

## Archaeology and Cave Art

Archaeology is the study of the life and culture of ancient people through excavations and the documents, monuments, objects etc. found within them. Caves constitute important archaeological sites where bone and evidence of past human occupation, such as remains of fires, food, utensils, ceramics, rock paintings and art, are found.

The Golden Age of Cave Art discovery was undoubtedly the 50 years spanning the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Why man began to paint and carve may have been due to the appearance and improvement of implements and hand tools. The reasons for the subjects of religion, hunting, fishing and reproduction are conjecture, but are widely illustrated in the cave art of Western Europe, Africa, Australia and the Americas.

Although standards tend to be European, it must be remembered that each region developed at its own pace. Paleolithic art in Europe lasted from 40,000 to 8,000BC. Petroglyphs, petroglyphs, painting and carving or sculpting continued beyond that time through the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages, but declined in both importance and occurrence.

Cave painting is the most common and best-preserved form of paleolithic art. It ranges from primitive finger and hand markings to skillfully executed three-dimensional paintings. Most hand images date from between 40,000 and 30,000 BC. They were created by blowing powder, frequently red ochre, over the outstretched hand held against a rock face. An example of this technique, from the end of the period in Cueva de las Manos, is shown on the stamp from Argentina (Scott 1808).

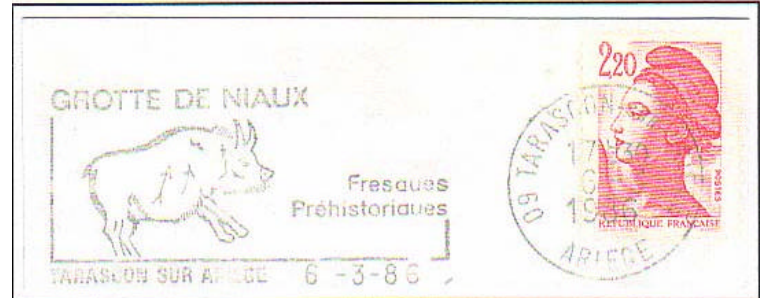


Line drawings followed during the next 10,000 years. They were often created by a series of "blots" of powder blown through a hollow tube, to make a dotted line. Although more often than not black, these dots are also seen in both yellow and red. The deer-like animals in Covalanas Cave, Santander, Spain, show this technique (Scott 1455).

During this same period there were parallel developments in Art Mobilier. The best-known example is the "Venuses" found from the Pyrenees to the Urals, the most famous of which is found in Brassempouy in southwest France in 1894. This is a finely modeled head in mammoth ivory less than 1.5 inches in length, dated circa. 23,000 BC. It can be seen on this stamp from France (Scott 1465).

Black shading and modeling techniques of bone, mane and muscle were being clearly demonstrated by 18,000 BC. An excellent example of this period is seen on France (Scott 1642) the stamp below, which

shows a superb rendering of the bison in the "Salon Noir" of Niaux Grotto. Both the difficulty of reaching this site near Andorra, and the location of many of the paintings a mile inside the cave, have resulted in the grotto not attracting as much attention as many other caves.



Toward the end of the Ice Age (10,000 BC), figures appeared filled with black and red color, often with a brown outline. Human forms, seldom seen before this time, appear with increasing frequency. Examples of this period from Spain are shown below (Scott 1450 the boar hunt, 1458 hunters and a deer herd, 1456 archers).



The following millennium saw figures becoming more realistic and colorful. On Good Friday, April 12, 1968, a group of cavers were exploring a cave in the Ardines, within the boundaries of the town of Ribadesella, Spain when their lights went out. The leader, 18-year-old caver, Celestino "Tito" Bustillo, saw a horsehead on the wall right in front of him and a bison on the ceiling when he relighted the cave. Professor Magin Berenguer, an expert in prehistoric cave art, later dated the drawings between 12,000 to 15,000 years old, from Franco-Cantabrian culture (Upper Solutrean period). The Cave was named Cueva de Tito Bustillo (Spain 1885 - Horse and 1884 - Woman gathering honey from Arana Cave).



