

receive different groups of people periodically.

The territories occupied by these Prehistoric clans of Western Europe are quite well defined. Despite the occasional establishment of a site farther north in the Seine watershed (Gouy, Milly) or in the no-man's land between the Seine and the Loire (Arcy-sur-Cure), the bulk of deposits in France is found around the Dordogne river and its tributary the Vézère, along the western bank of the Rhone and close to the headwaters of the Garonne, taking in part of the Ariège region and reaching out rather thinly toward the lower Pyrenees. From there it jumps over to the coastal region of Spanish Cantabria, causing a crowding of sites in Cantabria and Asturias, and concentrated to a certain extent toward the western and eastern ends of these regions respectively. Nonetheless, significant deposits are also found in the central and southern parts of the Peninsula such as: Maltravieso, Las Palomas, La Pileta, Ardales, Nerja, etc.

So this is how man follows the reindeer, horse or bison without fail: after meat, his main source of proteins and protective hides for his furless body which alone has no defense against cold; carrying his household belongings along with him in his constant wanderings, and pro-

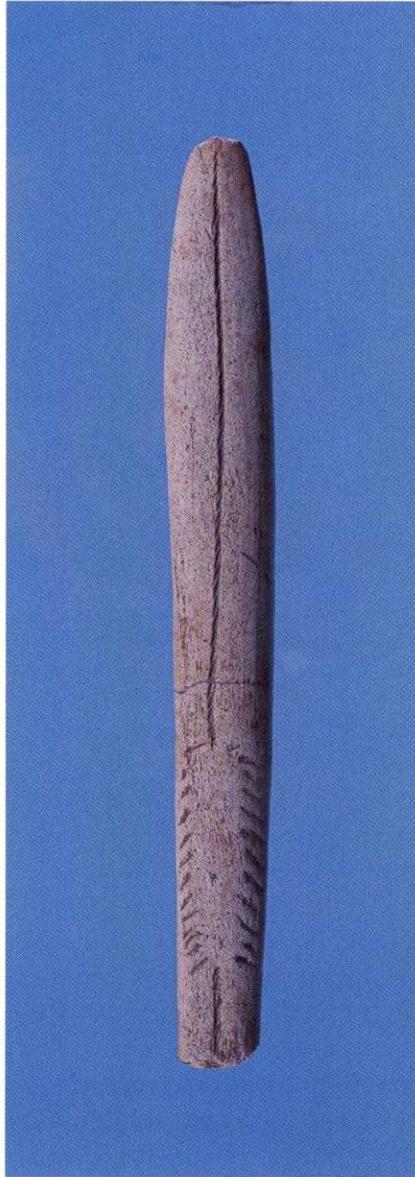


Fig. 36.—Cova Rosa (Ribadesella). Decorated lance.

Fig. 36.—Cova Rosa. Azagaya decorada.

moting the spread and exchange of his knowledge.

Man carries along his sack of material needs on his back, but he also takes along the means to

satisfy them; and with hard work he will be able to do it. But at the same time, he also carries along the equally heavy burden of his spiritual needs. He anxiously works out ways to satisfy his need for *something* he cannot define but that is bothering him. To this man of the Upper Paleolithic, it is already an ancient longing coming from back generations over a vast period of time. Man walks along with so many mysteries at his side! Tremendous mysteries, which for him include the Sun, the Moon, lightning, crashing thunder, the sea, fire... Some are beneficial and others are terrifying. Mysteries in themselves: hunger, thirst, birth, dreams, death. Prehistoric man is hypersensitive, for all these mysteries scheduled for millennia have come upon him all at once to thrash and choke him. He, mankind, will have to find solace by taking this wonderful step toward the creation of Art. Without a doubt, Art is born and develops through magical and religious rituals. This circumstance comes back again and again in the Art of all times, even in the most recent ones.

But before digging into his spiritual baggage, we shall poke around in his sack of material needs, among his utensils, so we may have better knowledge of his improvements after his first work with stone.

CHAPTER III

CULTURAL DIVISIONS OF THE UPPER PALEOLITHIC

Despite the brief time period spanned by the Upper Paleolithic Age, for its thirty-five or forty thousand years certainly are brief compared to the five hundred thousand of the previous cycle, its culture has subtle distinctions and its technical conquests are truly impressive. Using a classification that has become classic, created by the French historian Abbé Henri Breuil who is never sufficiently admired, the Upper Paleolithic is generally divided into three stages: the Aurignacian, the Solutrean and the Magdalenian, which are given these names due to the usual types of material found at three important French prehistoric sites: Aurignac, Solutré and Madeleine. After a few years, new discoveries shed a somewhat different light on these three initial overall groups, so as a consequence they had to be further subdivided into early, middle and late or recent. Late in terms of their distance from the initial stages, and recent if we regard them in terms of their relative proximity to our times. Later, once certain individual traits were identified from the results of some excavations, it was agreed that the early and late Aurignacian were a distinct culture in themselves which was called Perigordian, with roots similar to those named above,

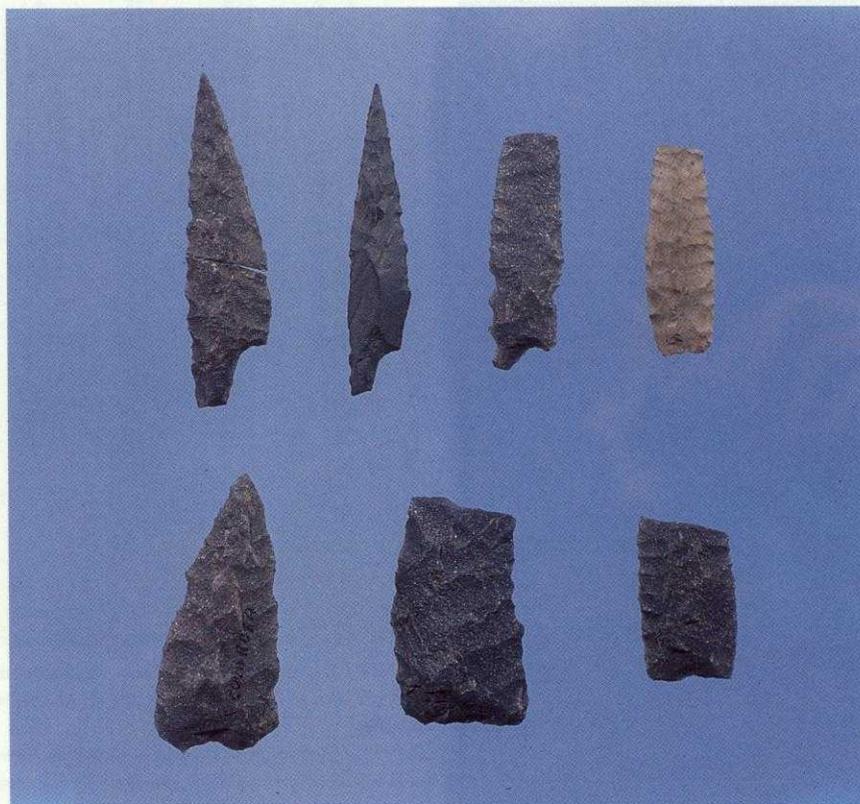


Fig. 37.—Cueto de la Mina (Llanes). Solutrean tips.

Fig. 37.—Cueto de la Mina (Llanes). Puntas solutrenses.

and the Aurignacian was limited to what Breuil calls the Middle Aurignacian. Early Perigordian is also called Chatelperronian, which is characterized by the so-called *Chatelperron tip* (fig. 27) and the late Perigordian or Gravettian, by having the narrow and blunt *Gravette blade* as its identifying object (fig. 28). The situation of both of these in time may be ascertained if we consider that the Chatelperronian is a prelude to the Aurignacian; per-

haps that necessary bridge between the Mousterian and the Aurignacian itself; with this prelude continuing along a different road resulting in the Gravettian, which in time comes after the Aurignacian. It is supposed that there could have been involvement of an isolationist ethnic group in this attached Perigordian phase.

Without being too brief, which is neither my intention nor it is the purpose of this work,

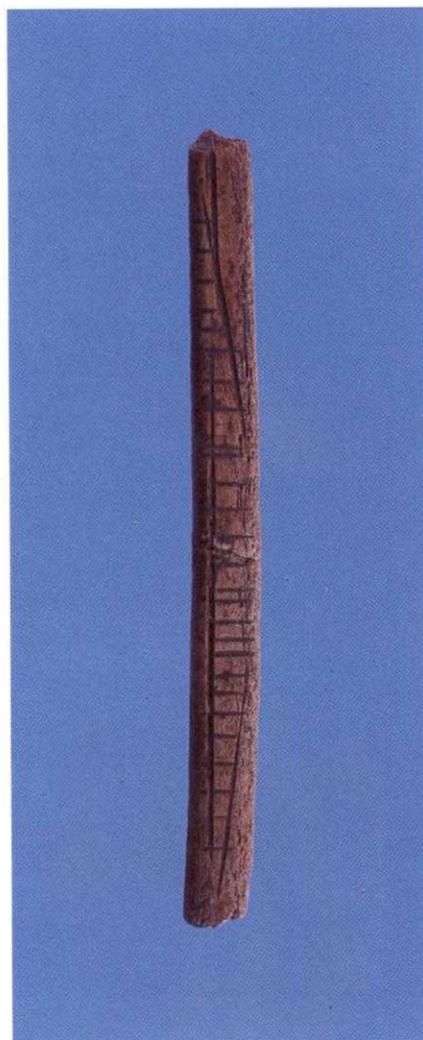


Fig. 38.— Cueva del Cerro (Ribadesella). Decorated assegai.

