SKIRA

PREHISTORIC PAINTING

LASCAUX OR THE BIRTH OF ART

THE GREAT CENTURIES OF PAINTING

PREHISTORIC PAINTING

LASCAUX

OR THE BIRTH OF ART

TEXT BY GEORGES BATAILLE

SKIRA

When Georges Bataille originally suggested the idea for it, this book struck us at once as the natural, the logical introduction to our series "The Great Centuries of Painting." To be sure, Lascaux deals not with a given century, but with an age long past which lasted many thousands of years. But these prehistoric paintings bear witness to what art was when art began. They reflect something strangely akin to our modern sensibility and, bridging the distance between then and now, leave us with the feeling that, in its ordinary sense, time does not exist.

A good many difficulties were encountered in the course of producing this book. There were nights spent working underground in the intense light cast by projectors trained upon this magical world whose details and color nuances, invisible under the subdued lighting installed for visitors, sprang out vividly in all their pristine beauty. We would rest during the day at the Soleil d'Or, a hospitable inn at Montignac, the charming town nearest the Cave. And every evening, after the regular visiting hours were over, we would go back up to Lascaux and start in again. Any number of times we came away feeling that at last our work was over. But each time, having developed our plates and checked the results, we decided to make a fresh start, for what the eye sees is not necessarily what the camera registers. The truth is that the Lascaux paintings mysteriously shift and change. They are not painted on a uniformly flat surface and cannot always be viewed from a normal angle, from squarely in front a few yards away, like ordinary pictures. These cave artists took every possible advantage both of the uneven surface of the rock wall and the perspective in each of the various rooms. At every step things change, almost beyond recognition. A bull looks squat and hunch-necked; shift your position and the same animal acquires an elongated body and the head of a giraffe. What is the ideal point of vantage? Each visitor will have the one he prefers; the men of Lascaux must have had theirs, and this we strove to make our own. The pictures at Lascaux literally defy the camera; often, where the greatest depth of field is wanted, the photographer, as he backs away, is brought up short by the other side of the narrow corridor.

To overcome these obstacles, it took all the skill and experience of our photographers, together with our own determination to record, for the first time in color, one of man's earliest creative masterpieces.

Our thanks go first of all to M. de la Rochefoucauld-Montbel, president of the Société Civile, owner of the cave, and M. Maurice Jardot, director of the Services de la Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques in France, whose helpful co-operation enabled us to work under the best possible conditions. We are also much indebted to Messrs. Marsal and Ravidat, guardians of the cave, who helped us in many ways; these are the men who, as boys fifteen years ago, discovered this treasure. Finally, the success of our undertaking is in large part due to our photographer Hans Hinz, whose skill and resourcefulness enabled him to produce flawless color photographs in the face of immense technical difficulties, and to Claudio Emmer, whose work is represented by numerous photographs in this volume.

A. S.

My endeavor in this study has been to show the eminent position the Cave of Lascaux occupies in the history of art and, more generally, in the history of mankind. By all evidence, what Lascaux contains stands out above all the other works prehistoric art has left us. While for the archeologist and prehistorian the most important of known caves, for whoever concerns himself with the history of art Lascaux has an incomparable significance: its paintings are in the rarest state of preservation; and they are the only ones of which it is possible to say, in the words of the greatest of our living painters, that nothing finer has been done since them. By limiting the discussion to Lascaux rather than speaking of the painted caves as a whole, we may speak of something that interests everyone. Amazing, splendid as they are, the other caves, imperfectly preserved and some very badly, have a less broad attraction, rather inviting the attentions of the specialist. I have stressed the work of art's humane importance, its meaning in terms of man's development. Indeed, I had no other choice, for my subject is the most ancient art, that is to say, art's *birth*, not some one of its later aspects or refinements.

Formerly, that moment at which art was born—the stunning moment when, creating art, man wrought a miracle—seemed considerably closer to us in time. Greece was the place where this wonder was first achieved, and we were accustomed to thinking of the Greeks as the first to have all the marks and all the titles of modern man. I wish here but to indicate that, Lascaux having been found, this critical moment may be situated many thousands of years earlier than we once thought. Resolutely, decisively, man wrenched himself out of the animal's condition and into "manhood": that abrupt, most important of transitions left an image of itself blazed upon the rock in this cave. The miracle occurred at Lascaux. So at least it has seemed to me: and thus viewing matters, I have devoted a certain amount of space to showing the close connection between the initial coming into being of the work of art and the emergence of humankind—of our own sort. This sudden, unheralded appearance of men like ourselves, this dramatic arrival is, I believe, precisely what was happening in this particular cave—happening in other caves too, but in the most significant manner at Lascaux. In order to demonstrate this idea, I have leaned upon some of the general evidence the history of religion affords; for religion, at least the religious mood or attitude, almost always associated with art, was, at art's beginnings, more solidly attached to it than ever it has been since.

With regard to archeological data, I have simply used what prehistorians have established at the price of an immense labor that has always called for patience —and often for genius. At this point I should acknowledge my heavy indebtedness to the brilliant achievements of Abbé Henri Breuil, to whom I applied when beginning my work, and for whose invaluable advice I am especially grateful. The archeological studies he undertook at Lascaux—and which are being fruitfully continued by Abbé Glory—have made it possible to write this book.

I wish also to express my gratitude to Mr. Harper Kelley for his friendly assistance; and my warm thanks to M. G. Bailloud for his particularly useful suggestions.

G. B.

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THE MIRACLE OF LASCAUX

THE BIRTH OF ART

A MILE or so from the little town of Montignac, the Cave of Lascaux, lying in the Valley of the Vézère, is not only the most splendid, the richest of known prehistoric caverns containing paintings; Lascaux provides our earliest *tangible* trace, our first sign of art and also of man.

For when speaking of periods more remote than the Upper Paleolithic Age, we cannot strictly refer to *man*. The caves were occupied by a being who resembled a man in one sense: he worked, had what students of prehistory call an industry: there were places set aside for the hewing of stone. But never was there any making of a "work of art". He would not have known how to go about such a thing and furthermore, it would appear, he had no desire to try. Probably dating, if not from the dawn of prehistory, from the opening part of the Upper Paleolithic Age, the Lascaux Cave would thus belong to the time when modern mankind first emerged. Every beginning supposes what preceded it, but at one point night gave birth to day and the daylight we find at Lascaux illumines the morning of our immediate species. It is the man who dwelt in this cave of whom for the first time and with certainty we may finally say: he produced works of art; he is of our sort. It is easy to add that the resemblance is imperfect: many elements are lacking in him, and we notice their absence. But perchance these elements really do not have all the importance we assign them. We ought rather to stress the fact he possessed a decisive virtue: a creative virtue which, today, has ceased to be necessary.

We have, after all, added very little to the inheritance left us by our predecessors: nothing supports the contention that we are greater than they. "Lascaux Man" *created, and created out of nothing, this world of art in which communication between individual minds begins.* And thus Lascaux Man communicates with the distant posterity today's mankind represents for him—he speaks to us through these paintings, discovered only very recently and unaltered after that seemingly interminable space of time. This unique message gives us strongly to pause. At Lascaux, more troubling even than the deep descent into the earth, what preys upon and transfixes us is the vision, present before our very eyes, of all that is most remote. This message, moreover, is intensified by an inhuman strangeness. Following along the rock walls, we see a kind of cavalcade of animals... But this animality is nonetheless *for us* the first sign, the blind unthinking sign and yet the living intimate sign, of *our* presence in the real world.

LASCAUX AND WHAT THE WORK OF ART MEANS

We have unearthed traces of that multitude of still rudimentary humans who lived before the time this animal dance was composed. But these dry bones only describe a cold, unfleshed form. Many thousands of years before Lascaux (probably some 500,000 years), these industrious bipeds began to people the earth. Beyond fossilized bones, they left behind nothing but their tools. These tools prove that ancient man had intelligence; but that intelligence, still crude, found its only application in the making of simple objects—the primitive clubs, splinters of bone and sharpened flints he used. From these objects, from what they reveal of his objective activity, we may learn much, yes... But never, prior to our discovery of Lascaux, were we able to obtain a reflection of that interior life of which art—and art alone—assumes the communication, and of which, in its living warmth, it is, if not the imperishable expression, at least the enduring survival.

Would it seem far-fetched to give art this decisive, immeasurable value? But would it not also seem likely that art's importance is more readily, more heavily felt at the moment art is being born? There is no more marked, no more emphatic distinction: to everyday utilitarian activity art opposes the non-utilitarian figuration of these signs which have the power to seduce, which are bred of emotion and address themselves to it. Later, we shall return to the explanations that ascribe the paintings to utilitarian causes. For the time being, we have but to take note of that crucial opposition. Directly we enter the Lascaux Cave, we are gripped by a strong feeling we never have when standing in a museum, before the glassed cases displaying the oldest petrified remains of men or neat rows of their stone instruments. In underground Lascaux we are assailed by that same feeling of presence—of clear and burning presence—which works of art from no matter what period have always excited in us. Whatever it may seem, it is to tenderness, it is to the generous kindliness which binds up souls in friendly brotherhood that the beauty in man-made things appeals. Is it not beauty we love? And is not that high friendship the passion, the forever repeated question to which beauty alone is the only possible reply?

We do not usually lay so heavy an emphasis upon the germinal essence of the work of art (which reaches past our practical interests, penetrating to what is in the heart of us); but that must very earnestly be said about Lascaux precisely because Lascaux looks at first to lie at the furthest possible remove from our contemporary selves.

It must be admitted: our first reaction to Lascaux is obscure, half mute, only half intelligible. It is the most ancient, the first of responses; the night of time through which it comes is pierced by no more than uncertain glimmers of faint light. We know next to nothing of the men who left behind only these elusive shadows, framed within almost nothing, unprovided with any explanatory background. We know only that these shadows are beautiful to look at, to our eyes quite as beautiful as our galleries'

finest paintings. But about these we do at least know something: dates, names of the painters, the subject, the intention behind the work. We are familiar with the customs and ways of life they are related to, we may read chronicles of the times in which they were produced. They are not at all, as are these at Lascaux, the issue of a world about which our information is confined to the knowledge that there were few resources in those days, that man was limited to hunting wild beasts and picking wild berries; for stone or bone tools and graves tell us but little of the elementary civilization he had developed. Even the date of the Lascaux paintings cannot be reckoned unless one is willing to be content with estimates allowing a leeway, this way or that, of a good ten thousand years. We can recognize almost every animal depicted; magic, we usually suppose, motivated the painters' efforts. But we have no way of knowing the exact place these figures held in the beliefs and the rites of those persons who lived many thousand years before recorded history began. We are unable to do more than relate and compare them to other paintings—or various kinds of art-objects—belonging to the same periods and the same regions, and these other works of art turn out to be just as mysterious. These figures do exist in some great quantity: the Lascaux Cave alone contains hundreds of them, and there are many more in other grottoes in France and Spain. Taken as a whole, Lascaux' paintings, while perhaps not the oldest, form the finest and most intact group we have. Indeed, we may say that nothing tells us more about the life and thought of those men who were the first to have the power to deliver themselves of that profound but enigmatic utterance, a detached work of art. These paintings before us are miraculous, they communicate a strong and intimate emotion. Yet for all that they are only the more unintelligible. We have been advised to relate them to the incantations of hunters who thirsted to kill the game they subsisted upon, but it is these figures, and not the hunger of the hunters, which stir us. And so we are left painfully in suspense by this incomparable beauty and the sympathy it awakes in us.

THE GREEK MIRACLE AND THE MIRACLE OF LASCAUX

THE POWERFUL impression Lascaux makes upon us is closely linked to the character of this suspense. But however uncomfortable may be these conditions of ignorance, our total attention has been aroused. One thing only is certain: here is an inexplicable and somehow miraculous reality which bids us look and consider.

It is an overwhelming discovery: before us are paintings twenty thousand years old. They have the fresh vividness of youth. Some children found them. Some children scrambled down into the fissure left by an uprooted tree. Had the storm spared that tree, the way would not have been opened to this Cavern, this fabulous Thousand And One Nights treasure.

Previously, works in some number and occasionally of admirable quality had given us an acquaintance with ancient art; but where else, what else could have caused

COW WITH DARK HEAD AND RED BODY, DETAIL (PAGE 78). AXIAL GALLERY, LEFT WALL. No. 21.

us this sudden start of wonder, of electrified amazement? It is difficult to make out the form in many other cave-paintings, faded by time and which, even when new, probably did not have the beauty that fascinates whomever visits Lascaux. The splendor of the underground halls is incomparable: even when directly before this wealth of animal figures, how is one to avoid a momentary suspicion that it is all a mirage, some deliberate trick? But precisely to that degree we doubt or, rubbing our eyes, ask whether it can be possible, the truth's evidence makes its simple response to the desire, common to all men, to be wonderstruck.

It is nevertheless true—we must mention it since we are speaking now of the visitor's reactions—that unwarranted doubts persist, baseless skepticism sometimes withstands the evidence. When I myself was in the Grotto, did I not overhear two foreign tourists declare they had been cheated, lured into a poster-paint and cardboard Luna Park? Today, it goes without saying, only ignorance or naïveté can deny the authenticity of the paintings and the Cave. The documents exist; learned criticism has inspected them; the opinion of specialists has been supported by the findings of geologists and chemists; the most thorough scientific examinations would surely and promptly have revealed any attempt at a counterfeit; and what is one to say of this cavern's accumulated multitude of secondary details? its myriad, almost indecipherable engravings? the elaborate schemes of repeated and interlocking motifs?

I insist upon the surprise we experience at Lascaux. This extraordinary cave fairly staggers its visitors: it unceasingly rewards that expectation of the miraculous which is, in art and in passion, the most profound aspiration of life. We often belittle, call childish this need to be wonderstruck... but we set right off again in search of the wonderful. That which we hold worthy of our love is always that which overwhelms us: it is the unhoped-for, the thing that is beyond hoping for. It is as though, paradoxically, our essential self clung to the nostalgia of attaining what our reasoning self had judged unattainable, impossible. From this point of view, Lascaux combines the rarest conditions: when today we visit the Cave, our impression of the miraculous arises first from the incredible luck that permitted Lascaux' discovery, then is doubled by a vague apprehension of the unearthly character these figures must have had in the eyes of the men who lived when they were painted. We accord Lascaux its place amongst the wonders of the world: we stand in the presence of an incredible hoard that accumulated in the course of ages. What then must have been the feeling of those first of men for whom these paintings, in which to be sure they took a pride similar to ours (although ours is so stupidly individual), had, evidently, an immense attraction—the irresistible attraction that is bound up with the revelation of the unexpected, the unhoped-for. It is especially in this sense we speak of the miracle of Lascaux. For at Lascaux, new-born mankind arose for the first time to measure the extent of its inner, its secret wealth: its power to strive after the impossible.

Greece also gives us the impression of a miracle, but the light that emanates from Greece is the light of broad day: dawn's early light is less certain, less distinct, but during a stormy season, early morning lightning is the most dazzling of all.

PART OF AN ELAPHIC DEER'S ANTLER (PAGE 82). AXIAL GALLERY, RIGHT WALL. No. 46.

LASCAUX MAN

FROM NEANDERTHAL TO LASCAUX MAN

THE REMARKABLE CAVE of which further on we shall give a detailed description lies a little below the present surface of the ground, on the brink of an industrial civilization. Only a few hours by rail or automobile separate Lascaux from Paris. We are necessarily struck—struck with utmost force—by the extreme contrast it presents with the world we know; no other cave we have yet discovered seems quite as alien to the context and the situation that surround it. But we ought not to forget that this miracle was wrought by forthright, self-willed men, the masters of an admirable art. Lascaux is its richest example: this Cave is the prism that reflects the burgeoning, the fulfillment of Aurignacian art and of Aurignacian civilization.

The period which for lack of a better term we are obliged to call Aurignacian, is not, strictly speaking, man's earliest; it is only the initial phase of the age prehistorians call by the name of Upper Paleolithic—or Leptolithic—or again the less precise, less scholarly, but certainly more agreeable Reindeer Age. The Paleolithic (or Old Stone) Age subdivides into three phases: Lower, Middle, and Upper. Man emerged from his grossly anthropoid or prehominid condition (fossilized evidence of which, such as the *Australopithecus*, has been lately unearthed) at the beginning of the Old Stone Age (at the beginning, that is to say, of the Lower Paleolithic); but at that stage man did not yet truly resemble us. The *Anthropopithecus* or *Sinanthropus*, whose remains date back to this era, are by now plainly distinct from the ape, but *Homo neanderthalensis*, inhabiting the earth during the Middle Paleolithic, was still a good deal closer to the ape than are we. Neanderthal Man's cranial capacity, equal to and even greater than ours, justifies giving him the name of man. More intelligent than his forebears, he was better able than they to equip himself with a variety of tools most of which were made by beating stone against stone. He was even aware of death, whereas anthropoids do not understand what is happening when life deserts one of their number: Neanderthal Man has left behind authentic burial-places. Furthermore, his posture was erect: like us, he stood straight. But no drill sergeant could have brought him rigidly to attention on the parade ground. For his legs were somewhat bowed: when he walked, the outer edges of his feet carried his weight. And, as the American anthropologist William Howells writes, the necks of contemporary and Neanderthal Man are respectively "comparable to those of a swan and a bull". His forehead slanted low, his supra-orbital ridges were massive, and although his chin receded, his jaw was broad and

prominent. Our knowledge of his appearance is based upon the study of his bones: unable though we are to give a living representation of him, we may assure ourselves, with Howells, that his face and general look must have been "more beastlike than any living man's." He talked and it is logical to suppose that his language was embryonic: students accord him a primarily affective and exclamatory "alalic" mumbling or babbling; but, as we shall see, that rudimentary language was able to make rough distinctions between one object and another. The fact remains, however, that we know of no work of art that we can attribute to the apparently uncharming personage prehistorians sometimes call *Paleanthropus.*

Not before the advent of Aurignacian man—*Neanthropus*, who lived at Lascaux—do we encounter evidence, and then indeed abundant evidence, of the aptitude to create works of art. This aptitude, it is worth remarking, coincides with the appearance of a man whose skeleton is similar to ours in its rigorously straight carriage and its light-boned facial structure. This new individual's mien was probably no less "human" than ours: his forehead was high, the protruding brow ridges were gone, his jaw was trimmed narrower. It would seem that Cro-Magnon Man—who goes back to the Reindeer Age's beginnings and whose skeleton has been found in the Dordogne in the vicinity of Les Eyzies—, if clothed in modern dress, would have had little trouble passing unnoticed in a society of modern men. Nor was he in any wise present-day man's inferior, unless it were in the experience our breed has compiled over the ages. When, therefore, we consider the works of those times, we ought not to be surprised to discover, not only an intimate resemblance between him and ourselves, but evidence also of that quality we esteem so highly and which is so rare, the *gift of genius.* Without question, Neanderthal Man was further removed from us than the most backward Australian aborigine. And without question, while not in every point our equal, Lascaux Man at least shared our form, our look, and had what we recognize as creative genius.

As discriminate from Neanderthal Man and other *hominidae,* the *Homo sapiens* of the anthropologists is essentially he whom we call Lascaux Man.

The question still remains: Did *Homo sapiens'* birth coincide with that of art? Anthropological opinion tends largely to believe that *Homo sapiens* came first—tens of thousands of years earlier. The discoveries providing the foundation for this belief are both hard to assess and few in number. The most important of them all (subsequently found out to be a fake) was that of the Piltdown skull whose upper part really did belong to a *Homo sapiens* (but that upper part was found to date from a time long after *Homo sapiens* had achieved common and widespread existence) and whose lower part was a chimpanzee's jaw tricked up to look like a fossil. The other two discoveries are less convincing; today, Hans Weinert and F. C. Howell regard them as representative of Neanderthal Man rather than of *Homo sapiens.* I incline to feel that in a certain sense they are wrong; however the following overall picture is, I think, correct: in the period which preceded man as we know him, the earth was inhabited by an almost homogeneous race of Neanderthal-type men plus, perhaps, some others, just as primitive

but a shade nearer to *Homo sapiens*. *Homo sapiens*, properly speaking, had not yet appeared. In the ensuing period, we find only *Homo sapiens* represented in the numerous vestiges we have uncovered—these vestiges directly or indirectly coincide with the development of art—; but at this period, mankind is generally less homogeneous, is mixed: there is something here of present-day man's mongrel character. If we set aside the evidence of one skeleton found in South Africa, Neanderthal Man has vanished by now, as if subjected to some violent extermination. What is more, it seems established that *Homo sapiens* cannot have directly descended from Neanderthal Man. It would not be illogical to posit the existence of a very different species of which, so far, we have no trace, and which at the opening of the Upper Paleolithic Age might have undergone a sudden spurt of development both in an evolutionary sense and in a numerical one: this upsurge would have been hinged with the birth of art. Originally formed outside of Europe, this new man "probably came from Asia". Arriving at the height of the last glaciation, this newcomer's appearance in the West was, Breuil proposes, a tremendous event: there occurred "the probably violent displacement of paleanthropic man, overrun and entirely destroyed by invading neanthropic man."

Our reasons are clear enough for assigning Lascaux the importance of a turning point, a beginning. But in the creation of the whole Lascaux incarnates, unreasoning chance had also its heavy share.

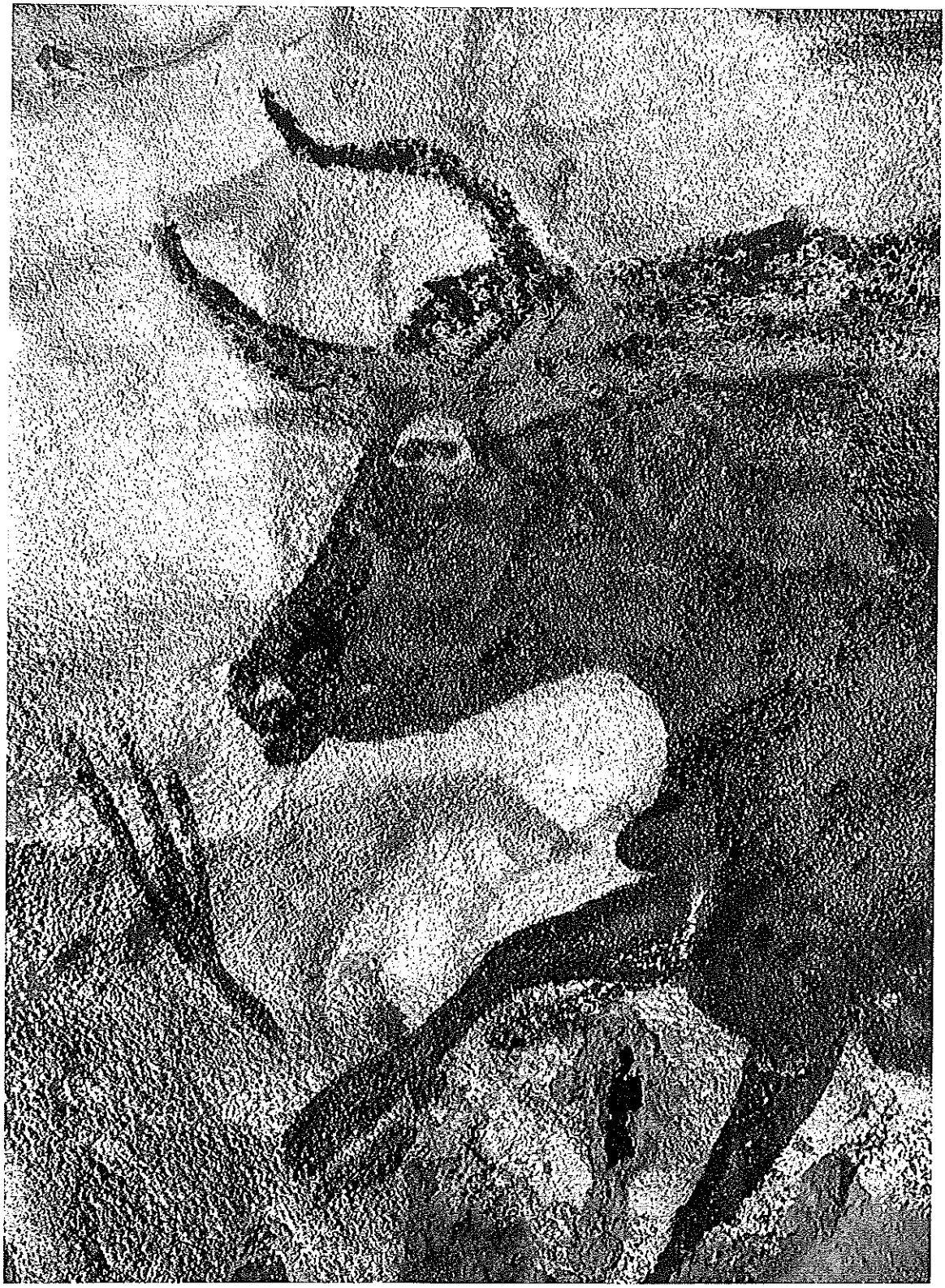
I said that Lascaux signifies the fulfillment of Aurignacian art; the statement requires some qualification. For since the early part of the Twentieth Century, "Aurignacian" has been made to refer to the particular sort of tools (and way of making them) Breuil originally defined. Consequently, the word has come to denote the Upper Paleolithic's initial phase. In France, in several other regions as well, Aurignacian tools succeeded Mousterian, bequeathed by Neanderthal Man at the Middle Paleolithic's close. But since the research conducted by Daniel Peyrony, who drew our attention to the complexity of diverse tool-styles, successive or contemporaneous, we have progressed to the point of discerning two distinct domains which, in principle, would correspond to two different civilizations: Aurignacian on the one hand, Perigordian on the other. But with what regards chronology, the division is a good deal less simple. We must visualize the following order: the first Perigordian phase is followed by the Typic Aurignacian phase, it in turn is followed by a second Perigordian phase, the Evolved Perigordian. The Lascaux paintings extend from the Typic Aurignacian to the Evolved Perigordian. This cumbersome and once much contested terminology is the one adopted in most recent studies; when speaking about Lascaux we are obliged to employ this system of reckoning, in the absence of calculable chronological data the only one that enables us to locate these works in time. But to give our factual exposition the desirable sharpness, we will borrow the terms Abbé Breuil and Raymond Lantier have employed only very recently: we will speak of *Middle* and *Upper Aurignacian*, specifying that the former corresponds to the Typic Aurignacian, the latter to Peyrony's Evolved Perigordian. In his *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal*, Abbé Breuil attributes

Lascaux in some part to the Aurignacian but in the main to the Perigordian; we will speak only of the Aurignacian, Middle and Upper. To help clarify a complicated sequence, a chronological table has been provided in an appendix (p. 141); there, the reader will find matched and differentiated most of the various terms prehistorians have employed.

We have also been led now and again to use a new system of reference, and to designate the man who lived during Middle and Upper Aurignacian times as *Lascaux Man*. But the exceptional importance we assign to Middle and Upper Aurignacian developments invites us to use yet another term particularly designating an epoch which in our view is so essential and which, moreover, is the symbol of a veritable blossoming forth, a genesis. Lascaux, to be sure, is only the focal center of a civilization that spread over a broad area. In all likelihood, this civilization had no true unity: we can say nevertheless that the Franco-Cantabric region, embracing southern France and northwest Spain, possessed an artistic unity that was maintained until the Reindeer Age's end. But Eastern Europe—without any appreciable contact with the West—also had its Aurignacian civilization where *Homo sapiens*, far from Lascaux, was stirred by a new-born power to make beautiful things. In England, in Africa, in Asia this new man developed concurrently. Widespread though the movement was, it had a center: the Dordogne.

Why did this particular spot favor such events? The Valley of the Vézère may then have been a thoroughfare for the immense reindeer herds migrating in the spring towards the Auvergne pasture-lands: slaughter lay in waiting for them here, but they nonetheless each year took the same route, assuring the men of the valley a plentiful food supply. With the ice-cap's retreat, these herds, fleeing the heat, drifted towards the Pole; stubborn habit causes the same facts to recur to this day: in Canada, the caribou year in and year out undeviatingly follow the same migratory route, and are regularly ambushed. These conditions, which might have already existed in the Middle Paleolithic when Neanderthal Man dwelt in the Dordogne, may have been the earth's most favorable. At any rate, for Old Stone Age hunters and down to neolithic times, this country must have been a privileged habitat; it was here, for the first time and with incontestably splendid results, that mankind underwent the experience of humanized life.

To be sure, our appraisal of it is determined by the evidence accident has put in our hands. Moreover, we are denied knowledge of paintings or other art-works that were originally situated in circumstances unfriendly to their lasting preservation. While we may speak with warmth of what we have found—and only lately found—, we are also obliged to speak with prudence. When all is said and done, it is likely that Lascaux such as it is represents about the summit of what man attained in that period, and likely too that the Valley of the Vézère was the place where intensified human life assumed a humane look in its own eyes and in the eyes of those who entered this pool of light. Lascaux' name thus symbolizes the ages when the human beast yielded to the subtler, keener, unfettered individual we are.



BLACK BULL (PAGE 85), DETAIL. AXIAL GALLERY, LEFT WALL. No. 26.

THE MEN OF LASCAUX WERE RICH

LIKE the skies' lightning, a flash of energy has come time and again to infuse its magic into history's wavering course. Upon various occasions, when hitherto listless, passive and as though asleep, man touched by that electrifying, seemingly heaven-sent passion, has stood suddenly up, clear-eyed and renewed, and has set forth to conquer; then, the gates of the possible swung wide, as though suddenly waked, he sees within reach what hitherto appeared in dream, only furtively to his eye. This passing from winter's torpid standstill to the springtime's rapid efflorescence seems always to have been like a transition from pale sobriety to drunkenness: as if, the life in him quickened, man were seized by a dizzying exhilaration which like some strong drink gives a feeling of power. A new life begins: it has lost none of the material harshness which is life's constant thorny essence, it is no less a perilous struggle, but the fresh possibilities it brings with it have the winy taste of delight.

We once believed that in its abject beginnings mankind knew neither this glad buoyancy nor this feeling of might; this miraculous upsurging, we thought, never happened until Greece, and when we speak of the miracle of Greece we have, do we not, a tendency to believe that the first of all humane glories belonged to those astonishing men who were Homer's children. But as for the men of the Old Stone Age, we usually accord them a sordid appearance: to our imagination, they were unbeautiful creatures, beasts almost, having beasts' hungers but none of their native grace, their calm, their ease. We fancied them gaunt, hairy, swart, modeling them after those outcast wretches who exist degradedly in the wastelands ringing our cities. The downtrodden have their own grandeur... and schoolbook illustrations concede something of the sort to cavemen. I can still see Cormon's once much admired painting—immense, frightful—illustrating Victor Hugo's lines

> *Lorsque avec ses enfants vêtus de peaux de bêtes,*
> *Echevelé, livide au milieu des tempêtes,*
> *Caïn se fut enfui de devant Jéhovah...*

A feeling of accursedness almost mechanically attaches itself to the idea of these earliest men: in the back of our minds, damnation and the decline of the *inhuman* poorer classes unfailingly wither distant figures which, though men, had no dignity. And perhaps, deep down within us, we secretly blame prehistoric men, who were after all men, for having nevertheless crouched in postures more befitting animals.

