A Middle Paleolithic Symbolic Composition from the Golan Heights: The Earliest Known Depictive Image[1]

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The century-long debate on the "origins" of image making has focused primarily on the explosive European Upper Paleolithic development. To the earlier Middle Paleolithic was conceded generic symboling behavior such as the burial of the dead and a use of red ochre but not the making of images. The recent microscopic analysis of a late Middle Paleolithic incised composition from the Levant, ca. 54,000 B.P., however, has documented a complexity and level of symbolic production fundamentally different from the generic modes that have been suggested for this period.

Excavations on the Golan Heights, in "Demilitarized Zone A" near the village of Quneitra, conducted by N. Goren-Inbar of the Institute of Archaeology of Hebrew University, Jerusalem, from 1982 to 1985 uncovered one of the few known open-air Middle Paleolithic (Mousterian) sites in the Levant (Goren-Inbar 1990*a*). Electron-spin-resonance dating of recovered bovid tooth enamel has yielded an average age of 53,900 ± 5,900 years B.P. (Ziaei et al. 1990), placing the site within the time frame during which anatomically modern humans and Near Eastern Neanderthals inhabited the area. The two groups used comparable Mousterian technologies and had similar subsistence strategies and a techno-complex that included hafting and the use of skins and wood (Shea 1988, 1989*a*, *b*, 1990; Bar-Yosef 1992). The Quneitra tool industry was typically Levantine Mousterian (Goren-Inbar 1990*b*:fig. 120). A plate of flint cortex (7.2 cm) found at Quneitra is incised with the earliest known "depictive" symbolic engraving (fig. 1) and the only engraving known from the Levantine Middle Paleolithic (Goren-Inbar 1990*c*).[2]

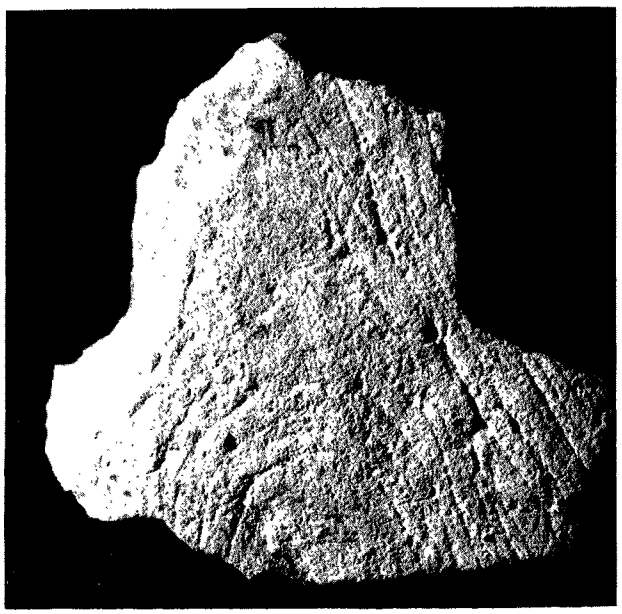

FIG. 1. *The Quneitra artifact, a flat cortex plate (7.2 cm) incised with four nested semicircles and surrounding vertical lines, Levantine Middle Paleolithic, ca. 54,000 B.P.*

The underside of the cortex (fig. 2) contains a number of fractured flint nodules surrounded by a relatively loose conglomerate containing tiny seashells and sand. The engraving of a composition of this complexity suggests that perishable organic materials (wood, bone, or skins) may also have been symbolically used at Quneitra or at other sites of the Quneitra population, but, if so, these are long gone. Preservation of the engraving was probably fortuitous, since the flint used to make tools at Quneitra had to be transported to the site, often as partially reduced cores, from distances of as much as 10 km (Hovers 1990).

The only other microscopically validated "symbolic" Mousterian engraving is a set of zigzag motifs incised on a nonutilitarian fragment of bone from Bacho Kiro in Bulgaria, dated by C^{14} to ca. 44,000 B.P. I studied the Bacho Kiro engraving at the excavator's request and verified it as having been intentionally incised by twisting or turning a sharp point at the end of each short stroke and, without lifting the tool, continuing the engraving at an abrupt angle, thus forming a continuous zigzag (Marshack 1976, Kozlowski 1992*a*). Microscopic study

1. © 1996 by Alexander Marshack. Fieldwork in the Levant was funded by the American School of Prehistoric Research of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, which in 1993 instituted a long-range program for the systematic microscopic study of the Near Eastern Paleolithic-to-Natufian symbolic materials. I thank the Israel Archaeological Authority for permission to study published and unpublished materials in collections, institutes, and museums of Israel and the Archaeological Institute of Hebrew University, Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem, and N. Goren-Inbar for making the Quneitra artifact available for study. I am grateful to N. Goren-Inbar and O. Bar-Yosef for corrections of archaeological fact that did not intrude on the symbolic or comparative analyses or interpretations.

2. The "earliest known" does not, of course, signify the earliest made; the fortuitous archaeological retention of an engraving of this complexity is probably indicative of contemporary and earlier marking on other materials. Nondepictive intentional engraving is known, for instance, from the Acheulian of Bilzingsleben in Germany (Mania and Mania 1988). A polished wooden plank from the Acheulian at Gesher Benot Ya'aqov in the northern Jordan Valley of Israel, with no evidence that it was used as a cutting board (Belitzky, Goren-Inbar, and Werker 1991), provided a surface that could, for instance, have been used for marking with ochre or charcoal. Ochre was used in this period in Europe, Africa, and the Near East (Marshack 1981). Israeli archaeologists familiar with the regional Acheulian, Mousterian, and Upper Paleolithic materials consider the Acheulians to have been approximately "modern" in their range of capacities.