Fig. 38.— Cueva del Cierro (Ribadesella). Azagaya decorada.

suffice to say that the Upper Paleolithic consists of those three large groups, each with their own identification, but with certain similar traits showing that there is definitely an intimate connection between the Aurignacian, Solutrean and Magdalenian. They form an evolutionary unit for these thirty to forty thousand years, during which it is not possible to draw a firm line separa-

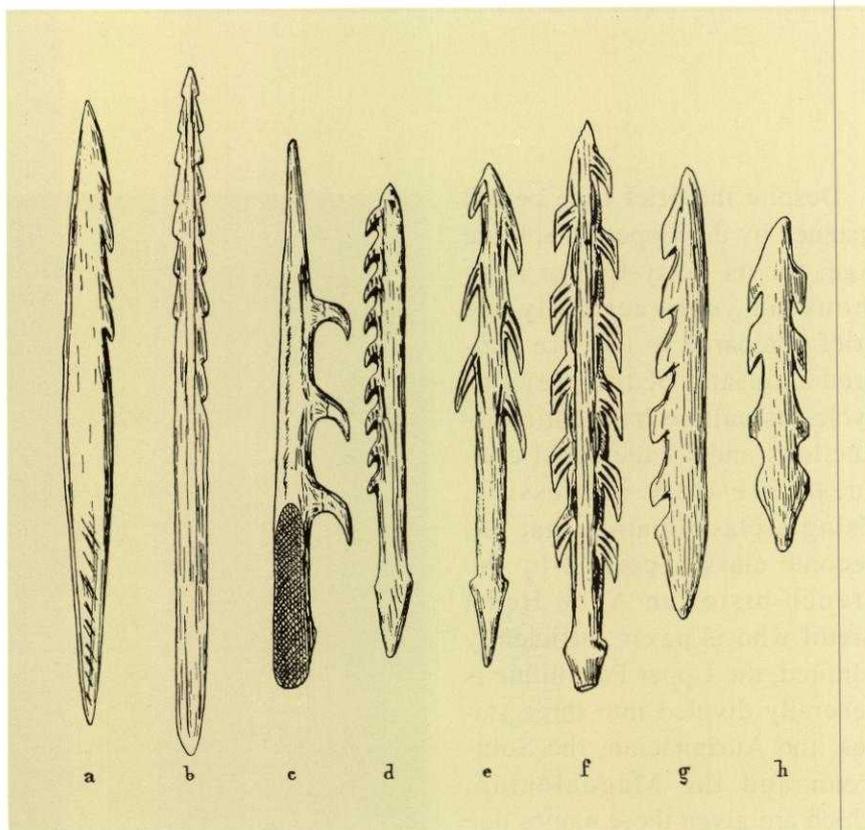


Fig. 39.— Development of Magdalenian harpoons. According to H. Breuil, (a) and (b) archaic; (c) and (d) with just one row of teeth; (e) and (f) with two; (g) and (h), predecessors of the Azilian harpoon.

Fig. 39.— Evolución de los arpones magdalenenses según H. Breuil: a y b, arcaicos; c y d, con una sola hilada de dientes; e y f, con dos; g y h, precedentes al arpón aziliense.

ting them, because the late elements of the old age become mixed in with the early elements of the new age, creating a large area with a combination of both. That is, an already evolved Solutrean will have to come before the old Magdalenian, with a mixture of both archaic and new forms in both. We could say the same about the late Aurignacian and the early Solutrean. Such behavior occurs in any stage of history because there are never sudden interruptions; rather, new methods have their formative period for testing new formulas

until the change finally becomes defined.

The Upper Paleolithic comes to astonishing perfection in utensils, not only in their richness of form but also in their delicateness; materials for their manufacture are also numerous: hard stone such as flint, opfite, etc., and other materials such as bone, wood, antlers and ivory. In these utensils conceived for functional purposes, man is already showing a marked sensitivity in the esthetics of his forms that proclaims his ability to create works of Art.

With Upper Paleolithic man, utensils have acquired spectacular lightness and elegance in addition to great cutting and practical usefulness. Variety of types increased through further specialization according to the requirements of different uses, to satisfy more and more demanding needs for comfort.

Our first encounter with the cultural stages of the French Cantabrian Upper Paleolithic,

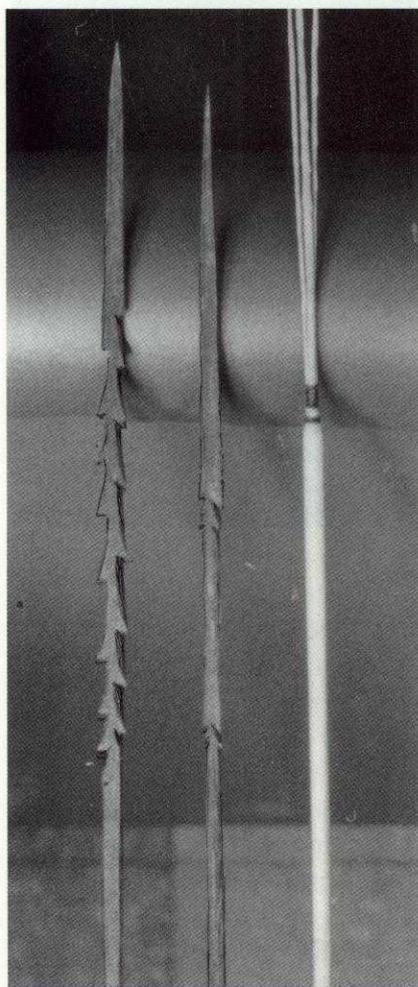


Fig. 40.— Toothed arrows used by Motilón Indians.

Fig. 40.— Flechas denticuladas utilizadas por indios motilones.



Fig. 40A— Tito Bustillo Cave. Magdalenian harpoons.

Fig. 40A— Cueva «Tito Bustillo». Arpones magdalenenses.

which is the era that impacts us directly, has to be through his tools; those ingenious means by which mankind makes up for his physical deficiencies to enable himself to dominate the difficult world around him. We are going around the Perigordian part in this encounter because it is a detour away from the main trunk of the last stage of the Paleolithic Age. We shall limit ourselves to a review of those utensils belonging to the three great cultural groups, as preparation for entering the history and consideration of the great work of mankind; his highest and most genuine creation which is Art,

for this is the one factor setting him far apart from the rest of the living world, not only by its supposed expressive appearance, but by the impulses that motivated it and their lasting significance.

Something on the Aurignacian

This stage provides different utensils making man's task of survival easier (fig. 29). Among these utensils, there are scrapers of all different kinds, and in contrast, burins designed with monotonous uniformity. The chisel

was probably used often for making instruments of bone, and is perhaps one of the more significant Aurignacian creations. Thin, serrated blades are added to these utensils; large knife blades, and even when bone and antlers are hardly used in the manufacture of utensils, one of the most characteristic objects from the early Aurignacian period is a bone tip with a slightly conical shape, opened up into two lugs to take a handle. There are others that evolve toward designs with a pointed or lozenge-shaped base, and this base is also designed for putting it on the handle by slipping it into a slot on a stick (fig. 30).

With the use of antlers and bone in the manufacture of utensils, the first manifestations of Art are shown in objects that are more or less permanent possessions. This is probably due to the fact that the drawings and carvings on them hold some significant magical value, whose coded message we are unable to translate at the moment. Among these embellished objects there are some that still preserve continuity in manufacture and use throughout the three overall groups indentified in the Upper Paleolithic, despite their natural evolution. For example, there is the so-called *staff of office*, a picturesque name given by researchers from the last century who thought this object was a symbol of dignity or office, and thought it was the same as a marshall's staff. This is a curious



Fig. 41.—Tito Bustillo Cave (Ribadesella). Magdalenian shafts.
Fig. 41.—Cueva «Tito Bustillo». Varillas magdalenienenses.

object made of reindeer antlers which as I have said, lasts from the Aurignacian up to the Magdalenian. It is currently called a *drilled staff*, due to the fact that its thickest and strongest part is drilled with a hole. Prof. Leroi-Gourhan emphasizes the possibility that this object may have been used as a spear-straightener used to flex the spears before heating the antler they were made from, which always tends to be curved. In this straighte-

ning function, the hole in this so-called staff would be used as a plier or wrench. But the significance of this tool lies in its decoration, which makes it a very beautiful object, adorned with flat sculptures or stylized or abstract types of relief, or simply with engravings.

During this first stage of the Upper Paleolithic Age and even long before, mankind was enriching his dress with hanging objects around the neck, some

composed of animal fangs, or a replica of them (fig. 31) made of antler. There were also rings made of bone and ivory or disk plates, etc., some with engravings, which are generally of a stylized sort. It is thought that these objects had no luxury adornment function as a frivolous following of fashion. Rather, what is involved is the satisfaction of some higher demand. Maybe they are amulets to stop evil or to help in the hunt, or perhaps a series of benefits can be bestowed upon their owner with their good offices. In some cases, for example the disks engraved with animal figures, may indicate the leadership status of the wearer through a totemic symbol. What is certain is that Neanderthal man is already showing concern about these supplemental manifestations of his personal dress, and Upper Paleolithic man even more so. The latter's recognized sensitivity and inclination toward esthetics, in some way intuitive, became extremely vigorous and eventually became the most important sign of his superiority.

Years ago I had the chance to make a close examination of some interesting necklaces belonging to some primitive tribes living in the interior of Venezuela, whose contacts with civilization even today are mostly through just a few Catholic missionaries. These necklaces were made out of the fangs of a puma, coyote or another kind of carnivorous animal, sometimes

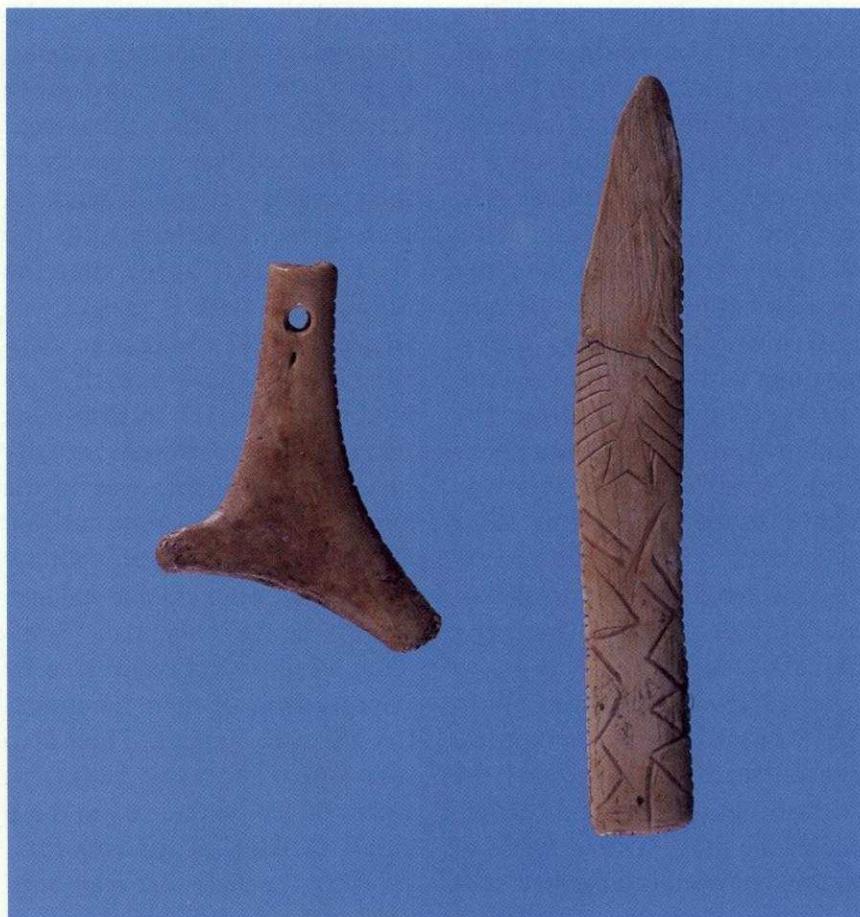


Fig. 42.— Tito Bustillo Cave. Magdalenian palette and pendant.