The reaction is involuntary, unavoidable: our idea of a man is in a fundamental way opposed to our idea of an animal; thanks to the bone structure which made them stoop, earliest men, in our view, have a halfbreed character: theirs is the semi-bestiality of the man who disregards, or is unaware of, his dignity. Either primitive men have in part lost the dignity that at first belonged to them; or they never had any to start with. Hence, when we inspect mankind's origins, we inevitably perceive indignity.

However, indignity is not the state that can rightly be said to characterize a beast, even if that beast later becomes a man. The indignity exists nowhere but in the mind of him who today imagines it existed then: for, once again, a non-human animal cannot display a want of human dignity, anymore than can a man separating himself from the animal be conscious of this lack. Most arbitrarily, we liken him to those amongst us who, mindless or forgetful of their dignity, misbehave and act like beasts. It is we ourselves whose alarmed imaginations have invented those sinister scenes of primitive men squatting round a carcass, between snarls and wild cries devouring chunks of raw meat. The picture may perhaps do in the Neanderthal Man's case, but it behooves us to remember the underlying difference between him and *Homo sapiens*. Insofar as we can judge, the Neanderthalian and his forerunners only by degrees detached themselves from the beast: we can make out no precise threshold, nor tell when it was crossed. But *Homo sapiens* is kin to us from the outset, and in the most decisive manner.

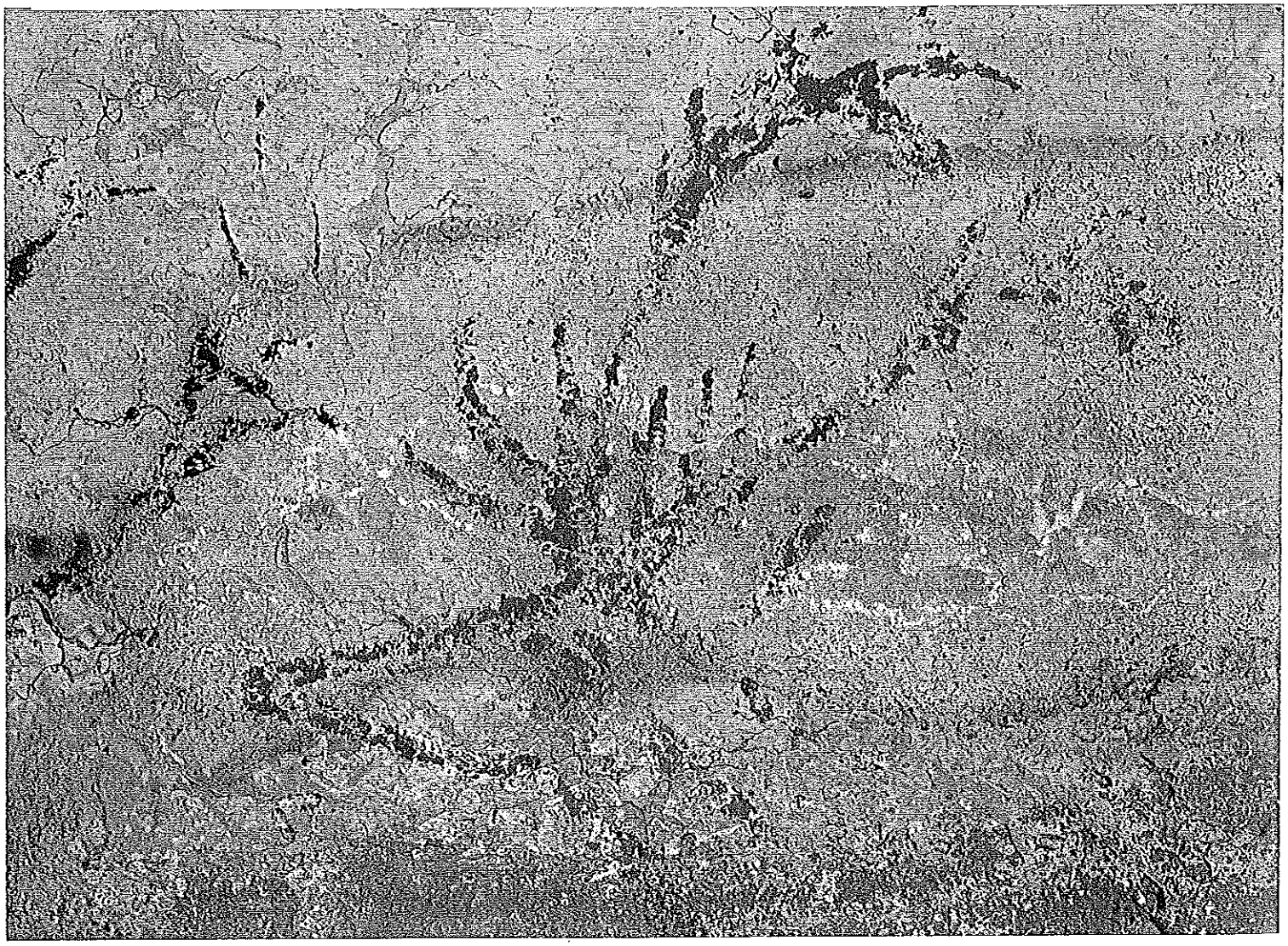
Recent and successive discoveries, of which the most important is almost the newest (it was in 1940 children first entered Lascaux), have dispelled this nightmarish image. The atmosphere of Lascaux is smiling; something in the look of things here tells us that these wonders were achieved with ease. Genius has the facility for overcoming the greatest obstacles; seldom do we find stronger evidence of it than here: there is no more perfect, more humane inventiveness than this demonstrated upon rocks painted when our life began. Lascaux announces a plenitude, a well-being which belies misery. Somehow to justify the worst, we used rather shabbily to imagine that primitive man's circumstances were distressing. We no longer have the right to confound *Homo sapiens* with our society's coarsest men, who conceive of no truth other than brute force. We had also forgotten that these unsophisticated beings laughed—that, finding themselves in a situation which terrifies us, they were the first who truly knew how to laugh.

Prehistorians are certainly right in calling excessively "severe and precarious" the life of men *who were just beginning to be men*. Their life-expectancy was far shorter than ours today; the bones we have found show a low average age. But their scant security does not signify wretchedness. They rarely saw fifty and the life of a woman was still more hazardous. Mammifers in general conclude their life "at the point sexual activity disappears or fades": at about fifty years for man, a little before then for woman. "The increased longevity common in our times is but an outcome of civilization's progress." Lascaux man had no inkling that such a longevity was possible. Plainly enough, the only distress he knew was that suggested within the framework of his existence. The idea of distress results from a comparison: for example, distress succeeds prosperity, or a ship is suddenly put in distress by a storm but for which it would have sailed smoothly to port. Again, distress may be a man's, a family's, a people's permanent state. But in this case, only he who knows of alternative conditions is able to define these as distressing. We can imagine the extreme example of persons prostrated by a misery so acute that they have no sort of hope, persons for whom misery and existence are one. This situation is exceptional. However it be precarious, life is almost always accompanied by conditions which make it possible.

Even today, good humor is no stranger to ways of life which seem dreadful to us. The Tibetans, who unprovided with windowglass and almost without fire endure abominably cold weather, are gay, merry, given to sensuality. Those Eskimos, who until then lived "singing like little birds," had cause to groan when a missionary, banning their feasts, deprived them of gaiety.

Standing before Lascaux' frescoes, rich beyond measure with the energy of animal life, how can we attribute to the men who conceived them a poverty this energy refutes? Had not the life they led amply lifted these men to heights of exuberance, of joy, they could not have represented it with such persuasive force. But, above all, we see that life's impact moved them in humane directions: this vision of animality is humane. Why? Because the life it incarnates is transfigured in the painting, made fair, made beautiful and for this reason made sovereign, exalted far above all imaginable poverty.

HEAD OF FIFTH DEER IN FRIEZE (PAGE 106). NAVE, RIGHT WALL. No. 64.



THE PART GENIUS PLAYED

We cannot lightly nod assent to what would diminish the importance of these paintings. We cannot but reject the customary description of their authors. Our reasons for rejecting it? These Aurignacian men were probably no less gay, no less merry, no less sensual than the Tibetans. We know almost nothing about them. True. But why attribute our own grave seriousness to them? Human laughter began somewhere. Perhaps not with Neanderthal Man; but Lascaux Man laughed, of that we may be sure. And we forget what a relief, what an unburdening new-born laughter must have been: it requires all of knowledge's weighty seriousness to make us forget it. Sometimes we envision primitive man locked in the vice of misery, at least of hardship. Sometimes we take him for a child. Nor do we hesitate to set him side by side with the modern "primitive". These several characterizations make some kind of sense—at least the last two of them do—, but, in the long run, we have got to discard them all.

Odd, the way some strove to compare the Cave's masterworks to children's scribblings... But our youngsters benefit from supervision and guidance; the men of the Old Stone Age were on their own. Abandoned upon earth, they make one think of those young humans who are now and then brought up by wolves: but they whom a rare misfortune entrusts to the solicitude of wild animals are little apt to surmount the backwardness sure to result from their privations. Earliest men are distinguished by an extraordinary achievement: unaided, alone—through the effort of generations, to be sure—, they elaborated a human world.

Rather more worthy of attention, the comparison relating Aurignacian Man to the primitive of today is closely linked to the attitude which leads modern science to apply the risky term *primitive* to, amongst others, behindhand Australian and Melanesian tribes. Their level of material civilization does indeed border on true primitives'. Despite positive differences, there is no denying they have points in common, whence it is easy to establish a convincing likeness. Like modern "primitives", earliest man is said to have practiced sympathetic magic and danced wearing masks, he is found to have had that "primitive mentality" deduced by sociologists... I should up to a certain point accept these comparative interpretations had I not the feeling a basic error lies behind them. Many hypotheses are justifiable (as hypotheses, be it understood), but, if modeled after today's retarded primitives, our idea of Lascaux Man will be faulty: instead of stressing similarities, it would be better to concentrate upon differences, and that between "savage" and Lascaux art is enormous. The latter is, if one wishes, much nearer the art, rich in various possibilities, that belonged to the Chinese or to the Middle Ages. Above all else, however close he was to the Polynesian of our day, Lascaux Man was also something the Polynesian is apparently not: laden with the promise of the most uncertain and most complex future.

We must especially think of the energy vibrating in Lascaux Man, and of the vehemence wherewith he tore himself from inertia's slough. For no apparent cause,

all of itself something sprang alive in him. The modern primitive, after untold ages of maturing, stands on a platform nearer the first men's level than ours; until some crucial change occurs, his lot is to stay where he is, uncreating and bogged down in the same "dark backward and abysm of time" that immobilized his forebears. For us, on the other hand, a new but indefinite time is being born; it matters little what we decide to do about it, the world within us is altering and in like manner, the world altered during that moment between the Reindeer Age's beginnings and the flowering of Lascaux. There was an outburst. There have been others since, yes; but none has had that aureate, daybreak light. I do not say those men had the clear, analytical awareness of it which, too often, is the limited definition we give to conscious awareness. But the surge of strength and the feeling of grandeur that bore them up may be reflected in the passionate vitality animating the giant bulls of the Lascaux frieze. There existed a tradition, not strong enough to quash the new impulse, but to it those painters doubtless did owe something. However, they strode out of it, *creating as they came;* in the Cave's semi-darkness, by the hallowing lamp-light, they surpassed what until then they had been by creating what was not there the moment before.

WHEN MEN FIRST BEGAN TO PLAY

THERE have been two capital events in the course of human history: the making of tools (with which work was born); the making of art-objects (with which play began). Tool-making was the invention of *Homo faber*—of him who, while no longer an animal, was not yet fully a man. That sufficiently well describes Neanderthal Man. Art began with full-grown man, *Homo sapiens*, who first entered the stage in early Upper Paleolithic times; in the Aurignacian period.

The birth of art has its obvious connections with the prior existence of tool-making. Not only requiring the possession of tools and some acquired skill in fashioning and handling them, art had in relation to utilitarian activity an opposite importance or value: it was a kind of protest against the hitherto existing world... itself indispensable to articulating the protest.

At its outset art was primarily a game. In a major sense it still is. It is play; while tool-making is primarily work. To establish the meaning of Lascaux (by which I mean the epoch whereof Lascaux is the materialization) is to perceive the shift from the world of work to the world of play: or the transition from *Homo faber* to *Homo sapiens:* from the roughhewn to the finished individual being.

Lascaux Man's predecessor, *Homo faber* inhabited the earth during Middle Paleolithic times; chronologically, he stands midstream in the crossing over from animal to human. The Paleolithic epoch, which preceded the Reindeer Age and lies under the sign of work and tool-making, stretched over some 500,000 years: an interminable impasse charted by the beds of *nuclei*, splintered, chipped, and hewn stone and bone implements which prehistorians have classified and, on the whole, ordered chronologically. Uncertainty still shrouds the question of whether individuals of the *Homo* genus were living before the Tertiary era: but the worked stones that served as tools only appear in geological strata dating after the Quaternary era. A five hundred centuries' span is not much compared to the estimated 280,000,000 years that went into the making of the oldest fossils. Still, 500,000 years loom immense when compared to the several tens of millenaries measuring the breadth—from Aurignacian to Magdalenian—of the Upper Paleolithic period, or when compared to the approximately 15,000 years separating us from the Magdalenian epoch, these 15,000 years including the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods, the various Metal Ages as well as the 5000 years of recorded history.

Roughly speaking, we may say that written history or history proper started 5000 years ago; that *Homo sapiens* made his first appearance 50,000 years ago in the Upper Paleolithic; that *Homo faber* began his activities 500,000 years ago. Save for the first, these are hypothetical dates; likewise, it is with reservations we suppose that man began to decorate Lascaux with animal figures almost 30,000 years ago.

However imperfect our approximations, we need a notion of the relative size of these stretches of time if we are to grasp Lascaux' significance and remember that this dawn-hour had been preceded by an immemorial secular inertness in human life—in,

at least, those rude forms of human life characterized by work and the making of tools. After five hundred thousand years of dense winter, Lascaux would be a veritable first day of spring. As a matter of fact, the climate itself appears to have turned milder, if not at the opening of the Reindeer Age, at least in the earlier part of the Aurignacian; and to that epoch, it seems, we are to ascribe the Cave's finest paintings... But the analogy has one fault: that immense winter was never in its turn preceded by any more clement season. We need not apologize for using the word *winter*: the four successive glaciations, in whose course France enjoyed much Siberian weather, froze the entire period. It was during the fourth (or, as it is called, Würm) glaciation that the Upper Paleolithic Age began. Shortly afterwards, the climate improved. The fauna pictured in the Lascaux frescoes belong to a relatively temperate region. The material civilization, the tools, and the work of this time differed little from what they had been before *Homo sapiens*' coming, but the former world was essentially changed: gone was a part of its bitter asperity. Despite everything, tool-making had advanced, and even then not every bit of man's energy and time had, of necessity, to go into hunting or toil. It was then that, to useful activity, art added another of play.

The fact cannot be too heavily stressed: before the Reindeer Age, work was the sole ingredient that outwardly distinguished human from animal life. So far, we have uncovered no evidence of other important human activities in that period. Hunting was not a form of work if we take *work* to mean a calm, deliberate purposeful application: hunting was a carry-over from animal activity. It would seem that in the days before art (drawing figures), there was, apart from the weapons employed, not much of the human about hunting. Only through working stone did man make an absolute break with the animal. What caused the scission was the exclusively human *thinking* work demands. Work anticipates, presupposes this object which does not yet really exist, which is presently being made, and which is, simply, the reason the work is being done. Two sorts of objects immediately come to exist in the worker's mind: actually present objects, and objects later to come. This already dual aspect is completed by the object of the past; therewith, all the gradations of objective existence range themselves in proper order. From incoherent barkings of desire, man can advance to distinct speech now that, labeling the object with a name, he is able to make an implicit connection between the material it is made of and the work required to get it from the old state to the new in which it is ready for use. Thenceforth, language firmly anchors the object in the stream of time. But man, designating the object, has been wrenched out of the world of nameless feeling—of sensibility. Though drawn back to this world, man cannot re-enter it unless, through his labor, he makes not only useful things, but creates a work of art.

MAN ACHIEVES AWARENESS OF DEATH, AND THEREWITH WRAPS IT IN PROHIBITIONS

REGARDING what they had made, these creators of objects, these users of durable tools suddenly realized that, themselves of less durable stuff, they died: while tools lasted, something in themselves did not withstand wear and time. Something gave out, failed... something, at least, departed them... In this way an awareness of death finally forced itself upon the men of those times, at whose close we find evidence of burial. A few burial-places, all dating from the end of the Middle Paleolithic, have been located in Europe and Palestine. They precede *Homo sapiens'* advent by only a little, but the skeletons they contain belong to the as yet incompletely developed Neanderthal Man. We might be led to think that this long-delayed reaction to death proclaims the arrival of a new period, of a different kind of man. But firstly, *Homo sapiens* was not a continuation of the Neanderthalian, who is only his distant relative (he apparently proceeded from a collateral branch). And, secondly, burial of the whole body followed after a less concrete and still older reaction which, most often, centered attention upon the skull. That was the part of the body which in death went on betokening the being who had dwelt in the body. Objects could change, but something outlived them: after he died, a man's skull kept on being that man with whom his survivors once had dealings. For rudimentary natures, the skull was beheld as an imperfect, deficient object which, in one sense, *was* such-and-such a man and which, nevertheless, wasn't anymore: that man was indeed dead and his skull no longer replied save with a grin to the enquiring gaze of survivors who were themselves, through the permanent objects they made, as permanent as anything else. From a certain number of the finds which have yielded us skulls apparently preserved with special care, we may induce that remotest mankind already had an obscure notion of death: these relics go back to moments in the Middle and Upper Paleolithic Ages. Thus, even during the long drawn out larval phase before his flowering, this fundamental awareness seems to have registered itself in man's mind: the primitive creature of those times would pause before the privileged object—some relative's head—which was, in a way, the man he had known yesterday but which, at the same time, announced that this man was no more, that he was dead.

All the Neanderthalian appears to have known of human life was its side of useful activity, which implies that he had some measure of intelligence or, if one prefers, the power to discern. If after the lapse of so great a length of time it is at all possible to judge, the discerning of death introduced into his consciousness something apart from and beyond impressions of the distinct and finite objects surrounding him. But, perforce, death had an exclusively negative sense and value for those men. That immense breaking, that immense breaking through which has always opened wide the way to possibilities other than efficacious action, was to remain unexploited until the coming of the man "with the neck of a swan". Until the Aurignacian, man seems to have confined himself to proscribing *the sentiment death inspired in him.*

HEAD OF "THE UNICORN" (PAGE 62). MAIN HALL, LEFT WALL. No. 2.

Those few words are nearly all we can say of the darkness Lascaux finally dispels. To convey the significance of that sunrise I had first to speak of the great night that lay behind it. But before putting down what I have to say of the day, let me briefly discuss this element of prohibition which, it seems, like the awareness of death, has its beginnings *in the night-time.*

I seem to find something missing in the greater part of the writings that deal with prehistoric times. Prehistorians inspect documentations accumulated with immense patience and labor and data sifted and classified with great skill. Their commentaries take into account the conditions under which lived the men they are studying. But, obedient to the single method that befits a specialized discipline, they confine their

thoughts to reflections upon the evidence at hand: it constitutes their province, and beyond its frontiers they will not venture. Never do they pose in general terms the problem of the transition from animal to man, from twilight to conscious life. This matter belongs to another domain, one which science judges by definition suspect: psychology being none too trustworthy, the matter is tossed into the lap of the philosophers: the scientist has successfully kept out of difficulty. But a gap remains. Can it simply be ignored? For their part, sociologists train their best attentions upon ethnological facts scrupulously gathered from observations of archaic peoples. They speak of definite, often quite silly taboos bearing upon such-and-such a point. They neglect a general fact: the difference between man and animal, considered as a whole, is not alone based on the intellectual and physical character peculiar to each, but also upon the prohibitions men believe themselves constrained to observe. If there is a clear distinction between man and animal, it is perhaps sharpest here: for an animal, nothing is ever forbidden. Its nature fixes the animal's limitations; in no instance does it limit itself. But it does not as a rule occur to sociologists—or to specialists in the history of religion—that the numerous prohibitions they list, compare and often analyze have, rather than many individual explanations, one encompassing explanation which implies, in a larger sense, the transition from the animal state—in which there is no such thing as a prohibition—to the human state—in which prohibitions are plainly the cornerstone of humanized patterns of behavior. Once again, the sociologist and historian of religion focus every time upon particular taboos without first reminding themselves that, generally speaking, human life stripped of prohibitions is unthinkable. More excusably, prehistorians do not raise the question since, in their province, they never encounter what in their opinion is solid evidence of a prohibition's existence.

However, the special attention paid to cadavers, or rather to human remains in general, and paid to them long before Upper Paleolithic times, suffices to show that, with what regards death, humanized behavior patterns are ancient, primal, hence fundamental. From the start, evidently, this behavior implied a feeling of fear or of respect: at any rate, a powerful feeling which made a strong distinction between human remains and all other objects. From the start, this distinguishing contrasted with an animal's absence of interest. Man's behavior with regard to death manifested his recognition of a new value: the dead, at least the faces of the dead, fascinated, overawed the living, who made haste to *forbid* that they be approached: these were not ordinary objects, to be eyed casually or heedlessly neglected. In raising this barrier of prohibition round what fills him with awe and fascinated terror, man enjoins all beings and all creatures to respect it: for it is sacred. The very ancient attitude of men vis-à-vis the dead signifies that the fundamental categorizing of objects had got under way: some were singled out as sacred and forbidden, the rest were considered profane, touchable and unrestrictedly accessible. This categorizing dominates the processes that go into forming the human; we are placed squarely before them when we turn our gaze upon those distant times, whereof Lascaux is the golden hour: the hour of full-grown man.

THE TIGHT-KNIT SCHEME OF PROHIBITIONS

OUR EFFORT to penetrate into the secret of Lascaux shall not succeed unless, from the first, we behold Lascaux as a world bound together by the idea of prohibition, pervaded throughout by taboos.

There were many others in addition to that linked to the terror of death, the only one whose concrete evidence has been preserved in underground depositories. The bones lasted: we find them just as they were left, and their positions tell us about the attitudes held towards them by men who lived many hundreds of centuries ago. However, of other equally fundamental forms of the behavior that set those men apart from animals we have no such clues. Basic human prohibitions make up two groups: one has to do with death, the other with sexual reproduction, hence with birth. Of the first group, only the prohibition dealing with mortal remains has been established as existing in prehistoric times. But nothing informs us one way or the other upon the existence then of the prohibition against murder, universal in its principle, and, like the former prohibition, relating to death. The second group includes more assorted prohibitions: incest, proscriptions bearing upon the critical periods of female sexuality, modesty in all its forms, pregnancy, confinement, childbirth. Needless to say, no factual evidence of these latter prohibitions has come down to us from times prior to the Reindeer Age: and of that Age itself, no graphic document has survived to inform us positively or negatively, directly or indirectly. But we are sure that these two prohibition complexes exist universally: historical documents and ethnographic observations uniformly agree on the question. Were I now to suppose that at least the roots of all these prohibitions, like the one concerning the dead, go back very far, further even than the Reindeer Age, I could not, to be sure, furnish formal proof to support my conjecture. (Nor, contrarily, can anyone supply evidence proving it mistaken.) For argument, I must appeal to the consistent, coherent workings of the human mind. Only, it seems, a vague, indifferent skepticism could maintain that conscious awareness of death, or the extreme solicitude shown for the lifeless body, necessarily derive from work. If we wish to be methodical, we may and indeed must doubt the connection between the prohibition of murder and the act of withdrawing a kinsman's corpse from possible contact with animals or other men. But it is only the fundamental reaction that counts. The same must be said of the sexual complex which, its exact opposite, complements the group of prohibitions concerning death. As for whether incest or the prohibitions treating sexual conversation during the woman's menstrual period go back to oldest times, that question cannot profitably be raised. But we may wonder about the possibility of a primary behavior pattern, without chiefly concerning ourselves about the individual forms it took in the beginning. Upon this head, we need only ask whether this behavior, like the behavior provoked by death, is or is not an inevitable consequence of work. The problem is to determine whether, in this world that work created, whose beginnings go back to the period bounded by the Günz and Mindel glaciations (the first and second of the Quaternary's great

glaciations), sexual activity, like death, did not appear as *something entirely apart. Entirely apart* from work and the regular recurrence of distinct relations work introduced between men and objects as between various humans. Upon considering as a body the prohibitions which generally dictate reactions of coming to a halt—and of dread or anguish—before what suddenly announces itself as something *entirely apart,* the bulk of historical and ethnological information shows *mankind at all times in agreement with us on this point:* for all known peoples, the realm of work lies in rival opposition to the realm of sexuality and of death. The very meagre traces we have of prehistory's remotest men shed certain light upon only one point: that of their behavior towards the dead. But may we not imitate the paleontologist who, from the isolated fragment he has found, reconstructs the whole? Disruptive of the routine order of things essential to work, unassimilable into the world of stable and distinct objects, that unpredictable part of life, now ebbing, now surging up again, had quickly to be set aside, fenced round and, depending upon circumstances, sometimes considered baneful, sometimes troublesome, sometimes sacred. There is, we see, no precise line that can be drawn between the sacred and the sexual. And, further along, we see something still stranger: that this trouble-inspiring, disruptive domain, whose power over us is as supreme today as ever it was, to those distant observers' eyes seems to correspond to the domain of animal life—which is not submitted to work. When fascinated by what we see in the Lascaux Cave, it is this domain's powers over us we are acknowledging.

WHERE PROHIBITIONS ARE OVERSTEPPED: IN PLAY, IN ART, IN RELIGION

IN THE present essay our subject is the birth of art. Of it, Lascaux gives us, today, the most arresting image, the richest, most moving echo. But, to get at the significance of that birth, we were obliged to view it against the background of the larval state that preceded **it.**

What Lascaux chiefly means and reveals is the end to that timeless deadlock. Afterwards, we may turn to what is reflected there of play—which, properly speaking, has in itself the value of art—and, as against play, its opposite, magic—which introduces the question of a calculated useful intention. Those prehistorians who have weighed and gauged the relative importance of these two factors as underlying motives behind the paintings are presently agreed that both may have been operative. However, I fear that with most the scales tip in favor of the magic intention and, therefore, of practical interest. Commentators, it seems to me, most often tend, perhaps out of timidity, to speak with undue reserve, and as though in passing, of an element of free creativity and of joyous festivity which these in some sort divine pictures may have had for the men who painted them. Modern experts stress hungry painters' concern to gain possession, through the devices prescribed by sympathetic magic, of animals often shown wounded by arrows. Without any doubt, we have got to grant that, behind the effort to create the marvelous, there was also a narrowly material motive at work. In Lascaux Man's mind, magic must have had a rôle similar to the one it occupies in the minds of the peoples studied by ethnology and ancient history. It would however be well to protest against the habit of overweighting this will to take, or invoke, efficacious action. We must finally admit that, in every ritual operation, the seeking after a specific end is never but one amongst a number of its operators' motives: these motives derive from the whole of reality, its religious and sensible (aesthetic) sides alike. In every case, they imply what has always been art's purpose: to create a sensible reality whereby the ordinary world is modified in response to the desire for the extraordinary, for the marvelous, a desire implicit in the human being's very essence. Any given work of art's specific intention is thus of small account if one considers the constancy and universality of that overriding purpose. Is it a true work of art where it is absent? That purpose is the major thing; whilst what in the work of art is isolated, petty, matters far less. The isolated element, the specific intention perishes in oblivion as soon as, to a later generation or a newcomer, it ceases to make sense; but the marvelous never loses its impact. What difference does it finally make if we do not know the narrow meaning those prodigious rows of upended stones held for the men who raised them? But those men wanted Stonehenge or Carnac to be prodigious: that prodigiousness conveys their still living will and assails us to our depths. Would it be otherwise with these paintings some few of which, furthermore, refuse to yield to the prehistorian's classic interpretations? What, without going further than the

entrance of the Cave, what does this imaginary "Unicorn" mean? What of the scene in the Well where, at the disembowelled bison's feet, lies sprawled a lifeless man? There are figures in other caverns about which the calculative simplicity of magic explains nothing. Why, groping in these obscure places, must we plant explanations everywhere? why, when, precisely, it is plain that the art of imitating the outer aspect of animals by means of painting or engraving *could not have been put to use before it came into being* and, in order *to be*, had first *to be found* in the course of accident, chance, or play. Conceivably, the imitation of wild beasts' cries or postures led the first painters to mark silhouettes on surfaces. This possibility may be of some help in interpreting the "finger-painting" done with colors on rock or by running the fingertips across, and thus grooving, moist clay. Traces of these exercizes (called "macaronis" by prehistorians) have been found in caves, notably at La Baume-Latrone. Sometimes these lines describe figures (p. 133). The rocky surfaces' natural contours now and then served as a point of departure or subject for interpretation; such is the case of the splendid deerlike animal of the Grotte de Bayol at Collias in the Gard department (p. 133). This figure, probably contemporary with the "macaronis" of nearby La Baume-Latrone, is drawn in obedience to the wall's natural relief which the paint discreetly reaffirms and accents. Only play, and not some practical purpose, could have prompted these clearly gratuitous doodlings.

At any event, the anthropologists' *Homo faber* (Man who works) never set foot on the road play would have led him to take. Only his successor, *Homo sapiens* (Man who discerns) struck out resolutely along it. Out of tentative sketchings unfolded an art full of mastery—of genius. We give the name *Homo sapiens* to the man who swiftly widened *Homo faber*'s cramped airless world. But the name is not altogether justified. The nascent mental awareness of earliest times is due to the work *Faber* performed; *Sapiens*' contribution is paradoxical: it consists in art, not in consciousness. The qualifying "sapiens" was applied at a time when it was more widely accepted than it is today, that conscious intellect distinguishes man from animal. When discussing Reindeer Age Man, in particular Lascaux Man, we more exactly distinguish him from his predecessor by stressing not consciousness, but aesthetic activity which, at heart, is a form of play. Huizinga's excellent term, *Homo ludens* (Man who plays, plays above all the admirable game of art), would surely suit him better, and perhaps alone suits him. Only "Man who plays" adequately and precisely counters the Neanderthal "Man who works". *Homo faber* was unpliant, sluggish, "beef-witted". His vitality had never overcome the heavy dulness of quadruped forms; heavy, he lingered near the anthropoid. The alert, awake air (which, by contrast, even mankind's worst examples and frequent uglinesses only emphasize), the forthright step, the determined, sovereign bearing of the light-hearted, engaging man who plays the game of human-play, begins with him for whom, until Huizinga struck upon it, anthropologists failed to find an appropriate name. "Homo ludens", Huizinga shows, is not exclusively applicable to the man whose works gave human truth the virtue and brilliancy of art; the term befits all of mankind. And, furthermore, *ludens* is the one word which, to *faber*, designating a subordinate activity, opposes an element, play, that exists independently and for its own sake.

