000). Compared to the carinated and/or nosed scrapers, the exploited blanks are generally thick blades which are sometimes cortical. The striking platform is the negative of a burin spall removal. A retouch along the edge of the blade allows shaping of the debitage surface. The

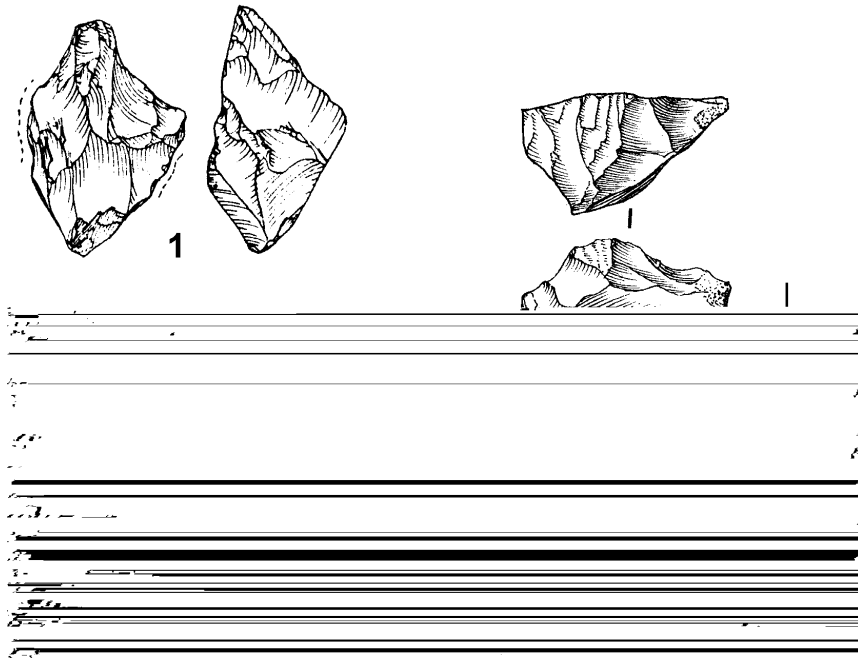


FIG. 7 – Carinated pieces: 1. Early Magdalenian, Birac III (after Lenoir, 1988); 2. Badegoulian, level C4 from Saint-Germain-la-Rivière (after Lenoir et al., 1995); 3. Protosolutrean, Abri Casserole (after Aubry et al., 1995).

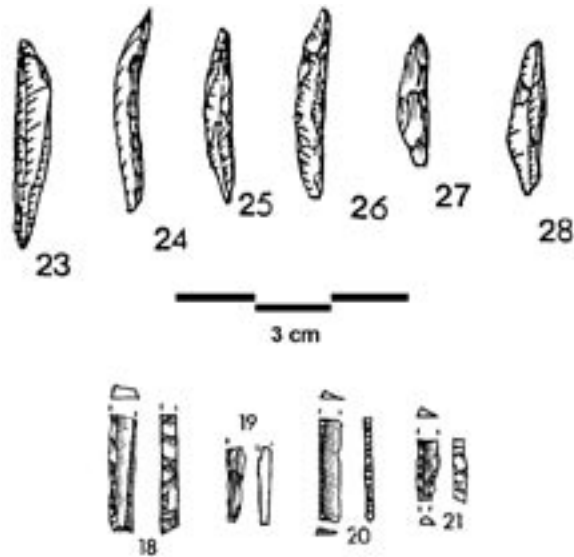


FIG. 8 – Retouched bladelets associated with carinated pieces: 23-28. Badegoulian, level C4 of Saint-Germain-la-Rivière (after Lenoir et al., 1995); 18-21. Protosolutrean, Abri Casserole (after Aubry et al., 1995).

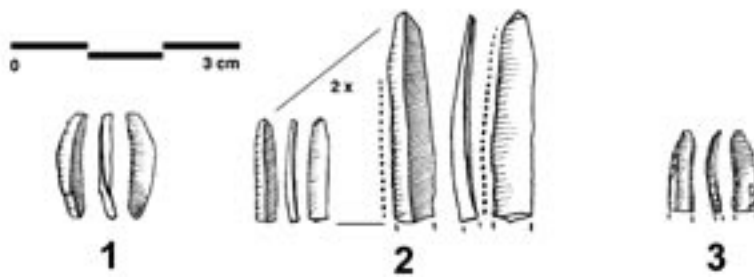


FIG. 9 – Dufour bladelets (Cave XVI, level Abb) (drawings by J.-G. Marcillaud).