Prehistoric art did not capture the public imagination until 1940 with the discovery of Lascaux by four schoolboys chasing their dog. This gallery was a revelation in its realistic portrayals and use of symbolism. So popular did this site become that by 1960 more than 2,000 people a day were lining up to see the Hall of Bulls. The viewing caused so much damage to the paintings that the French Government closed the caves to preserve them. Today only small select parties have the opportunity to view the treasures, however, we can see the roof of the Hall of Bulls on France (Scott 1204). Many theories developed over dating this site, but consensus now places it towards the end of the Ice Age (10,000 to 8,000 BC).

The passing of the Ice Age led to a less nomadic existence for man, and saw and more easily tamed animals replace the herds of reindeer, bison and mammoth. Man, the ever-moving hunter, became the more stationary hunter-fisher-farmer. The axe and bow entered the arena and improved fishing tackle appeared. This was reflected in the continued cave art, yet on a much-subdued scale. The beginning of this Mesolithic Period (8,000 to 3,000BC) marks the increase in humans appearing as art subjects. Towards the end of the Mesolithic and into the Neolithic Age, groups of hunters, as well as the bow and arrow, appear frequently.



In the Neolithic or New Stone Age (3,000 to 2,000 BC) there was diminished cave painting in Europe. There is a great body of African work which helps fill this gap, but much of it is thought by scholars to be of more recent origin, in some cases as late as the mid-nineteenth century. Although cave painting disappeared from the scene, there was a late flowering of rock carving in the Bronze Age (2,000 to 500 BC), which is seen illustrated on Qatar (Scott 863).

Generally, while we find Cave Art in Europe deep within caves, elsewhere it is frequently found in open, though protected, areas. Many places had no Ice Age but had equally harsh variations in climate, such as the Sahara, and this is reflected in the changes in subject and style we see over the centuries.

African Rock Art displays striking similarities with that in Europe. Africa is a treasure house of Stone Age Art which tends to be older and nearer to Paleolithic times in the north, and generally more recent in the south. The glorious finds at Tassili-N'Ajjer National Park, Algeria (France Scott 2046) dated to 6,000 BC, could be contemporaries with later European Cave Art.



South of the Sahara, the discoveries in Chad (Scott J25 - 2 Deer and J26 - 3 Deer) are also of considerable antiquity, as are those in Zimbabwe (Scott 451), and Botswana (Scott 139), which have some spectacular work with Paleolithic characteristics.

Australia also displays a north-south divide. Some work in the north is tentatively dated 35,000 BC, though in the south it is generally 6,000 BC. One of the great problems is up to even 100 years ago the aborigine regularly repainted their heritage. In the north the painting is naturalistic, but more geometric shapes were used in the south and southeast as seen on Scott 933.

The Americas are rich in cave and rock art from the Arctic to the Antarctic, but they have not been given much philatelic recognition. The Mayas and Aztecs, however, have been recognized many times with their statues and glyphs. Brazil issued a sheetlet in 1985 with three stamps showing cave paintings with all the characteristics of the late Stone Age Scott 1998, 1999, and 2000).



On January 31, 1987, Venezuela issued two stamps with aboriginal art on prehistory pottery found in caves. The 2Bs stamp (Scott 1380), collected from Cueva La Leona in Teta de Niquitao, State of Trujillo, Andes region, shows a woman-like clay figure with incised lines. The cave was used by the Indians of the region as a forum for their magical-religious rituals. The 20.5 cm high and 13 cm wide clay figure is hollow which produces sound when touched, causing it to be called "Instrumento Musical Prehispanico" (prehispanic musical instrument). It belongs to the Betijoque style (300 – 1000 A.D.).



The second stamp with a 3Bs face value (Scott 1382) shows a white clay bottle with black geometrical design, from Cueva Morrocroy near La Cueva, Chichiriviche, State of Falcon. The bottle is 16 cm high and belongs to the Dabajuro style (1300 –1700 A.D.) The area of Morrocroy in Chichiriviche has many caves rich in archeological remains.

Cuba issued a stamp in 1990 (Scott 3192) depicting its native Indians painting on the ceiling of Cueva Numero Uno, Punta del Este. Another Cuban stamp, with a face value of 20 cents, was issued in 1986 (Scott 2906) as part of the "Latin-American History" series. It represents a seated anthropomorphic female figure found in Cueva de Santo Domingo, State of Trujillo. The figure is of the Santa Ana style dating (200 – 400 AD).



You do not have to go to a stuffy, sterile museum to appreciate art - - Visit a cave!