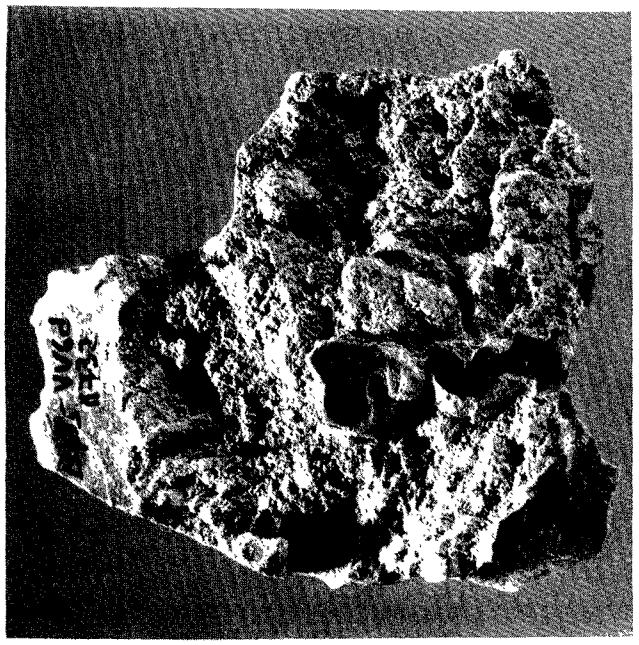

FIG. 2. *The obverse face of the Quneitra cortex.*

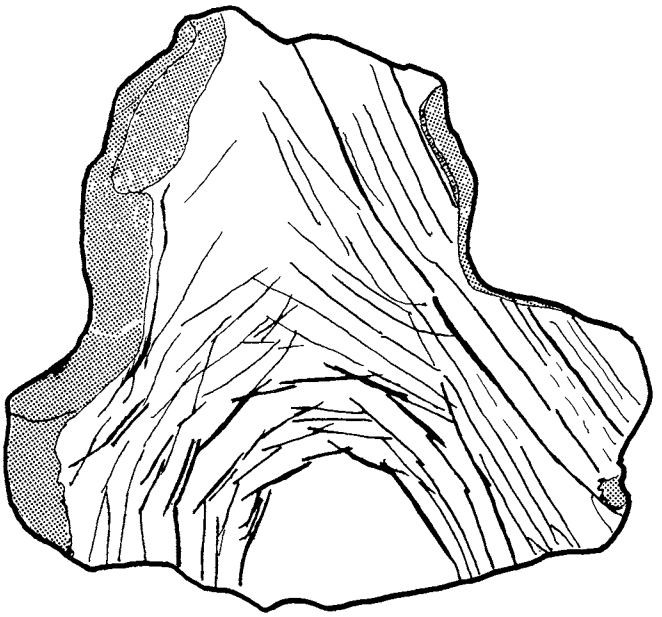

FIG. 3. *Schematic rendition of the composition incised on the cortex (as determined by microscopy.)*

of the Quneitra composition reveals a completely different and cognitively far more complex strategy of engraving.

A set of four nested semicircles is carefully incised along the lower edge of the cortex (fig. 3). Analysis suggests that the lower and upper arcs may have been incised first—almost equidistant—and that the two inner arcs may have been more lightly incised later. Partial deterioration of the granular surface made it difficult to study the engraving with a binocular microscope at high magnification, but use of lesser magnification in conjunction with a high-intensity pencil beam of light directed across the surface at low angles and slow rotation of the cortex through 360° as the angle and direction of the beam were shifted made it possible to identify tool-made strokes and their cross-sections at many points within the composition. As the stone was turned, incised strokes that caught the beam often revealed their cross sections as well as occasional inner striations. These analyses indicated that the semicircles had been made by incising short, straight or at times slightly arced strokes that were appended to one another linearly (figs. 3–5). Above and around the nested arcs is an additional later, lightly incised, more angular "arcing."

At the far left on the stone a set of long verticals was apparently incised rapidly with varying pressures (figs. 3, 6). Intentional engraving is clear in that the ends of some of these long strokes were extended to the cortex edge with a small appendage; the small strokes clearly indicate that the lower edge was the original base of the composition. Vertical strokes are also evident at the right of the stone, but, because of either greater surface deterioration or the angle at which the stone or tool was held while incising, these are often shallow or exceedingly faint (fig. 5). One sinuous stroke incised at the far right of the stone carefully follows the broken edge of the cortex, suggesting that the cortex in this area may originally have been shaped as it is and that the line was incised to match the contour of that edge. At the left of the cortex, however, a section seems to have broken off subsequent to the engraving, interrupting some of the long verticals.

COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY

Reconstruction of the engraving documents a surprising cognitive complexity. To begin, the image does not conform to any known style of image making or symboling in the early Paleolithic record, though nested semicircles and arcs are occasionally documented in the European Upper Paleolithic some 25,000 years later. It is perhaps relevant also that the image is not the depiction of an animal or a human (male, female, or mythic) or the decoration of a tool, pendant, or amulet—some of the primary categories of depictive image making discussed for the later Upper Paleolithic. Nor is it a bead, often considered among the earliest forms of human symbolic production; bead manufacture is unknown from this period in the Near East. The composition is, in addition, not an instance of that random scribbling that was once theorized to be the beginning of "art" and image making, a scribbling that was supposedly followed by the recognition of an accidental form in the mélange. Instead, it is a product of preconception and careful planning. It involves an intentional centering of the nested semicircles and a stroke-by-stroke accumulation during which the concept of nested semicircles was kept in mind as the stone was turned and incrementally incised and the developing image and the placement of each stroke were evaluated against the plan. Following en-

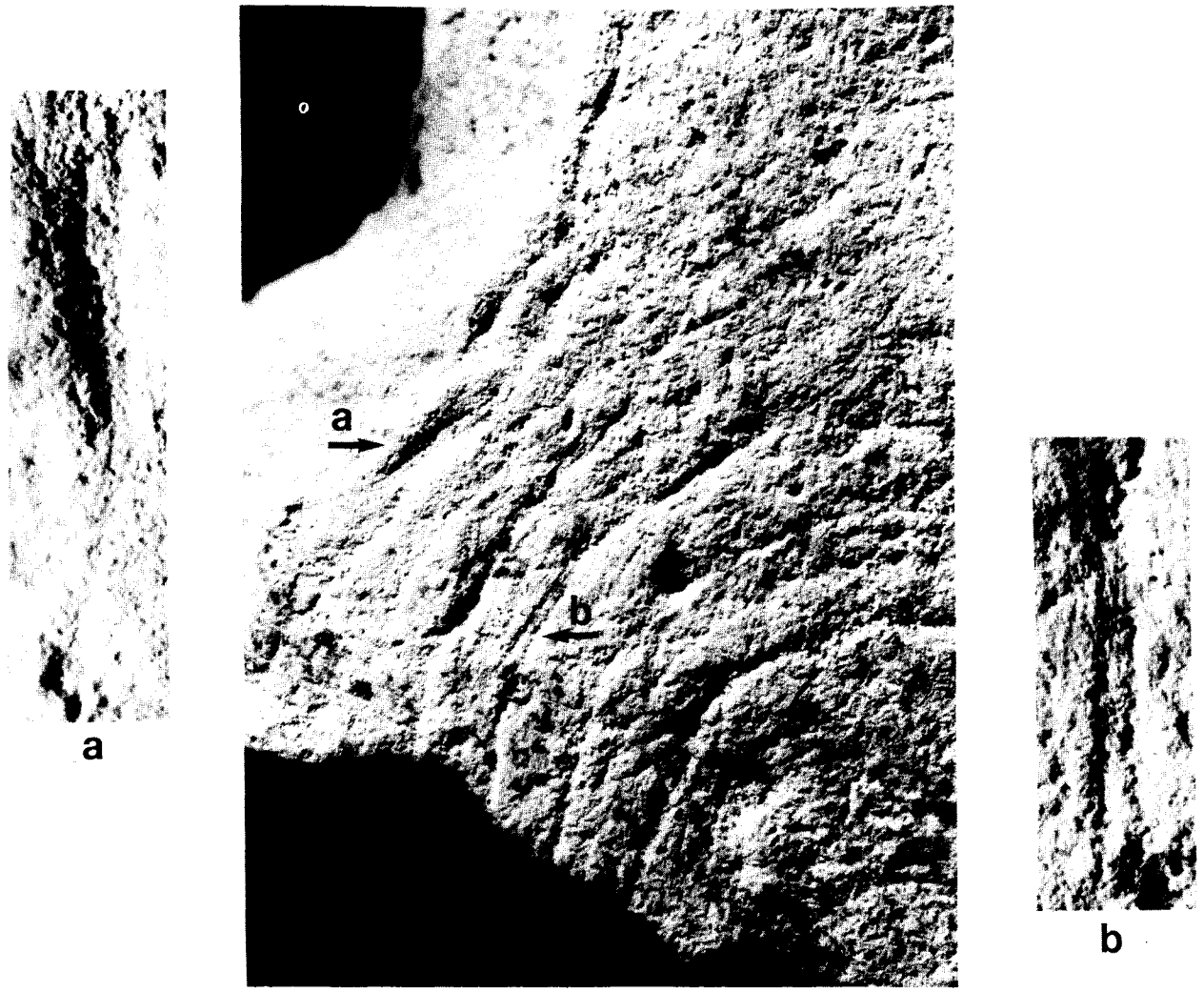

FIG. 4. *Close-up of the marking at the right of the Quneitra cortex, indicating a portion of the concentric arcs and the straight line incising of the short strokes.* a, *extreme close-up of the stroke incising a double track at the far right of the stone, which tails out with a single long track, made at an angle;* b, *short stroke incising a double track in the outer, fourth semicircle, the top of which overcrosses and extends beyond the upper stroke to which it is appended and the bottom of which extends beyond the lower vertical to which it is appended. There is a faint indication of striation within the double tracks of strokes* a *and* b.

graving of the semicircles, the long strokes were added, accommodating both to the centered arcs and to the shape of the stone. The final image or composition seems to be a type of depictive, schematic abstraction.