It was when he played and, playing, gave his game the permanence and marvelous quality of the work of art, that man shed his careworn mien and took on the lofty stature wherein he placed all his pride. Playing, to be sure, cannot be the source or cause of evolution; but there is no doubting that the block-boned Neanderthalian coincides with work and the more supple, light-muscled, unfettered man with the flowering of art. True, nothing proves that, earlier, play did not in some degree unbend larval mankind's stiffness: but the latter had not the power to create this *humanized* world out of the play which weds man's inner meaning to the meaning of art, which frees us, if upon each occasion for a time only, from the oppressive yoke of grim necessity, and in some sort brings us nearer that marvelous heritage, that shower of riches for which everyone of us feels himself born.

HEADS OF TWO COWS (PAGE 74). CEILING OF AXIAL GALLERY. Nos. 24 and 23.

PROHIBITION AND TRANSGRESSION

I MAY return, in terms whose sense has grown tighter, to a fundamental dichotomy, and more firmly note this: *the fullness and reality of the game man plays* are consequences of his overstepping what is prohibited.

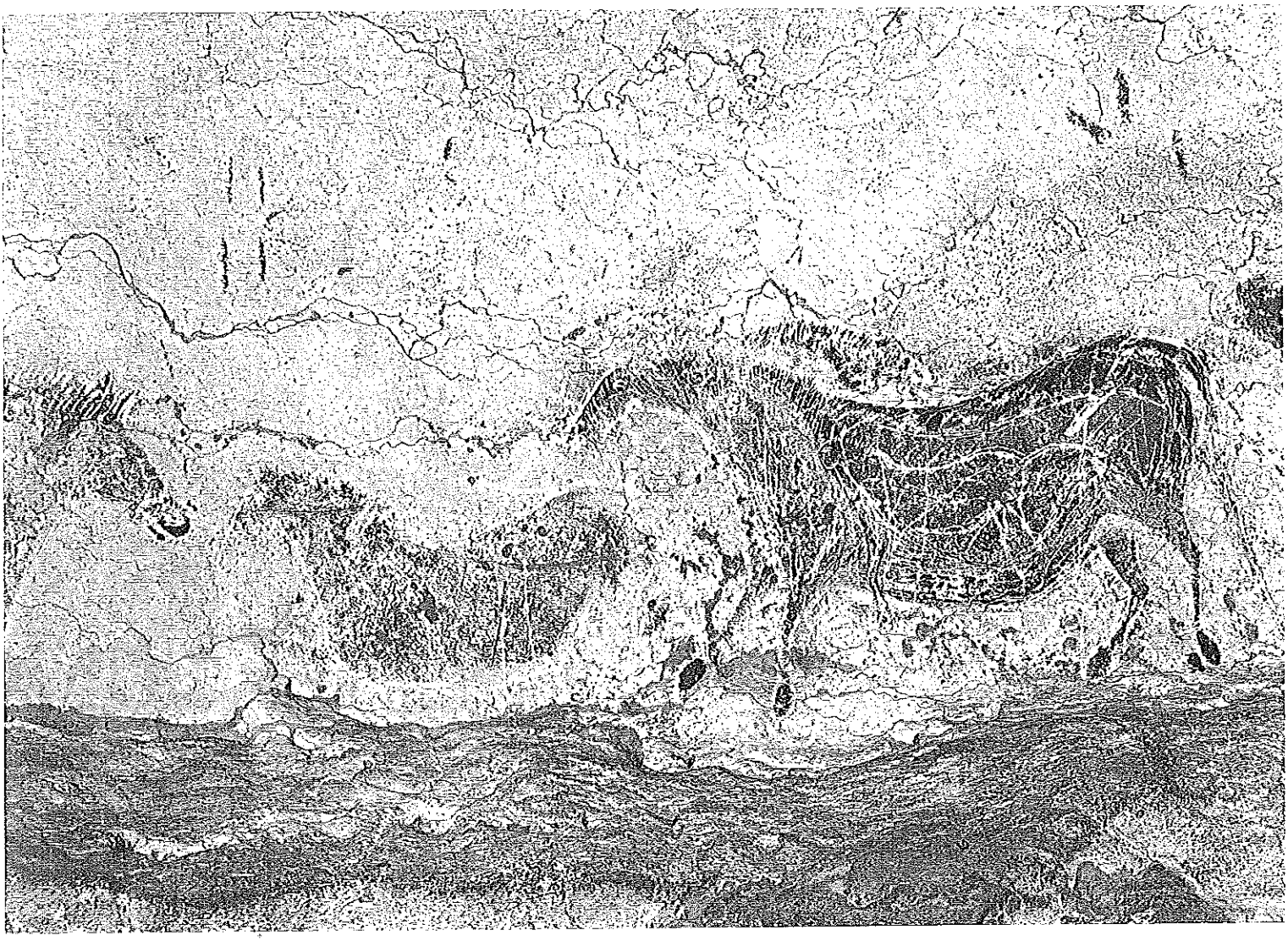
I drew attention to the relationship between prohibitions and work: prohibitions preserve intact—if and when possible, and as far and for as long as possible—the world work organizes and shelter it from the disturbances repeatedly provoked by death and sexuality: the enduring animality in us forever introduces raw life and nature into the community: prohibitions exist to quell these uprisings and spread oil on the sea of insurgent animal passion and unruliness. When in the Reindeer Age play in the form of artistic activity first bypassed work, the former was construed as work, although of a new kind and resulting in a fascinating game. As the thaw continued, the prohibition work engenders was itself affected. Prohibition—that scandal of the mind, that paralysis, that stupor—could not simply of a sudden cease to exist. Scandal and stupor plodded on, but life outdistanced them just as play outdistanced work. We have, of course, no prehistoric details describing the struggle; abundant evidence does however come from the peoples we are familiar with through history or ethnology, and it flatly indicates that an impulse to disobey it is the necessary counterpart to the decree ordering retreat before the forbidden. Everywhere, at every time, the feast day denoted the moment when the everyday, workday rules, ordinarily put up with, were abruptly laid by: at feast-time, the lid came off the pot. During holiday, not all the prohibitions were suspended, none were entirely, but their principle and certain of their effects were. The feast was nothing other than the legitimate occasion for relative licence. We ought probably to induce the occurrence of such interludes during the Reindeer Age—we ought once again to do as the paleontologist does with fossils: reconstitute the whole from fragments.

Neither can we furnish proof that transgression was unknown, non-existent in pre-Reindeer Age times. But let me be clear: when I refer to transgression I am not thinking of the case in which, through its feebleness, a given prohibition ceases to function. Rules are not always effective. They are sometimes not respected. There is sometimes the individual who, insusceptible of anguish, has an animal-like indifference towards everything of this sort. The transgression for which indifference is responsible —which, rather than transgression, is really sheer ignorance of the law—must surely have been common in times when prohibitions were gradually coming to be felt without always asserting themselves clearly. *Transgression*, I think, ought to be applied only to an act committed, not because of a want of sensibility, but, to the contrary, knowingly, despite the toll it is certain to exact. Authentic transgression caused a profound distress, but in time of holiday, the intense excitement alleviated it. The transgression I refer to is the religious transgression that relates to the ecstatic sensibility, which is the source of ecstasy and the core of religion. It is connected with the feast, wherein the sacrifice

is a moment of paroxysm. In the sacrifice antiquity saw the sacrificer's crime; amidst the onlookers' dreading silence, he slew the victim; and thus, knowing full well what he was doing, himself conscience-stricken, he violated the ban proscribing murder. Our point here is that, in its essentials and in its practice, only art expresses that prohibition with beseeming gravity, and only art resolves the dilemma. It is the state of transgression that prompts the desire, the need for a more profound, a richer, a marvelous world, the need, in a word, for a sacred world. Transgression has always adopted marvelous forms of expression: poetry and music, dance, tragedy, or painting. The forms art takes have their origin nowhere but in the festival celebration, in all ages the same, and the feast, which is religious, calls for the deployment of all of art's resources. An art independent of the impulses that engender the feast is unimaginable. In one respect, play is the transgression of the law of work: art, play and transgression come not singly, but every time joined in defiance of the principles presiding over the disciplined regularity of work. Apparently, the chief concern in earliest days was—as still it is in archaic societies—to bring work and play, prohibition and transgression, the profane season and the riot of holiday, into a kind of delicate equilibrium within which contraries blend, play takes on the guise of work, and transgression contributes to affirming prohibition. We may propose as fairly certain that, in the strongest sense, transgression only begins to exist when art itself becomes manifest, and that the birth of art fairly closely coincided, in the Reindeer Age, with the tumultuous outbreak of play and festival announced by these cave-painting figures, vying with one another in energy and exuberance that attain fullest expression in the game of birth and death played on stone.

Summoning, as it does, all of men's resources into action and because, during it, these resources take the form of art, the feast ought in principle to have left behind some traces of itself. Indeed, we do find some from the Reindeer Age; but earlier periods have left us none. These traces, as I say, are fragmentary, but if we follow the interpretation offered by prehistorians (who acknowledge the existence of feasts at the epoch of the cave-paintings), they so fortify the likelihood of the hypothesis we are developing that we can consider it sound. If the reality differed from our attempted reconstruction of it, I suspect it could have differed only a little; and even though fresh evidence were to come to light (as in time we have every reason to suppose it shall), I dare say it would not substantially contradict what I have said here.

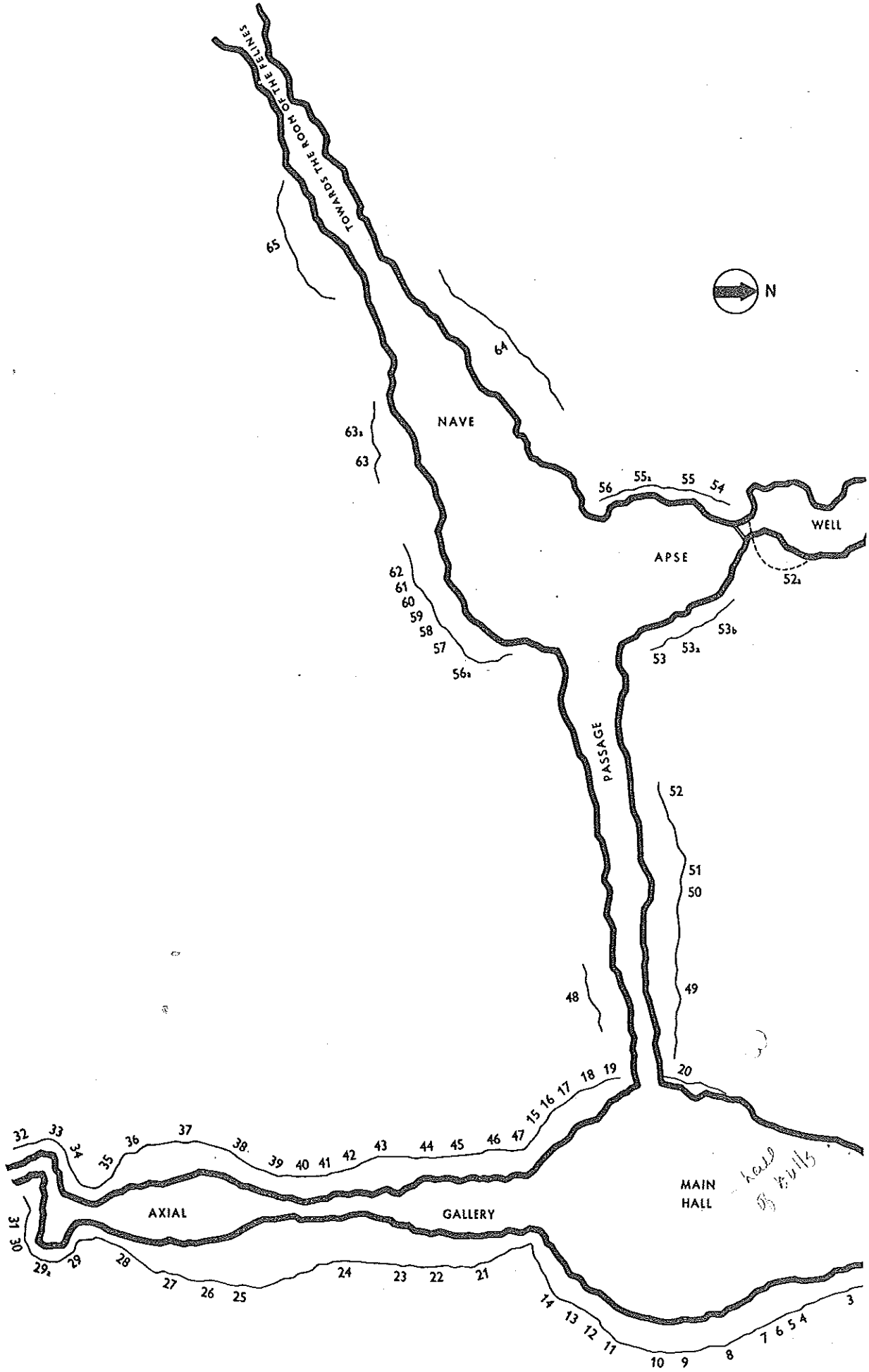
If we undertake to give a specific explanation to any particular work, we may, for example, maintain—as has been maintained—that the cave engraving of a wild beast was made with the intention of driving off evil spirits. To be sure; every work reveals a specific practical intention that *adds* itself to that general intention I wished to bring out when I discussed the transition from animal to man, a step that is conditional upon recognizing prohibitions and upon violating them. These conditions hold firm today, by them we still define human life, without them this human life would be inconceivable. They surely existed from the beginning although prohibition necessarily preceded transgression. What remains uncertain is where to situate the initial step from prohibition to transgression: that is to say, at what moment did transgression, given free rein



HORSES BELONGING TO THE SECOND GROUP (PAGE 101). NAVE, LEFT WALL. No. 63a.

in an outburst of festivity, first obtain the decisive rôle it has had in human behavior ever since? Such a principle does not contradict the specific interpretations every work separately inspires. A work of art, a sacrifice contain something of an irrepressible festive exuberance that overflows the world of work, and clash with, if not the letter, the spirit of the prohibitions indispensable to safeguarding this world. Every work of art, in isolation, possesses a meaning independent of the desire for the prodigal, a desire each has in common with all the rest. But we may say in advance that a work of art in which this desire cannot be sensed, in which it is faint or barely present, is a mediocre work. Similarly, there is a specific motive behind every sacrifice: an abundant harvest, expiation, or any other logical objective; nonetheless, in one way or another, every sacrifice has its cause in the quest for a sacred instant that, for an instant, puts to rout the profane time in which prohibitions guarantee the possibility of life.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CAVE


TOWARDS THE ROOM OF THE FELINES
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NAVE
APSE
WELL
PASSAGE
AXIAL GALLERY
MAIN HALL
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64
63a
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55a
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56a
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PLAN OF THE LASCAUX CAVE

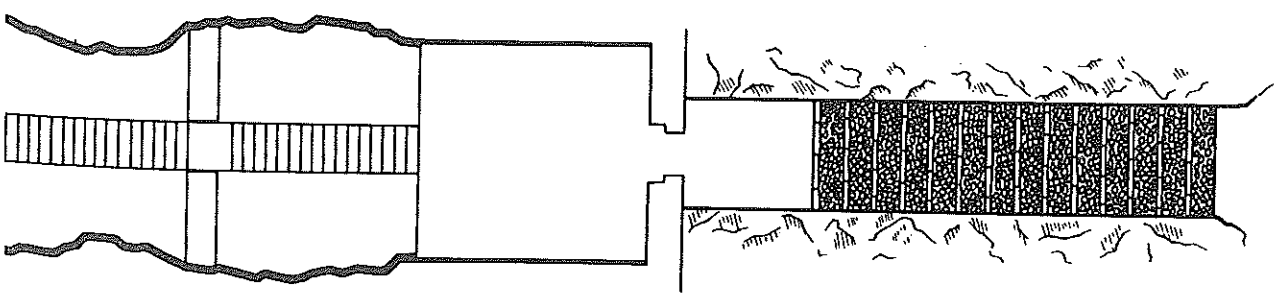
The numbers correspond to those used by F. Windels in his *Lascaux, "Chapelle Sixtine" de la Préhistoire*. The same reference numbers figure in the caption beneath each color plate. Diagrams showing the position of each painted or incised subject are given on pages 48, 72 and 96.

KEY

Contour of the rock wall at ground level

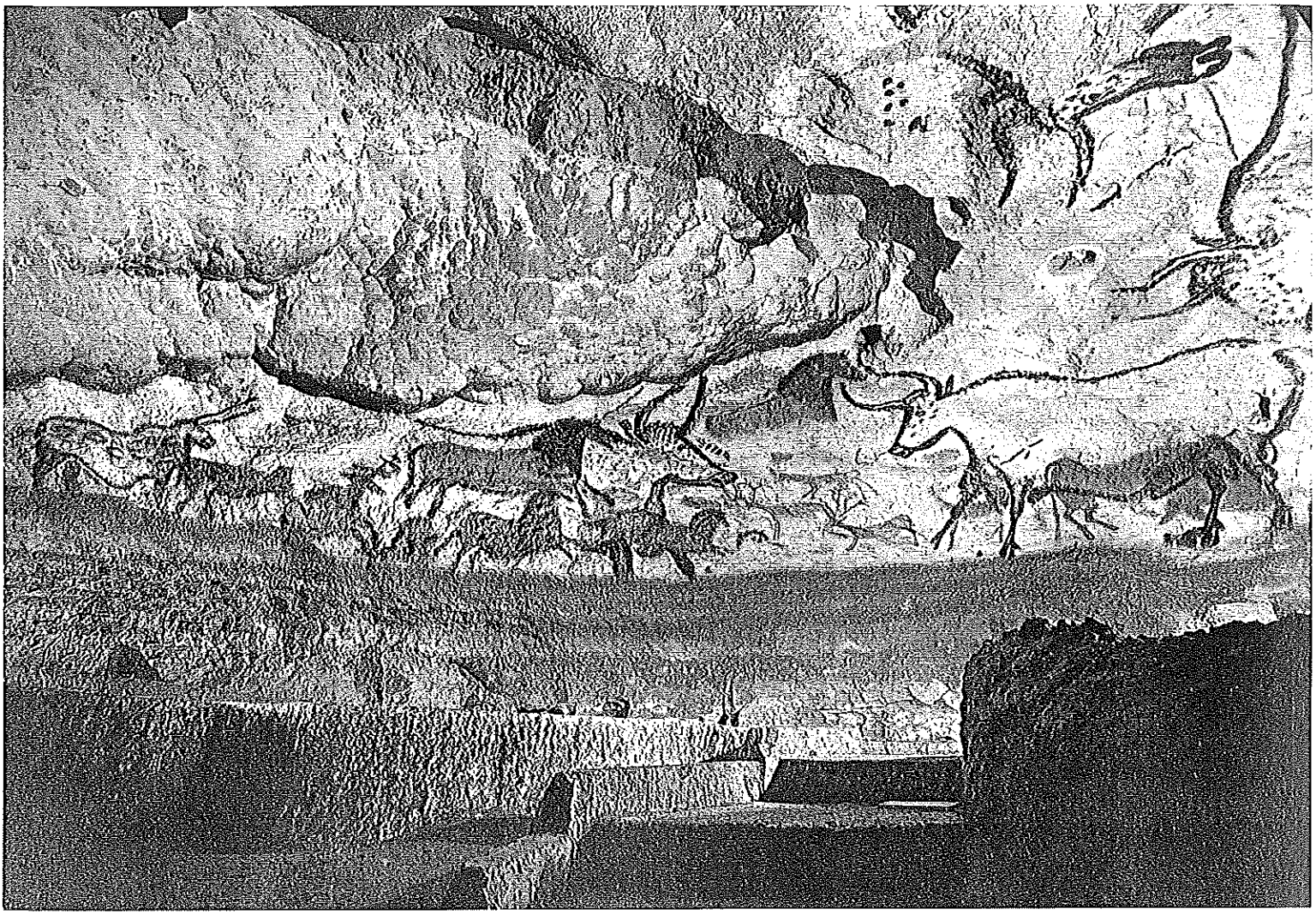
Position of the paintings and incised figures

SCALE: 5 millimeters represent 1 meter



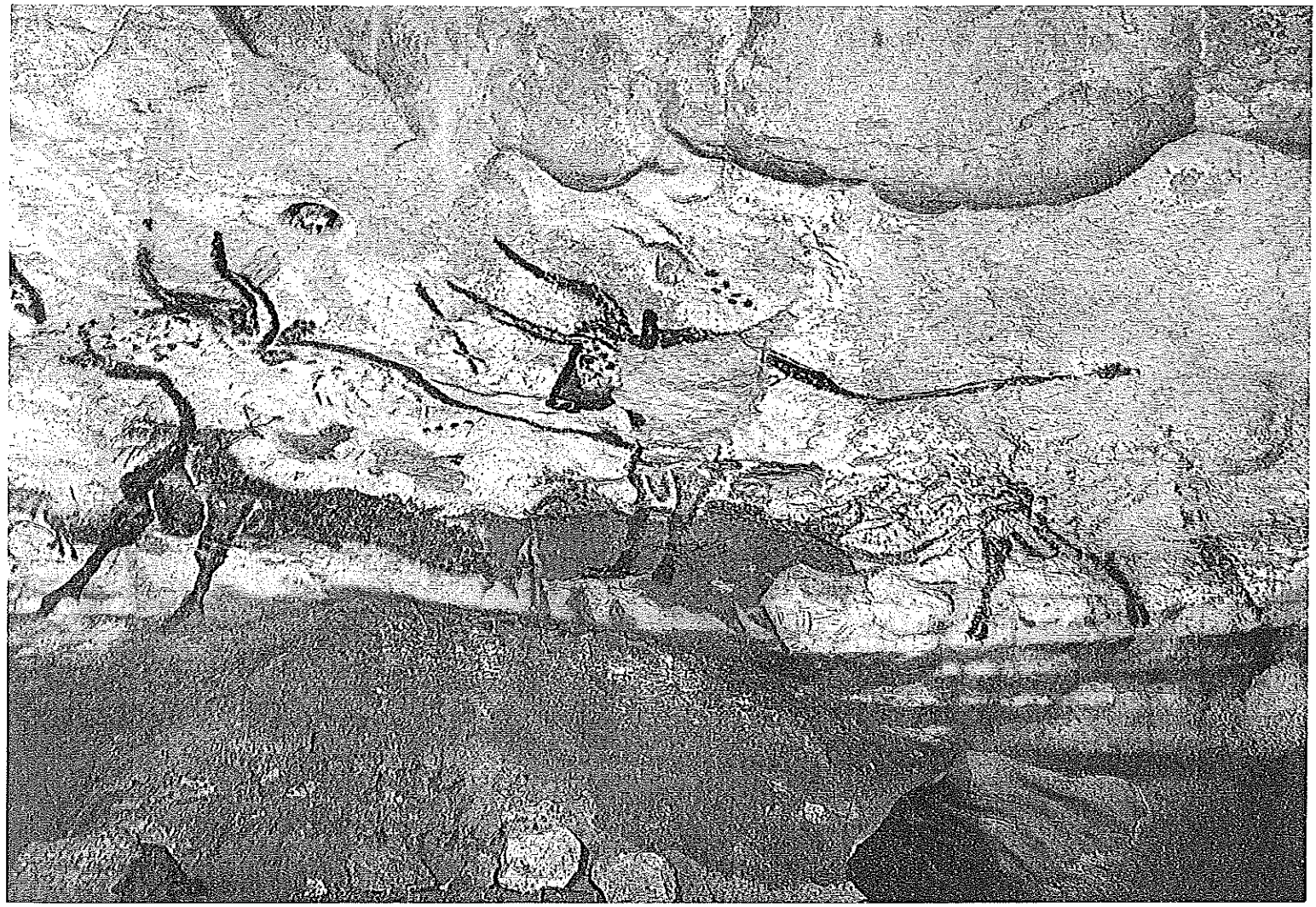
GENERAL VIEW OF THE MAIN HALL OR HALL OF THE BULLS.

These steps bring us face to face
with one of the earliest and mightiest creations of man:
the fabulous world of the Lascaux Cave.



LEFT WALL OF THE HALL OF THE BULLS.

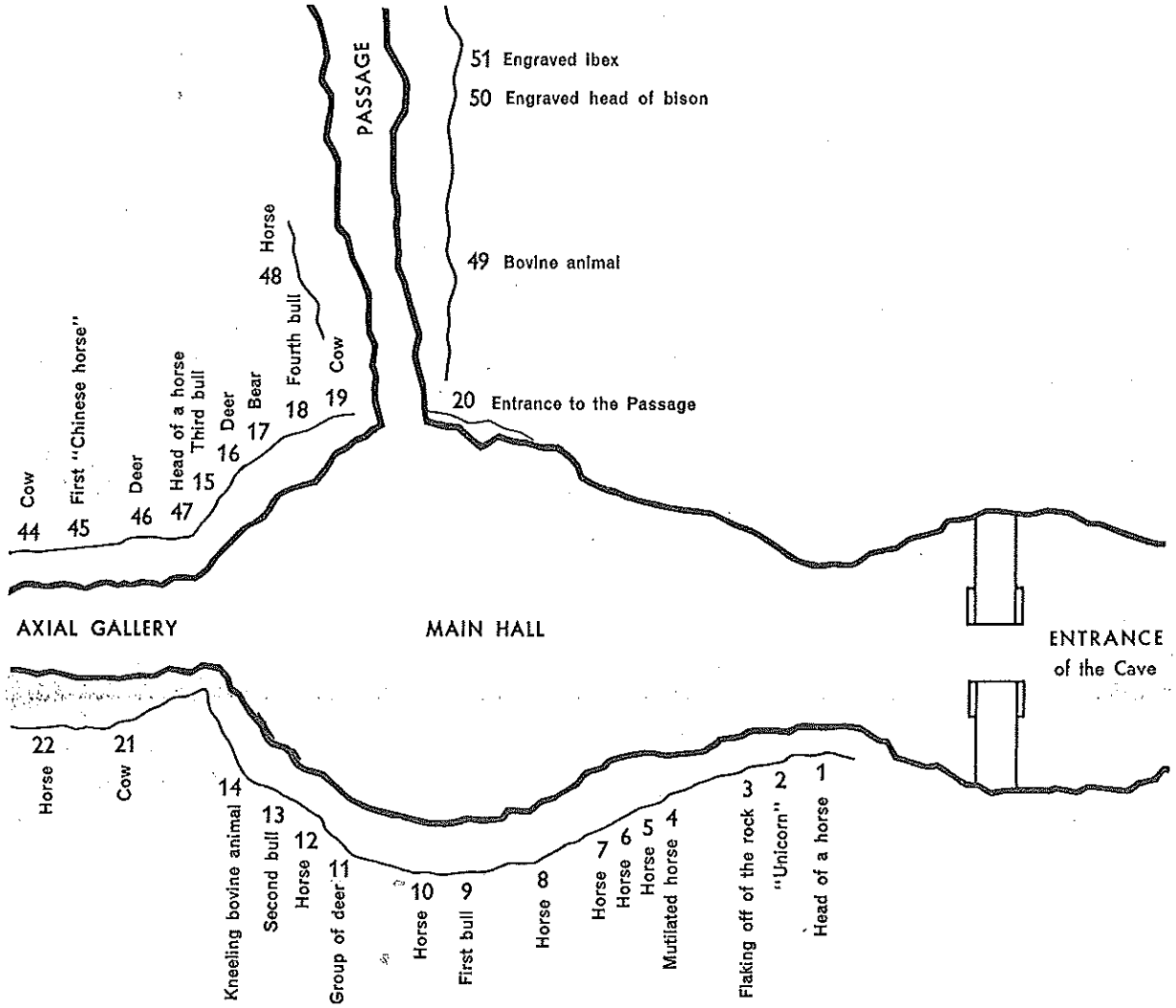
At the entrance of the Hall of the Bulls
the Unicorn initiates
a monumental animal dance of Bulls, Horses and Deer.

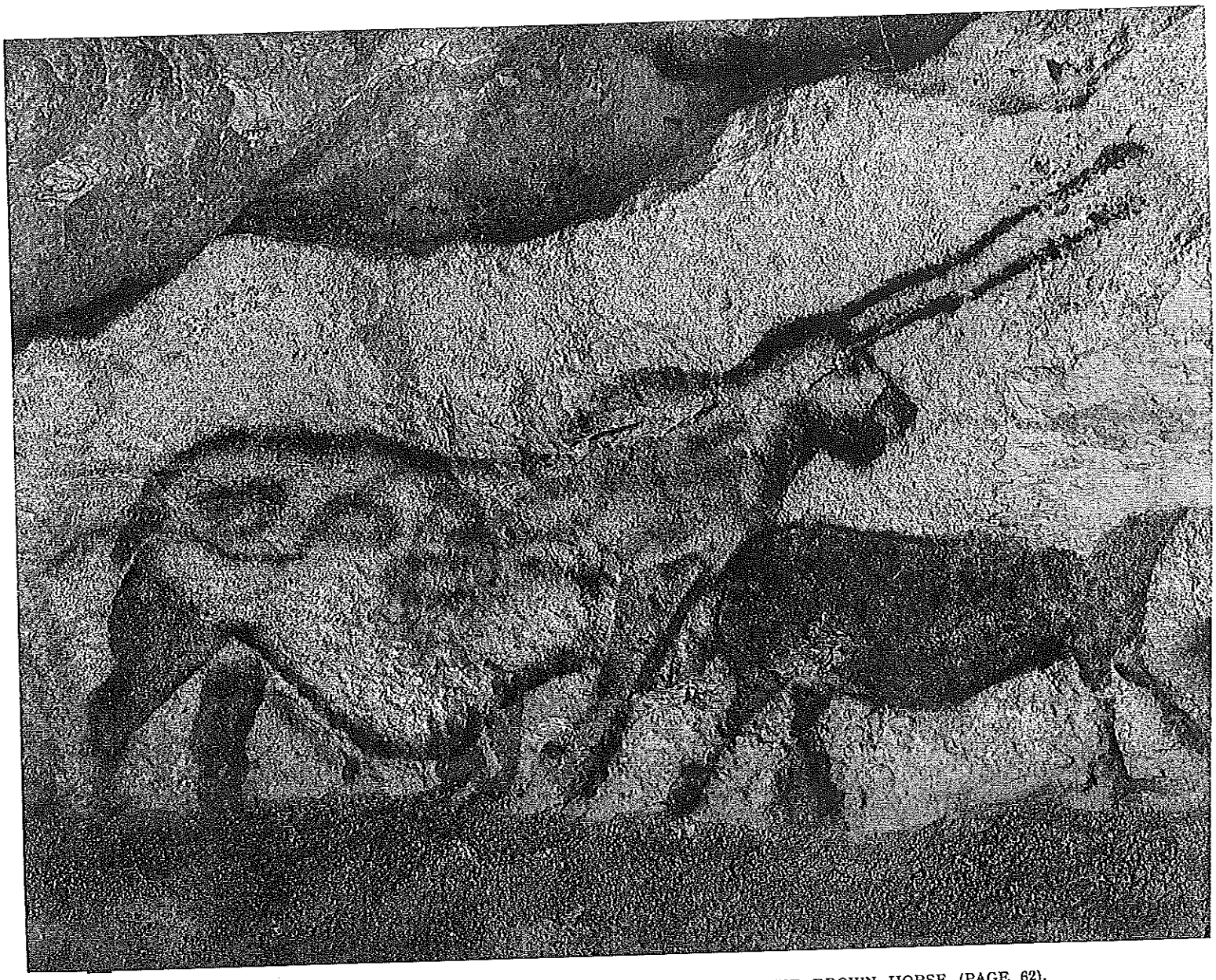


RIGHT WALL OF THE HALL OF THE BULLS.

