

ANTHROPOLOGY

Cave Man Lover

Cave Gentlemen Who Gave Their Women a Square Deal, Is an Idea Developing From the Finding of Primitive Art

By EMILY C. DAVIS

WHEN the Stone Age cave man's eye fell upon the maiden of his choice, he did not hesitate. Striding up to the cave woman, he took her fiercely in his arms. Timidly, she shrank away. But with one light, sure blow of his club he laid her helpless at his feet. Then, stooping, he clutched her long hair and dragged her off to his cave, his chosen mate.

So runs the traditional love story of the big, virile cave man and the shrinking, submissive cave woman.

It is a popular story. It has made the cave man a hero and a symbol. Many a romantic maiden of our own Steel Age has sighed her preference for cave men.

The only trouble with the story is that it can be traced back to its origin. And the origin wasn't anything that happened 20,000 years ago, when cave men walked the earth and went out wife-hunting. The cave man lover is a tradition no older than the imaginations of grandfather and grandmother, who discussed such things in the Victorian Era. The story was one of those gossip stories that grow bigger and better every time they are told, until they crystallize and become folklore.

Cave Psychology Forgotten

The truth is, science realizes today, that the cave man's psychology is lost and forgotten information, almost beyond hope of recall.

That being the case, you can understand the eager interest of a French archaeologist, Count René de St. Perier, when he was digging recently in the Grotto of Isturitz, in southern France, and unearthed a bit of rare archaeological treasure. It was a Stone Age artist's picture of a man and woman together. The picture, according to St. Perier's speculation, appears to have something to do with courtship—the courtship of one of those mysterious cave men.

The man in the picture has no club, but in the leg of the woman is lodged a barbed dart. If the Count de St. Perier

is right, and this is a love-scene, it would seem that darts, not clubs, were the weapons of Cupid in the Old Stone Age.

The curious little picture has brought the cave man and cave woman into the scientific limelight. American anthropologists have disagreed with the French scientist's interpretation. In the clash of opinions there emerges a new American theory of the cave man as a fair-minded human being who gave the women folk a squarer deal than women have gained later in many a civilized society.

The controversial picture was discovered by the Count de St. Perier in a cave-apartment where many people of the Stone Age long ago took shelter. In the floor of the cave, explorers have unearthed harpoon points of bone and stone, broken stone ornaments, and animal bones from many dinners, all lying buried in layers of occupation.

With such objects as this belongs the important bit of Stone Age art. The unknown artist of the Magdalenian period, some 20,000 years ago, choose for his art medium a long piece of bone. On this, with a sharpened tool, he engraved his pictures. He decorated both of the flat faces of the bone.

On one side, the artist outlined a shaggy bison, wounded by two barbed darts and rushing along in desperate, snorting fury. Such pictures of the hunt were popular art subjects in the Magdalenian period of the Old Stone Age. Some archaeologists consider that the hunting pictures may have been used in sympathetic magic. That is, the hunter would have portrayed in art the scene he hoped to enact. He believed that making a picture of a wounded bison would put the real bison in his power, so that it could not escape his aim.

The bison found in the Grotto of Isturitz is so skilfully engraved that it is hard to believe that the same artist would have turned out the crude and awkward picture of a man and woman found on the other side of the bone.

In order to depict the man and woman together, the artist placed the woman above the man. At least, so they

appear when the bone is held vertical. The French archaeologist suggests that the artist meant the man and woman to be understood as standing side by side.

The woman's head is broken off, in damage done in ancient times. Her ornaments may still be seen. She wears a necklace and around her ankle is a bangle.

The man has bobbed hair and a receding forehead, continues the French archaeologist's description. Like the woman, the man wears a necklace and bangle. Both of the figures have their hands raised in a gesture which might be one of supplication.

Key to the Story

But the most important feature of the picture, by far, is the little barbed point sticking in the woman's leg. That dart is the key to the story.

"What is the meaning of this strange scene?" asks the Count de St. Perier in a report to the French journal *L'Anthropologie*.

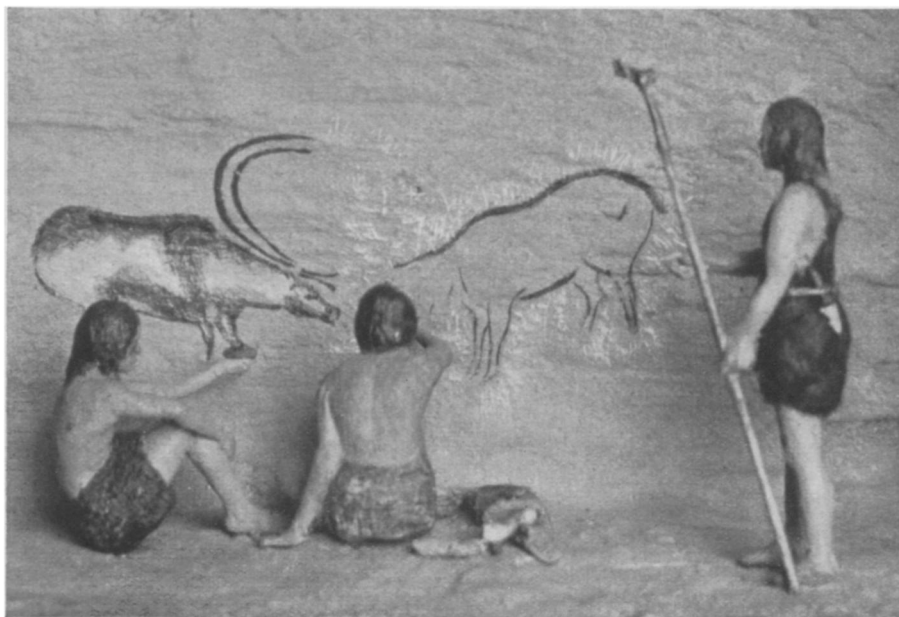
It is not a fight nor a slaying, he reasons, in spite of appearances. War scenes in Stone Age art are known, but not one of them has ever shown a woman in the fray. Moreover, he points out critically, the attitude of the man does not appear hostile.