MIDDLE PALEOLITHIC PROBLEM SOLVING

The size of the artifact, the scale of the composition, and the small strokes indicate a surprising precision in the gripping and use of an engraving tool by the primary, categorizing hand (which was incising the image) and precision of a different order in the turning and orientation of the artifact by the second or subsidiary hand holding the cortex. These were cognitively separate but coterminous complex processes of the right and left hands performing different tasks but coordinated and evaluated by the visual system against an internalized, preconceived image and plan (see Marshack 1984, 1985, 1988 *a, b,* 1989, 1990, 1993).

There is evidence, therefore, for more than the mere production of an image—for (1) a planned sequence of categorizing strokes, (2) an ongoing "gestalt" evaluation of the developing form in terms of the size and shape of the stone, (3) an evaluation of the "fit" of that developing form to an original concept, and (4) a continuing sequence of changing right and left hand behaviors. These are highly evolved cognitive capacities and processes that are found only in two-handed human image making. Two-handed production of this order is found among both anatomically modern humans and Nean-

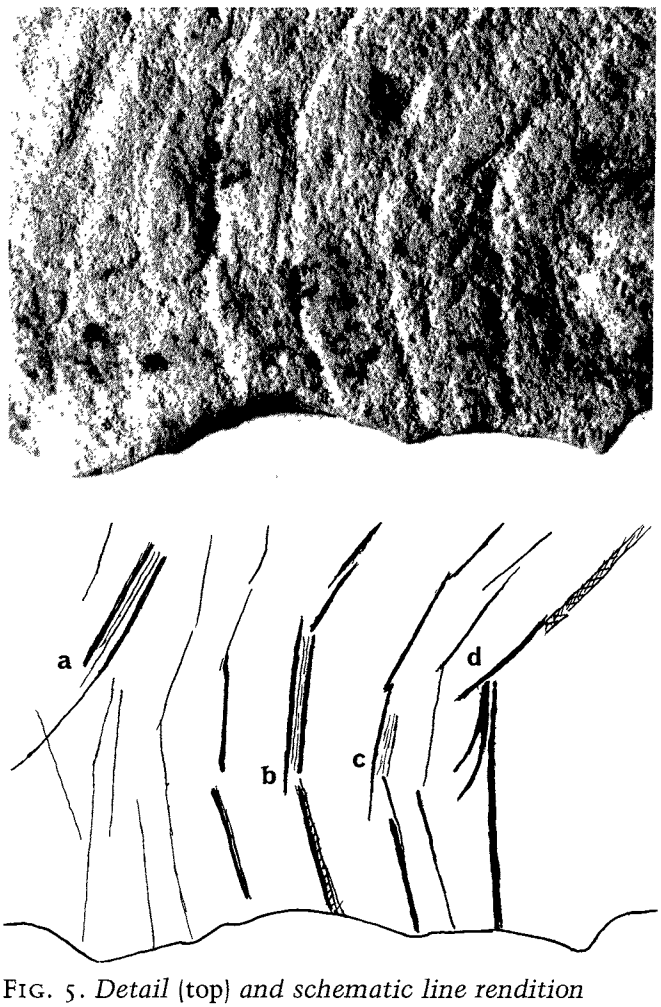

FIG. 5. *Detail* (top) *and schematic line rendition* (bottom) *of the marking in the area at the right of the cortex.* a *and* b, *double-track strokes shown in fig. 4;* c, *short stroke in the third semicircle, incised at the same angle as* b *and providing the faint indication of a similar double track;* d, *first, inner semicircle, with a straight-line stroke that extends beyond the vertical that descends from it. That attached downward vertical was made with two prior strokes incised at the wrong angle but corrected with a vertical stroke angled more inward.*

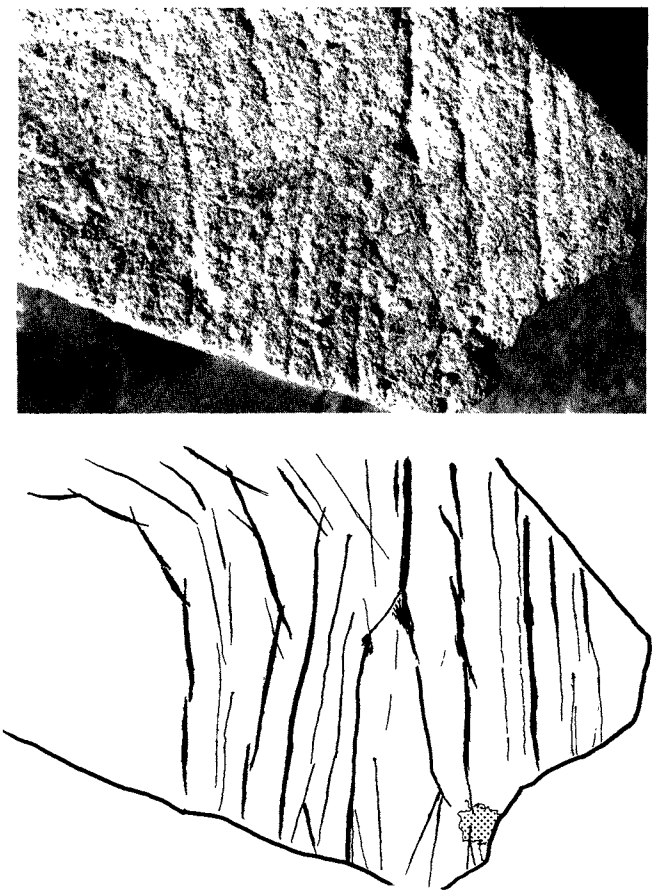

FIG. 6. *Detail* (top) *and schematic line rendition* (bottom) *of marking at the left of the cortex indicating long strokes irregularly and apparently rapidly made with different pressures. The four nested semicircles were incised first and the surrounding marking (perhaps representing a different "motif") was added later.*