Line and color have been left miraculously untouched
by passing ages. Our response
to this art is so direct that we lose all idea of time.

PLAN OF THE MAIN HALL

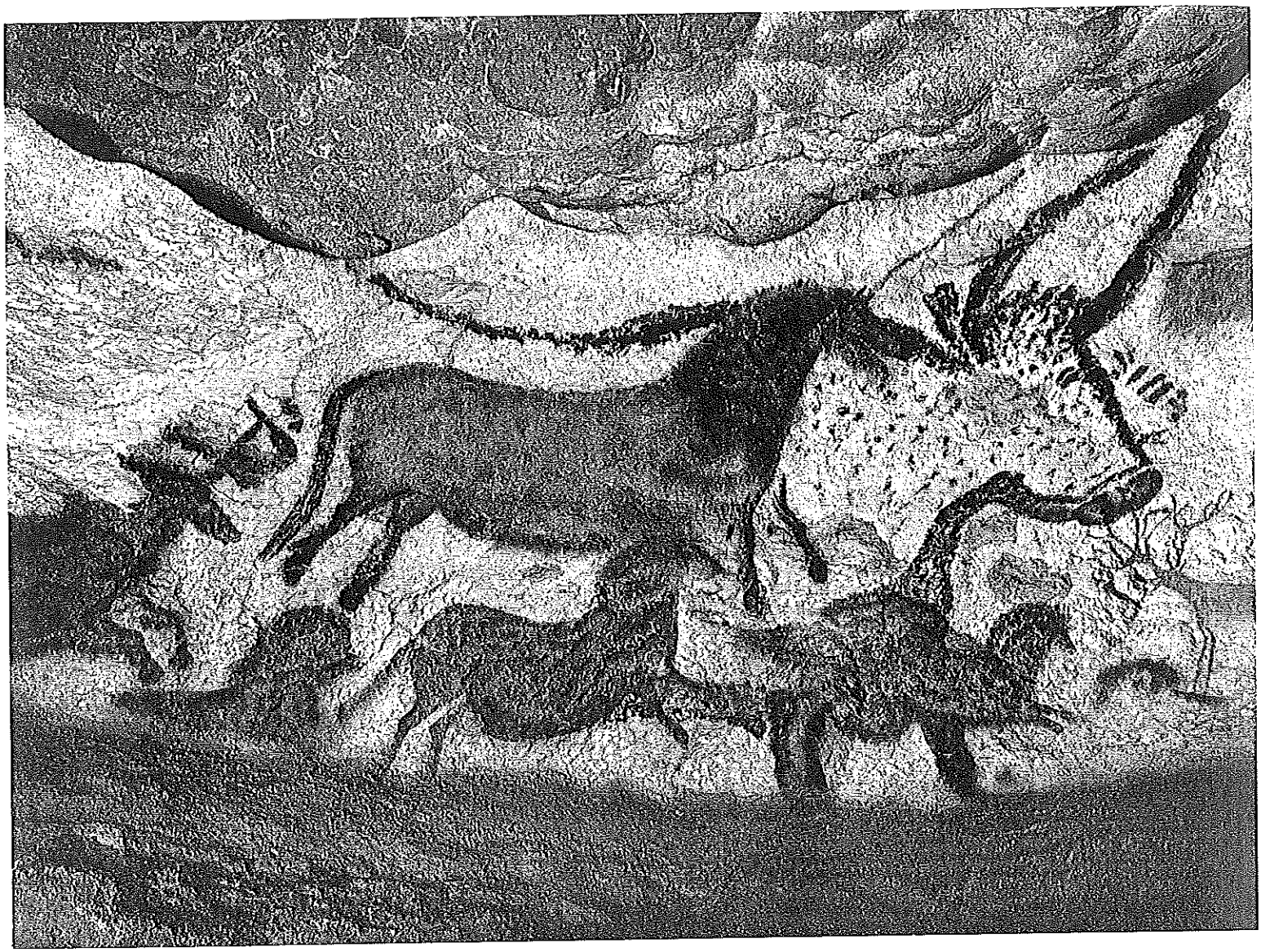




IMAGINARY ANIMAL ("THE UNICORN") (LENGTH: 8 FEET) AND DETERIORATED BROWN HORSE (PAGE 62). MAIN HALL, LEFT WALL. Nos. 2 and 4.

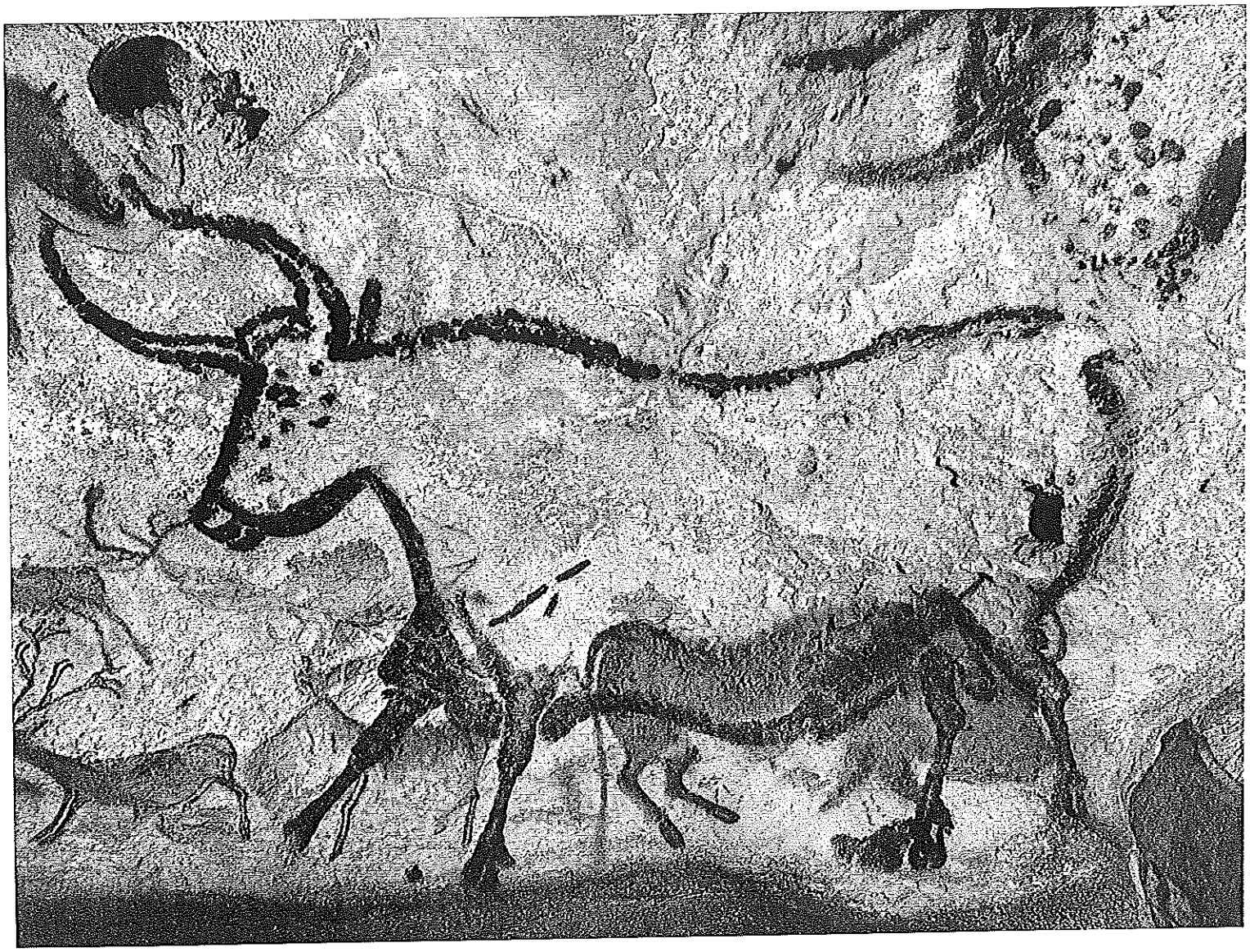
The Site of our Birthplace

A marvel for that visitor who journeys thither from the modern cities of these industrial times; but still more a marvel in the eyes of the men who ordered its magnificence: such appears the Lascaux Cave, which transports us back to those dim, lost moments when the human voice first began to make itself heard. This, then, is our birthplace. But it has not been fittingly remembered, nor given the renown it deserves. It would seem that our prehistorians sin through excessive modesty: they have been chary of praise for a discovery... made in consequence of some youngsters' curiosity.



FIRST BULL (HEIGHT FROM KNEE: 10′ 3″), RED HORSE AND BROWN HORSES (PAGE 59).
MAIN HALL, LEFT WALL. No. 9.

However, we cannot separate these paintings from their authors nor, generally, from the men of whom prehistorians, with the necessarily limited means at their disposal, have given us a sketchy idea. Making our way into the grotto, we have the feeling that, under unusual circumstances, we have slipped far below the earth's surface, are wandering à la recherche du temps perdu. *A vain search, true enough; nothing will ever enable us really to relive this past, irretrievably sunk in the night. And vain in the sense that human desire is never wholly satisfied, since it is forever a straining towards a fugitive goal. But the quest, at least, is possible, and we must recognize whither we strain. Little would it matter what those dead ancestors bequeathed to posterity were it not that we hoped to make them, if for only one fleeting instant, live again in ourselves.*

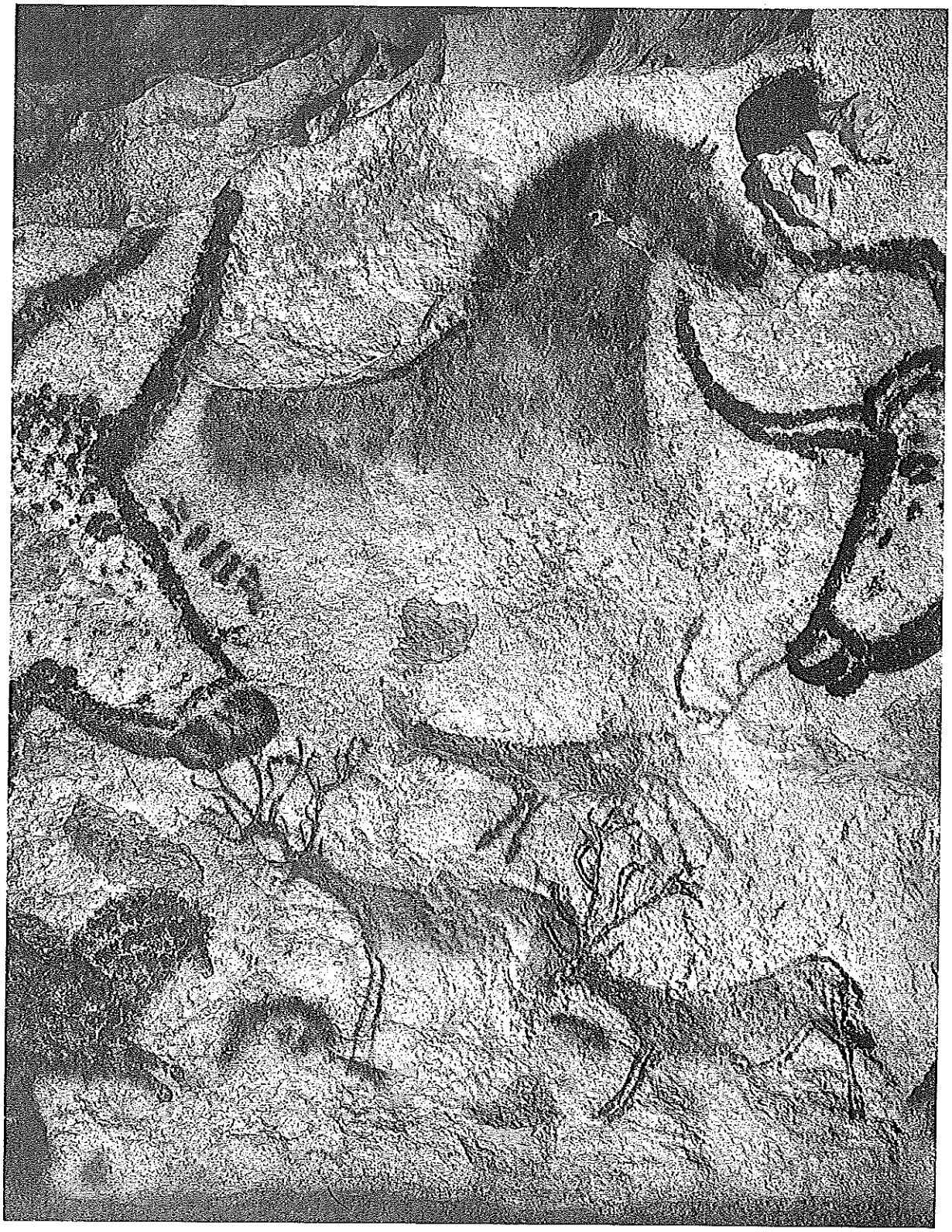


SECOND BULL (LENGTH: 11′ 6″) (PAGE 61); UNDERNEATH THE BULL, A KNEELING BOVINE ANIMAL (PAGE 62). MAIN HALL, LEFT WALL. No. 13.

THE MAIN HALL

Rid of illusions, with our thoughts clear, free of impatience, we must bear in mind that these steps, leading down to subterranean Lascaux, are guiding our footsteps over ground trod by remote beings who had scarcely emerged from the dark condition of what is animal.

These steps lead—through bronze doors recently installed to protect the paintings from the outside air—into a vast elongated Hall. We cannot be sure, however, whether it was by this side prehistoric men used to enter the Cave. They may have come in from the outside by way of an entry that has since disappeared; perhaps, as Abbé Breuil



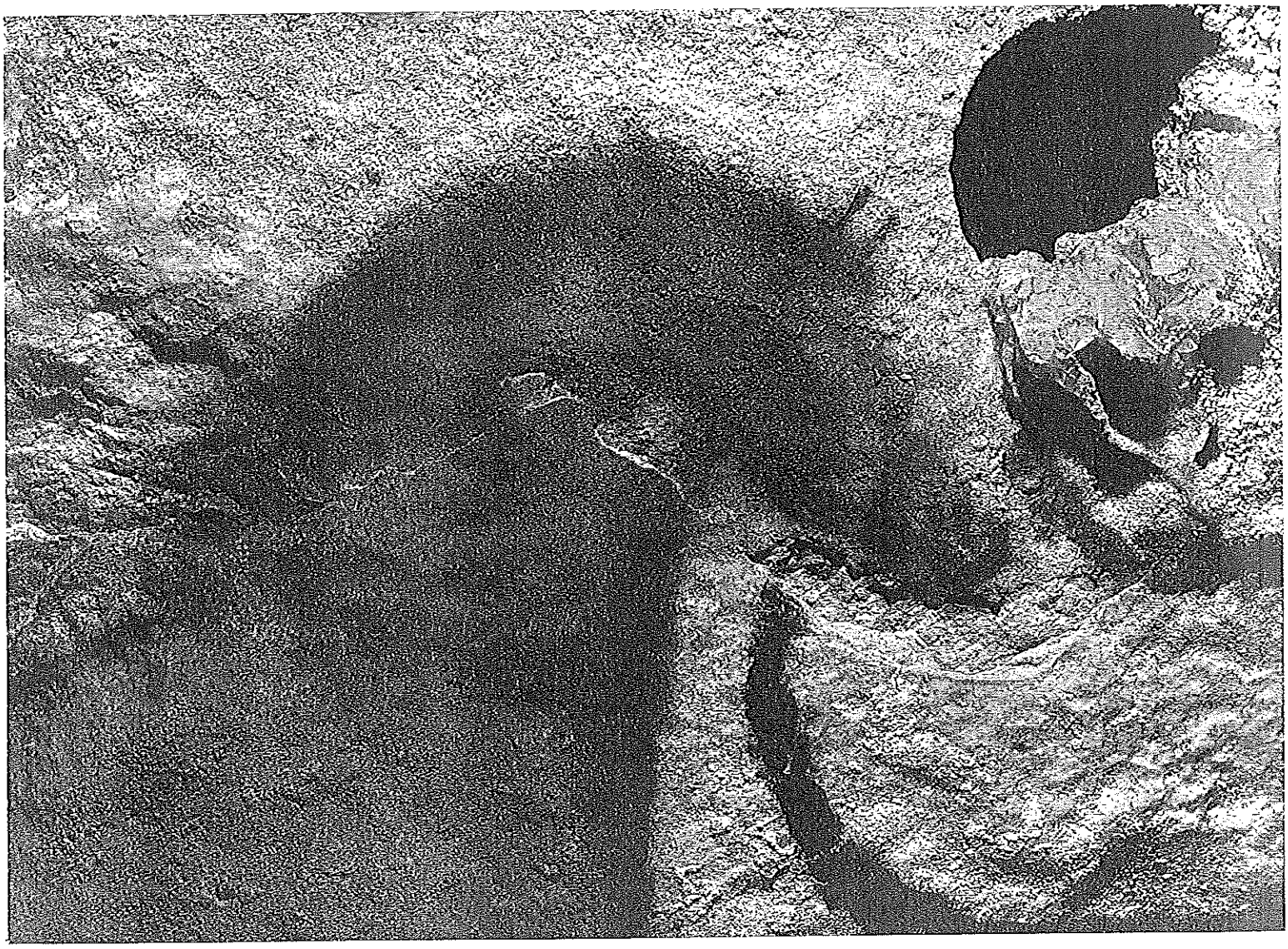
DETAIL OF THE LEFT WALL OF THE MAIN HALL, BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND BULLS.
Nos. 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13.

suggests, that entry lay "on the right, towards the Well". But with Breuil we hasten to add that we can do no more than conjecture upon that former entrance's general location. Nevertheless, no matter from what side they entered it, the Main Hall, with its spacious dimensions, with the wealth and splendor of its paintings, was certainly for them, as it is for us, the most important part of the Cave. That Hall measures some thirty feet across and about one hundred deep, but the disposition, the ordering of the indeed rather chaotic frieze stretching around the walls and up on to the ceiling overhead (figs. p. 45/47) gives the impression of a kind of rotunda which, at the end we have just entered, might once have been completely open. By pure luck, that open space was sealed shut, pure luck protected this Hall against deterioration. So noble are its natural proportions, one cannot imagine any change that might have improved them. There is no hall decorated with paintings that has been more successfully, more triumphantly arranged. Lascaux has been called "the prehistoric Sistine Chapel" (earlier, the same phrase had been applied to Altamira); but to my view, the Sistine, whose figures to be sure are more dramatic, suggests a more conventional conception, has a more static aspect: charm and the unexpected belong to Lascaux. One enters the Cave at a side of the northern end of this Hall: opposite one extends a long frieze of animals dominated by four gigantic bulls. These astonishing figures—one of them measures above five yards long (fig. p. 61)—spread out end to end, follow round the wall, and circle back along the left. Halfway down the opposite wall, a long relatively straight passageway leads out of the Hall, without however interrupting the lively march of the frieze. The latter is thickly peopled with animals covering all the rock surface available. The regularity of its development is really owing to the natural regularity of the surface that has been painted: relatively smooth, partially coated from the beginning by a whitish layer of calcite, that surface begins waist-high on the wall and, moving from left to right, widens vertically—but one barely notices that the width of painted area is greater on the right. (Finishing in an oval dome, the ceiling lifts well above the wall's smooth part, and has an irregular surface somewhat like the inside of a nutshell.) This circular disposition of surface suitable for painting governed in advance the general shape the frieze would take and at the same time facilitated the distribution of the figures. Thus, the men who succeeded one another at the task of painting them, while never individually having the overall scheme in mind, spontaneously composed its elements and the naturally unified grouping was finally realized. From all appearances, they did their painting not all at once but over an extended period, and as at the time there was no reason for not doing so, they often crowded over upon already painted areas—whence the overlapping and superimposing—; yet, it was only rarely they would disturb anything which, painted at an earlier date, contributed to the Hall's magnificence.

If we would attempt to recapture the atmosphere in this extraordinary Hall at the time of its first inhabitants, we should imagine a certain number, doubtless upon some occasions a great number, of little grease-burning sandstone lamps whose luminous effect probably approached that of wax candles burning at night in a church. As a matter

HEAD OF FIRST BULL (PAGE 61). MAIN HALL, LEFT WALL. No. 9.

HEAD OF SECOND BULL (PAGE 61). MAIN HALL, LEFT WALL. No. 13.



RED HORSE, DETAIL (PAGE 59). MAIN HALL, LEFT WALL. No. 12.

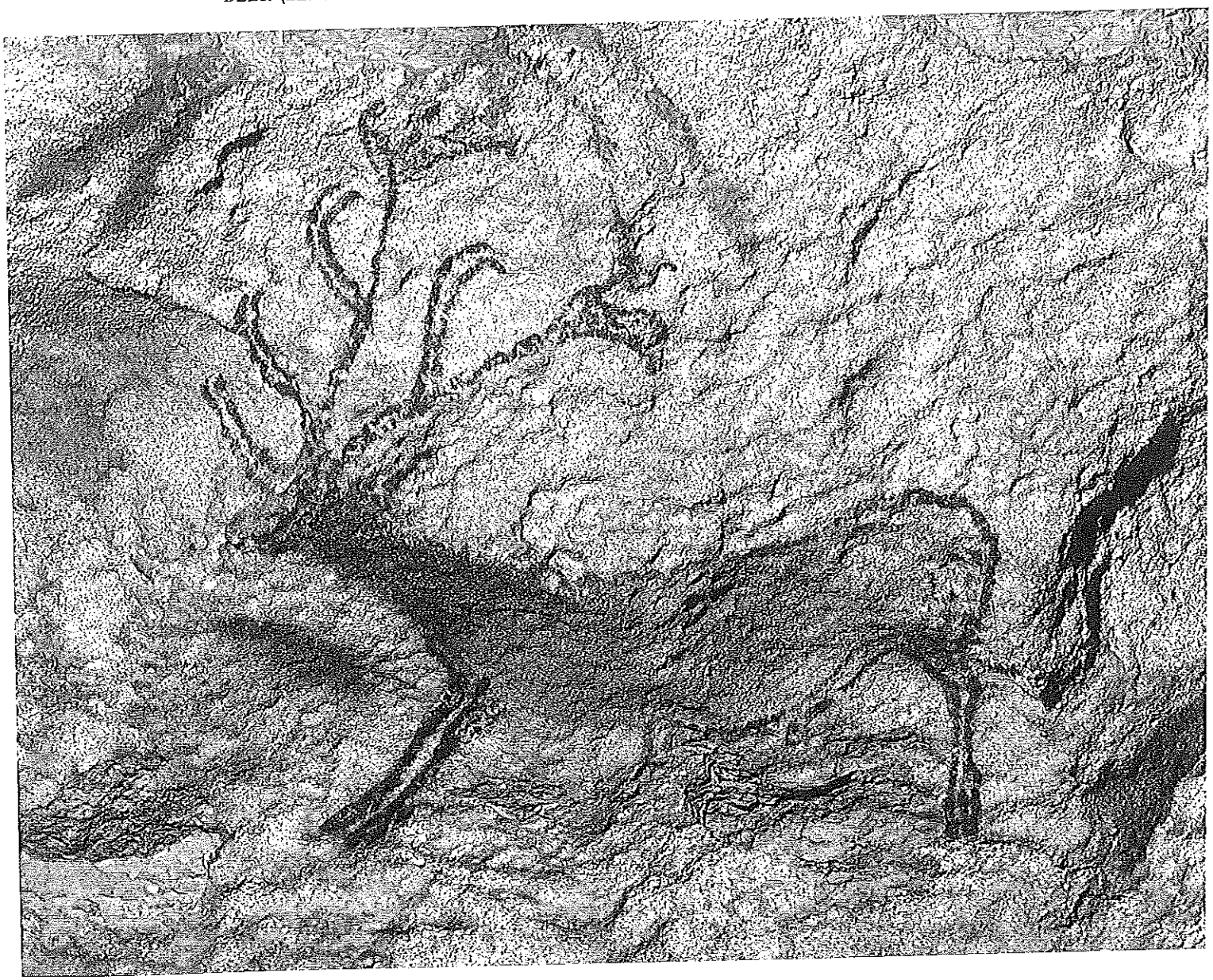
of fact, I think that the present lighting in the Cave (rather subdued, and this for a number of reasons, foremost amongst which would be the fear of eventual damage that might be provoked by the drying effect of the heat strong lamps would generate) differs little from what it must have been in the Reindeer Age when large gatherings collected in the Main Hall. But electric light is harsh and, in a way, lifeless; the milder wavering flames of candles is more like the light paleolithic lamps gave off.

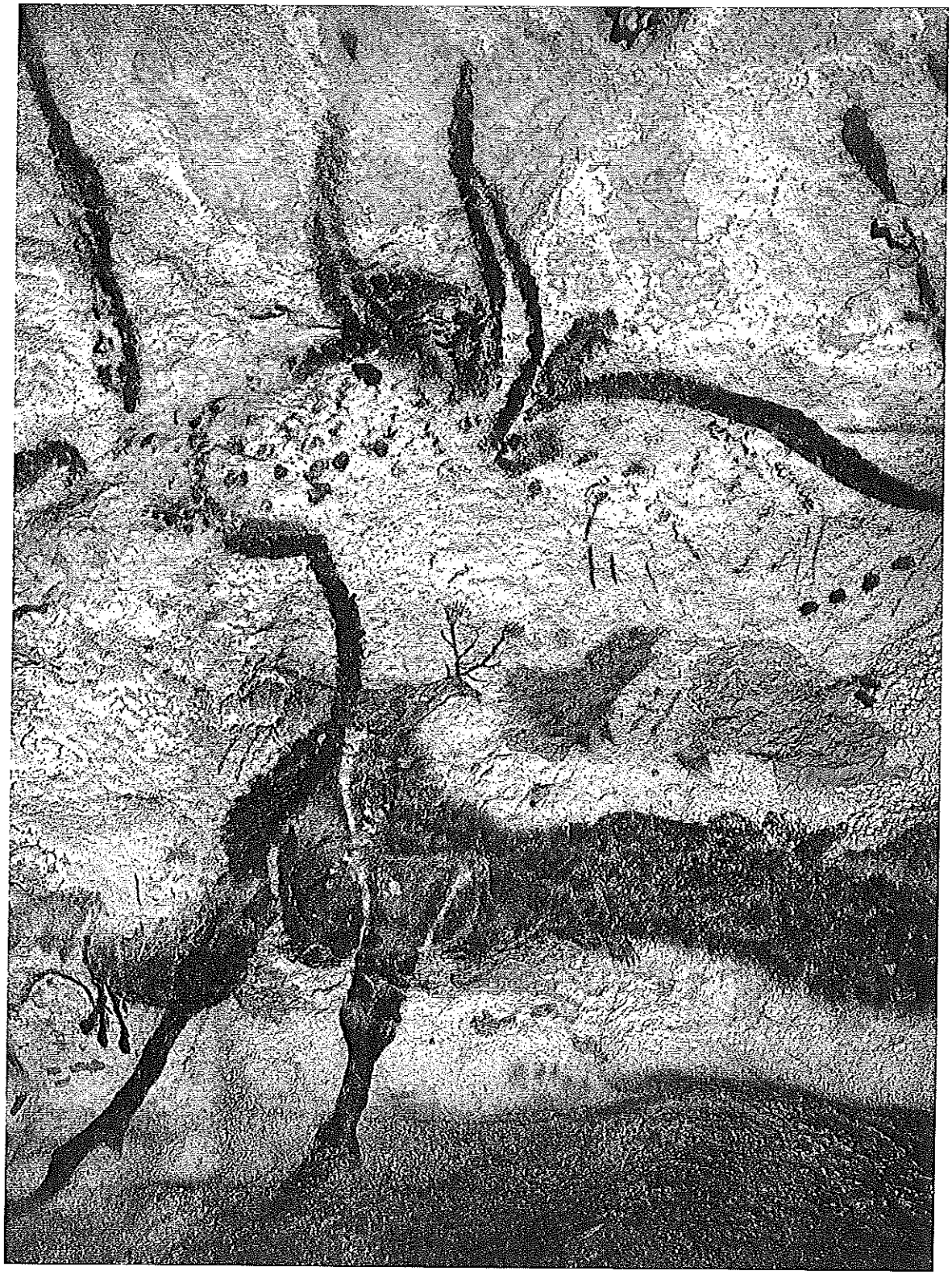
We know nothing whatever of those gatherings in a Hall which contains space for, let us say, a hundred persons, even a few more if crowded together. But we may suppose that the painted caverns, which were not used for dwelling places (only those parts near freely circulating air sometimes housed permanent occupants), exerted a powerful attraction. All men share an instinctive dread and awe of complete darkness. That terror

is "sacred", obscure light suggests what is religious: the Cavern's aspect intensified the impression of magical power, of penetration into an inaccessible domain which, at that time, painting strove to create. The caves still have about them something that seizes, spellbinds the visitor, quickens his pulse: these places are still able to cause an inner distress not at all unlike the anguish connected with sacred rites. (Indeed, in Haiti ancient caves are employed to this day for the mysterious ceremonies of Voodoo.)

To be successful, the dread-inspiring spell the painter sought to cast did not, however, require large audiences. Figures were often painted (or graved) in galleries too narrow to admit a sizable assembly; and sometimes—as for example in the "Room of the

DEER (LENGTH: 28 INCHES) (PAGE 62). MAIN HALL, LEFT WALL. No. 11.





THIRD BULL, DETAIL (TOTAL LENGTH: 12′ 6″) (PAGE 61).
MAIN HALL, RIGHT WALL. No. 15.

DEER (LENGTH: 28 INCHES), DETAIL OF PLATE ON PAGE 58. MAIN HALL, RIGHT WALL. No. 16.