surface is narrow and convex, which also allows the production of small and twisted bladelets. The striking platform is maintained by the removal of the bladelet core tablets (the “Thèmes” type) described by F. Le Brun-Ricalens (since their discovery, similar pieces have been found at other sites in Dordogne such as Le Flageolet I and the Grotte XVI) (Fig. 10). These flakes are very characteristic; in particular, their proximal face has on its butt the negative bulbs of the bladelet removals from the debitage surface. Two methods can then be used to maintain the striking surface:

- either by accentuation of the retouch along the edge of the blade until it forms a notch to restore some longitudinal convexity;
- or by the removal of a relatively thick curved bladelet from the striking platform which straightens out the debitage surface: this method can bear some debitage accident on its upper face (hinged removal for example) (Fig. 11).

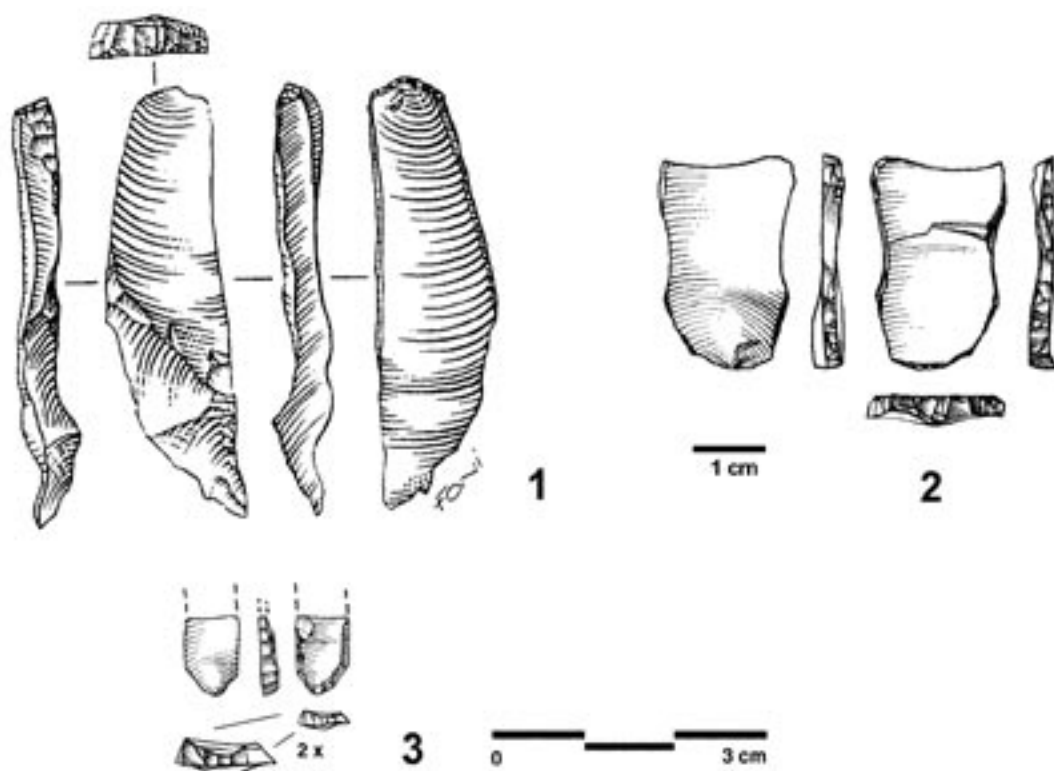


FIG. 10 – Bladelet core tablets (Thèmes type) (platform rejuvenation products from carinated and busked burins): 1. Thèmes (after Le Brun-Ricalens and Brou, 2003); 2. Le Flageolet I, level IX (after Lucas, 2000); 3. Cave XVI, level Abb. Drawings by J.-G. Marcillaud.

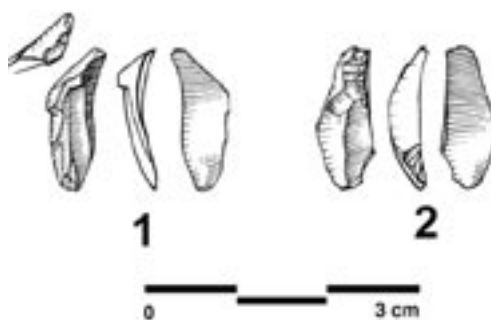


FIG. 11 – Rejuvenation bladelets of the debitage surface of carinated and busked burins (Cave XVI, level Abb) (drawings by J.-G. Marcillaud).