derthals (Marshack 1988*b*, 1989; Hayden 1993). Two-handed, visually mediated right/left-hemisphere specialization and two-handed sequential production are, for instance, present in the making of a stone tool. A particularly high degree of such skill is, in fact, required for Middle Paleolithic (Mousterian Levalloisian) lithic technology. In the Near East, the Levantine Neanderthals and anatomically modern humans (separate human populations but not necessarily different species [cf. Bar-Yosef 1992; Marshack 1988*b*, 1989, 1996*a*) were making the same types of tools and building similar fireplaces (Qafzeh, Hayonim, Kebara) and were using comparable hierarchically and bihemispherically organized skills. Tool making and fireplace building are mediated and evaluated for *practical* use, while the Quneitra composition was mediated and evaluated for a nonutilitarian, apparently symbolic referential purpose. Nevertheless, the two-handed, visually mediated productive skills—neurologically involving occipital, frontal, temporal, parietal, right/left hemisphere, and lower cerebral participation—were comparable. The generic, conjoint skills involved in such two-handed production had developed for both groups on the same evolutionary trajectory of hominization. I have long argued that the development and evolution not of tool making but of the more generic, visually mediated, two-handed problem-solving capacity was among the crucial capacities selected for upon the advent of bipedalism and during hominization (Marshack 1984, 1985, 1988*a*, *b*). An evolutionarily developing hominid capacity for visual mediation and evaluation would have thus become increas-

ingly involved not only in subsistence but in diverse forms of symboling. It would, as a result, have played a significant role in the evolution of culture and language (Marshack 1984, 1985, 1988*a*, *b*, 1989, 1991*b*, *c*, 1993; Eccles 1989:117–39).

A late capacity and skill not merely for complex toolmaking but also for symbolic production was present among the Neanderthals. The Neanderthals and anatomically modern humans both used the Levallois technique. They both hafted tools—a complex sequence of production that required planning and the acquisition, preparation, and use of different tools and materials including wood, flint, bone, mastic, and thongs. Hafting is a complex, experientially learned, two-handed cultural skill. The Neanderthals in Europe also carved an exquisite nonutilitarian oval plaque from a lamella of a compound mammoth molar at Tata, Hungary, dated ca. 100,000 B.P. (Marshack 1989). The two-handed skill required for that carving exceeds any yet known for anatomically modern humans during this period, though anatomically modern groups were present in the Near East at Qafzeh by ca. 92,000 B.P. (but see Marshack n.d. *a*). During the Châtelperronian, at the site of Arcy-sur-Cure in southwestern France ca. 35,000–34,000 B.P., the Neanderthals produced a set of beads from animal teeth and a fossil crinoid (Leroi-Gourhan and Leroi-Gourhan 1965, Marshack 1989). The two-handed skill required to make the beads was fully modern and at least comparable to the skill involved in the earlier Neanderthal, Mousterian carving of the Tata plaque. It has been suggested that the Châtelperronian beads may have been derived from concepts carried into Western Europe by newly arrived anatomically modern humans, the population that would soon establish the Aurignacian explosion in bone technology and bead making (Chase and Dibble 1987, White 1992). The capacity, however, to evaluate a bead, its production, and its symbolic *use* was clearly not restricted to anatomically modern *Homo sapiens*. We are therefore faced with a question when considering the Quneitra composition: Was it made by Neanderthals or by anatomically modern humans?

NEANDERTHAL AND MODERN HUMAN CAPACITY AND CULTURE

It may be relevant that the Quneitra composition was made in that period when anatomically modern humans in the Levant may already have begun their cultural preparation for the Upper Paleolithic. The chronological position of Quneitra near the end of the Middle Paleolithic (Mousterian) sequence in the Levant (Bar-Yosef 1992:195) suggests that possibility (fig. 7). The variability in tool production at Quneitra (Hovers 1990) may also indicate an incipient and developing technological and "cultural" shift. The variability in late Middle Paleolithic tool production occurring in this area has been commented upon by a number of archaeologists (Goren-Inbar 1990*c*, Marks 1983, Meignan 1988, Munday 1979). Shifts in lithic technology and subsistence complexity were, however, also occurring in the late Mousterian among the Neanderthals of Europe, and these regional shifts had apparently served as part of the preparation for the Châtelperronian (Mellars 1991). The Quneitra engraving therefore poses an interesting question. One reason, of course, is that the composition seems to document a form or type of symboling different from any hitherto discussed for this period. It represents a clear departure from gross symboling processes such as those involved in the use of red ochre, burial of the dead (at times with grave goods), or the manufacture of three-dimensional forms or shapes (as in the Tata plaque). It represents a shift to the creation of far more complex potentially variable and perhaps ritually used *abstract* and *schematic* images and referents. If this was the case, we would be dealing not with a "sudden" genetic shift in symboling *capacity* but with a regional shift in the way in which the cultural realm had begun to be marked and differentiated.