Felines" at Lascaux—the artist worked in recesses and nooks so cramped that one man has trouble edging his way inside... But large numbers probably met in Lascaux' Main Hall, so capable by itself of arousing feelings of religious dread. At any rate, we must remark the painters' apparently constant concern to leave intact an already simple and redoubtable majesty, forcefully expressed by the huge bulls overmastering the sanctuary.

Nothing added later ever altered this scheme. Although partly obscuring one bull's flanks, a series of brown horses galloping along the left wall (figs. p. 45/46, 50 and 52) nevertheless heightens the line of that bull's back. One fine red horse with a fluffy black mane (figs. p. 52 and 56) is so placed that the tips of its nostrils lie between the horns of the second bull. But only the horse's head and forequarters have been painted, and the figure halts at the level of the first bull's horns. (Abbé Breuil is inclined to think it was

HEAD OF FOURTH BULL (PAGE 61). MAIN HALL, RIGHT WALL. No. 18.

left incomplete to avoid trespassing upon the pre-existing bull). That explanation may hold true in other cases, for the same arrangement recurs frequently at Lascaux. Here, in the Main Hall, elements are subordinated to the larger effect—which, to be sure, did not come entirely out until many years had passed: it grew slowly out of the composition plotted by the four bulls (figs. p. 45/47, 50/55, 58, 60 and 61).

One ought not identify this calculation with the modern artist's more deliberate, more methodic attack. In a sense, we might even be able to discern something animal in the blind sureness wherewith the Lascaux painters achieved without concerting this

FOURTH BULL (LENGTH: 18′ 4″) (PAGE 53); BELOW, RED COW FOLLOWED BY HER CALF (PAGE 62). MAIN HALL, RIGHT WALL. No. 18.[b]

result. Even the heavy red cattle figures (figs. p. 46/47, 51 and 61)—painted, or repainted afterwards, to right and left of the Gallery's entrance—which encroach upon the bulls' hoofs, legs and chests, without at all spoiling the balanced delicacy of the ensemble, increase the impression of a great number (as though these walls were intended to recreate a dream of unbounded plenty; these red animals also add to the diversity of what is represented in the Hall: the cow on the right is followed by a calf (fig. p. 61), and (fig. p. 51) the bull on the left sinks to its knees to die). Most of the left wall's deer (figs. p. 52, 57 and 128), whose slender elegance relieves the massive composition, were carefully spared during the painting of the bulls; of the four in the group, only one half disappears beneath the bulk of the second bull. Later, another was further worked over: its body, re-done in bistre, was partly outlined in black, and the head, neck and antlers were darkened. Was this an effort to give the animal a more natural air? Probably; and the change simultaneously enriched an already strikingly diverse composition.

One of the few figures seriously affected by later additions is the little sepia bear swallowed up in the black of the third bull's chest. Apart from its head, emerging above the bull, and one paw, showing below it, the rest of the bear, although covered over, is still conveyed by the rock's relief, originally employed to heighten the bear's outline (figs. p. 47 and 58). An exceedingly archaic horse, described simply in line (it is one of the Cave's earliest paintings), without being blotted out, was covered by the indeterminable horned animal (fig. p. 49) to the left of the entrance to the Hall.

This last figure deserves particular attention. By no means amongst the finest, it is surely one of the Cave's strangest paintings. While usually called "The Unicorn", the two long lines protruding from the creature's head do not correspond to the legendary creature's single horn. Commentators have related this animal to other Reindeer Age imaginary figures, such as the "Sorcerer" (or god) of the Trois-Frères (p. 120 and 135), but all these composite figures are part human, part animal. Would "The Unicorn" be a disguised human? The explanation seems gratuitous, for when in the art of these remote ages the human being is concealed behind an animal mask, whatever is distinctively human about him (his legs, for example) is unequivocally rendered. The Lascaux "Unicorn", resembling nothing at all, is animal from top to bottom (figs. p. 30, 45, 46 and 49).

"In its heaviness of body and of feet," writes Abbé Breuil, "it resembles some member of the cattle family or a rhinoceros; the stubby tail would rather indicate the latter; the flanks are marked with large O-shaped spots, for such a weighty body the neck and head are ridiculously undersized; the square muzzle recalls a feline's; from its forehead thrust forward two rectilinear rods, each ending in a bulb or tuft, and resembling the horns of no animal, unless it would be, as Miss Bates has suggested, the *pantholops* of Tibet..."

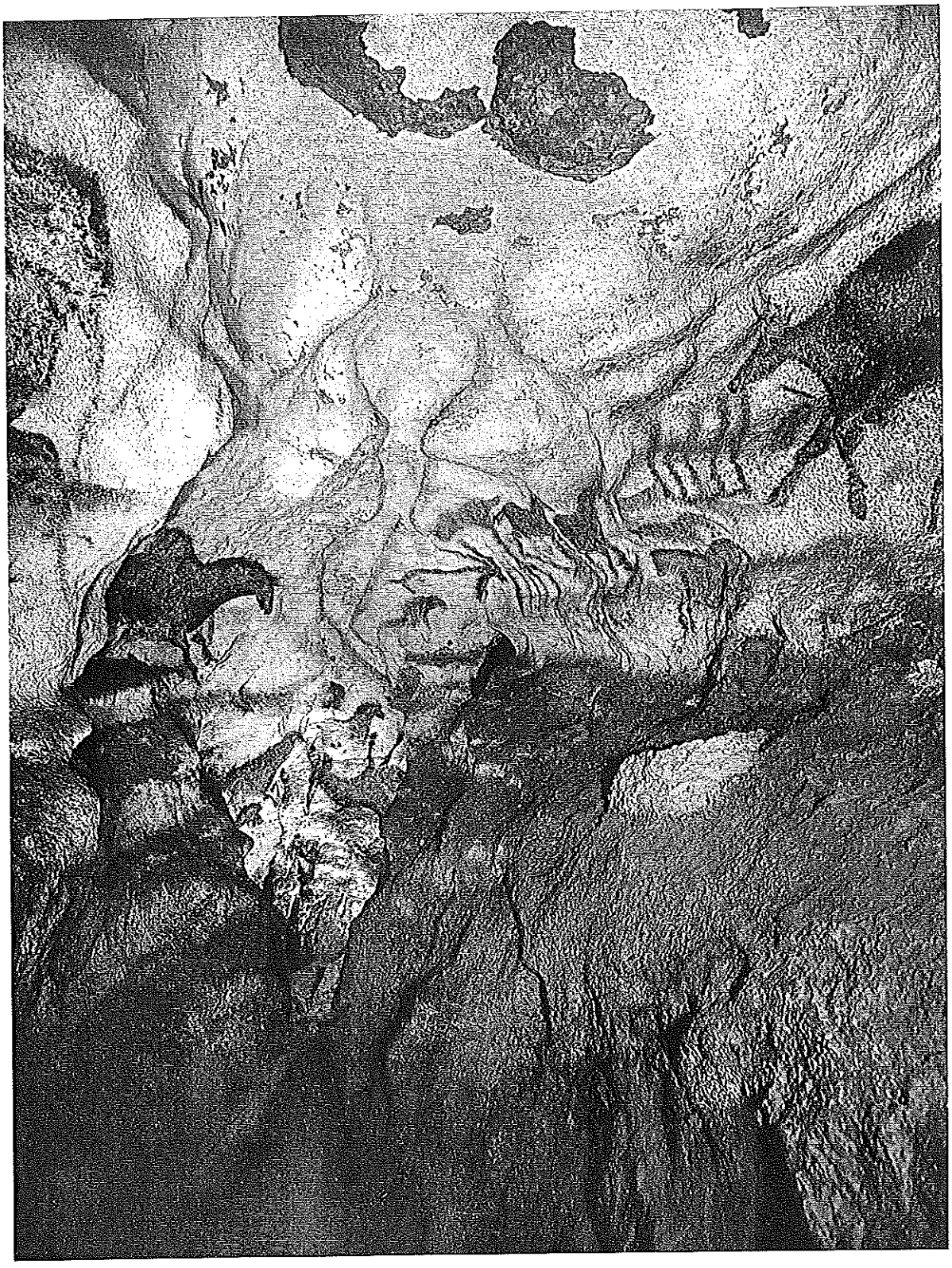
To this we can add only that the "Unicorn" has no apparent connection with magic and that, in this naturalistic art, so frequently thought to be motivated by chiefly material, "economic" considerations, it belongs to the sphere of fantasy, of dream, controlled by neither hunger nor the real world. Even were the disguise hypothesis

to be taken seriously, we must view the "Unicorn" as some supernatural creature born of religious imagination. It is not the disguise of a hunter undertaking to decoy the game he is stalking. It would be pointless to introduce, between painting and fiction, an intermediary image, that of a costume camouflaging one or more men. Whatever the case may be, in the light of this imaginary form we can no longer insist that all of this period's animal figures were constantly and necessarily based upon actual living counterparts: the impulse behind the figures is not solely the desire of a successful hunt. If some element other than hunger, if play, if dream slipped its way into the painting of the Cave, should we not decidedly guard against an idea which would turn Lascaux into a triumph of logic, which would make short shrift of that free impulse, that airy gesture, essentially motivated by nothing, suggested by fantasy, which, when missing from art, leaves art bereft of charm?

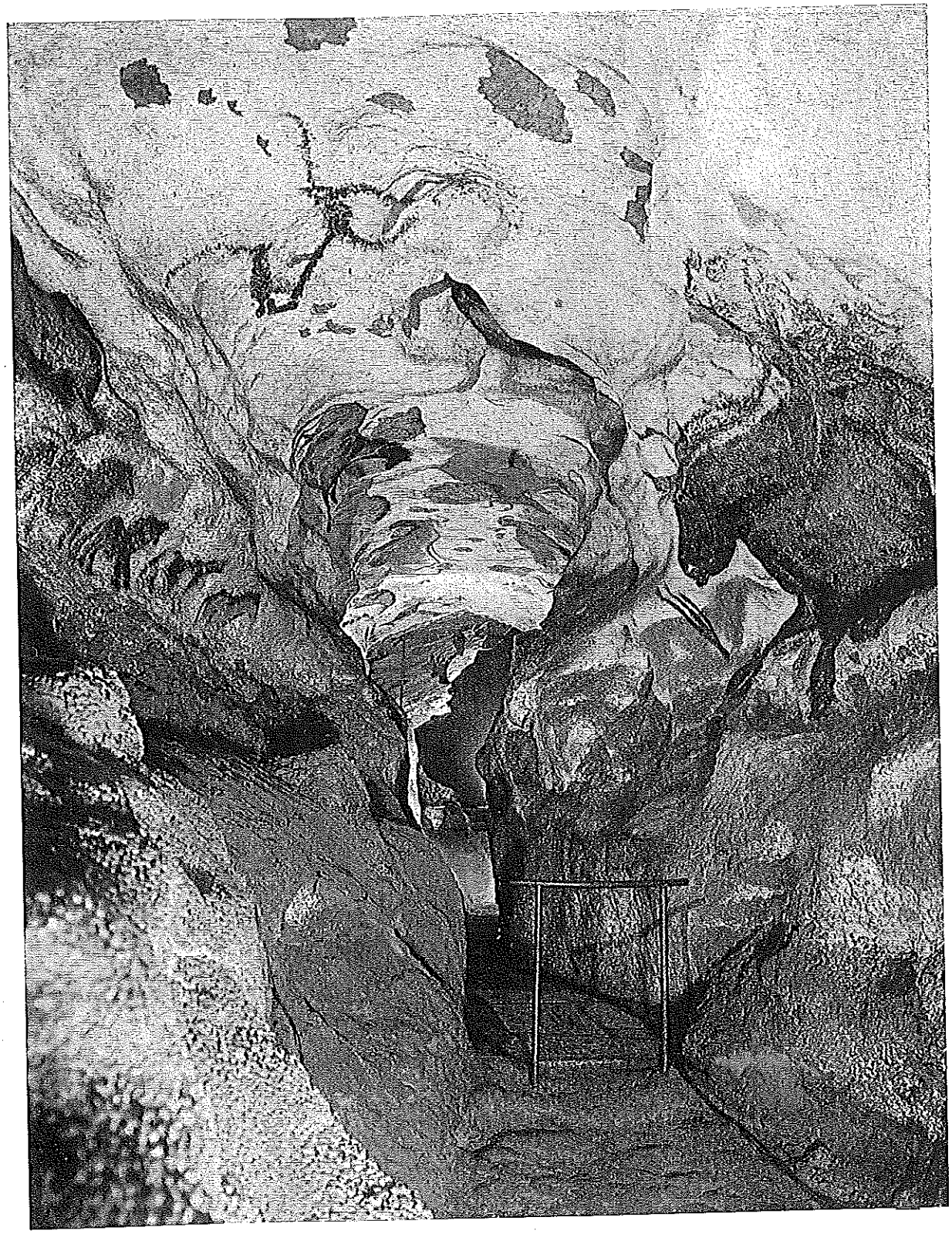
As we descend the stairs into the Cave, this "Unicorn" is the first figure that meets our eyes. The earlier black horse's head on the left is isolated and hardly discernible. It is not blended into the vast movement of the overall scheme, whereas the "Unicorn" plainly belongs to this solemn host which, in a sense, violently animates the Hall, which, directly he enters, brings the visitor to an astounded, breathless halt. For suddenly, before his eyes, the shrouded depths of ages stand bare, revealed, brought vibrantly to life in these mute pictures. The "Unicorn"—painted, Abbé Breuil feels, at the same time the bulls were—participates in the spirited composition consolidated and magnified by the bulls: the "Unicorn" amplifies it, complements it, enriches it with a touch of the strange, and with the "Unicorn" the throng's onrush begins; it perfects the concentration of savage existence which fills the teeming Hall and confers upon it an implicit plenitude; shoulder to shoulder with these majestic figures, the "Unicorn's" utter inscrutability, its utter foreignness make it only the more divine.

Leaving the Main Hall, we enter the Axial Gallery,
a long dead-end corridor
whose rocky surfaces everywhere teem with life.
Beside the entrance an inspired tangle of figures forms one
of the most striking compositions in all art.

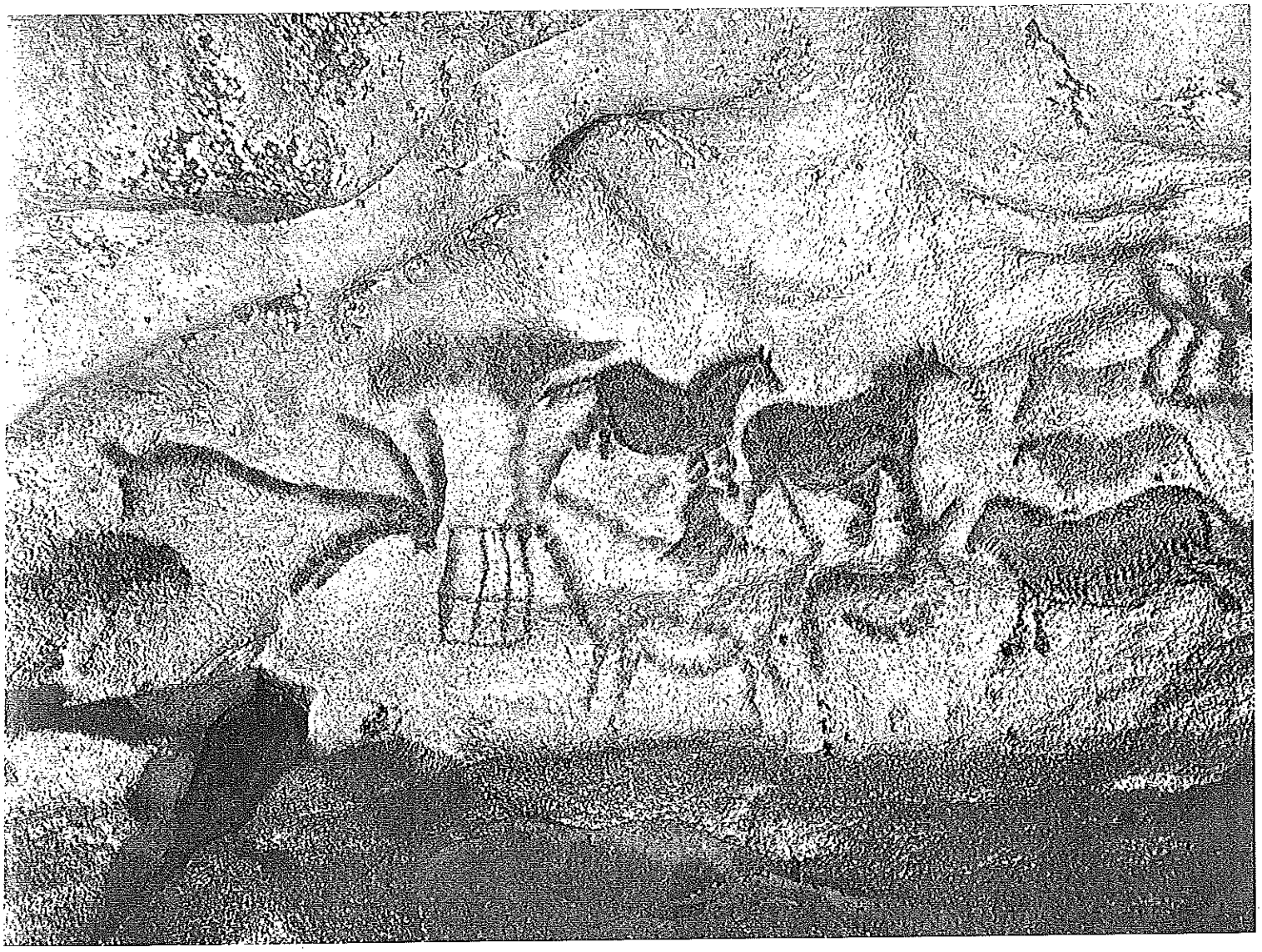
ENTRANCE OF THE AXIAL GALLERY, SEEN FROM THE MAIN HALL.



VIEW OF THE FAR END OF THE AXIAL GALLERY.

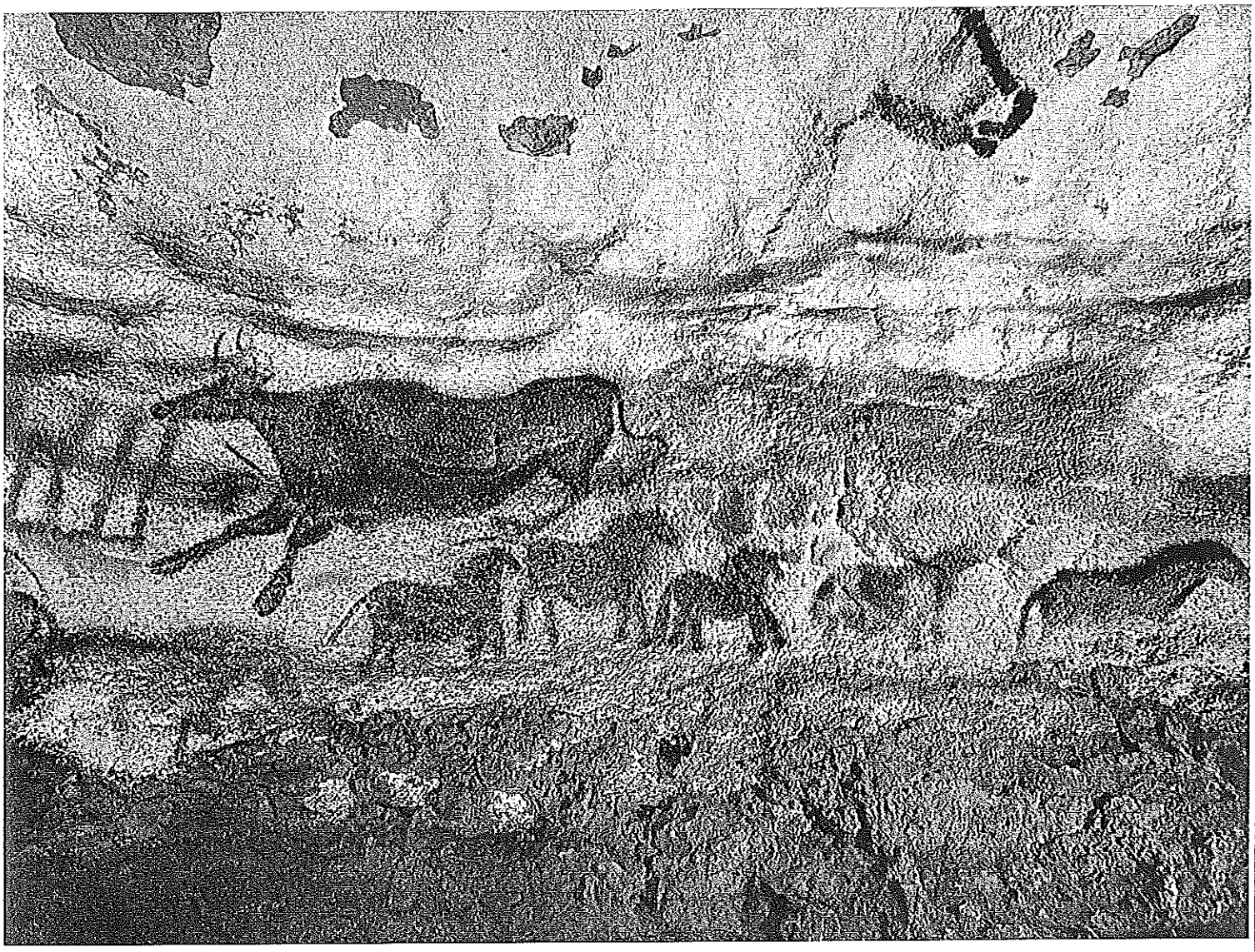


ENTRANCE TO THE AXIAL GALLERY, SEEN FROM THE FAR END.



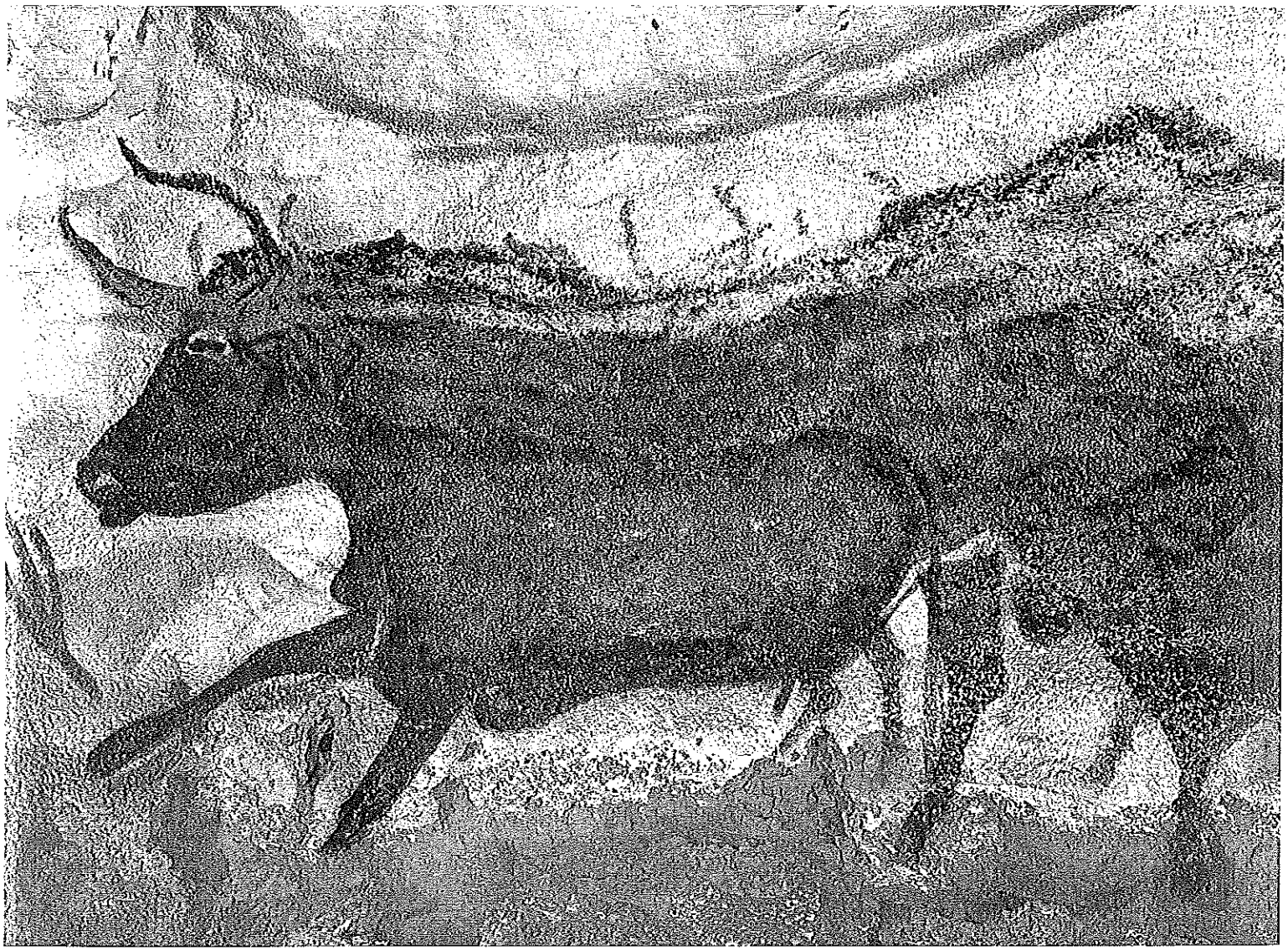
RIGHT WALL OF THE AXIAL GALLERY.

A long frieze
of little horses and ibexes with a sprightly cow
leaping over their heads.



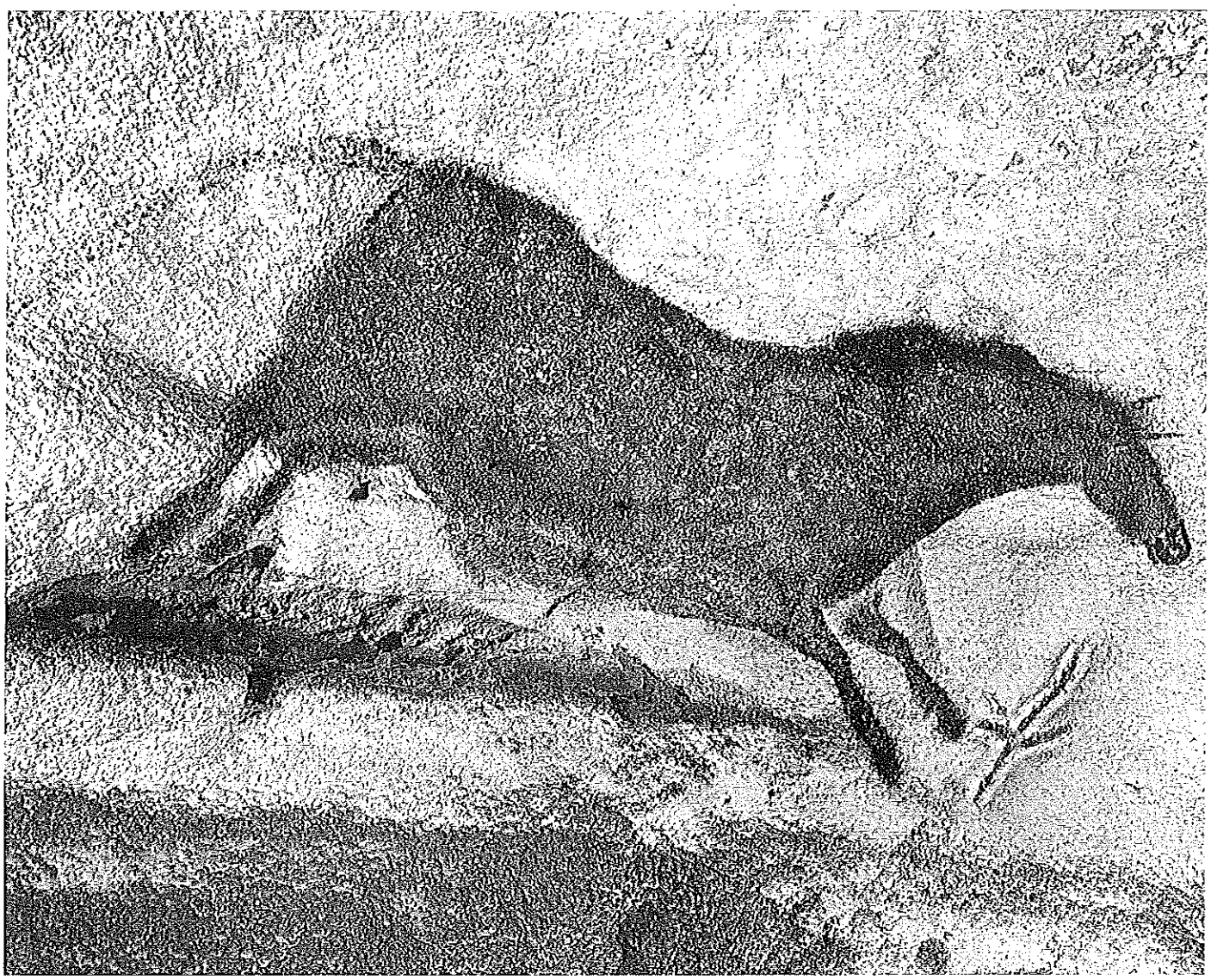
RIGHT WALL OF THE AXIAL GALLERY.

The rich texture,
variety and finesse of the colors
give this scene a gemlike sparkle.



LEFT WALL OF THE AXIAL GALLERY.