The carinated pieces of the Grotte XVI

The study of the most recent Aurignacian level of the Grotte XVI, layer Abb, (the oldest, Aib, being less abundant and without a date for the moment) will serve as the basis for pursuing the diagnostic problems of the Aurignacian (Fig. 12).



FIG. 12 – Archeostratigraphy of Cave XVI (after Guibert et al., 1999).

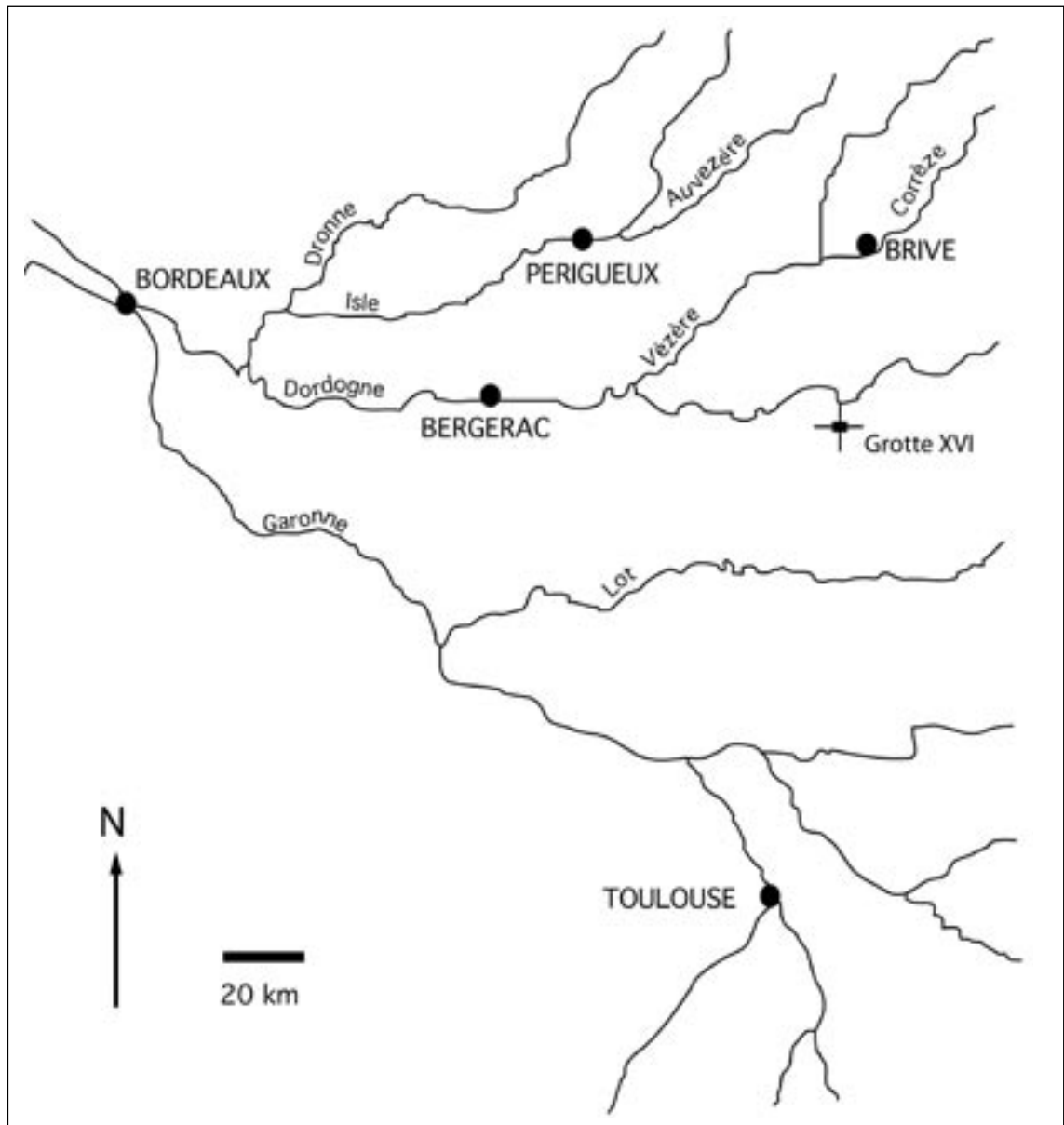


FIG. 13 – Location of Cave XVI.