The suggestion of such a conceptual shift is crucial. If at 54,000 B.P. complex imagery was being produced in

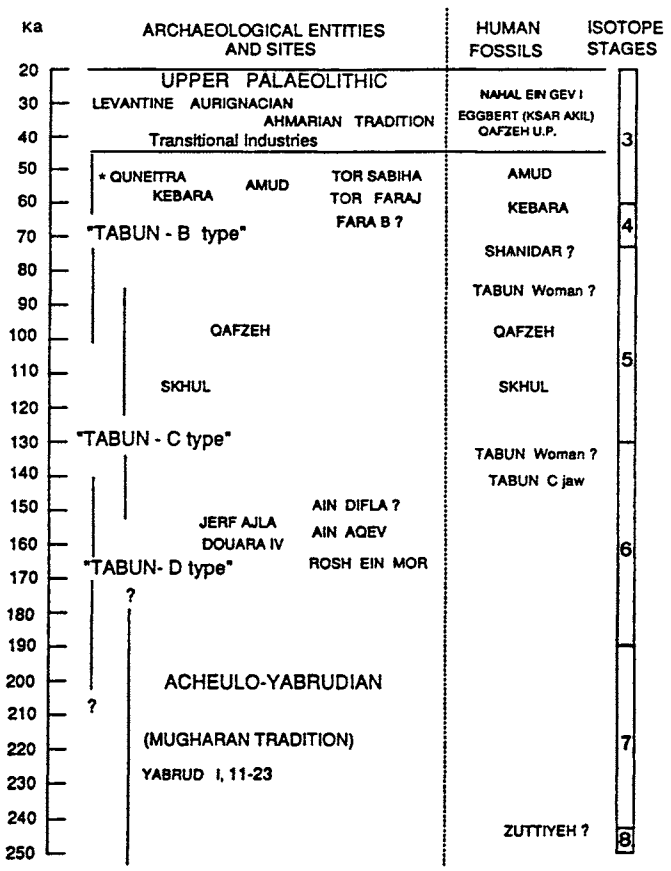

FIG. 7. *The Acheulian, Middle Paleolithic, and Upper Paleolithic sequence in Israel. (Bar-Yosef 1992:195) "Question marks indicate the uncertain position of fossils or those which are not yet dated. The apparent overlapping of the Mousterian industries reflects the standard deviations on the age measurements and conflicting dates. The industries are stratified and therefore cannot be contemporary with each other."*

the Levant, it probably most often involved the use of perishable organic materials rather than flint cortex. The use of cortex represented the fortuitous availability of the material at the site and, in this case, its fortuitous preservation. The flint used at Quneitra was probably transported to the site in the form of partially reduced small blocks with cortex attached. Detached cortex, perhaps of the size here used for the engraving, was an available resource, and its use was therefore probably opportunistic. Since Quneitra was a short-term seasonal camp in a system of logistical mobility, the marking materials that might ordinarily be found at an early hunter-gatherer site (accumulations of weathered bone, prepared wood, treated skins, local ochre, etc.) were probably not plentiful. When such materials were available during this period, it is possible that they were used opportunistically as was this piece of cortex.

The use of a wide range of local materials for symbolic purposes is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the European Upper Paleolithic; limestone, marl, soapstone, steatite, coal, clay, chalk, fossils, shells, water-worn pebbles, flint nodules, ivory, bone, antler, manganese, ochre, charcoal, twined thongs, etc., were all put to symbolic use. It is probable, therefore, that wood and other perishable materials were also so used.[3] I have indicated, for instance, that twined thongs made of skins were used for personal decoration (body bands, belts, headbands, armbands, bracelets, ankle bands, aprons, etc.) in all the regions and periods of the European Upper Paleolithic and that dart and spear feathers were at times painted with symbolic motifs (Marshack 1969, 1981; 1991*c*, 1994). These symbolic products are lost, but their depiction on painted, engraved, and carved human images remains.[4] Perishable materials were probably also used in the Mousterian (Marshack 1989, 1991*a*). The engraved cortex at Quneitra must therefore be assessed in the context of this well-documented early human productive capacity and variability. It is of interest that opportunistic engravings on flint cortex are found in the Mesolithic, almost 50,000 years later, among the post-glacial flint-knapping hunter-gatherers of Scandinavia, despite the widespread availability and common use of antler, bone, and amber (Althin 1950, Fischer 1974).