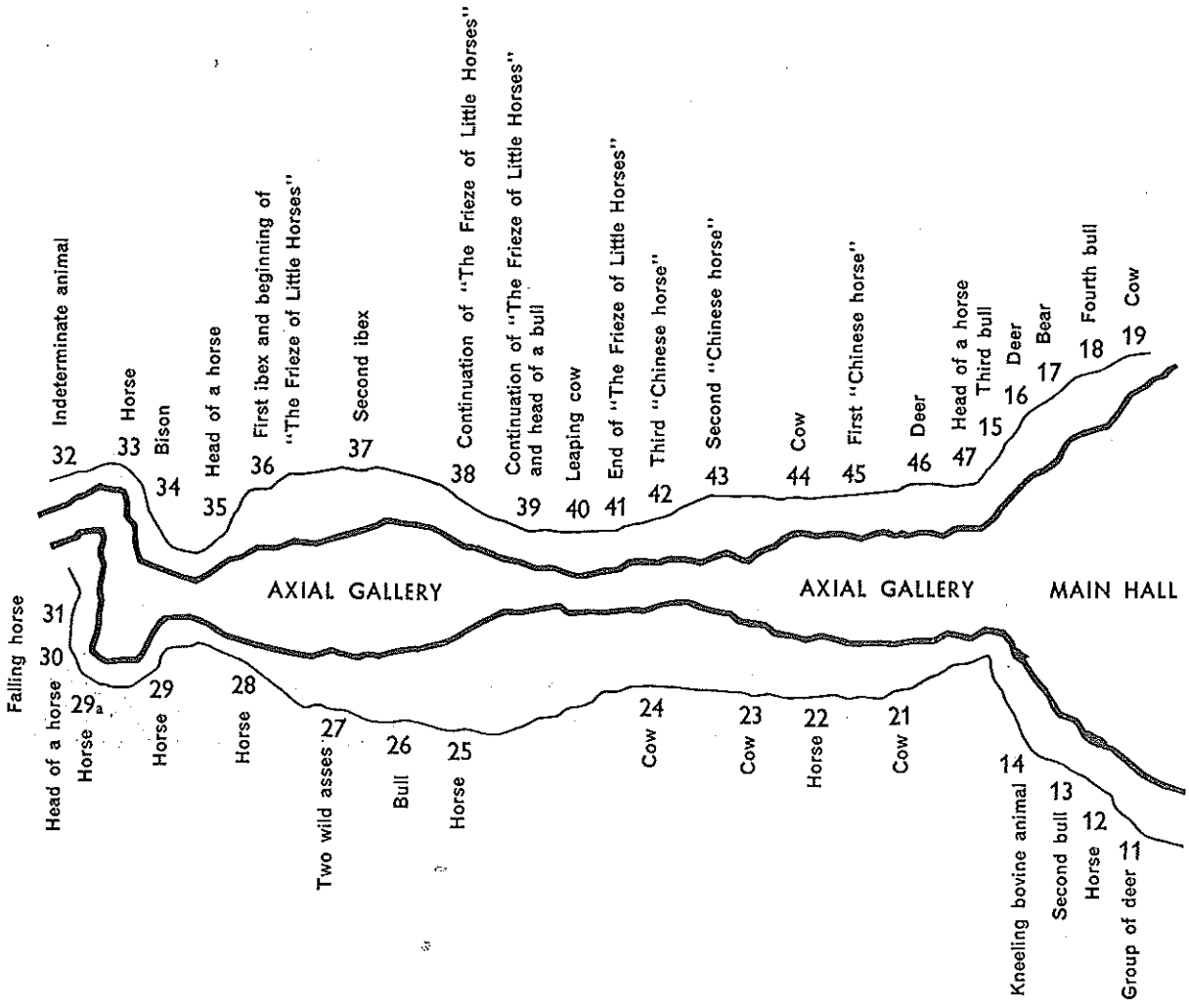
This composition is one of the most powerfully expressive in the whole Cave. A large bull blots out several other figures, made faintly visible by the floodlights and the camera eye.

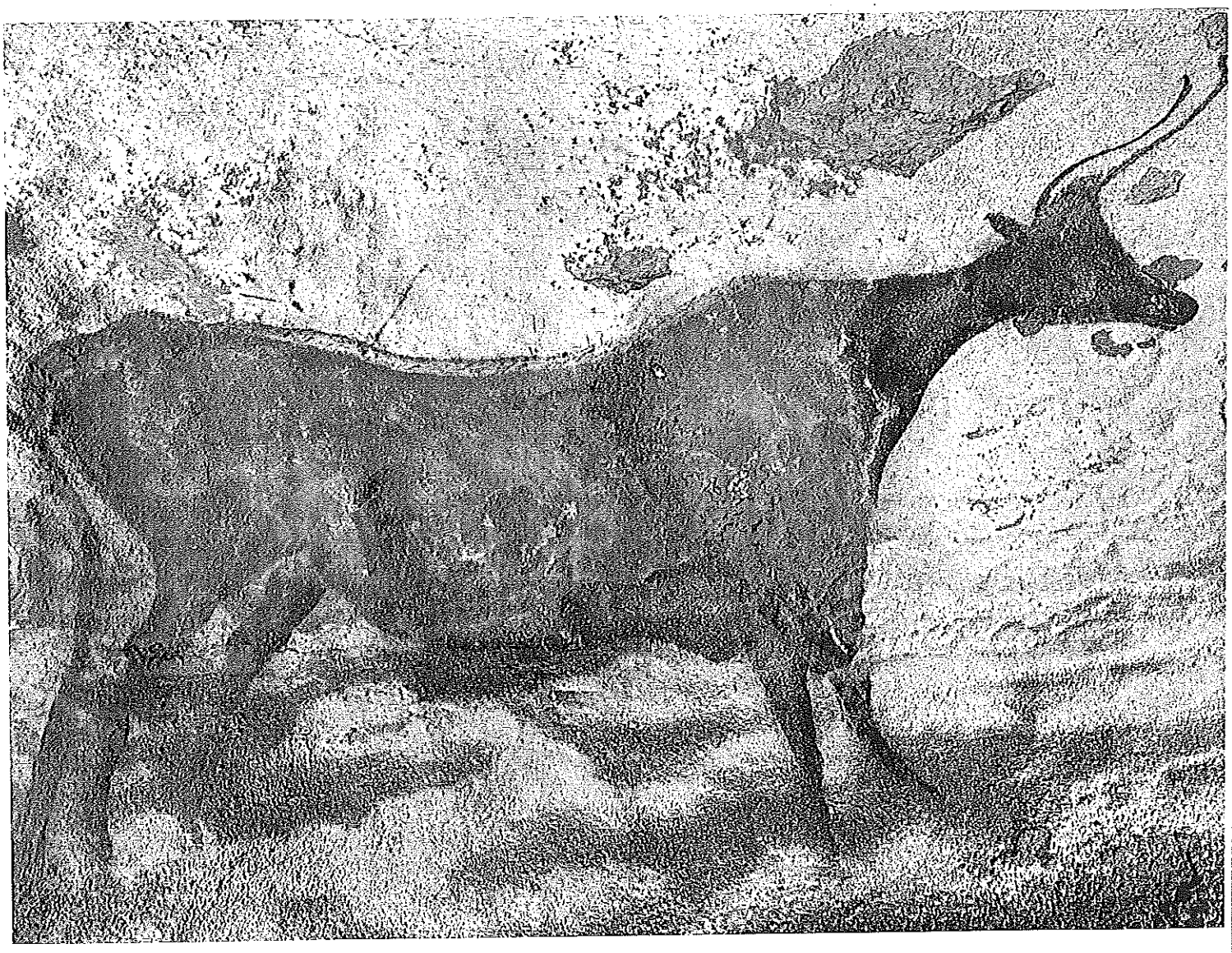


LEFT WALL OF THE AXIAL GALLERY.

On the left wall of the Axial Gallery
are this galloping horse and the black bull, vivid symbols
both of animal strength and elegance.

PLAN OF THE AXIAL GALLERY





COW WITH DARK HEAD AND RED BODY (LENGTH: 9′ 3″) (PAGE 78). AXIAL GALLERY, LEFT WALL. No. 21.

THE AXIAL GALLERY

The same coherent disorder—composed, without there ever having been a meditated effort at composition—continues in the long sinuous Gallery (visible, however, from one end to the other) starting at the far end of the Hall and, so to speak, prolonging it.

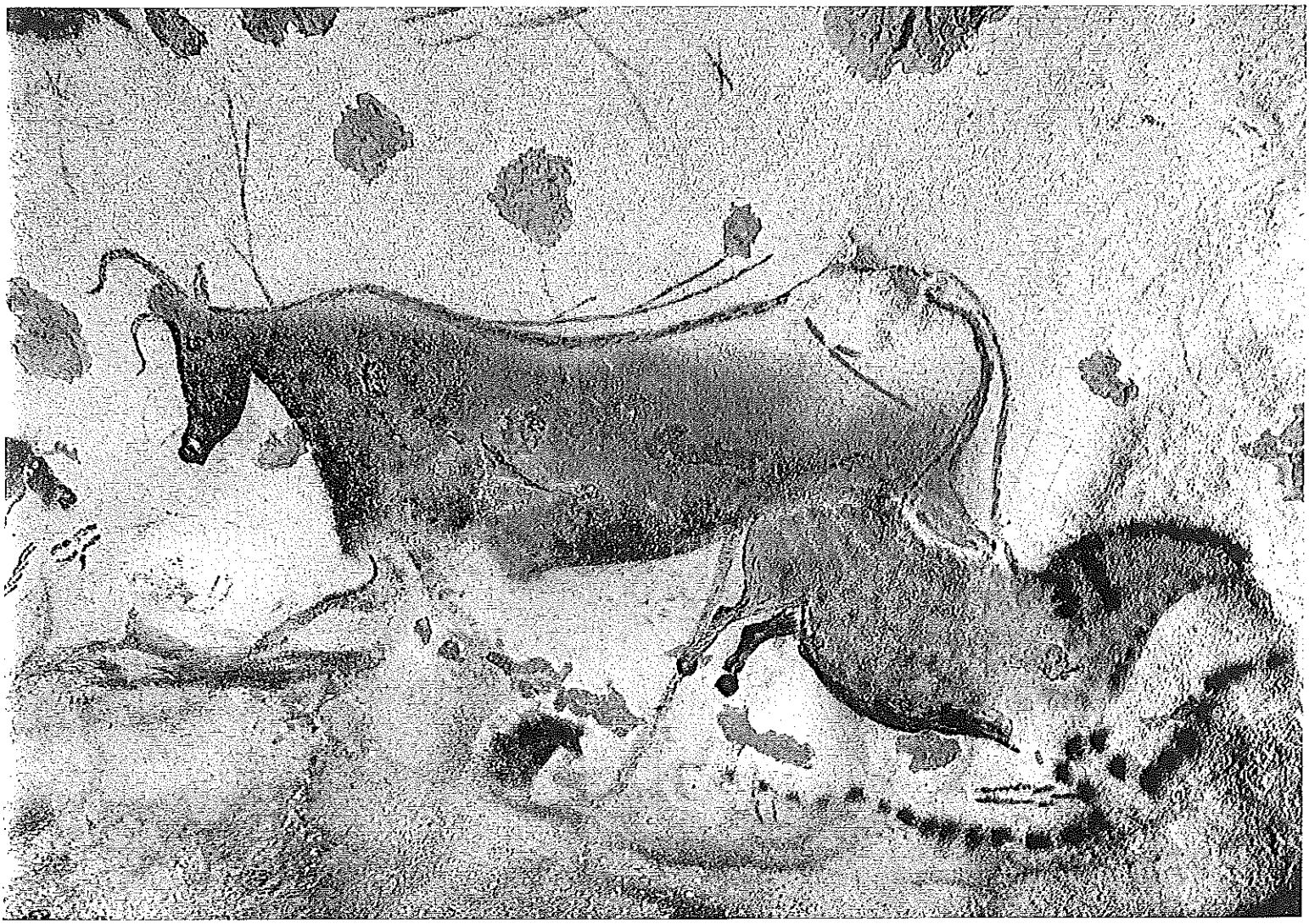
It prolongs the Hall, yes, but remains distinct from it owing both to the arrangement of its paintings and to its location. This long appendix to the Hall has very aptly been named the Axial Gallery. It lacks the Main Hall's stately grandeur (but in return has none of the relative ponderousness caused by the giant stature of the bulls, nor the awkwardness of the interloping "Unicorn"). Behind the Gallery's capricious arrangement one may perhaps even glimpse the wry smile of malignity. There is nothing here to

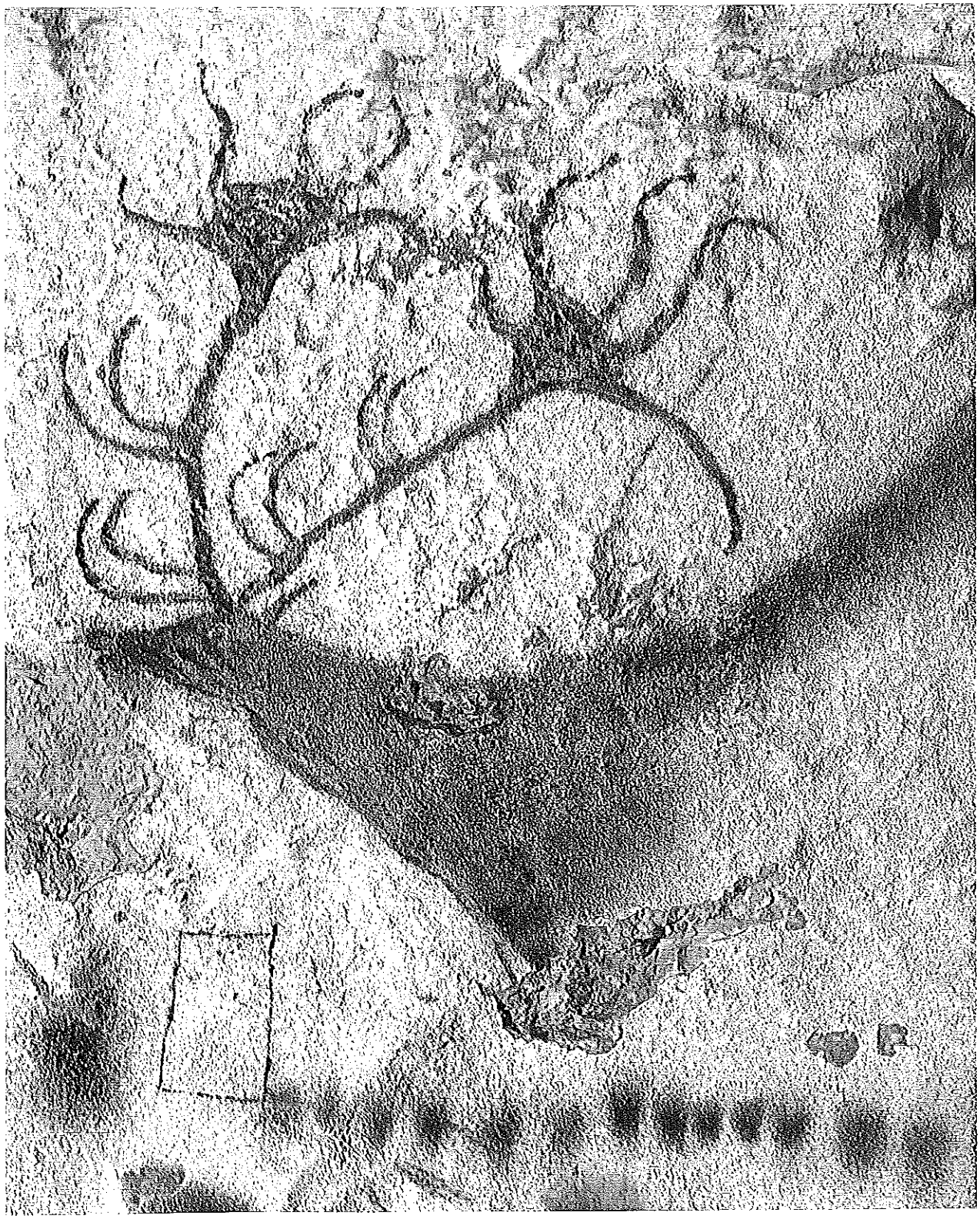
match the sweeping movement, the spectacular cavalcade of the Hall; on the contrary, in the Axial Gallery action splits, scurries in every direction, the figures' gamboling antics defeating any possibility of unity. Sprightly cows execute ridiculous leaps and the impression of skittering and skating is crowned by the startling image, at the end of the Gallery, of a horse falling head over heels.

No less amazing, no less wonderful than the Hall, the Axial Gallery is a long passageway, constricted halfway along, gradually descending towards an end disposed somewhat like a theatre upon whose stage the falling horse scene is enacted; from the right of this "stage" a much narrower wing winds around, then pinches shut, marking the limit of this part of the cavern.

Splayed across the ceiling not far from the entrance to the Axial Gallery is a group of reddish cows (fig. p. 36, 65 /67, 74, 76 and 77) whose light, almost jesting air is quite as

RED COW (PAGE 74) AND FIRST "CHINESE HORSE" (PAGE 82).
AXIAL GALLERY, CEILING AND RIGHT WALL. Nos. 44 and 45.

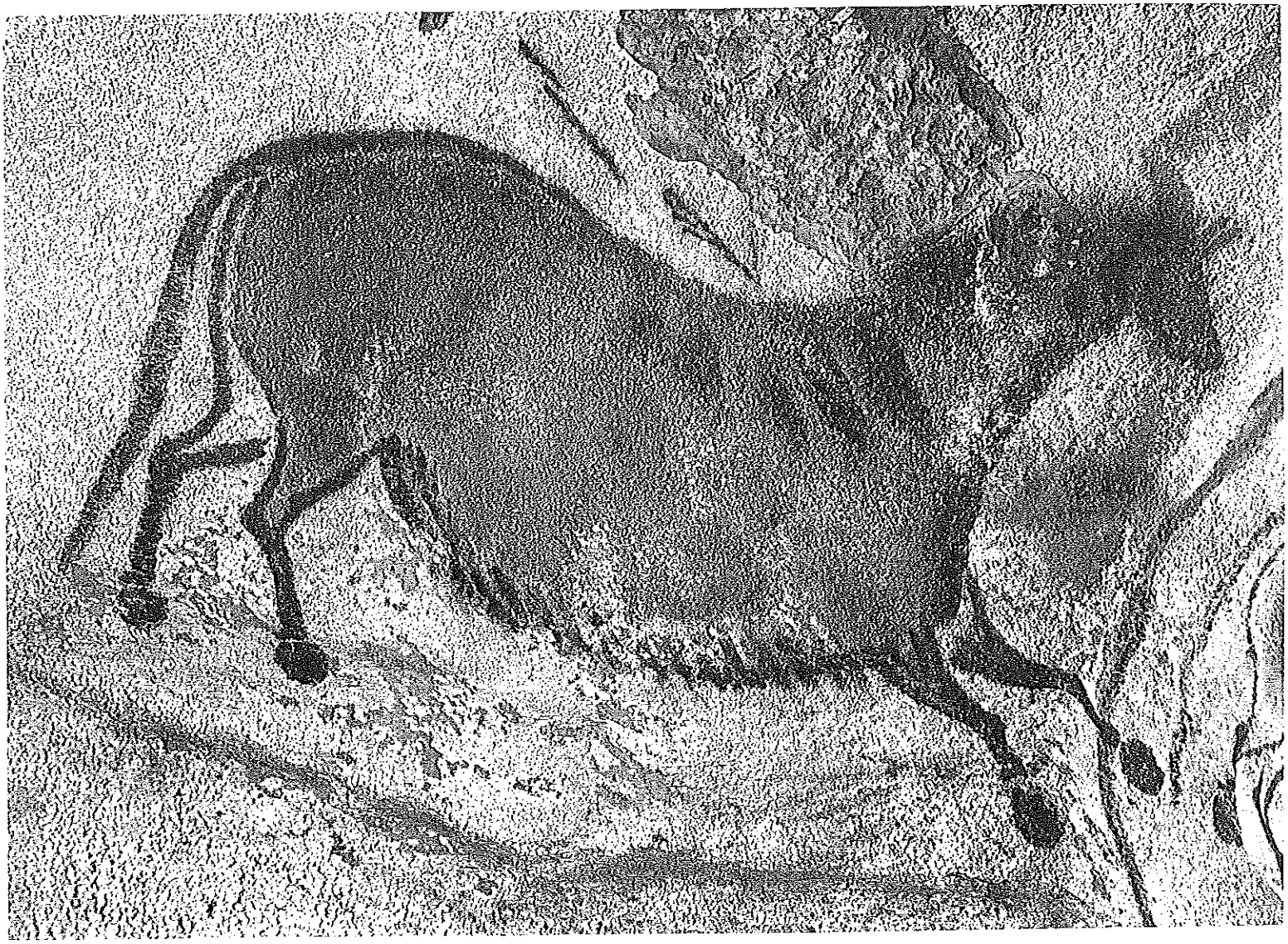




HEAD AND BACK OF A DEER (PAGE 82). AXIAL GALLERY, RIGHT WALL. No. 46.

HEADS OF A HORSE AND THREE COWS (PAGE 74). CEILING OF AXIAL GALLERY. Nos. 43, 44, 24 and 23.

RED COW (PAGE 74), DETAIL, AND OBLITERATED OCHRE HORSE. AXIAL GALLERY, LEFT WALL. No. 24.

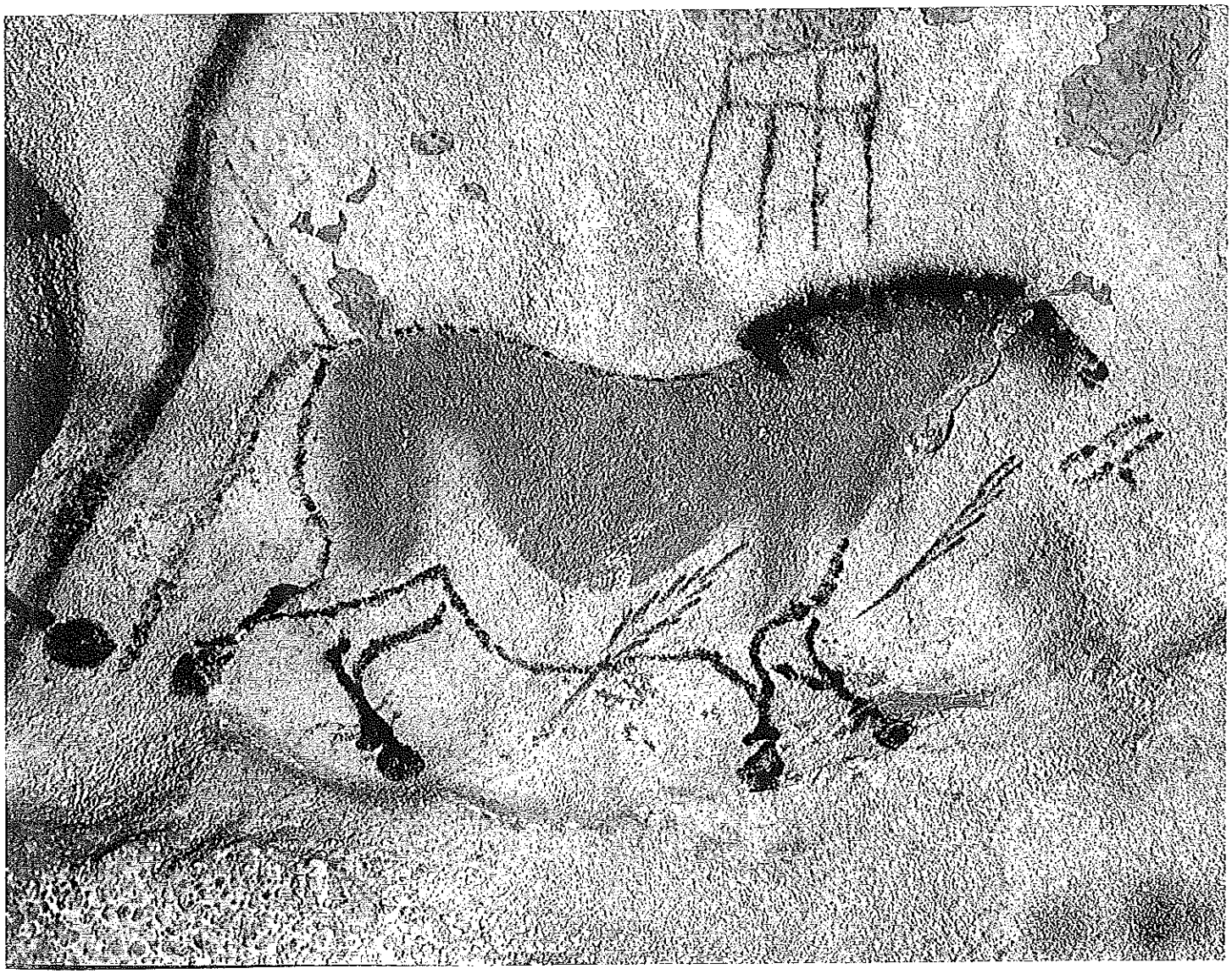


THIRD "CHINESE HORSE" (LENGTH: 41 INCHES) (PAGE 82). AXIAL GALLERY, RIGHT WALL. No. 42.

paradoxical as their location. As though playing some kind of game above our heads, they seem to compose, not a roundelay which could perfectly well be represented upon a vertical surface, but an ensemble which radiates out to every side, producing an effect that could be gained nowhere but on a ceiling. Only the first of these cows, set a little to one side (figured to the left, it is really less upon the ceiling than upon the wall) is truly finished. In treatment it resembles the others, differing only in its darker head and thoroughness of execution—from head to tail, nothing has been left out (figs. p. 14 and 73). Also like the others, it has been laid down upon an earlier outline, traced but not filled in with paint (one notices the line of the former figure's back showing above the completed painting). The ceiling cows are distributed around a center where their heads come near to meeting; from that center extend out the unfinished bodies (they were quite probably

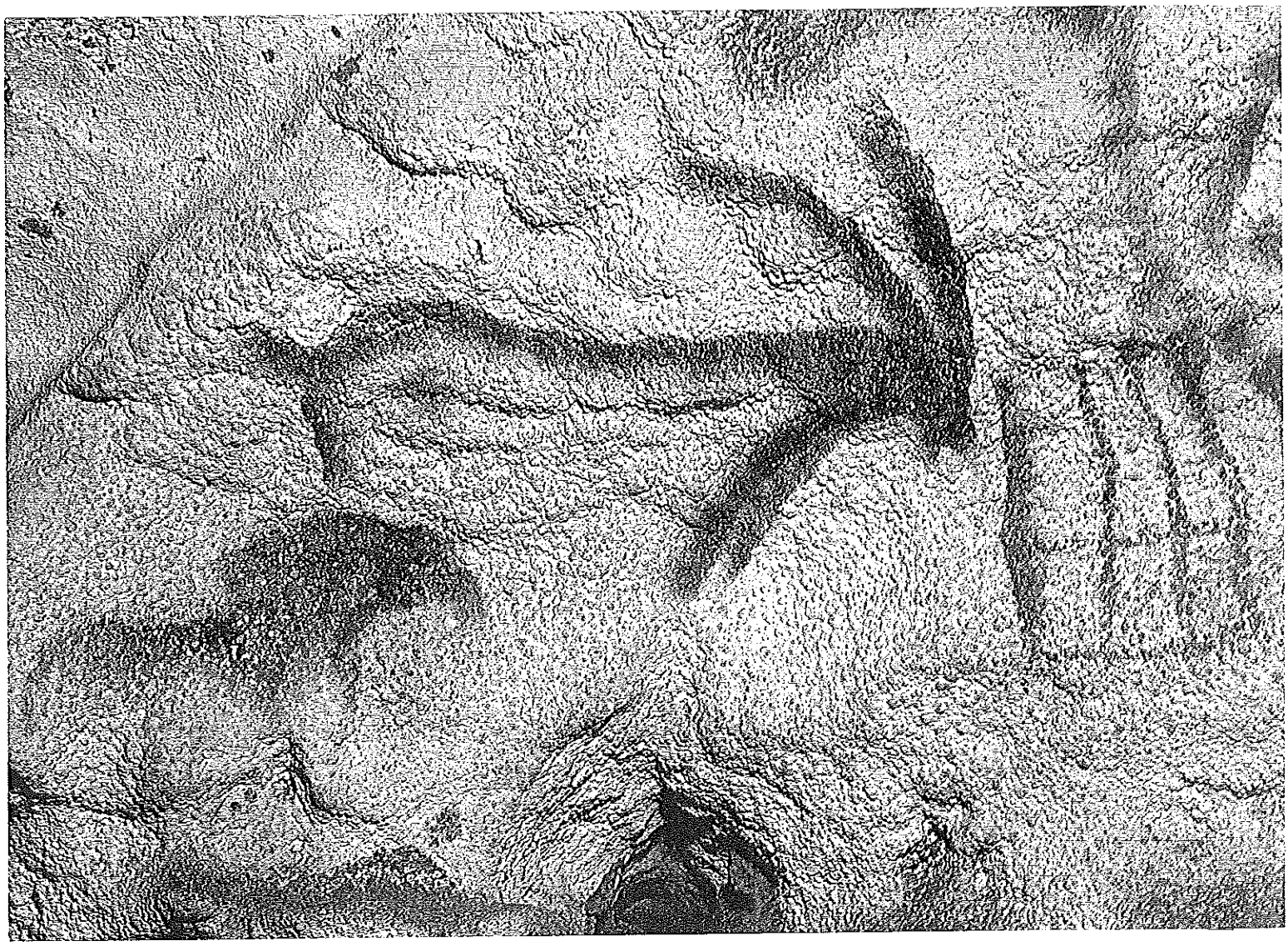
left unfinished, in one instance at least, to avoid encroaching upon a nearby and older figure). A high degree of delicacy distinguishes these heads: the foreheads are straight and the noses very long, the horns fragile and fancifully curved—all of which, while giving them an exquisite quality, also gives these animals a certain queer air of frivolousness. It used generally to be agreed that these cows do not belong to the same species as the bulls, once taken to be *Bos longifrons*. But today that identification is disputed. In all likelihood, the Main Hall bulls are *Bos primigenius*, a species that became extinct in Europe during the Seventeenth Century and of which we have no acquaintance save through drawings that have come down from the period. The male *Bos primigenius* was huge, regularly standing, so we must judge, a good six feet high; the female, on the other hand, was considerably smaller and apparently corresponded in size

SECOND "CHINESE HORSE" (LENGTH: 56 INCHES) (PAGE 82). AXIAL GALLERY, RIGHT WALL. No. 43.



GALLOPING HORSE, DETAIL (PAGE 87). AXIAL GALLERY,
LEFT WALL. No. 28.

FALLING HORSE (TOTAL LENGTH: 6′ 3″) AND HEAD OF HORSE (PAGE 89).
FAR END OF AXIAL GALLERY. Nos. 31 and 30.