Fig. 42.— Cueva «Tito Bustillo». Espátula y colgante magdalenenses.

mixed on the same string. Their appearance is similar to what we have obtained from excavations from our Paleolithic Age (fig. 32). These necklaces actually have magical meaning for individuals from these Motilón tribes and they do painful incisions on themselves with these fangs, with blood flowing freely from them. They believe that by cutting themselves, they are in some way acquiring the same physical capabilities and spirit of the animal the fang belonged to from the wound. So therefore, if the cut is made by a puma's

fang, then the man would acquire the strength, agility and ferocity of a puma, to enable himself to fight this wild animal as an equal, or else to prevail against some other species with the advantages gained. There are necklaces made with bunches of fallow deer toenails that are shaken along the trail of the hunt, because it is believed that their sound will attract the herd to them. There are several examples that could be added to this case, related to the *magic of hunting*. But the curious thing is that these men who remain in their

primitive cultures, have also added metal medals with the image of the Virgin and Saint Joseph and other saints represented in Christian iconography to their necklaces due to their relationship with the missionaries, mixing them in among the fangs of wild animals. With this, primitive magic acquires a new meaning with the start of missionary influence, adding the benign spirit of Christian saints to the amulet, and in this way adding to the far reaching value of something that could merely be considered to be an ornament.

The use of these hanging objects lasts all the way up to recent Paleolithic times. With different kinds of reasoning behind them, they go past the limits of those times and become one of the most favored forms of adornment even in educated contemporary societies (women's necklaces, cameos, medals, etc.), just to show the few variations there have been and also the limited imagination shown by man in the esthetics of personal adornment. One can even think of less apparent hanging items currently in use like the watch fob or key chain, etc. These are also remembrances of objects that were used by our prehistoric ancestors ten thousand years ago.

Notes on the Solutrean

For me, the Solutrean has two outstanding features. One of them is the great progress they

attained in sculpting stone, with innovations in hunters' weapons, making them more and more effective. The other great goal they attained was the beauty of their artistic designs in work on flat surfaces. Concerning the first, we shall agree that the Solutrean's work is in fact true filigree (fig. 33). Man is so skillful in manufacture with very hard materials such as flintstone, that these hard materials actually appear to be pliable wax in the hands of the Prehistoric artisan. On the other hand, their subtlety of line, gracefulness and balance of volume not only make Solutrean weapons very aggressive by improvement of their functionality through design. They also turn out to be very beautiful works of sculpture, even in these small utilitarian instruments, showing the skill that man already possessed in the field of art (fig. 34). We shall discuss these artistic activities with due diligence and careful analysis in other chapters, because Art is the subject of this book, and anything written herein that is not directly related to that subject is merely introductory commentary required for presenting both the origin and the environment that brought forth the creative mixture necessary for Art to come forth (fig. 35).

A brief review of Solutrean instruments will give us an idea of their most significant innovations (fig. 36). The tip made in the shape of a laurel leaf in the early Solutrean is novel, and the

very fine willow tip is novel in the late period. Winged and shafted tips, both crafted over the entire surface, are also novel. These light, small and finely made utensils are likely to be genuine arrowheads. If this is so, they would indicate that there was already knowledge of the bow back then (fig. 37). Another important conquest is the sewing needle, whose manner of design and use have not changed despite the thousands of years that have gone by. Among Solutrean decorated objects, excepting *driilled staffs* with a tradition going back to the Aurignacians, the so-called *palettes or spatulas* are outstanding as a creative contribution. They are of bone, flat, elongated in shape, curved down to the lower end which is also slightly pointed, and on the other end they are finished off with a sort of handle that is sometimes in the shape of a fishtail. The surface of these *palettes* is decorated with engravings representing figures of animals or simply abstract subjects: diamond shaped checkers, parallel lines, wheat spikes, etc. Without being able to positively determine the use for these utensils, we think it may be very possible that they were used for mixing colors and fats, just as they were and still are used in some painting techniques. Their use from Solutrean times on may be significant when the art of painting comes into its maturity, for these objects become more prevalent in the Magdale-

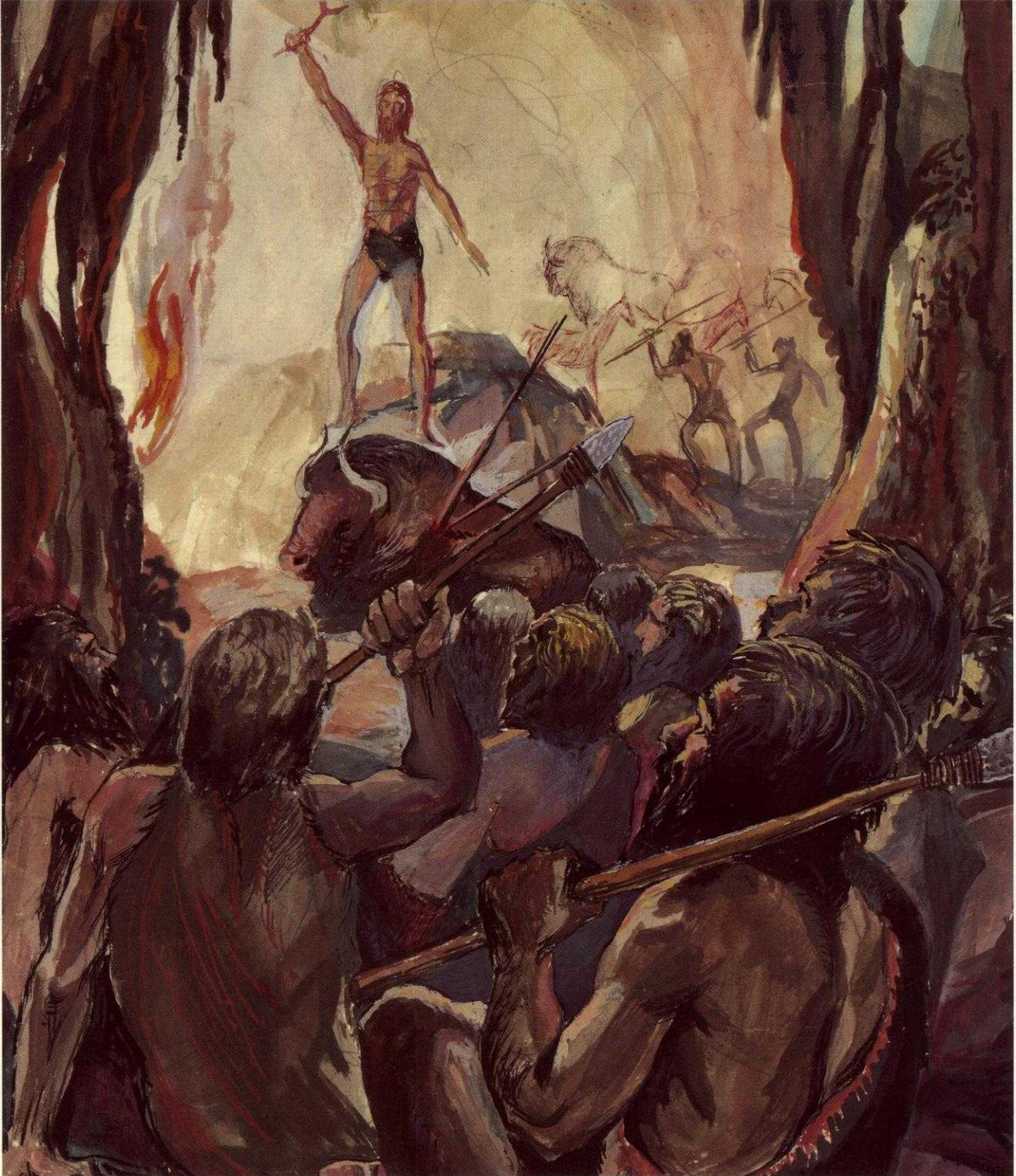


Fig. 43.— Fancied scene of magical rites associated with hunting as performed in prehistoric cave sanctuaries.

Fig. 43.— Supuesta escena de ritos mágicos relacionados con la caza, desarrollada en las cavernas-santuario prehistóricas.

nian, when Painting attained its finest technical subtleties and tremendous progress.

News on the Magdalenian

The Magdalenian is the culmination of the Upper Paleolithic. In this cultural space, there is a deterioration of stone crafts, which had attained such high perfection in the Solutrean. These are partially replaced by mass use of bone. Bone was then, perhaps what plastic is to us in our day. It took over a large part of crafts, because it offered certain qualities that excited the Magdalenians: ease of working, strength, lightness and aggressivity, this last quality being attained with no problem since it provided sharp edged cutting instruments.

However, there is continued use of other materials. So-called harpoons are made from antlers, as well as spears, which are a very ancient tradition but in the Magdalenian they are decorated with abstract designs (fig. 38). The harpoon is a Magdalenian invention, probably from their last phase, and they are also probably a result or derivation of the spear point, which in this harpoon version has hook shaped projections added on the sides. These evolve from serrations along one side only, up to ones having a double row of teeth and an increase in their number on each side. Their special shape keeps the weapon from backing