It is relevant, too, that the so-called explosion of image and symbol that began in the Aurignacian of Europe some 20,000 years later (ca. 32,000 B.P.) often documents an already highly evolved, variable, and sophisticated set of symboling skills and modes. I have suggested that the nature, content, and variability of early Upper Paleolithic symboling in Europe suggest not a beginning or origin but rather the products of a long preparation (Marshack 1989).[5] If this scenario is valid, it raises important questions: Were symboling concepts and modes, perhaps of a different order or style than is exhibited in the early bone technologies of Aurignacian Europe, carried into Europe from the Near East (or from elsewhere) by anatomically modern humans—symboling traditions that would "explode" within the referentially and resource-rich contexts of the midlatitudes following the so-called Middle Paleolithic/Upper Paleolithic transition (see Kozlowski 1992*b*:13–14)? Such a "transition" is documented, for instance, at ca. 47,000–46,000 B.P. at Boker Tachtit (Marks 1983, Bar-Yosef 1992), thousands of years before its occurrence in Europe (Kozlowski 1988; Bischoff et al. 1989; Straus 1989, 1990; Oliva 1993),[6] but the typical bone industry developed by the

3. An early use of wood is documented in the carved and shaped Acheulian spears from Clacton-on-Sea and Lehringen in Europe, in the microwear evidence for the boring of holes in wood during this period (Keeley 1977, 1980), in the polished plank from Gesher Benot Ya'agov (Belitzky, Goren-Inbar, and Werker 1991), and in the Pleistocene use of wood in Japan (Bahn 1987) and Africa. Pope (1989) has suggested that the Middle Paleolithic and Upper Paleolithic cultures of Southeast Asia may have used bamboo more than wood as a general resource. I have studied incised rods of bone and wood from the Middle Stone Age of Border Cave in South Africa, data ca. 37,000–35,000 B.P., that are similar to incised bones from the Aurignacian of Europe. There is also edge-wear evidence on stone tools for a use of wood in the Middle Paleolithic of both Europe (Anderson-Gerfaud 1990; Beyries 1987, 1988) and the Levant (Shea 1988, 1989*a*, *b*). In the historic period the use of wood where available for symbolic purposes far exceeds the symbolic use of bone.

4. These data disagree with the Eurocentric and ethnocentric presumption that the beads of the Upper Paleolithic represent "one of the most powerful and pervasive forms in which humans construct and represent beliefs, values, and social identity" (White 1993). A comparable explosion of beads is not found at the time of the Upper Paleolithic anywhere in the world, though social complexity and marking, language, and other forms of symboling were, of course, present. There is no evidence for bead manufacture in the Levantine Middle Paleolithic, though a few perforated shells of the cockle *Glycymeris* at Qafzeh may suggest an early use of beads and the presence, therefore, of more common and perishable forms of personal decoration.

5. A major problem in studying the trajectory of hominization resides not in morphology, tools, or the remains of meals but in the generic evolving potentially variable hominid-to-human capacity and its range. The artifactual evidence almost always indicates a use of that capacity in some context with prior cultural preparation. With the Quneitra engraving, then, we are dealing not with a question of the relative cognitive capacity of anatomically modern humans and Neanderthals but with one of differential cultural development. Cultural developments in human societies vary enormously, and, more important, the symbolic cultures of human groups vary more than do their shared or comparable technologies. The problem raised by the Quneitra engraving is understanding possible differences in developing regional cultural models and "frames"—ways of thinking about and symbolically abstracting and marking certain cognized aspects of the inherently variable processual realm. Rather than a sudden "invention" of language, art, or personal decoration by one human group as opposed to the other, what may be involved is the mapping of the human realm in different ways. Within some such loosely formulated theoretical frame one can perhaps begin to approach the debate over the Middle Paleolithic/Upper Paleolithic transition not in terms of categories based on measurable morphological differences, quantifiable artifactual differences, or the presence of a particular class of symbolic activity but through an investigation of incipient and often quantitatively negligible cultural developments. Such evidence is present at many levels and in many forms, including evidence that is archeologically sparse but nevertheless strongly indicative. Underlying this problem is a subject rarely addressed, the evolutionary trajectory of neurological-cognitive development (Marshack 1985, 1988*a*, *b*, 1989).

6. Bar-Yosef has posed the problem from a Near Eastern perspective: "Behavioral information was rarely sought by early excavators

Aurignacians, clearly abetted by the massive bone resources found on the steppe and tundra of midlatitude Europe, is absent.

It may also be relevant that study of the little-known Upper-Paleolithic-to-Epipaleolithic symbolic materials of the Levant has documented the presence of many of the symboling modes and concepts and much of the symbolic variability found in the European Upper Paleolithic and Epipaleolithic (Marshack 1994, 1995, 1996*a*, *b*, n.d.*a*, *b*).[7]

THE LEVANTINE CORRIDOR

Unfortunately, the early Levantine symbolic materials have never been subjected to methodological analysis. The possibility that symboling concepts and modes (if not "styles" or symbolic artifacts) could move in and out of the Levant, an acknowledged geographical conduit and human walkway (Bar-Yosef 1992), may require a reevaluation of Eurocentric suggestions of a European "origin" for "art," language, social complexity, and personal decoration (Knecht, Pike-Tay, and White 1993; see Marshack 1994, 1995, n.d.*a*). Neanderthals apparently moved into the Levant around 70,000 years B.P., some 30,000 years *after* the Tata plaque was carved in Europe and *before* the Quneitra composition was incised, perhaps carrying into the Levant their symboling traditions and skills. Later, anatomically modern humans apparently moved into Europe, perhaps carrying Near Eastern symboling traditions and skills. Still later, the Aurignacians made a foray into the Levant, carrying bone-working and symboling traditions that had been developed in Europe (the split-base point, etc.) (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1988, Marks 1993). Finally, with the end of the Pleistocene, there may have been circum-Mediterranean and trans-Caucasus movements of peoples and traditions into the Near East, as still later there was a movement northward of farming, farmers, and concepts into Europe. Such long-distance movements of groups carrying complex technologies and symboling traditions are well known during the Upper Paleolithic even within Europe (see Marshack 1995).