EXTREME LEFT SIDE OF "THE FRIEZE OF LITTLE HORSES" AND BLACK IBEX (PAGE 89).
AXIAL GALLERY, RIGHT WALL. No. 36.

and color and general aspect to the Gallery animals. In any case, these are unmistakably wild beasts, to a woodland quality joining what is perforce ungainly in the domesticated farmyard cow we know; this ungainly look is especially noticeable in one of them which, its body bulkily athwart the ceiling, has the suspended, surprised air one associates with a candid snapshot. To the right—where they leave the beginning of the Axial Gallery free—these cows continue a remarkable series of three little horses, often designated "Chinese horses" (figs. p. 65/67, 74, 76, 78, 79), and these in turn follow a deer (figs. p. 16 and 75) of which only the back and forequarters are shown. While the deer faces away from the Hall, the horses face towards it. The second horse is one of the most refined, one of the most engaging figures in the entire Cave. Its light, sharp silhouette is so to speak anchored by the darker ochre color of some insignia which one may interpret

as fletched arrows released in flight. (We observe that the animals are frequently striped and cut across by arrows and may safely conclude that these additions, painted or scratched on later, express the hunter's desire to bring down his quarry.) Because of their compact stockiness, the horses invite comparison with certain examples of Chinese painting—whence their name. But this second horse strikes me as more perfect than any of the most exquisite horses one meets with in Chinese art. Outlined in black, the mane and the hoofs black too, they are done in an ochre color which contrasts vividly with the more reserved white of the underlying calcite providing the delicate tone of the belly. Like the black horses of the Main Hall, they could have been arranged in a frieze, but in the Axial Gallery things are managed differently; as I have pointed out, the composition in the Gallery is, from beginning to end, scattered, dispersed—but,

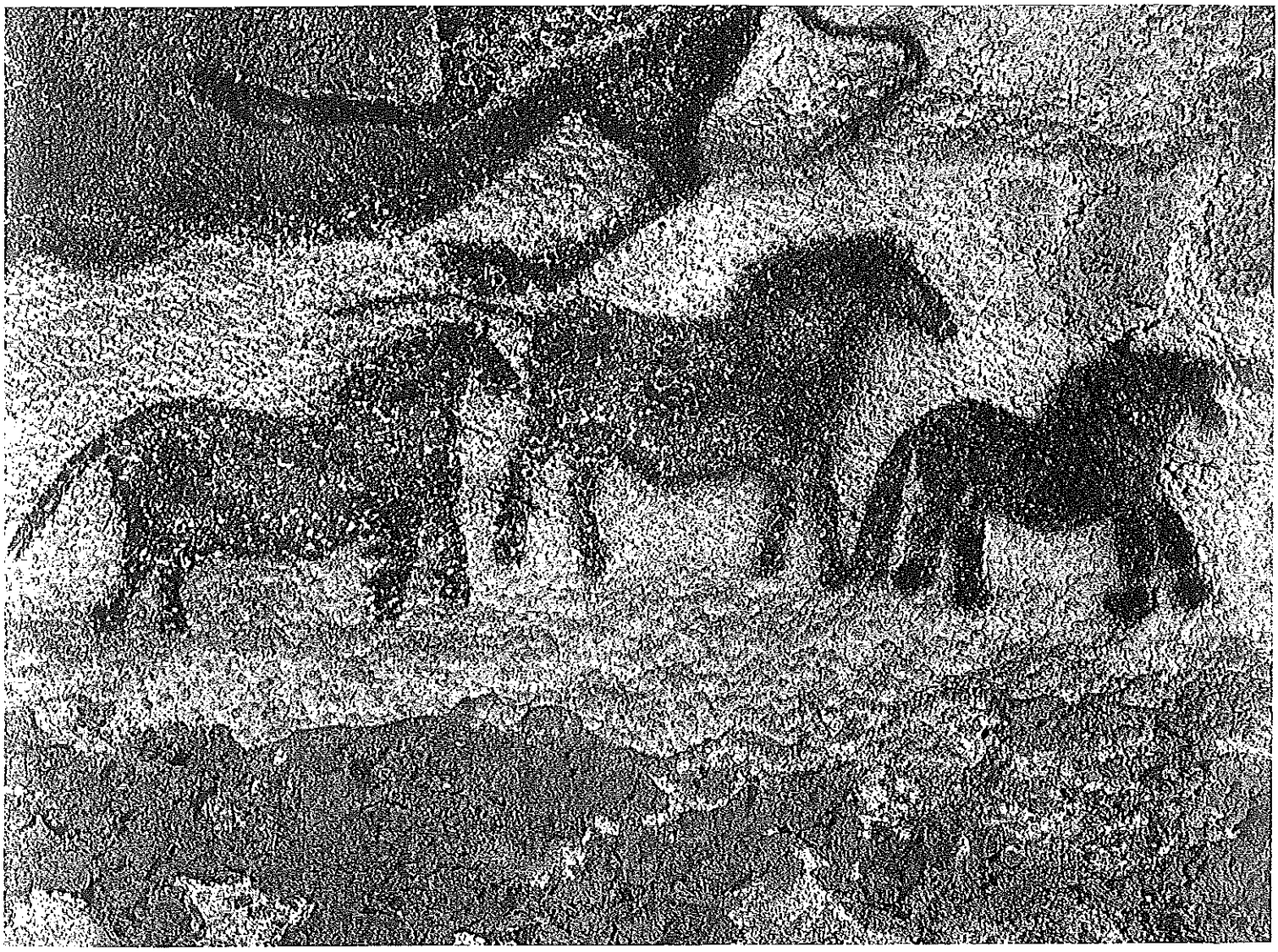
CONTINUATION OF "THE FRIEZE OF LITTLE HORSES" AND BISTRE IBEX (PAGE 89).
AXIAL GALLERY, RIGHT WALL. Nos. 37 and 38.

"FRIEZE OF LITTLE HORSES", DETAIL OF LEFT CENTRAL PART (PAGE 89).
AXIAL GALLERY, RIGHT WALL. Nos. 38 and 39.

CENTRAL PORTION OF "THE FRIEZE OF LITTLE HORSES", LEAPING COW (LENGTH: 68 INCHES) (PAGE 89). AXIAL GALLERY, RIGHT WALL. No. 40.

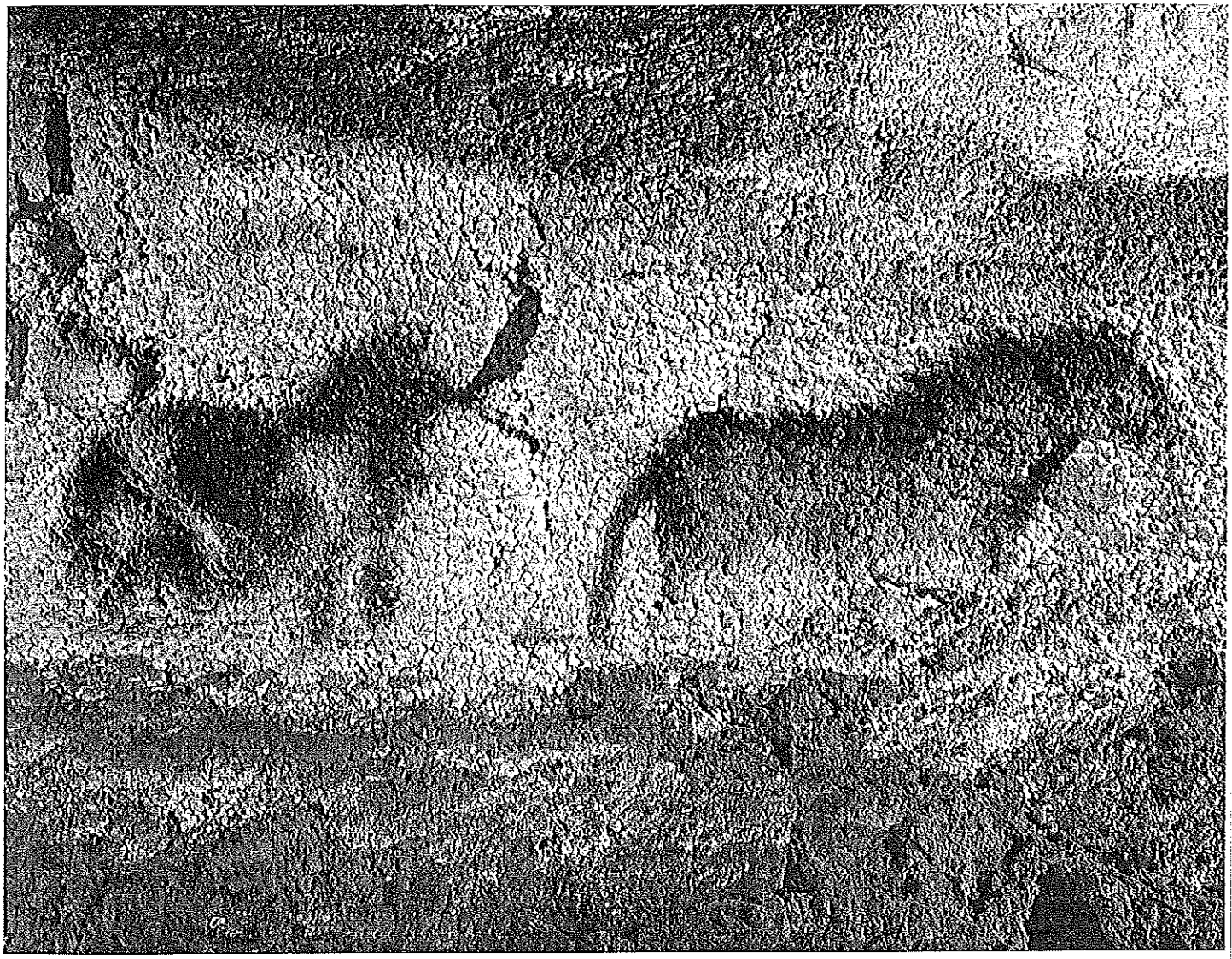
however it may be subtle, a pattern does exist, formed out of the mosaic of discordant elements. Taken all together, these elements harmonize, but only seldom rely one upon the other and never combine to launch a broad, single movement. I should like to underscore the ease and charm of this arrangement, apparently created by nothing but the operations of chance and instinct. In the Axial Gallery no spectacular scheme dazzles the visitor; instead, he gazes at a spreading constellation of animal life floating about him.

Midway down, the Axial Gallery thins; where it widens out again, on the left, we come upon a superb black bull (figs. p. 21 and 70), very large, very vigorous, sharply isolated. Abbé Breuil seems to think it one of Lascaux' most recent paintings—we refer now to the present state of the bull, for, covering a certain number of other and hence earlier paintings, hesitation and repeated trial efforts went into its execution. Simply



"FRIEZE OF LITTLE HORSES", DETAIL OF RIGHT CENTRAL PART (PAGE 89).
AXIAL GALLERY, RIGHT WALL. No. 41.

drawn with a stroke of bistre pigment, four very archaic heads of smaller bulls push the tips of their horns above the great bull. Two straight-nosed red cows, similar in treatment to those on the ceiling, but done in a more violet red and enclosed in a brown outline, may be seen showing through the bull's transparent black. Finally, the present bull is superimposed upon the tracing of a former one which, according to our best judgment, is contemporary with the giant bulls of the Hall. After the black traced outline was filled in with color, the form of the bull was further worked over and corrected. It would be difficult to imagine a more composite, a fuller painting, and one might suppose that such repeated attentions would have impaired if not destroyed its freshness and muddied its simplicity. Quite to the contrary, we cannot too heavily stress the satisfying effect of the final result: this massive presence imposes itself with uncommon mildness and



FAR RIGHT SIDE OF "THE FRIEZE OF LITTLE HORSES" (PAGE 89).
AXIAL GALLERY, RIGHT WALL. No. 41.

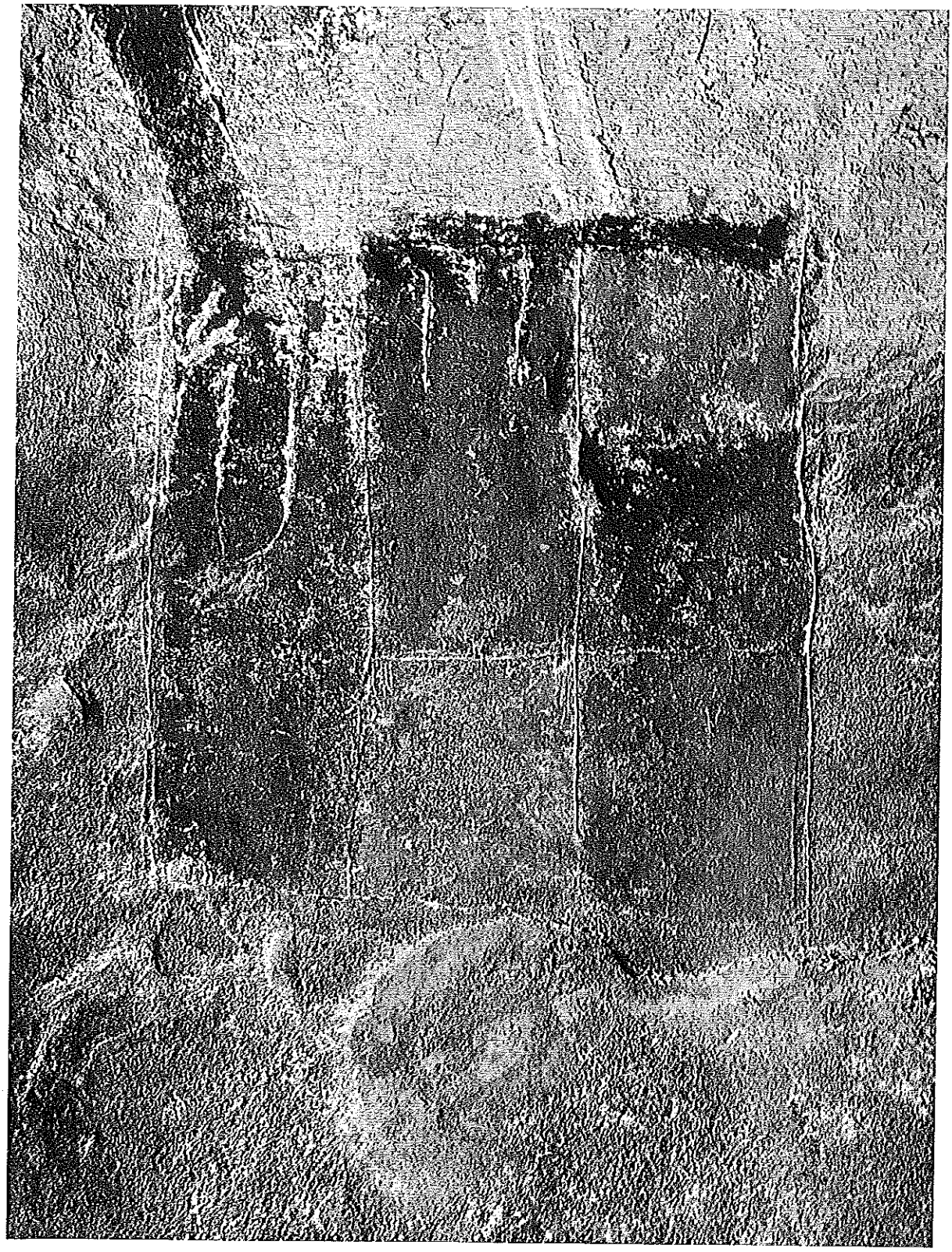
at the same time with a wild and animal warmth. With a disquieting sureness, this figure evokes what is tender in robust animality—impersonal and unconscious.

A little further into the Gallery, the painting divides and occupies two levels. Near the floor, two beasts, one of them a wild ass, confront each other—their color, it cannot be denied, is a rather poor bistre and their paleness and lack of relief distinguish them from the greater part of the Cavern's other figures. Above them, racing at top speed towards the Gallery's depths, gallops a dark-colored horse (fig. p. 71 and 80). The two levels meet again in a bend in the corridor; before veering to the left, the wall of the Gallery acts as a kind of screen masking this juncture. Of secondary importance and visible only from close by are a bison, a horse and an indeterminate animal niched in the Gallery's final twist. But on the left wall, within plain sight, is an extraordinary

HEAD OF BOVINE ANIMAL (PAGE 89) DOMINATING "THE FRIEZE OF LITTLE HORSES".
AXIAL GALLERY, RIGHT WALL. No. 41a.

combination of two figures that arrests the visitor as he advances down the Gallery. First, a black horse with a tufted mane; below and in a so to speak heraldic manner dominated by it, a second horse, falling (fig. p. 81). Plunging freely, head downwards, its forelegs jut stiffly into the air: this figure, which can only appear puzzling at first glance, needs to be viewed in terms of a method of hunting which is still employed by archaic peoples today: a herd of animals is driven to the edge of a cliff or precipice from which, panic-stricken, the hemmed-in beasts hurl themselves in a last effort to elude capture. At Solutré in the department of the Saône-et-Loire an equine ossuary resulting from mass slaughters of this sort does indeed date back to the Reindeer Age. The uptilted horse at the far end of the Gallery is surely shown falling under these same circumstances; the cliffs that overhang the Valley of the Vézère could very probably have been the setting for many such episodes.

There remains, in the Gallery's waist and on the righthand side, a long frieze wherein the principal figure, summarily drawn and styled in the manner of the Main Hall bulls, is an immense cowlike animal shown leaping (figs. p. 67 and 88). Below it, a dozen smaller-scale horses provide the group with its name: "The Frieze of the Little Horses" (figs. p. 3, 68/69, 82/87). Unlike the creatures painted in the Main Hall, these animals have a vague, indecisive quality: and this makes them only the more animal-like—aimless, irregularly scattered, free. Bordering upon somnolence, theirs is the freedom of ruminant activity: supremely modest, they seem to drift and become absorbed into the neutrality of nature. The earliest of the lot seem originally to have been composed in a fairly uniform bistre afterwards touched up with black. The four of them that are almost entirely black look to be more recent: they file quietly to the right, making their way along after one of the earlier touched-up horses. The second of the four is very small, very shaggy, and looks very much like a Shetland pony. On the far left of the frieze, two ibexes face each other: one is drawn heavily in black—its treatment makes one think of the early bulls—; the other, older it seems, is composed of bistre daubs connected into continued lines (figs. p. 82/83). Set not far above the file of horses, the great black cow (fig. p. 85), massive but nevertheless gracefully, even slenderly shaped, is painted in a jumping position: forelegs thrust straight ahead, hindlegs tucked up and tail swung by the movement of leaping. It was painted atop a red figure, unidentifiable now, but whose persisting color stains the cow's side. If there is something foolish about this leap, that is chiefly because it bears no relation to the group of smaller figures. Breuil has mentioned the similar treatment of the jumping cow and the solitary bull painted on the other wall almost directly opposite. The two animals would seem to represent Lascaux art at the very peak of its technical refinement (if not, however, of its communicative value). The while attesting a rare, a consummate skill in the rendering of movement, this cow is far short of being one of the truly impressive figures in the Lascaux Cave: it has none of the neighboring bull's stunning presence, nor any of the majesty of the Main Hall bulls. Nor again has it the charming grace of that lovely "Chinese horse" which gleams like a kind of guiding star at the entrance to the Axial Gallery.



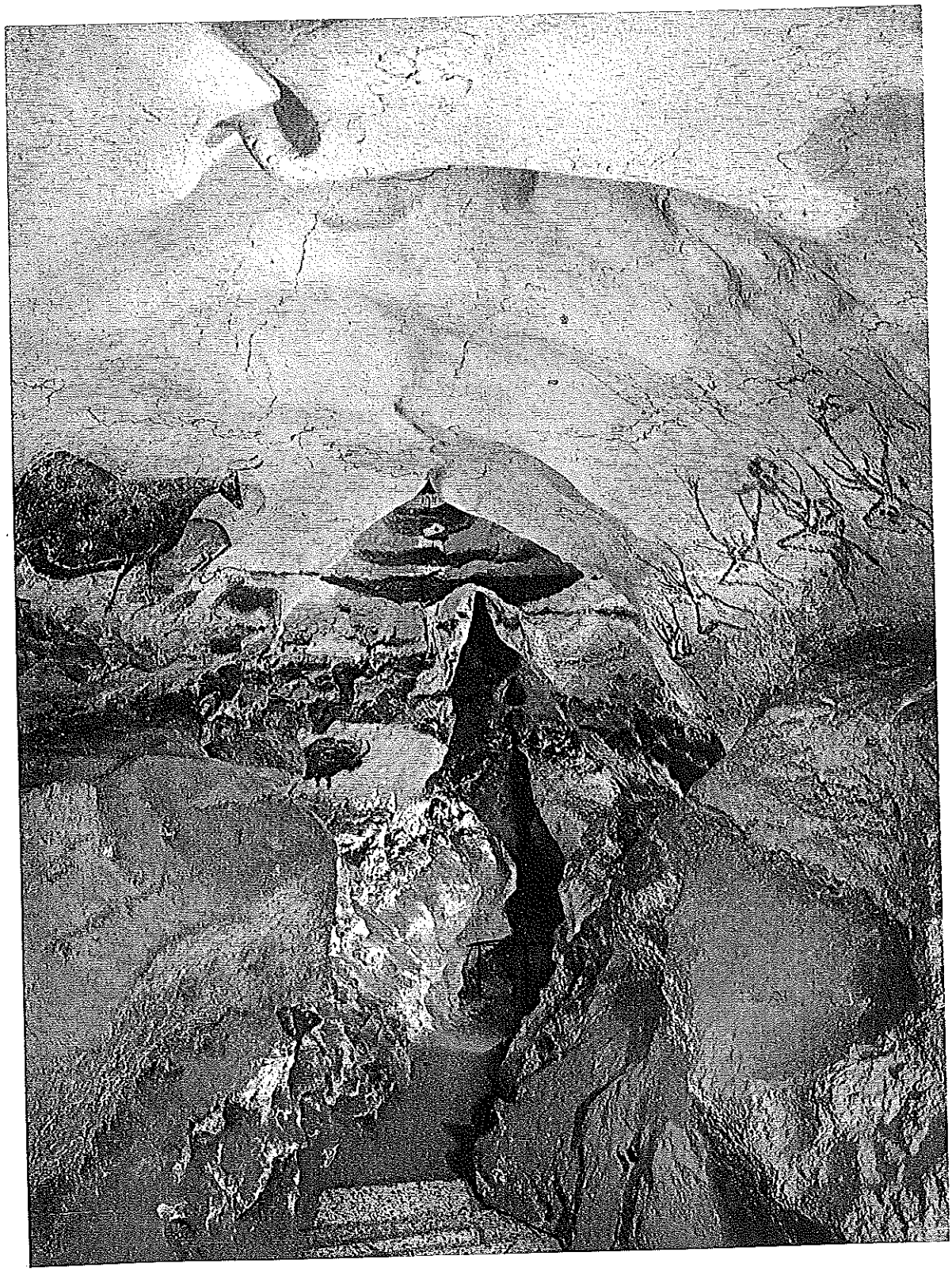
THE THIRD OF THE UNINTELLIGIBLE FIGURES ("COAT-OF-ARMS") (PAGE 91)
AT THE FEET OF THE LARGE BLACK COW (PLATES ON PAGES 100 and 101). NAVE, LEFT WALL. No. 63.

The Obscure Symbols –

Certain insignia, whose interpretation is at best very difficult, are to be met with here and there in the Main Hall. In the Gallery (and in "The Nave", of which we will speak presently) they are still more numerous, more conspicuous. The most striking are rectangular, criss-cross, one looks a little like a pitchfork... Various commentaries have not succeeded in settling just what they mean. They have been identified as hunting snares: certain ones amongst them in the Font-de-Gaume Cave might, with a stretch of the imagination, confirm this interpretation. Some observers have been reminded of lean-tos made of woven branches (in the Grotte de La Mouthe, not far from Les Eyzies, there actually is a fairly large representation of such a hut); the word *tectiform* often applied to these signs relates to the lean-to theory. They have been beheld as tribal insignia, as coats-of-arms: Abbé Breuil inclines thus to interpret those particular rectangles which, occupying a very conspicuous place in the Nave, are divided up checkerwise into multicolored squares. For Raymond Vaufrey, these polychrome rectangles "would rather recall those robes made of sewn-together animal skins, such as one sees in certain painted shelters in Southern Rhodesia"—but, as Vaufrey himself observes, the African decoration he describes is exceptional (figs. p. 90, 100 and 101). Others of the symbols are simpler, without for that being the more accessible: we sometimes find series of discs or of dots, sometimes mere lines, or patterns of lines. Some complex groupings of straight lines (in the Axial Gallery, for example, in front of the black bull's muzzle and before the galloping horse) have been judged to be plants.

In northwestern Spain's Cave of Castillo there are vast compositions formed of such signs, complex geometric figures and punctuations making up what once upon a time were doubtless meaningful patterns. We are given to wonder whether these were not perhaps ideograms, some sort of crude system of writing. But the groups of signs at Castillo, impressive though they are, have to be approached prudently: we may say that these signs suggest this or that to us, but we are forced finally to conclude that our guesses are based on nothing solider than personal reactions. Many of the traces that have survived these remote ages are (and in most cases will remain) unintelligible. We ought often to remind ourselves of that when, intruding upon Lascaux' silence, we plunge further than anywhere else is possible into the realm of the deepest past. We ought also to bear this idea well in mind: that the further we feel we have wandered out beyond the shores of the familiar, the further we are likely to penetrate into the secret of this forever vanished world.

Leading off the right side of the Main Hall,
a narrow Passage runs to the Nave and the Apse.
The Nave is a long, high-vaulted room of vast proportions
in which the majestic groups of paintings
are spaced further apart from one another.



GENERAL VIEW OF THE NAVE.

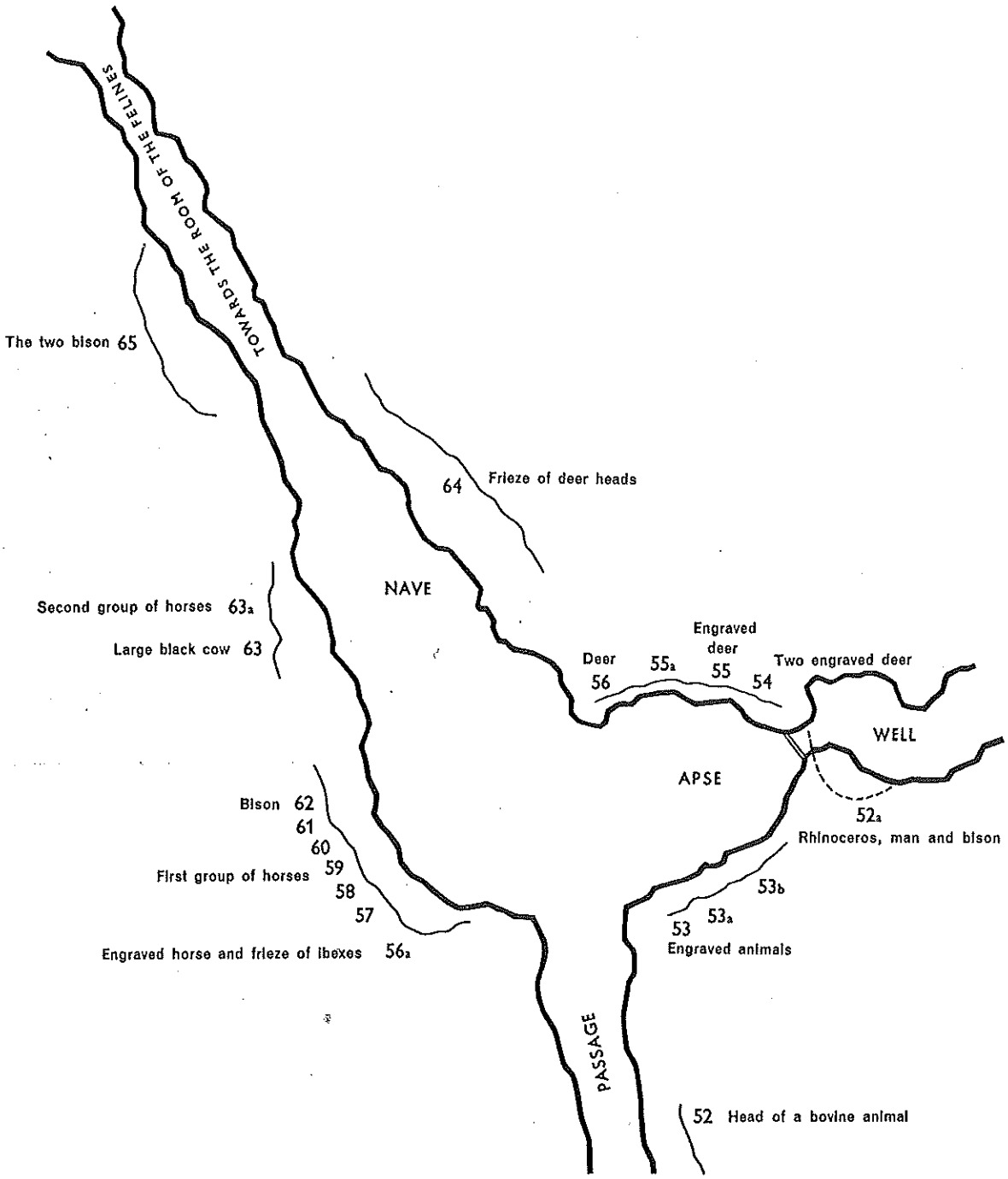
GENERAL VIEW OF THE LEFT WALL OF THE NAVE.

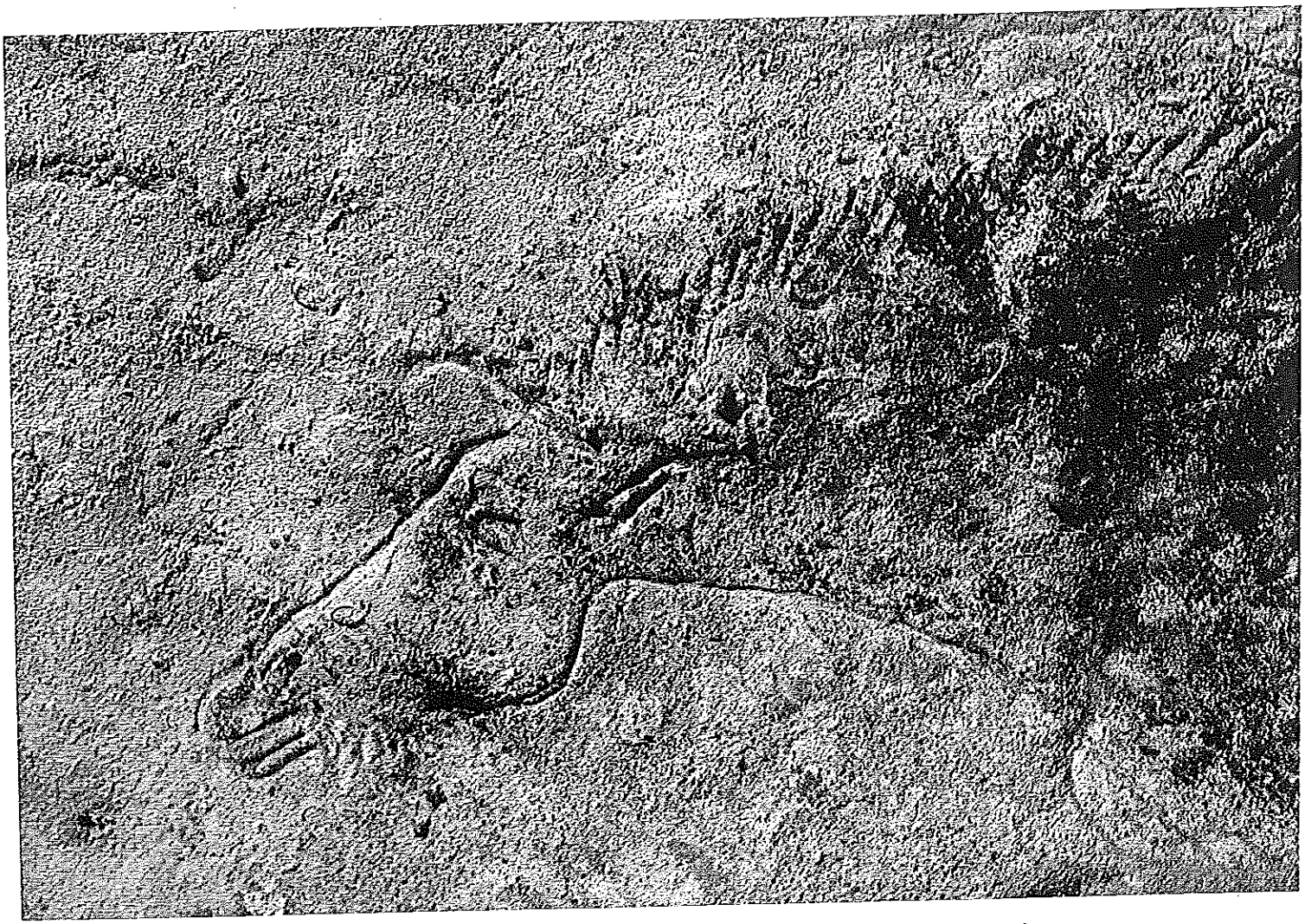
Along the left wall of the Nave painted and engraved groups
are staged at various levels.
They are dominated by the imposing figure of a great black cow.

