

ARCHAEOLOGY

Stone Age Dictators Painted, Too

It Was Because Their Art Was Credited With Magic That Intellectual Men Ruled Spain Long Ago

By EMILY C. DAVIS

REMEMBER when the cave man's traditionally rough lovemaking was laughed down by Gilbert K. Chesterton? Very doubtful, said the Englishman drily, that women were ever so reluctant to be wooed that men had to drag them by the hair.

Well, the bubble of another cave-man tradition has been pricked. This time we are told that brains, not brawn, ruled Europe 20,000 years ago.

At that time, which none of us remember, our ancestors were still in the Old Stone Age, but in the latter part of it. Better homes were still caves, draughty and unimproved. Fur coats were the usual clothing, but had little chic by our standards. A crude world, and supposedly one in which the strongest man was the best. The chief who led his cave men into the hunt or the fight was doubtless the man of super muscle. But—

The most influential men in Europe then were intellectuals, declares a noted French archaeologist, Count Henri Begouin of Toulouse University.

Count Begouin has been re-examining the famous and puzzling paintings that Stone Age artists left in caves of Spain and southern France. From them, he has arrived at new and more definite conclusions regarding the state of cave society, which he reports in the international scientific review, *Scientia*.

Leaders of that day, he finds, must have been the artists who painted realistic animal pictures in the eerie depths of caverns. Even the chief bowed to the artist.

Like Today

It reminds us a little of Europe today, with kings playing second fiddle to Dukes and Fuehrers, although the brains-and-brawn part of the parallel falls down in some cases.

As Count Begouin explains it, a Stone Age artist became leader mainly because of his talent. We talk figuratively about an artist having magic in his fingers. The cave world believed it. The artist was best qualified to be tribal sorcerer because he could work magic, vitally important to

the tribe, so they thought, by his life-like pictures.

Working alone, or in select conference, you can imagine the artist-sorcerer handling his important executive tasks. Usually, he retired to the depths of a long cave, and that meant crawling, slipping, risking his neck to get through passages leading to the remote region he chose for his painting. There, by smoky torchlight, he would spread on the wall the outline of a great bison or a mammoth, or a herd of wild horses. By painting dart points stuck into the beasts, or by hurling a real weapon and saying the right magic, the sorcerer could make his associates believe that the picture would be magically translated into real hunting success when the brawny hunters went after food.

Not Oldest Art

The world's oldest art was produced somewhat before this time. Count Begouin has a theory as to how art began. The Greeks, he thinks, had the right idea in principle when they said poetically that the first artist was a lover who drew a line around his lady's shadow to keep her always with him. Only, the first artist was not Greek and romance was not the motive.

It seems likely that our Stone Age ancestors, like many primitives of today, thought every man and beast had a double—a soul or shadow. Remember how the after-world is referred to in classic literature as the realm of shadows. But "me-and-my-shadow" was no game for children in the Old Stone Age. When a cave man saw a shadow of a hyena or a cave bear looming on his wall by torchlight, he shuddered and fled. Later, when he saw a line of rock that resembled the back of a bison, he was startled. Then he remembered that no bison could squeeze into that narrow place. But he kept wondering whether the big bison's double got into caves and roamed there. And he amused himself by finishing the outline of the big game beast that nature had partly carved.

The idea of mastering the shadow by trapping it came somewhat later, the French scientist reasons. The world's first artists, even the brightest, probably were

not instantly struck by the possibilities for big magic. But when he got this idea, the artist became Cave Man Number One of his tribe.

Archaeologists have argued over the significance of Old Stone Age cave art ever since 1879, when a little girl spied a strange beast painted on the low ceiling of a Spanish cave and pointed it out to her incredulous father. It has never been agreed whether the world's early artists worked for pleasure, so to speak, or for the deadly serious business of magic.

Fine Enough

Count Begouin's view is that the cave frescoes are fine enough, many of them, to pass for aesthetic art. But assuming that cave men did this painting "for art's sake" is too simple an answer, he firmly declares.

It may be hard for us to understand the psychology of the Old Stone Age. But many savages today are virtually living in Old Stone Age conditions, and they offer a glimpse into that past world. And furthermore, there is so much evidence of mysterious goings-on in connection with the cave art, that the idea of magic is practically unescapable.

People who doubt that this art was used magically have always been hard put to explain why else cave artists so often worked in inconvenient places. Some pictures are more than 2,000 feet from an entrance to a cave. Some paintings are tucked away in corners, where few admiring visitors would ever find them. If the paintings were for magic, this is understandable, for initiates have always worked in secret.

It is significant, too, that some cave walls are crowded with pictures, while other walls just as good for art work are blank. Magic makes this understandable. Says Count Begouin: the much-painted walls presumably had a reputation, as good for magic.

Most peculiar of all is the cave artist's tendency to revise his work. Wild boar and horses were given several pairs of feet. A big cat in the Cave of the Three Brothers had had its head re-drawn three times and its tail twice. Why? You can find the answer in psychology. The first brain executives were lazy—or perhaps they called it being efficient.

Whenever the food problem became acute, or a prowling beast became a menace, the people turned to the sorcerer

to take action. And that meant creating a new and distinguishing animal personality, to be symbolically slain.

But, says Count Begouin, "if doing as little as possible was a human trait even then, the artist thought twice before making a picture as important as this feline, and was content to re-make and change head and tail."