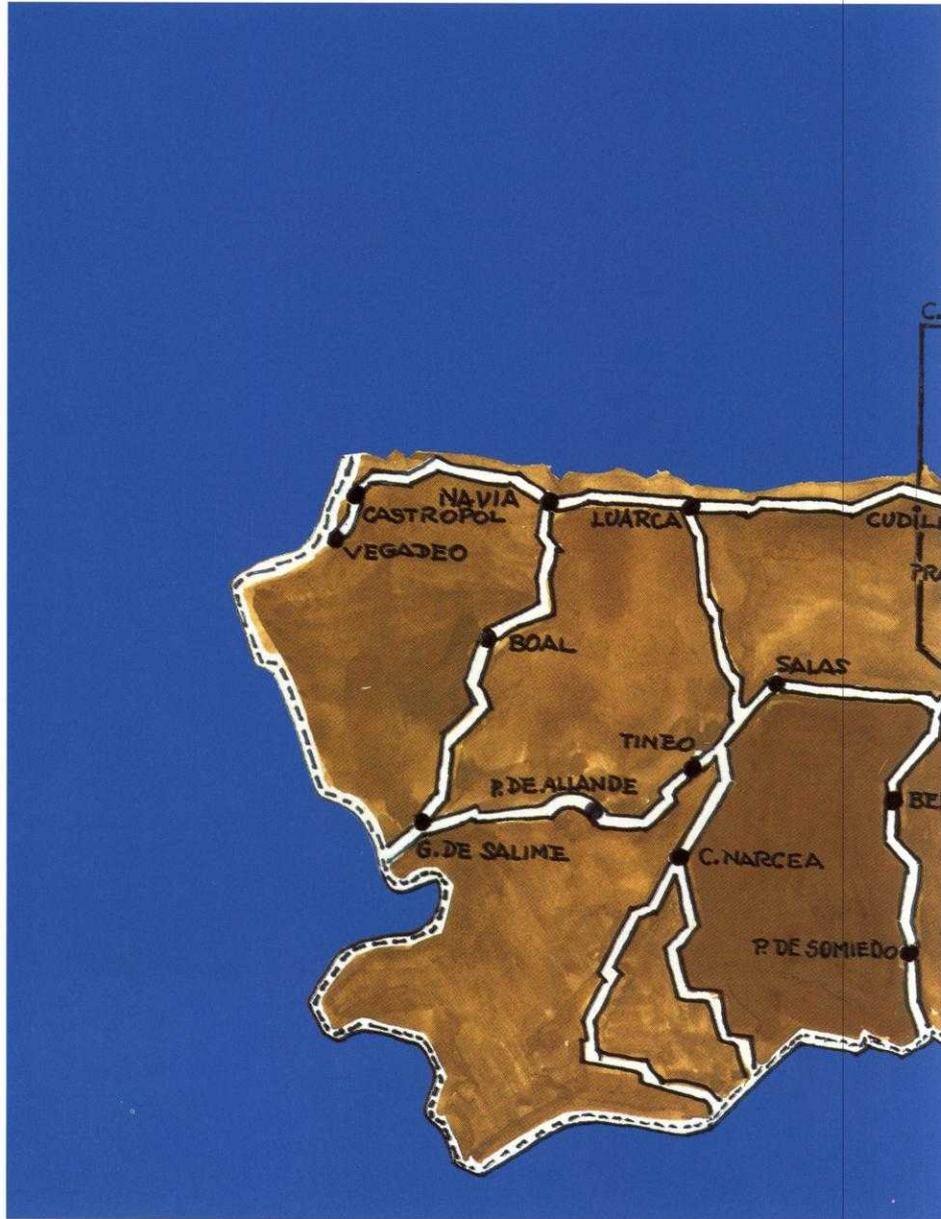


Fig. 45.— Schematic map of Asturias, with the location of caves with wall art. The most important ones are pointed out with asterisks.

Fig. 45.— Mapa esquemático de Asturias, con el emplazamiento de cuevas con arte parietal. Se señalan con asterisco las más importantes.

out again once it causes the wound, through the action of these shaft hooks. On the base, a little before the end which is pointed, there are two wings or wide parts to fasten the ties to the wooden shaft and enable

recovery of the weapon through the use of an attached strap. At the final stages of the Magdalenian, harpoons are drilled with a hole in the base that is probably for improving the above mentioned functions (fig. 39).

and sometimes fruitless pursuit (fig. 40A). Another instrument invented in the Magdalenian is the so-called *spear-thrower*, also made from reindeer antler, owing its name to its possible use in throwing spears. It is a rod having a hole on one end and a small hook on the other. Let us remember once again that these artifacts were usually decorated with drawings that were sometimes abstract and other times stylized; but where the decorative complement becomes tremendously enriched is in these *spear-throwers*, with beautifully executed flat figures.

In the area of small embellished utensils, we have some half-round rods made from antler with the hard outside part constituting the curved section of the instrument, and the flat side being the spongy material of the horn. The way we know them in their half-round shape may not have actually been their real shape. They may have been in the form of a fully cylindrical object stuck together in the middle by the flat spongy area. Some of these rods have a conical point on the end and others have a flute tip. They could have been used as spears (fig. 41).

Concerning hanging adornments, there are some that continue with use of traditional designs but there is also an enriching contribution from new models. For example, some of these hanging adornments have the shape of animal heads, frequently horses, cut as a silhouette in sizes no larger

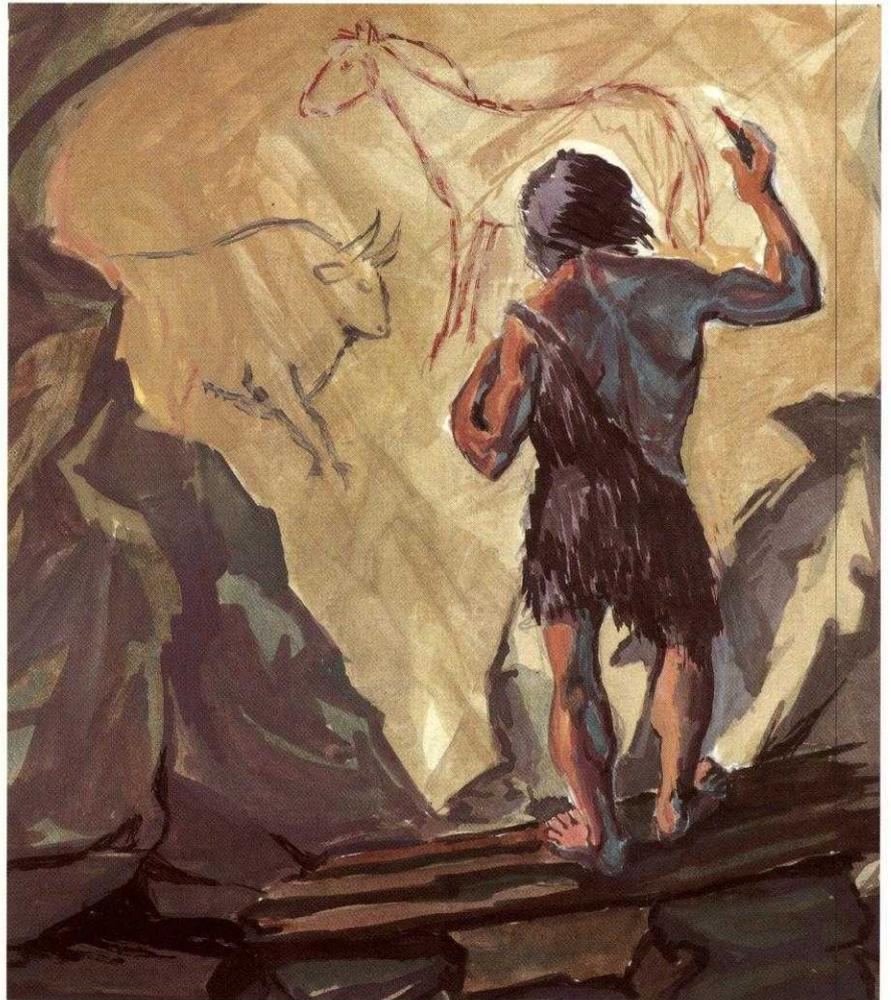


Fig. 44.— One of the simple ways of getting up to be able to paint on surfaces high up above a man's reach.

Fig. 44.— Uno de los sistemas más simples de suplemento para alcanzar superficies situadas en alturas fuera del alcance del hombre.

than two inches, concisely modeled in a barely visible low relief, with details finished off by engraving. They have one or two small holes to put a piece of hide through to hang them around the neck (fig. 42). One of the most favored Magdalenian models are some circular medallions made of bone, thin and about two and one half inches in diameter, with engraved decoration on the surface that is nearly always stylized.

Among the varied objects created by the crafts of Magdalenian man, there is a kind of cylindrical flask made of bird bones. Sometimes they have holes, and may have been used as flutes. In cases where they have no perforations, they could have served for the purpose of storing needles or perhaps colors. There are also some decorated stone bowls known, which most likely would have served as lamps.

CHAPTER IV

ART IN THE UPPER PALEOLITHIC

Reflections on Its Cultural Message. Expressive and Technical Formulas

Although technical improvement attained by mankind during the Upper Paleolithic Age was very significant as we have been able to see through a summary representative sampling of the very numerous inventory of devices that were manufactured during this time, these ancestors would not have acquired the great human dimension we now recognize, had the information from their thousands of years not been supplemented by the legacy of their Art. This priceless treasure provides an image of our ancestor far from cold speculation, making him into a live being intimately related to us; because Art, as we were saying earlier, is the tie that binds together our lineage in one of the strongest and most noble ways.

As we have stated in preceding pages, Prehistoric Art does not spring forth and develop from a need for decorative luxury. Its reason for being is its role in magical and religious ceremonies, where man prays for help with his wants, faced with a multitude of needs that are weighing him down. Among these are the two most significant material needs that appear again and again

to face Humanity of all time: children to insure the survival of the species, and food. Added to these is another great eschatological concern: life after death. This was perhaps the dominant obsession in the individual, and may be behind many of his coded signs, which for us are impossible to decipher.

In the beginning, wall Art is done in outside shelters near the entrances to caverns, but soon becomes located way back in them. Upon reflecting on the reasons for this change, the conclusion was reached that the work of the artist was not for the pleasure of esthetic delight, because it was not located at the permanent living space. Rather it was found in the most hidden parts of the cave, supposedly visited very rarely and also supposedly for the celebration of some sort of ritual act. On the other hand, these artistic formulations show details emphasizing a supernatural scope in their intentions. Thus, the places where these samples of art are located came to be called *sanctuaries*, and this is where these still poorly known ceremonies were held.

In our visits to the caverns, a visit to that part set aside as the *sanctuary* is an absolute must. There, with the help of our imagination, we may feel ourselves

drawn into that great magical and religious assembly. We may even be able to imagine the artist working with the light of rudimentary lamps made of stone bowls or of the skull of a deer, full of grease fed through wicks made of vegetable fibers. There, all around the artist, is the great assembly of our remote ancestors. On their faces they show the disquieting pulse of the flickering movements of light and shadow coming from these primitive lamps. They are influenced by the natural scenery around them, by the ritualistic action of the artist and by the accumulation of mysteries taking charge of a part of their life (fig. 43).

It has been repeatedly said that Paleolithic Art was essentially *animalistic*, merely considering that the great majority of it has animals depicted in its stylized expression. This is an explanation that we may surely find attractive due to the high degree of artistic perfection attained in its expressive wall compositions and in the decoration of utensils and wearing articles. But in addition to this animalistic repertoire, Prehistoric man also set forth a series of messages in abstract shapes, which to date still cannot be read, or at least not in a plausible fashion, despite the numerous



Fig. 46.— El Pindal Cave. Inlet in front of the entrance to the cave.