Situated in the Massif du Conte, at the confluence of the Céou and the Dordogne rivers, south of Sarlat, this cave has a rich cultural sequence. At the base there are Mousterian levels (Fig. 13). The last and the richest level, layer C, is underlain at its top by a polycyclical and polyphased combustion area (Rigaud et al., 1995) containing a Mousterian industry of Acheulian tradition dated by TL to between $62\,400 \pm 3600$ and $57\,500 \pm 3600$ BP (Guibert et al., 1999). Above this deposit, layer B, (sometimes subdivided into Bc and Bf due to a slight change of color) has been identified across almost the entire excavated surface (51 m) with an average thickness of 10 cm. Its industry represents an early Châtelperronian. Several ^{14}C dates between 35 000 and 39 800 BP have been obtained for this layer.

The sequence is continued by two Aurignacian levels — Aib and Abb, the latter dated to $29\,740 \pm 510$ BP (GifA 94201), $29\,285 \pm 420$ BP (AA 6841) and $28\,140 \pm 405$ BP (AA 6840) — a Gravettian layer, Abc, dated to about 26 000 BP, a Solutrean layer, As, dated to about 20 000 BP and a Magdalenian level, Oa, dated to about 12 500 BP (Lucas et al., 2003).

to obtain curved or twisted bladelets, according to the hammer impact point (Tixier, 1991). It is the existence of that very characteristic debitage surface, described by several authors (Bardon et al., 1906; Bourlon et al., 1912; Pradel, 1962; Demars, 1982; Lucas, 2000) that draws attention to a certain continuum in the group of Aurignacian carinated pieces

The difference between the carinated scrapers, and the carinated and nosed scrapers, essentially rests on the presence of one or two side notches. We have seen that the production of the notches results from shaping or reshaping the debitage surface. Their presence or their absence thus indicates a more or less advanced stage of bladelet production: these two types of objects can then hardly be studied separately, and must be placed together under the same name “carinated scrapers”. It is a similar situation for the carinated burins and the busked burins, the latter being only different from the former in the presence of a notch on the edge of the blade, due to the successive reshaping of the longitudinal convexity of the bladelet debitage surface (Fig. 14).

This group of objects, placed together under the name “carinated pieces”, represents two types of bladelet cores where exploitation follows similar principles, in particular concerning the morphology of the debitage surface.

Must we then eliminate the carinated pieces from the typological lists, since they are now considered to be cores? The answer may not be as simple as it seems. Indeed, at Le Flageolet I, some of the cores were recycled as endscrapers or burins after an initial use as cores (Hays and Lucas, 2000).

Discussion and conclusion

If we accept that different categories of objects exist which are characteristic of the Aurignacian, do these categories have the same diagnostic value? The question applies, for instance, to:

- objects found in the Aurignacian but also in other cultures (for example, the carinated and nosed scrapers);
- objects found only during a particular period of the Aurignacian (for example, the Aurignacian blades);
- objects found only in the Aurignacian and specific to a geographical area (for example, the Caminade endscrapers of the Dordogne Valley).

The fourth and the last category of objects is that of the objects found throughout the Aurignacian period without distinction in time or space. But do these objects exist? May we classify Dufour bladelets in this precise category? The problem is that when we talk about Dufour bladelets, it is not always the same subtype (Demars and Laurent, 1989). The subtype Roc-de-Combe, issued from the production of the carinated pieces, is found throughout the Aurignacian period in the Périgord. In the same way, the Dufour bladelets of the subtype Dufour (the “large” Dufour) appears at different periods of the European Aurignacian: in Portugal, in Pego do Diabo (28 000 BP; Zilhão, 1993); in Spain, in Arbreda (40 000 BP; Bischoff et al., 1989); and in Italy, in Fumane (40 000 BP; Broglio, 1993).

The two subtypes carry the same type of retouch: could the alternate retouch of the bladelets be a diagnostic element of the Aurignacian? With regard to the busked and carinated burins, they are only found during the Aurignacian period but, even if they do not seem characteristic of one particular period of the Aurignacian, they are not always present within

the entire sequence (for example at the Abri Pataud). Their absence does not necessarily predicate a cultural definition distinct from the Aurignacian.

How can we then characterize the Aurignacian in all cases?

1. It seems obvious that it is necessary to use a combination of criteria, the sole presence of a few carinated pieces being insufficient.
2. The criteria are not inevitably typological; the production of bladelets from busked and carinated burins is specific to the Aurignacian, and may be a good criterion when it is found.
3. The identification of regional facies may facilitate the diagnosis of the Aurignacian; these regional facies may have both very specific objects and objects found in the Aurignacian in general (for example, Caminade endscrapers associated to Aurignacian blades).

The definition of the Aurignacian is then complex because it is both geographically and chronologically variable. One element, however, seems to emerge throughout this period: a strong bladelet component.

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