He concludes: "It seems more reasonable to interpret the dart as a symbol implying the idea of a conquest, no slaying involved."

The Count is thus suggesting that Stone Age lovers employed sympathetic magic. It would mean that the Stone Age lover, like the Stone Age hunters, did not trust to his own strength and brains in an important engagement. He felt safer if he had worked a few charms to insure victory.

If the cave man did indeed make pictures of himself shooting down his chosen bride, it does not necessarily follow that he reproduced the scene in reality—shooting a real harpoon point into the leg of the woman. The dart in the picture might be nothing more than a symbol of conquest, like Cupid's arrow on a valentine.

Don't forget that a prehistoric cave man looking at a modern valentine, with its cherubs shooting arrows at fat red hearts, might possibly draw some far-



STONE AGE ARTIST AT WORK

A chieftain directs and an assistant stands by holding a lamp. Animals and men are common subjects of the primitive artist, but pictures of men and women together are rare.

fetches conclusions that twentieth-century suitors went a-wooing with bows and arrows.

The Count de St. Perier contents himself with saying that he thinks the scene was the sympathetic magic of a Stone Age lover.

Even that is more than some American anthropologists will allow, after examining the evidence. Taking issue with the Frenchman's theory, Dr. John M. Cooper of the Catholic University of America declares that the fragment of Stone Age art might be interpreted in a variety of ways.

The man and woman might be dancing; or going through a religious ceremony. Injuries deliberately inflicted are far from rare in ceremonies among primitive tribes.

Woman in Hunt?

Another interpretation—the scene might be a record of something that had happened. Perhaps the man and woman took part in the bison hunt on the reverse side of the bone. The woman's injury could thus be accidentally incurred in the attack on the raging bison.

There are other possible interpretations. The picture is quite literally a problem picture. Dr. Cooper would say that one suggestion explaining it is about as good—or as bad—as another, considering how very little is known about the social and domestic life of the Old Stone Age.

Archaeologists can dig up direct evidence of the industries, arts, and other material culture of the Stone Age cave men. But the earth does not preserve direct evidence of the courtship customs, rites, and beliefs of those people.

There is an indirect method, however, of getting at the question. That is by studying primitive people who live today on an economic and social level approaching that of the Old Stone Age thousands of years ago. Some of these modern tribes, in African jungles, in the Australian bush, or Oceania, are, or were until very recently, living literally in the Stone Age. Civilization left them alone.

From study of these primitive groups, who represent the nearest approach to civilized man's past, Dr. Cooper concludes that the popular notion of the brutal cave man and the down-trodden cave woman is most unfair. The cave woman probably enjoyed equal rights as women have seldom enjoyed them in more advanced society.

"Among the most primitive peoples," he explains, "the average woman is far from being the drudge, the abject slave, and oppressed inferior she is often pictured and described as being. Among these peoples, woman's position is quite good. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that her position depends on her own personality. If she is able, of good character, or strong personality, she counts in society; otherwise, not.

Cases of henpecked husbands are far from rare at all levels of culture."

The more marked oppression and exploitation of women, Dr. Cooper believes, did not exist in the dawn of human society, when life was very simply organized. It was in the "middle ages" of social evolution, when men turned from being hunters to being settled farmers and herdsmen, that women were relegated to subordinate positions. Men then became the property owners, men the strong fighters. So, men were the beings who spoke with authority.

Evils From Middle Ages

It was in the middle ages of human culture, Dr. Cooper points out, that many undesirable institutions appeared. To this stage of man's development belong head-hunting, organized warfare, human sacrifice, torture of prisoners, slavery, cannibalism. These institutions, like those that subjugated women, were seemingly not present in primitive society.

How the cave woman came to be known as a down-trodden creature is explained by Dr. Cooper, who traces it back to the Victorian Era. At that time, human history suddenly took on a new long-distance perspective. New biological conclusions were coloring ideas in other subjects. So, pondering man's past, the Victorians complacently reasoned that human society must have changed greatly for the better throughout history.

Our own age, they assumed, is the finest flower of civilization. So they looked back upon the dimly-seen figures of Stone Age man and woman and shuddered to think what darkness and brutality must have clouded that long-ago existence. Stone Age man must have been a beast. And Stone Age woman must have led a terrible life.

Since then, Dr. Cooper points out, science has enormously increased its facts. Scientists know today how very complex human society is, and how irregular its progress.

Sometimes, as the material civilization advances, the status of woman improves; then again, it is retarded. There is little connection between the two factors.

It does appear, however, that Stone Age man and woman set a fairly high standard in women's rights. As the facts and probabilities emerge, it seems that the modern maid who sighs for a cave man may be wishing for a quite desirable sort of mate, after all.