Fig. 46.— Cueva de El Pindal. Ensenadilla frente a la entrada de la cueva.

attempts that have been proposed and sundry hypotheses that have been ventured. These are the so-called *signs or ideomorphs*, an appropriate designation put forth by Professor Jordá. This is because their representations are so unexplicit, and their apparently stylized shapes fail to suggest even indirectly, the animate or inanimate world around the society that put them down, with only rare exceptions. A special nomenclature has been developed for this group of abs-

tract shapes according to the special features of these signs: tectiform, branch shaped, key shaped, grate shaped, etc., as the imaginative wanderings of the mind go along making up images to recall the ambiguous designation. But one thing is certain, which is that the code of this whole group of signs is unknown. It is a secret code whose meaning we have been unable to penetrate. If one day we were able to do so, the soul of Prehistoric man would show us the

heights to which the subtlety of his rhythms and sustaining notes had taken him.

Art as a representation of nature is different, which as I was saying, is essentially animalistic and is traditionally given a magical role related to hunting: depiction of the animal helps in his capture, just as some primitive tribes today still believe. In summary, this is the hypothesis that enjoyed considerable respect a number of years ago. In more recent times, it was largely

disregarded though it is again coming back into favor. Personally I believe that there are several positions that may be taken on the subject, ranging from the possibility of representative incorporation of the totemic character into the clan or individual, to the possibility of company for the dead in their afterlife, as foodstuffs represented alive and capable of reproduction and ready for slaughter. Thus, there can be an enormous variety of hypotheses, but their description and reasoning would take up too many pages in this book and that is not really its subject.

So whether it be called the *magic of the hunt* or by any other name, Prehistoric Art has far reaching intentions. Though for the viewer today its far reaching nature has lost its supernatural overtones, it still retains its absorbing burden of seriousness, giving this artistic work an exceptional significance revealing to us not only the skill of the hands, but the high spirit that inspired it.

The special details highlighting most of these animalistic depictions give an idea of certain specific ritual formulas. There are stylized headless animals: the *Cats' niche* of the Cave of Lascaux; a bison in Les Combarelles and another in Altamira; a goat and a deer in Niaux; several bovines at Les Pedroses (Asturias); etc. These animals depicted headless are no doubt a result of some unknown formula,

but their message, unintelligible for us, was perfectly known as a symbolic formula within the society for which they were made. In other cases, the ritual formula shows animals wounded by javelins, spears or axes; at other times, there are marks on the body or comma shaped spots of color, etc., etc.

Superimposition of engravings is very frequent in the development of wall Art. In pictorial subjects this is rare and never total; for at most, a small part of the figure is encroached upon and always in an area that is not easily noticed.

This leads us to consider the possibility that stylized pictorial Art is made to be viewed; that is, it has the dual function of its message and its clarity in exhibition. In contrast, engravings are superimposed on top of one another all over, and cannot possibly be viewed clearly. It is as though a mental prayer were involved; a message that has value merely because it was sent, but not from its documentation. On the other hand, it also allows a multitude of depictions where the amount of surface area available for use is limited.

We may also say that the Art of the Paleolithic, or at least what is known, is closer to us as European Art of any time, as was or is the Art of other historical cultures such as the Egyptian, Chinese or Syrian. Its decisiveness and takeoff; its bravery in setting forth its compositions; its expressive naturalism, clear

and serene; its faithfulness and penetrating sharpness in observation, but nonetheless not lacking in personality, are evidently earmarks of Western Art, which has always been distinguished by its dislike of affectation and conventional formulas except during inevitable periods of decadence. Therefore, despite the fact that other high, advanced cultures arose in the East, the West was always the pioneer and always superior in the Arts in terms of sensitivity and creative power.

Art is manifested as such at the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic, for in the Aurignacian, samples are starting to show up that already carry a message with evidence of far reaching communication. However, these expressive formulas are surely the fruit of long previous experience whose remains are unknown to us. I believe this is so because the first samples from the Upper Paleolithic Age come to us after having already attained cultural representativeness and practice in technique.

The Aurignacian depictions become known to us through engravings at sites such as Ferrassie, Cellier, Castenet, Belcayre, Souguett, etc., most of which are vulvar type figures. Even though they may have been salvaged from Aurignacian strata, it would be good to remember that they were done on blocks of stone dislodged back then from ceilings or walls, and because of this, the possibi-

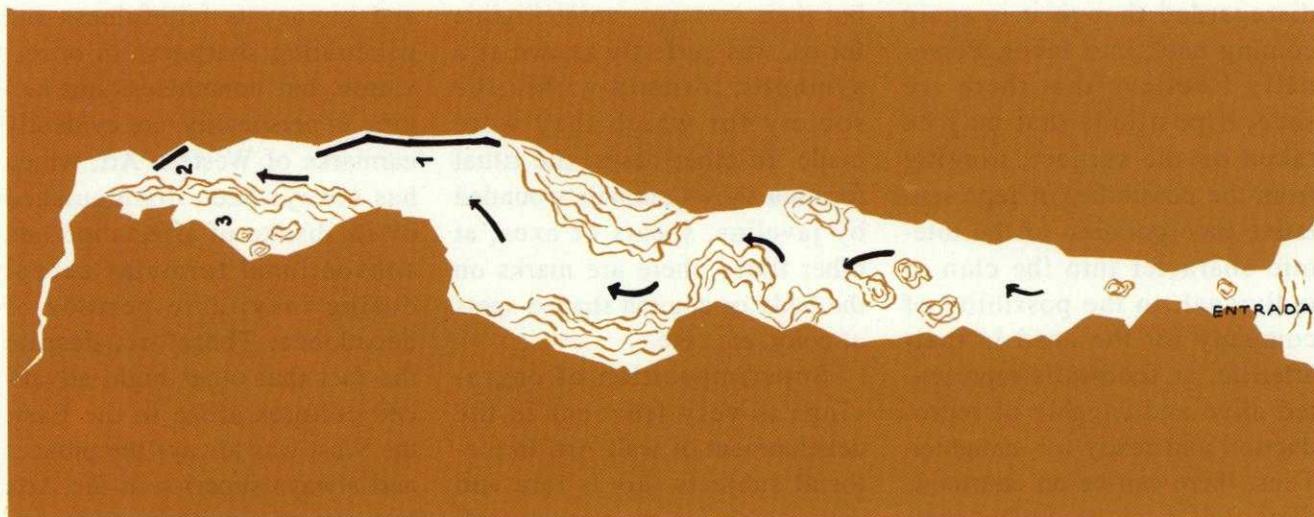


Fig. 47.— El Pindal Cave. Schematic map of the cave.
Fig. 47.— El Pindal. Plano esquemático de la misma.

lity exists that these engravings could have been made before they were dislodged, and could even predate the Aurignacian sediment. There are some examples in Asturian caves that we shall comment on at the proper time. The technique of these representations in French caves uses a deep, wide furrow, close to bas-relief.

It is very likely that at the same time these wide-furrowed sign depictions are being made at outside shelters or cave entrances, others are being made in more or less deep *sanctuaries* in red paint. Of course, if I mention probable concurrent execution by both systems, I am doing so because their styles of graphic representation are similar. Therefore, if they are similar in their physical appearance, then they also may be similar in their philosophical time period.

Although vulvar symbols at this primitive stage are a very

outstanding and repeated theme perhaps coming from earlier roots, they also have a series of abstract-symbolic motifs to satisfy the need to provide visible expression for a multitude of concerns of a magical and religious nature, in which man may not have yet attained proficiency in their stylized naturalistic representation. That, or else he may have preferred a more mysterious code. But these signs, still far from being zoomorphic representations, are understandably read and interpreted by Paleolithic man and repeated all over his wide territory. They provide us not only with the certainty that there indeed existed a community of ideas, but also of the respectable status achieved by the society that created them. These expressive formulas have survived over time due to their homogeneity and message bearing capability, enriching their repertoire even though their sig-

nificance was left behind when they lost their uniqueness as a guide when other manifestations of imitative stylism of nature arrived to imprint wall surfaces and object art with overwhelming superiority.

How long would the creation of this code, whose symbols and abstract signs are called *ideomorphic* by Prof. Jordá, have lasted? We are aware of their move to the walls, but if at the first moments of this connection we are already finding a variety of symbols and possible messages along with them, then it may be supposed that they already had a long tradition behind them. It is probable that this formative stage may have been performed on portable objects to make their movement easier along with their communication to all parts of society. They also very possibly could have been done on materials that were easy to handle and work with such as



Fig. 48.— El Pindal Cave. Horsehead painted in red.

Fig. 48.— El Pindal. Cabeza de caballo pintada en color rojo.

tree bark, hides and wood, and they perhaps could have started out with decorations on the human body itself. As we well know, this involved easily destructible materials and for such reason they have not survived to our day.

Some authors believe that Paleolithic Art started out with the engraving technique by chance: scratches on bones in scraping off the meat, rubbing two materials of different hardness together, etc., and that a series of cuts at any given

moment could create an invention with the appearance of an image.

I believe that the emergence of man into the world of Art is not something that happens as a coincidence. Upper Paleolithic man already had a long history in his prehistory, which means hundreds of thousands of years in the use of his conscious efforts to achieve effectiveness with his weapons. He shapes stone, wood and bone and uses these three in an effort that is anything but a coincidence,

because it is in response to a reasoned intention that from the start is aimed at attainment of specific goals, for example to make his life easier, or at very least less difficult. By the Acheulian period, his utensils had already achieved considerable technical improvement and variety. Therefore, I believe that when man has concerns of a spiritual nature; his secondary need, since his primary need must be for material things; he has developed and possesses the technical and inventive means to be

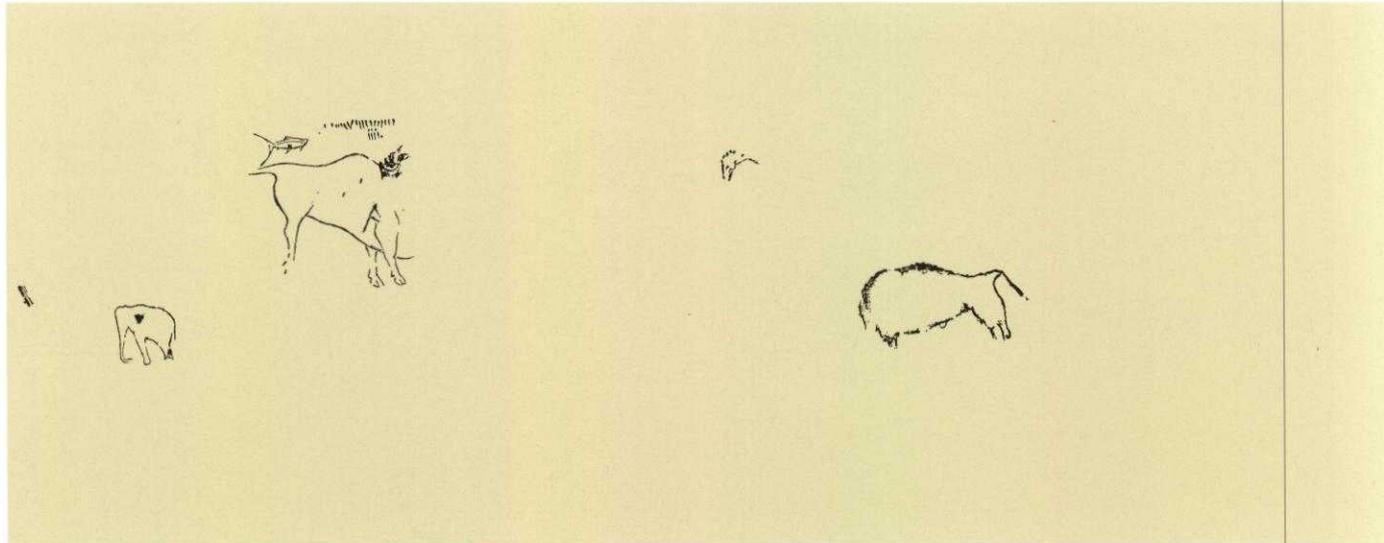


Fig. 49.— El Pindal Cave. Drawing to show the location of the depictions on the wall.