INTERPRETING EARLY IMAGE MAKING

If the Quneitra image is depictive, what does it represent? We here enter one of the most difficult areas in the study of early image and symbol but one that is important in the debate on supposed "origins." The problem is how, today, one "sees" what one "sees" and does not "see" what one has not been prepared to see (Marshack 1992). The excavator, Goren-Inbar (personal communication, 1990), has suggested that the image "looks like" the volcanic landscape one sees from the Golan Heights at Quneitra. My first impression while studying the engraving, without knowledge of the geography, was that it reminded me of rainbow arcs and surrounding rain. The South African ethnologist, Lewis-Williams, and others (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988, Lewis-Williams 1991, Bradley 1989) have theorized that the geometric motifs and patterns found in prehistory are often depictions of drug- or trance-induced "entoptics." Other contemporary hypotheses discuss such images in terms of regional or temporal "styles" or in terms of a classification of decontextualized motifs (bundles of lines, nested arcs, etc.) or as forms of information exchange. I was amused, for instance, to find while studying the composition that when I turned it 180° it reminded me of a headless classical Greek torso with a flowing robe. There is no need at this point to judge or evaluate these hypotheses. It may be sufficient to indicate that they probably reflect contemporary acculturation and that the acculturation of the Middle Paleolithic maker was probably of a different order. If the Quneitra image, for instance, was incised as part of a *seasonal* ritual, it may have had a meaning that was largely context-bound, primarily referable to symbolic behavior at that time and place.

Quneitra, 950 m above sea level, is one of the rainiest areas in Israel, with cold rainy winters and hot summers (Goren-Inbar 1990*a*). Rains begin in September or early fall and continue till May or late spring. Since the site was a short-term camp, one may assume that it was visited in the early summer period of lessening rainfall, subsiding floods, and a declining lake, the period when new forage was available for animals. The arriving group probably carried partially reduced flint cores to the site because the primary local stone was a comparatively crude basalt. If the group arrived during the period of diminishing intermittent rains, it may have witnessed the seasonal rainbows. We may thus have not the depiction or representation of a "scene" but a Middle Paleolithic reading of "spiritual" significance for the appearance of a rainbow, marking the group's early summer arrival at these hunting grounds. The image may have been made in ritual recognition of a spiritually relevant event. If so, the incising would have had an accompanying tapestry of behaviors, concepts, myths, and stories. Within some such scenario, however, it may not have been the depiction that was relevant but the ritual

who centered their efforts on elaborate lithic studies. However, if we are to understand the cultural changes that reflect behavioral changes which were not caused by the introduction of a new hominid species or a hypothetical neurological mutation, we need to gather behavioral information from such diverse sources as spatial distributions of bones and artefacts on occupational surfaces, choices of plant foods and firewood, season of site occupation, and so on" (Bar-Yosef 1992:193)—to which may be added those aspects of symbolic behavior now under study.

7. The earliest evidence is a bone point with rows and set of marks incised by different points from Ksar Akil, Lebanon, in the "Levantine Aurignacian," ca. 29,300 ± B.P. (Tixier 1974). This example is as highly evolved and complex as Aurignacian examples found in Europe from the same period (Marshack 1972, 1991*a*, 1995*a*). A bone tool documenting a comparable accumulation of incised sets also comes from Ishango in Africa, recently dated at 25,000 B.P. (Marshack 1991*a*, Paleoanthropologists 1992, Hare et al. 1993). From the Levantine Epipaleolithic, which chronologically matches the European Magdalenian, come incised accumulations of sets and subsets, many of them not yet published, that are comparable in complexity and content to those of the Magdalenian (Marshack 1991*a*, 1994, 1996*a*, n.d.*a*, *b*).

act of which it was a part. The ritual act would have terminated with the performance or engraving and explanation, and the incised composition would have remained as a product of that performance. I have elsewhere pointed to evidence for such contextual image production and performance in the European Upper Paleolithic and in the Upper Paleolithic and Epipaleothic of the Levant (Marshack 1991*b*, *c*, 1992, 1994, 1996*a*, *b*; n.d.*a*, *b*).

These closing suggestions are not intended as an interpretation or an explanation of the Quneitra composition. They are, instead, a caution against interpretations based on contemporary assumptions and theory. I hope that this discussion has made it possible for a contemporary viewer to move from the initial perception of a unique, idiosyncratic, and isolated image to evaluations and perceptions that may lead to broader future inquiry. My work in progress on symbolic materials from the late Acheulian and the Upper Paleolithic and Epipaleolithic/Natufian of the Levant is part of such inquiry.

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Figurines, Fertility, and the Emergence of Complex Society in Prehistoric Cyprus

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The interpretation of anthropomorphic figurines, whether from Upper Paleolithic Europe or from later prehistoric periods of the Mediterranean region, remains one of the most elusive and problematical areas in the study of early representational art. Perhaps more than any other type of artifact from the prehistoric past, the female figure has persistently elicited a priori concepts concerning the nature of early religion and gender-biased views concerning the roles of women and men in early societies. For the Abbé Breuil, the "Venuses" were manufactured as erotic paraphernalia, providing "pleasure to Paleolithic man during his meals" (Ucko and Rosenfeld