Value in the Rite

His conclusion is that the rite of painting, not the picture itself, was important. The finished work was no more valued than the file copy of some government proceeding today.

One more reason why the cave man's art is believed to be magic is that some animals were painted without eyes, ears, or even heads. This might be dismissed as carelessness, except that the same thing was done in ancient Egypt for magic. An old papyrus document tells of this device to keep wild game from seeing or hearing the hunter's stealthy approach.

Which began first in the world, painting or sculpture, has been warmly argued. The French archaeologist says the evidence points to a parallel development. He considers that early sorcerers used both techniques for the welfare of their society.

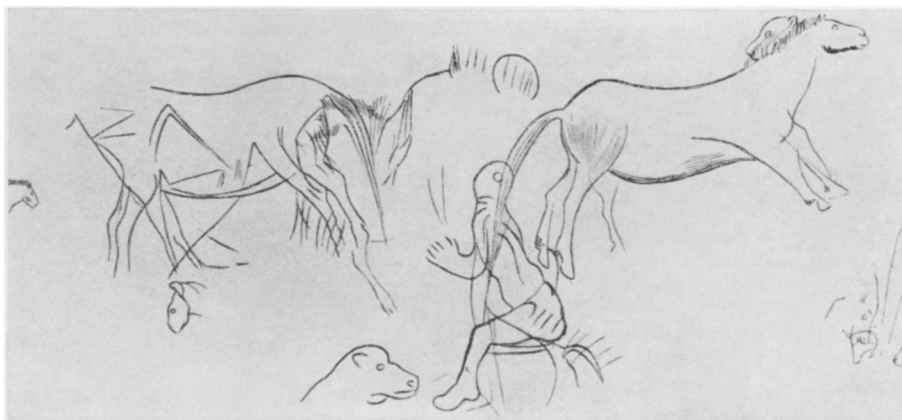
By this view, the grotesque sculptures of over-fat women, which science dubs Stone Age Venuses, are seen as objects of magic value. Most archaeologists do take this view, believing that the feminine figures were portrayed not from any modernistic art school ideas, but because the early sculptors were carving women of the maternal type. Increasing the number of a tribe's warriors and hunters was advocated then, just as it is in some nations of the world today. And magic was the cave world way of providing official backing for a bigger population.

Nevertheless, the far-from-streamlined Venuses of the Stone Age may have been the admired type, long preceding blondes. It is only later toward the end of the Stone Age that the Venus de Milo form of woman became the ideal, according to one anthropologist.

Besides paintings and sculptured objects, other clues to magic rites of the Old Stone Age can be cited. Count Begouin is particularly impressed by the clay manikin of a bear cub found in a cave.

The clay image of the cub had no head, and between its paws when found, lay the real skull of a young bear. The statue is marred by blows, and it is worn by some covering that has rubbed against it.

By Sherlock Holmes reasoning, this



LAZINESS

The mystery of the extra feet: Stone Age artists revised their work because they were lazy, is the view of Count Begouin, noted French archaeologist. They persuaded their fellows that a new tail or legs made a new animal, just as good for the sympathetic magic of insuring luck in hunting.

image was made to meet the emergency of some bears that constituted a public danger to the tribe. The sorcerer met with a committee of hunters in his mysterious cave lair, and there he rigged up a bear skull and bearskin over the clay manikin, and the hunters beat the imitation bear and went away full of confidence that they would kill real bears for the tribe. In just such rites, says the French archaeologist, American Indians and African pygmies of later times have prepared for successful hunting.

Even the footprints of the human beings who frequented the caves have been trailed by Count Begouin and his three sons, after whom the Cave of the Three Sons was named. In one cave which he explored, called Tuc d'Audoubert, he had to break his way through thick stalagmites to reach a gallery, and there, undisturbed for thousands of years, he found bare footprints of men so clear that with a magnifying glass he could recognize texture of the skin.

A ritual dance was performed here, he deduces. He can trace five different tracks, which are those of marching feet, following a leader. They are feet of young people in their early teens, and they moved in their ritual formation toward the figures of a male and female bison carved in clay. No wounds or darts mar the figures of these bison. The rite was apparently one of initiation into manhood not unlike the sort of thing young primitives of today perform.

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Three Uses for Straw in Egypt's Brick Making

THE PLIGHT of Bible Israelites, when a hard-hearted pharaoh refused them straw for their brick-making in Egypt, has often puzzled readers. Pharaoh's commandeered builders were left to find their own straw or do without it. But how much of a hardship was that, anyway?

Three ways in which Egypt's brick makers used straw are explained by Sir Flinders Petrie in his new book "Egyptian Architecture," and they offer some points for understanding the Israelite problem.

Egyptian brick, he explains, was generally dried in the sun. And when the black Nile mud—that was most often used—dried and hardened, it would contract as much as one-eighth of its size unless some other substance were mixed with it to prevent contraction. Chopped straw could be used for this. Or sand would serve the purpose. Some of the bricks in Egyptian buildings contain no straw, so investigators have commented.

But the straw had two other uses for which Prof. Petrie names no substitutes. Workers were accustomed to roll each lump of clay in straw dust before molding it. The straw overcoat would prevent the brick from eroding away in the rain, and more immediately it made the moulder's task easier by preventing the mud from sticking to the oblong wooden mould.

This latter point may have been the problem that most disturbed the Israelites. They were expected to turn out