Fig. 49.— El Pindal. Dibujo clarificador de la situación de las representaciones artísticas del panel principal.

able to depict myths, messages and prayer. Call it what you will.

Now we come to a consideration on the dual road to expression on flat surfaces, used by man to manifest his cultural ideas. On the one hand, there is the imitative stylization of nature, principally zoomorphic; and on the other, abstraction through the varied and complicated *ideomorphic* system. The first question that comes up is whether these abstract manifestations come first, at the same time or arrive later.

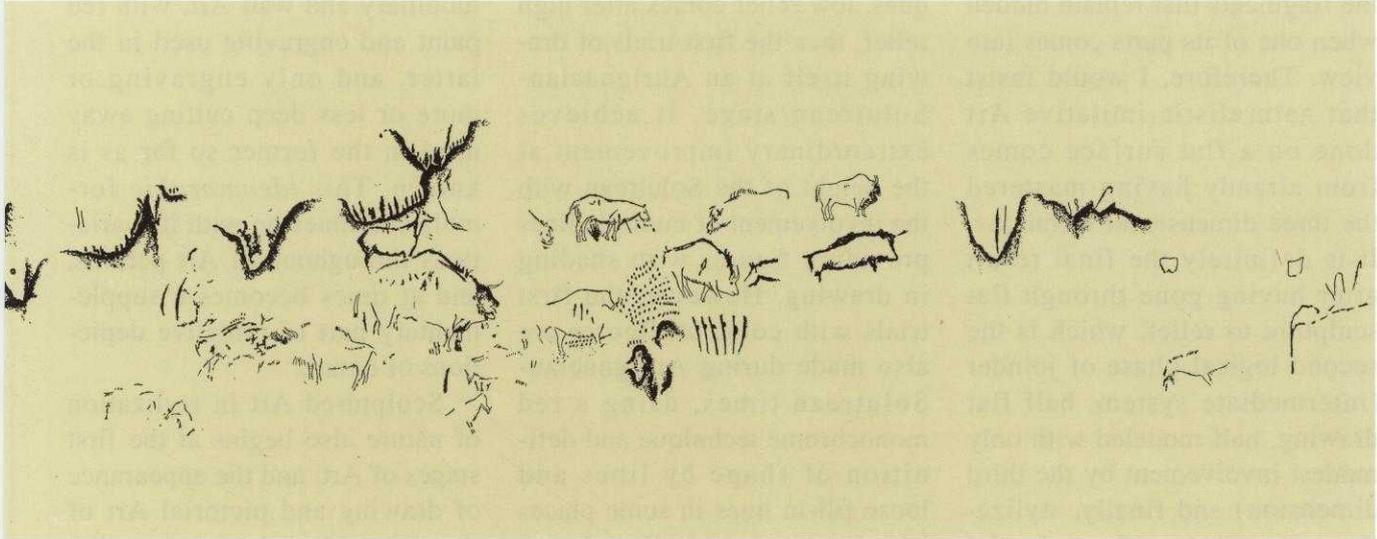
With the current status of our knowledge, it has become hard to come out for one side or the other. However, in Art displayed on cavern walls, I think the world of *ideomorphs* arrives earlier than the imitative stylization of nature; but I also believe that these two tendencies are not very far apart in time. Abstraction requires enrichment of the

imagination, an intellectual process more than a technical skill, to lead to a kind of expression that is also to be *read* and understood by the society that lives with it. It is an indirect procedure that is redone in the mind, without any natural closeness enabling one to reproduce what is seen by sight. I assume it is done this way due to the difficulty in depicting on a flat surface, what man is used to seeing with all its bulk and animation. The other type of expression, the imitation of nature, is much easier for us to follow through its birth and evolution. But to do this, before going back to when it started on the walls of the *sanctuaries*, we must consider those remains that can provide us with some news on the emergence of mankind into the world of Art.

Back in 1894, the French prehistorian E. Piette stated that

the road traveled in Paleolithic Art starts with flat sculpture, followed by bas reliefs and trimmed shapes, and arrives at the Magdalenian with skill at engraving. This theory, which was mostly rejected for years, deserves reconsideration. Personally I believe that it is for the most part acceptable exactly as it was stated by the French Professor, even though my discourse may have to stray in other directions in order to arrive at this decision.

Naturalist imitative art, which is what Paleolithic Art is, provides us with a series of datings in female statuary that to a certain extent are controlled. An important study by Prof. Henri Delporte on depictions of women in Prehistoric Art provides, in addition to other significant contributions, a very complete listing of sculptural findings on this subject. From these we have



culled some flat specimens from the most primitive stages, and we are faced with the fact that part of these were found in Mousterian strata and others in Aurignacian, which in some cases also provide Mousterian material. Carbon 14 tests on occasion show an age of twenty-seven to thirty thousand years before Christ, and as a curious circumstance, small pits dug into the floors of the dwellings were found in some cases, giving the impression that these little statues had been kept and *preserved* there. This circumstance gives rise to the hypothetical possibility that some of these little sculptures would have been passed on from one generation to another for strict safekeeping because they were of a cultural nature. On the other hand, we find ourselves with specimens of work that is very well executed technically and is a product of a

long process of improvement unknown to us, perhaps because it may have been done in fragile materials such as clay. The specimens recovered show the use of modeling and polishing techniques, etc., on very hard raw materials. If we add to this the wide cultural spread of this element that is representative of a community that was culturally developed and spread across many miles from Eastern to Western Europe, I think the antiquity of these small sculptures may be much greater than the age determined from information collected. Another circumstance that should be considered is the size of these figures. Their average size is less than four inches, which is more or less the same as the sizes that man is used to over a stone chipping tradition of thousands of years in making his utensils. He is also used to handling the three

dimensions and it is only natural that when he comes upon the spiritual need to represent his myths through physical stylization, he should do this by the method he is used to, which is three dimensional: a volume he can surround and master in all its parts, and see in its completeness.

The transfer of three dimensional shapes to two dimensional shapes on a flat surface is a very difficult conquest. Artistic depiction of nature on a flat surface is unfaithful. It has to be done differently, requiring a complicated mental process plus a mastery of work in three dimensions, to be able to transform them and summarize them in two; for it is necessary to simulate the presence and the reality of something we do not see because it is hidden behind another opaque part, and has to be reasonably coordinated with

the fragments that remain hidden when one of its parts comes into view. Therefore, I would insist that naturalistic imitative Art done on a flat surface comes from already having mastered the three dimensional technique. It is definitely the final result after having gone through flat sculpture to relief, which is the second logical phase of joiner (intermediate system, half flat drawing, half modeled with only modest involvement by the third dimension) and finally, stylization on a flat surface. In the relief technique, we shall review the very representative specimens of the *Gran Abri de Laus-sel*, which are also reliefs of images of women, recovered from Gravettian strata which as we shall recall, are supposed to be a stage parallel to the recent Aurignacian and may also be an evolutionary stage of sculpture in its long East-West path.

It must be understood that my purpose is to determine the possible primacy of sculpture as a principle of the expressive formulas of Paleolithic Art. This does not mean that sculpture itself might not have been practiced at the height of drawing and pictorial wall Art, for this is shown by the great frieze of the horses of Cap-Blanc, or the pair of bison of Tuc d'Adoubert, and the numerous works included among utensils up to the last stage of the Magdalenian, for example.

So therefore, in following the development of artistic techni-

ques, low relief comes after high relief, then the first trials of drawing itself at an Aurignacian-Solutrean stage. It achieves extraordinary improvement at the height of the Solutrean with the involvement of multiple lines providing figures with shading in drawing. However, the first trials with color on figures are also made during Aurignacian-Solutrean times, using a red monochrome technique and definition of shape by lines and loose fill-in lines in some places in an attempt at shading. Later, the excellent pictorial phase of the Middle Magdalenian arrives. The area of color has now become much larger, giving the surface of the paintings shadings and polychromatic character, etc. Sizes are now larger and everything seems to indicate that technique and sensitivity have peaked, showing in a certain way the joy that the artists must have felt in their creative work, in addition to the seriousness and far reaching nature of cultural demands.

After achieving this great goal, wall Art will go into a period of decadence, going back to monochrome, usually black, becoming schematicized and returning again to abstract forms.

In an attempt to bring order to and summarize this whole complex description set forth on Upper Paleolithic Art we could say that:

Depictions in sign are shown from the earliest times, both in

mobiliary and wall Art, with red paint and engraving used in the latter, and only engraving or more or less deep cutting away used in the former so far as is known. This *ideomorphic* formula continues on with its variations throughout all Art periods, and at times becomes a supplementary part of imitative depictions of nature.

Sculptured Art in stylization of nature also begins at the first stages of Art, and the appearance of drawing and pictorial Art of the same kind does not arrive until toward the end of the Aurignacian period.

Despite the new forms of wall Art, sculpture continues to co-exist with it through time, and achieves wonderful perfection and beauty both in weapons and articles of everyday use.

We shall also make brief mention of the technical devices that man used in his wall Art. The placement of some of the figures is several yards high, which no doubt made it necessary to get up to this high rock surface. He would often have to make use of some sort of a scaffolding with a wooden frame. Other possible ways would be to pile up stones or earth to get to the desired height (fig. 44); but these are very tedious ways which would sometimes mean days and days of hard labor. On the other hand, the shapes of some of these abstract motifs with actual checkering, ladders and other types of crosshatching, indicate that man was already in

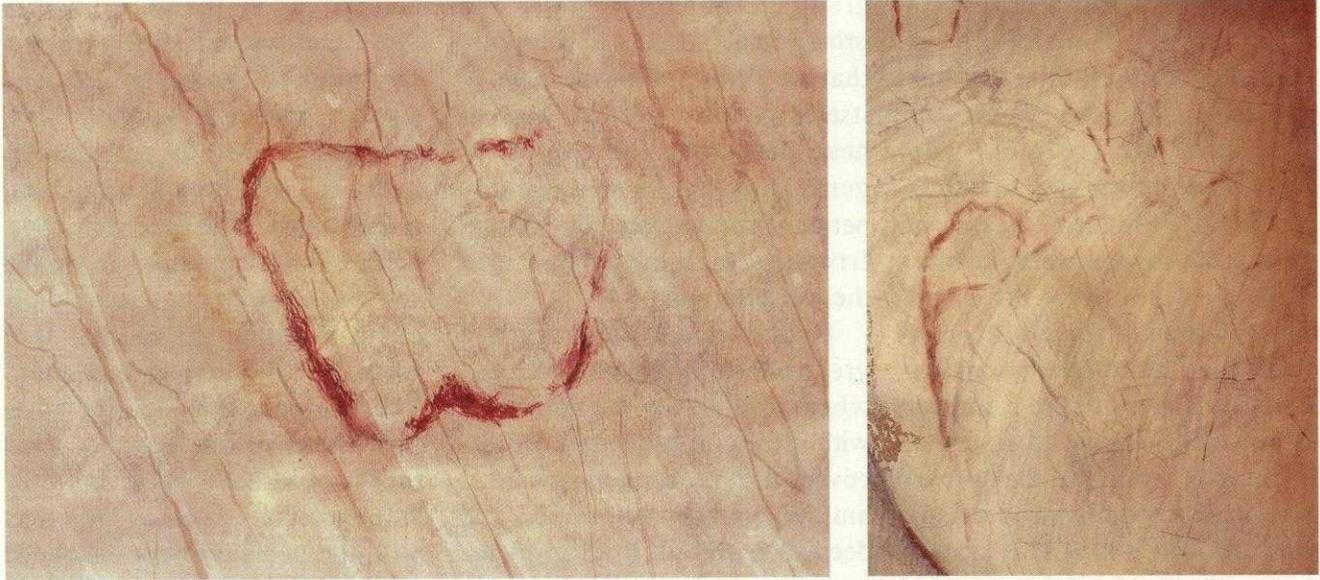


Fig. 50.— El Pindal Cave. Shield shapes painted in red, and other signs.
 Fig. 50.— El Pindal. Escutiformes pintados en rojo y otros signos.

possession of enough knowledge about how to make apparatus of that kind or other similar kinds back in those days. These would not have only served his needs in making these works of art, but also in making traps for hunting which he certainly used, and cabins, etc.

Concerning materials, especially for painting, he uses tampons, very probably made from the inside of hides; brushes made from the hairs from these hides or from vegetable fibers and at times he even makes use of his fingers. Palettes of wood and bone, with which he will also mix his colors by kneading them into animal marrow or fat, which is an indispensable vehicle due to its plasticity in applying the paint to the rock. Huge seashells serve as containers for the pigments. He often uses burins for engraving, though

these are also supplemented by other tools, such as the spatula for scraping and serrated tools for parallel lines. Concerning pigments, he takes advantage of red and brown hematite, manganese for violet and dark purple, black from wood, either from burning or rotting, and various natural earths such as yellow ochres.

Final Considerations on this Prelude

The apparent evolutionary slowness of the Upper Paleolithic should not seem strange to us, for we have already seen the extremely slow progress of the Lower and Middle, and compared to them, progress in the Upper Paleolithic really has to appear rapid to us.

As man goes along accumulating knowledge, development of cultures picks up speed. If we look back into historical ages, we become aware of how evolutionary cycles become completed in shorter and shorter periods of time, and how they have attained supersonic speed today in this aspect, with changes in ideas and formulas in the space of twenty-four hours. This impatience also has its influence on Art, which is improperly confused or mixed up with advances in functional technology, without realizing that Art must be a product of far reaching spiritual values that are at the same time a product of ideas about the supernatural.

A knowledge of historical Art will give us an idea of how to approach Prehistoric Art. If we ask our Western Art for an explanation of Greek statuary; if

we were to ask that question again at the flourishing of Roman portrait art, or at the time of soaring Gothic bell towers, or to Middle Age sculptors who made sculpted statues of saints and devils in hidden recesses in these same towers where human eyes could not view them and thus made *only for the eyes of God*; if we asked for reasons for Spanish imagery or the paintings of El Greco or any other manifestation of world art, the answer would have a common denominator, though it may vary according to the winds of the environment. For the Greeks it may be their hero worship and cult of the body; for the Romans, survival of the physical image after death; for Christian truth, worship of the true God. Reasons for Art were always motivated by the common catalyst of human concerns about the continuation of life beyond the limits of nature. The language, invocation, and expression of these concerns is through Art. Art is more than a skill; it is something more than just a talent for sensitivity to beauty, goodness, truth, esthetics and ethics. Art is very possibly one of the ways that God has given us so we would be able to communicate directly with Him. In summary, it is something that can take us away from our small misery. Art, entering upon the transcendental, creates a supernatural Nature. When art departs from its transcendental qualities, it becomes handicraft. When technical pro-

gress shakes up Humanity and proud mankind gets to the point that he cannot even believe in itself, we have spiritual barrenness, desolation and confusion, generating works without any permanence precisely due to that frivolous lack of substance in their inspiration.

Every time I go to view a great panel of Prehistoric Art, whether it be for the first time with the joyful excitement of discovery or after numerous visits, I am always very impressed and deeply respectful. It all grips me with its grandiosity, with an unknown sort of solemn monumentality that goes far beyond that prayer made of Art. But since creating Art is recreation, no doubt the artist himself also felt the high excitement of this trance when he sent these messages aimed at the supernatural, swelling joyfully with the importance of his mission as a mediator, as a custodian of a part of divinity allowing him the privilege of drafting this precious plead.

This is definitely the artist's reward; for the genuine artist, and not the mystified artist; to pass on light being received so that Humanity will be able to see in the shadows along its path.

Surely the Prehistoric artist was an outstanding celebrity in the community of his time. We must suppose that not all its members were suited to creating Art. Yesterday as well as today, there would be a selection made among the more outstanding members until the master emer-

ged. We know the sacred walls, those that were destined for the centuries; but before the invocation was made on the wall, there would be another perishable material used. Here the executor or executors, under the sharp eye of the master painter, no doubt set with a priestly cast, would go about handling the secrets of a trade involving religious rites. These artistic flounderings have not lasted to our day because they would have been done on soft materials such as practice with the burin on bark or wood, on sheets of clay, etc. Colors would be ground on stone plates, then mixed with animal fat until they attained the required consistency. Tampons, brushes, palettes, etc. would be made. The secrets of the trade would be learned and practiced by neophytes who may never achieve supreme dignity, though they would be recognized at a certain level. On occasion, as in the guild shops in historical times, when the master would give the outstanding student his journeymanhip, the latter might then draw his first art designs on the wall surface. Thus, the incomprehensible engravings, unfinished silhouettes and placement of some figures may possibly be from demands of apprenticeship.

I shall conclude these considerations on Prehistoric man by describing and analyzing evidence of his art in the region of Asturias: art testimonials left by the Asturians of Prehistory. The-



Fig. 51.— El Pindal Cave. Engraving showing an incomplete figure of a horse.
 Fig. 51.— El Pindal. Grabado representando la figura de un caballo incompleto.



Fig. 52.— Wild boar painted in red, facing what appears to be a lance point, and a horsehead painted in the same color.
 Fig. 52.— El Pindal. Cabeza de caballo y jabalí pintados en color rojo.

refore, we shall keep the image of mankind in our memory, viewing him in the hopeful activities of his everyday life, full of integrity as a man, let us not forget, with his senses awake; with his intelligence as penetrating and

developed as any mediocre or intelligent man today, and a sensitivity attracted to all that is beautiful and good, which fills us with admiration. However, he is continuously doing battle with ugliness and evil as is always the

case. We have tried to approach our brother who is so distant in time and share his trials and the harshness of his life to get to the essence of his existence. We have tried to imagine the *comfort* of his cabin under the stone of the cave, with the bitter smell of hide, leftover food and human sweat; and we have also guessed at his anguish as he is faced with mysteries: procreation and death with unknowns of the afterlife. We have also shared his joy at good hunting and fishing. Man's current attraction to these activities are a remnant of a practice maintained for thousands of years for the purpose of survival, probably the same as the attraction we feel toward the flames in the fireplace. But our deepest and most admirable sharing is with mankind that was capable of projecting itself beyond that Prehistoric era, contributing the wonder of its extraordinary Art, an undeniable example of birth and destiny touched by the supernatural which makes it into something close to us. For when we discovered their Art, we recognized the truth of what Teilhard de Chardin said when he stated: *what we are really discovering is our own infancy, we are discovering in ourselves those same essential aspirations in the depths of our own souls.*

CHAPTER V

PREHISTORIC ART IN ASTURIAS

Population and Characteristics

France and Spain share the most outstanding part of the flourishing of Art in the Upper Paleolithic. In Spain, it is the Cantabrian coastal strip that provides the most Prehistoric dwelling sites, and therefore the largest amount of Art specimens. Along this coastal strip, Cantabria and Asturias are rich in these deposits, and in Asturias they are mostly concentrated in the central and especially the Eastern part of the region, as a land selected by mankind from that remote era, no doubt influenced by a good microclimate within a hostile environment; a land separated from the ice of the Pyrenees, with plenty of hunting, a rich variety of flora, rivers full of fish and many miles of coastline full of seafood.

All this came into play to keep man on a short leash within this relatively small territory in his nomadic wanderings. Here, the Easternmost of caves with Art in Asturias is the one called *El Pindal*, and the Westernmost is the cave of *La Peña de San Román de Candamo*, known for short as *Candamo Cave*. From one end to another, there are over a hundred caverns that have provided remains of human occupation and more than thirty of these

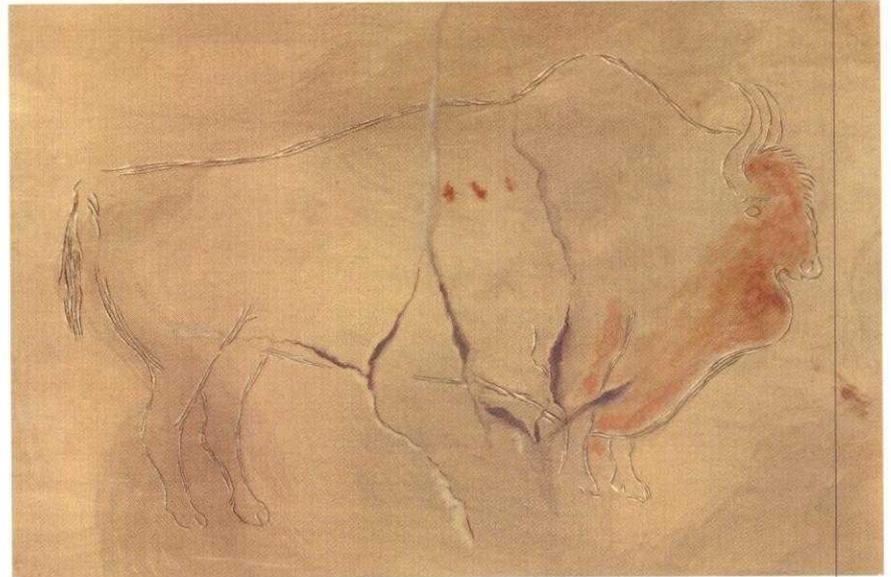


Fig. 53.— El Pindal Cave. Bison engraved and painted, including three colored dots on its body.
Fig. 53.— El Pindal. Bisonte grabado y pintado, con tres puntos de color rojo sobre el cuerpo.



Fig. 54.— El Pindal Cave. Engraved figure of indefinite nature; could be a depiction of a wild boar.
Fig. 54.— El Pindal. Figura grabada de carácter indefinido; podría representar un jabalí.

show some manifestation of Art, large painted or engraved wall either in decorated objects or in surfaces. (fig. 45).

So then it appears that Asturias is the last area where culture spreading down from the South of France to the Cantabrian coast arrives, and it also appears that the Nalón river is the last frontier; from there on, unknown lands. This makes one think that perhaps the inhabitants of this already populated territory may have merely been receivers of this culture that actually may have flourished on the other side of the Pyrenees. But perhaps this is not altogether precise, since although they actually were receivers of these advances, their role was not limited to that. There were also inspired stages in which they were capable of exporting cultural improvements during the Solutrean and Magdalenian ages, with the creation of new kinds of instruments for the improvement of original pieces and excellent achievements in Art, that in some cases are even superior to other examples. In relation to this, and so as not to deprive the reader of news, we will say that there were levels of excellence attained in mobiliary art that are demonstrated in quite a few specimens, just as in wall Art. The ones we have known in Asturias up to now have been scarce. However, it is quite possible that excavations in progress may soon be able to provide us with the abundance we all are hoping for, because true jewels of mobiliary art have been recovered recently, which we shall be referring to.

Dear reader, before saying what the Art legacy of our ances-

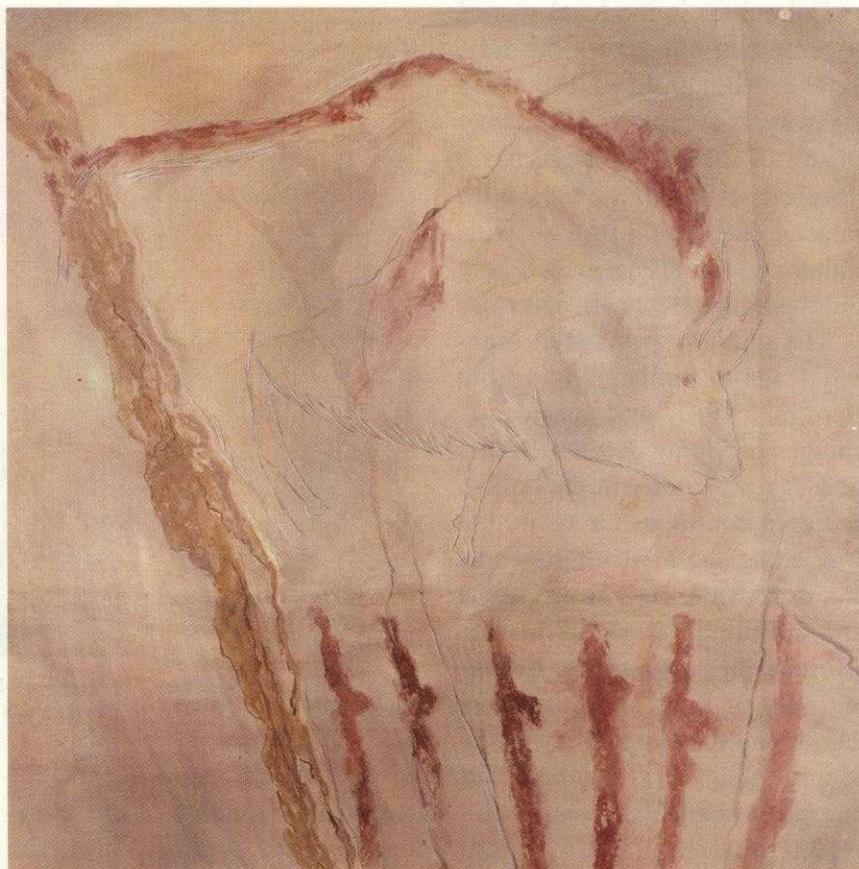


Fig. 55.— El Pindal Cave. Engraved bison with painted red spots and signs.

Fig. 55.— El Pindal. Bisonte grabado y tocado con color rojo, y signos del mismo color.

tors is all about, I must state that I shall only refer in detail to the most outstanding examples, because the lesser significance or low artistic level of some models would occupy pages that could be given to others more deserving of paper and printing.

Let us begin our encounter with Art in the Eastern part of the region.

The Pindal Cave

On the Eastern edges of Asturias, lying on the last foothills of the Sierra de la Cuera sloping down to the sea, is the territory of

Ribadedeva: the bank of the Deva. The Deva river becomes a full, mature river with the water pouring into it from the Cares, and it winds along the border between Ribadedeva and Cantabria, sharing its waters half and half across an imaginary line hidden among the rushing waters that is shown on maps with a line traced in black. The Deva River, which at the end of its course spreads out up wide and slow, loses the aggressiveness of its confined whitewater existence among the rocks, until it finally abandons the nature into which it was born and blends into the Tina Mayor estuary.

Colombres is the local seat of government, but across the way, on the other side of the main highway, is the town of Pimiango on top of a hill. Pimiango has a jeweled string of houses with palacial ostentation in their wide patios and cut stone, which here and there include an ancient ruin.

The winding provincial highway leads to Pimiango and from there, it joyfully and confidently plunges headlong down the other side. It rests briefly in the hollow and then continues on again, but now along the difficult slowness of the hillside until it arrives at San Emeterio Light House: a Cyclops that also shoots beams, but only of light, with the excellent intention of guiding ships or keeping them at a distance from that part of the Cantabrian sea.

But our road is not to the lighthouse; we are going to the *El Pindal* cave. At another time we would have gone by a partially hidden pathway among thorns and green and exuberant laurel leaves with the murmur of the sea near by.

There are steps leading down to a small, relatively flat square surrounded by cool grass and set among walls of solid rock. At one side is the entrance to the cave and across the way, about two hundred feet away and some forty feet down, is the sea. The opening of the cliff leaves a narrow passageway letting in the sea; but this is a tame sea because it is bottled up and slowed down by the jumble of rocks that have fallen from the cliff, forming a



Fig. 56.— El Pindal Cave. Engraved mare and a human hand painted in red.

Fig. 56.— El Pindal. Grabado definiendo a una yegua y, bajo ella, una mano humana pintada en rojo.

barrier at the mouth of this canyon (fig. 46). In this inlet, the mul and the large bass search hungrily for crabs shedding their shells, just as they did thousands of years ago. Perhaps the mul and the bass were not the species that came around, but this inlet could have been an ideal port for the inhabitants of the cavern, if it were not for the fact that its original entrance, the one used by Paleolithic man, is unknown. Besides this, we also do not know any place, deposit or site with any manufactured specimens these men could have left us.

It was in April of 1908 that Hermilio Alcalde del Río made Prehistoric painting in the *El Pindal* cave known to the world. This was the first knowledge of wall Art in Asturian caves,

because Candamo, which was second, would not be unveiled for another five years.

After that first contact, Alcalde del Río himself, Abbé H. Breuil and L. Sierra collaborated in a study of the cave, which was published in 1911 along with others in a magnificent work sponsored by the Prince of Monaco with the title *Les Cavernes de la region Cantabrique*.

In 1929, reverend José Fernández Menéndez, then in charge of the parish of Colombres, also published an article on *El Pindal*, and in 1954, I worked an entire month myself in the cave, reproducing the engravings and paintings in it, resulting in the discovery of several figures that had been overlooked in the previous work, and was able to complete



Fig. 57.- El Pindal Cave. Fragment of engraved horse, appearing to be caught by the muzzle in a trap.

Fig. 57.- El Pindal. Cabeza de caballo grabada; parece prendido por el hocico en una trampa.



Fig. 58.- El Pindal Cave. Incomplete figure of a horse.

Fig. 58.- El Pindal. Grabado de figura incompleta de caballo.

some of those that had been only partially drawn by Abbé Breuil. The results and supplementary



Fig. 59.- El Pindal Cave. Painting in red depicting a doe and bison engravings with color retouching and some Solutrean type tips.

Fig. 59.- El Pindal. Pintura de cierva y grabado de bisonte; bajo su cuello, dos puntas de tipo solutrense.

studies were published by the Institute of Asturian Studies in its Bulletin for the same year, 1954, under the signatures of Prof. Francisco Jordá and my own.

The cavern at *Pindal* fairly shouts out its river origin without any shyness at all; so much so, that during the rainy season it seems to make amends for its current dryness and getting its strength together, it lets forth a timid stream that tries to scamper along the sandy bottom of the cave with embarrassment. We need to look at the map to see from its long and winding shape, that the waters used to run with

heavy flow, smoothing things off and licking at the walls, thus providing surfaces for the artist. From the current entrance to the end it is over eleven hundred feet long, and remains attached to a narrow umbilical cord from which it received the liquid life that led to its formation (fig. 47).

The *El Pindal* cave is chaotic, disorganized and therefore surprising. Visibility is lost in unforeseen blockages where darkness is in control, giving free rein to fantasy. One supposes and guesses at the natural forms of *El Pindal*, but it is hard to be specific. What really can be defined with