GENERAL VIEW OF THE RIGHT WALL OF THE NAVE.

On the righthand wall a frieze of deer heads
is drawn in bold lines.
These animals seem to be swimming, heads held above the water.

PLAN OF THE PASSAGE, NAVE, APSE AND WELL





ENGRAVED HEAD OF HORSE (LENGTH: 4½ INCHES FROM NOSTRILS TO EAR) (PAGE 99).
NAVE, LEFT WALL. No. 56a.

THE PASSAGE, THE NAVE AND THE ROOM OF THE FELINES

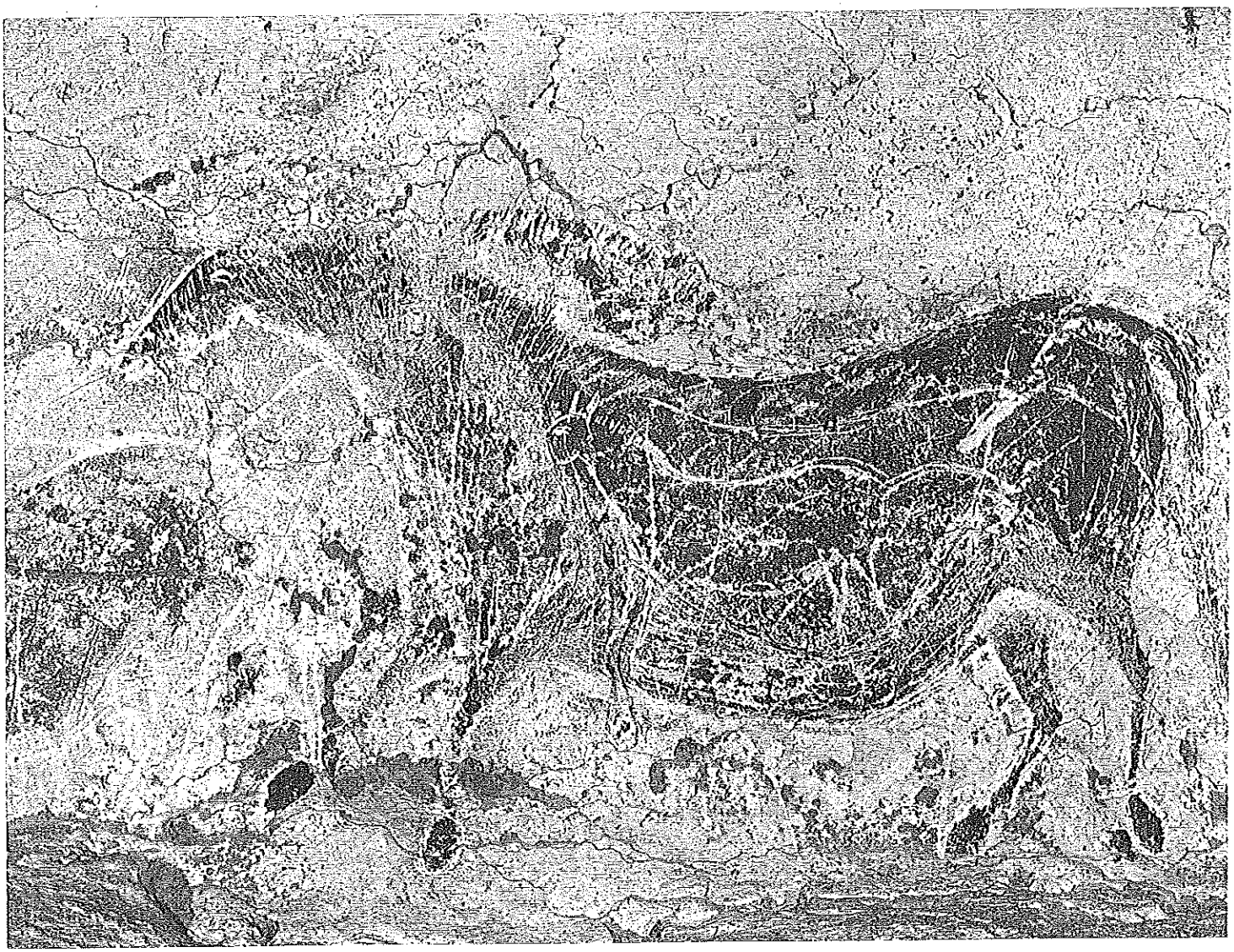
As we cross the threshold of that part of the Cave whose proportions have suggested that it be called the Nave, we have a clear view of Lascaux' most remarkable examples of the rectangular multicolored signs or insignia we mentioned a moment or two ago.

The Nave extends a low-roofed Passage running from the right of the Main Hall and in which one discovers not really figures but bare, often elementary, often confused traces of painted or engraved animals. In particular, the lower legs and bellies of two large-scale bovines remain decipherable on the left of the Passage (the painting of the upper parts is now completely dilapidated). The entirety of this sector of the Cave, including the "Apse", beginning where Passage and Nave join and bulging out to the right, differs from the Main Hall and the Gallery thanks to the crumbly nature of

BISON STRIPED BY ARROWS (LENGTH: 56 INCHES) (PAGE 100).
NAVE, LEFT WALL. No. 62.

its calcareous rock which never benefitted from a layer of calcite: as a consequence, whole paintings have fallen to pieces. Engravings, often hardly visible and frequently overlapping, are numerous hereabouts where the soft rock offered little resistance to the engraver's tools: the Passage contains a number of such works.

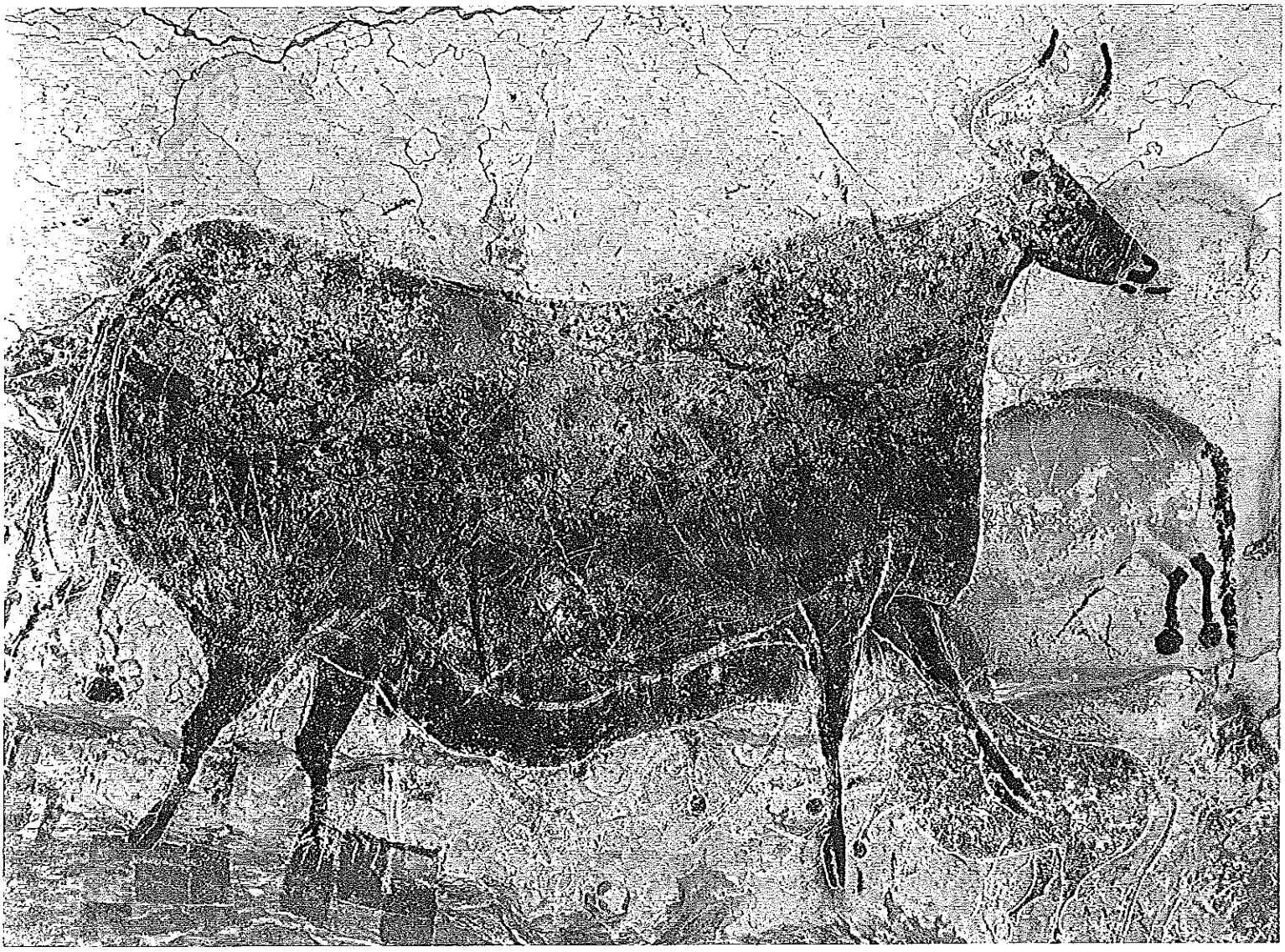
The Nave proper starts some twenty yards after the Passage ends: it is a gallery that has a lofty ceiling swinging to a vault and a floor declining so sharply (drained by water, its level has sunk since prehistoric times) that steps have had to be installed to permit visitors to descend in safety. Directly one enters and surveys it from above (fig. p. 93), one is struck by the grandiose and "disparate" aspect of this part of the Cave. Its paintings divide into four groups, each plainly separated from the other. Three of them are ranged on the left: first, there is that dominated by the ibexes;



HORSE BELONGING TO SECOND GROUP WITH A SMALLER HORSE ENGRAVED ON ITS FLANK (PAGE 101).
NAVE, LEFT WALL. No. 63a.

then, further down, comes the large cow group (fig. p. 94); and finally, last of all, the two bison group (fig. p. 105); while on the right lies a frieze of deer heads (fig. p. 95).

From the head of the stairs, high up overlooking the whole of the Nave, the visitor finds himself abreast and at the level of the ibex group, the only one he can see from close by. Unfortunately, this series of heads is faint: the elegant horns alone remain distinct; these are really mere vestiges of obliterated pictures. Four of the heads were black, four red. To the ibexes' right appear two no less faded horses; however, one of them, on the angle formed where the wall juts out, is visible enough thanks to the deep chiseling that models the head (fig. p. 97): Abbé Breuil remarks a kinship between this horse and the "Chinese" ones of the Gallery. The animals belonging to the middle register are relatively well preserved. Whilst the horses and ibexes were figured on a



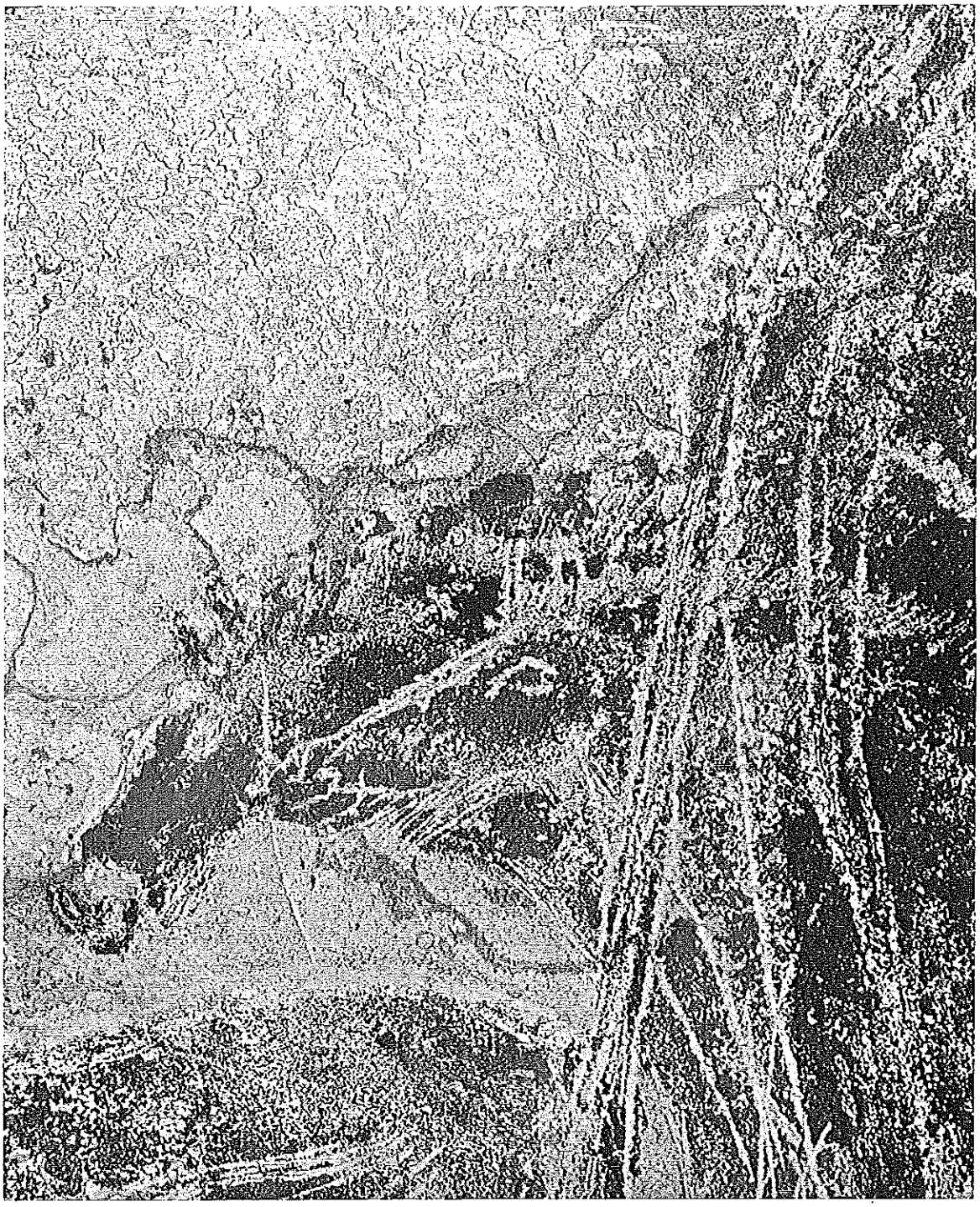
LARGE BLACK COW (LENGTH: 7′ 2″) (PAGE 102). NAVE, LEFT WALL. No. 63.

vertical area of wall forming a kind of entablature, the animals of the lower registers were nestled in a concavity beneath its shoulder. Still within this recess, on its far right side, is a frieze which, stretching between two rectangular insignia, is, from left to right, made up of a gravid mare following hard upon a stallion in its turn preceded by a second gravid mare. These animals are fronting left; to their right is a bison, fronting right (fig. p. 98), whose painting overlaps the last mare's hindquarters. After having first been painted, all these animals' outlines were then chiseled. Arrows, moreover, have been scratched upon the paintings: the sides of both stallion and bison are each seven times cut across. From the central pathway running through the Nave we are just able to see—and preferably if we stoop—this middle register's figures. But those belonging to the lower register, which lies completely hidden on the underside of the protruding shelf of rock, are not to be seen at all unless we bend far down

underneath the ledge: from close on we discover two horses of which the righthand one is figured grazing, its head lowered to the ground.

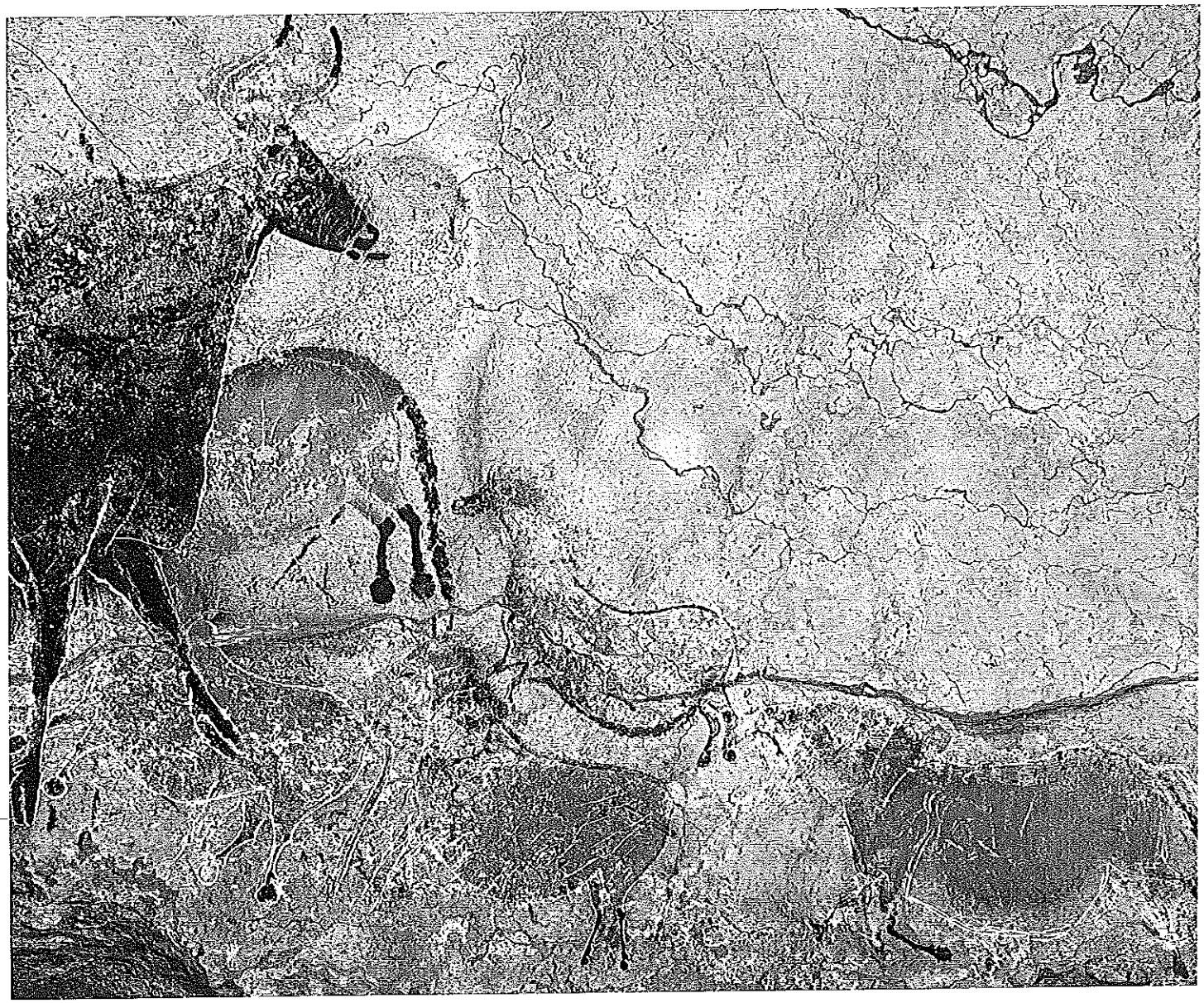
These horses are of the same family as the black-maned red horse encompassed by the tracing of the Hall's first bull (fig. p. 50). They are allied also to the horses in the Nave's second group—those horses which, further along, presently surround the large, more recently painted cow. These horses and the cow as well have etched outlines. Numbering a score, they originally formed a long horizontal line along that part of the wall now standing high above the pathway descending the Nave's sunken floor. The bison in the recess is chronologically posterior to the adjacent horses: and so it would seem that this section of the Cave was initially devoted entirely to representations of the horse. Taking our departure from what is left of it (figs. p. 39, 99, 102 and 103), we must visualize a broad, colorful sweep of horses, some of which were submerged by

UNINTELLIGIBLE FIGURES ("COATS-OF-ARMS") (PAGE 91) AT THE FEET OF THE LARGE BLACK COW.
NAVE, LEFT WALL. No. 63.



HEADS OF HORSES FROM SECOND GROUP (PAGE 101) BEHIND THE LARGE BLACK COW.
NAVE, LEFT WALL. No. 63.

the very ample cow in the center (fig. p. 100): however, we need but suppose for a moment that the dominating cow were absent, and the more ancient and splendid effect comes through.



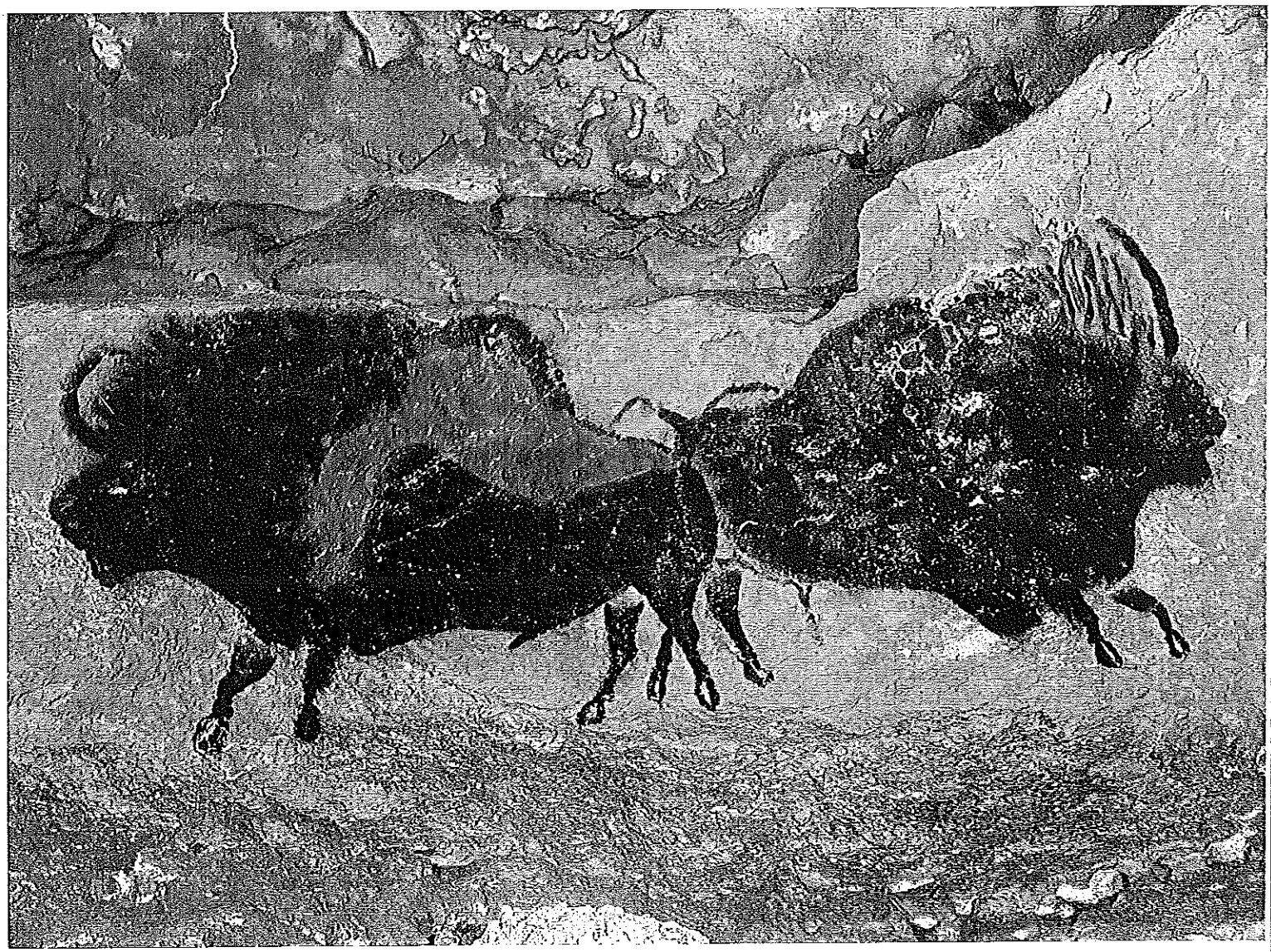
HORSES FROM THE SECOND GROUP (PAGE 101). NAVE, LEFT WALL. Nos. 63 and 63a.

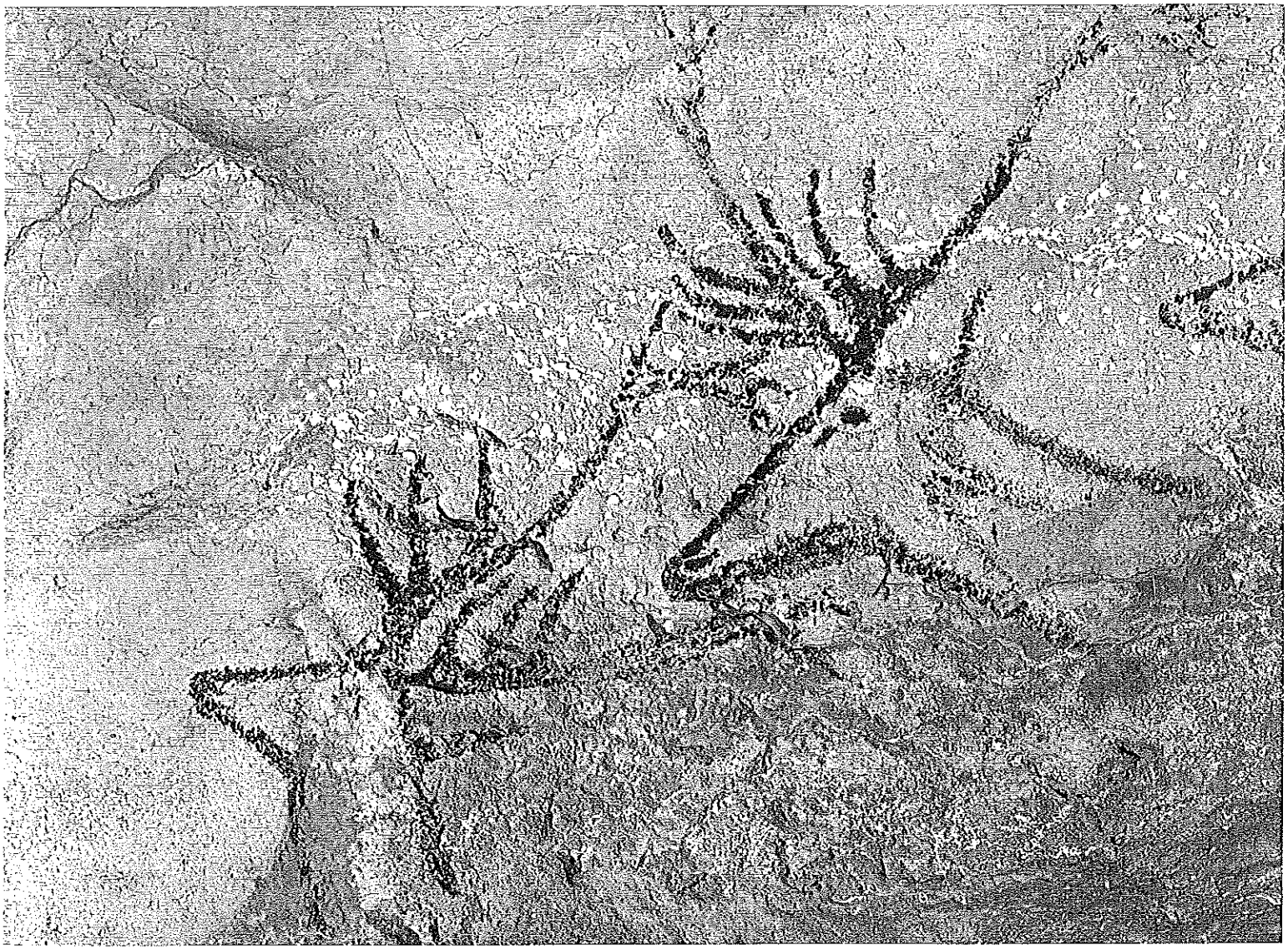
Perched high aloft, the cow's mass powerfully commands the Nave: the lighter tone of the rock now shows through the cow's worn dark color, but the effect still remains one in which delicacy and the monumental are wedded. As with the Gallery cows, this may be a female specimen of *Bos primigenius*. Surely one of the Cavern's most recent figures, in rendering it is akin to the Gallery's black bull and cow; like them, it betrays an exceedingly clever, indeed a sophisticated hand. It was perhaps deliberately intended to eclipse the surrounding herd of horses, certain of which vaguely show through the cow's relatively transparent black. Below its hoofs are the three checkered rectangles whose decorative effect rounds out a complex but at the same time curious

DETAIL OF "THE TWO BISON" (PAGE 105). NAVE, LEFT WALL. No. 65.

and impressive composition. Some ten yards further down the Nave, our eye is suddenly caught by an isolated group's diverging, one might well say explosive action. Two charging ithyphallic bison, seemingly joined at the hindquarters, as though bursting from confinement bolt in opposite directions. Both are done in dark brown, but the shoulders, the prominent hump and part of the flank of the one on the left are covered with a splash of red fleece about which there is something that suggests a veritable mantle of royalty. This painting, it seems to me, is the most tumultuous the Reindeer Age has left us. Little is lacking that could help convey a naked animal violence. The bristlingly erect fur, the shaggy heads, the searching, furious gaze in the eyes, the tense contrast of slender legs straining beneath massive bodies, the compact splitting movement with unsurpassed power express a deep-chested, thunderous anger—bewildered,

"THE TWO BISON" (LENGTH: 8 FEET) (PAGE 105). NAVE, LEFT WALL. No. 65.

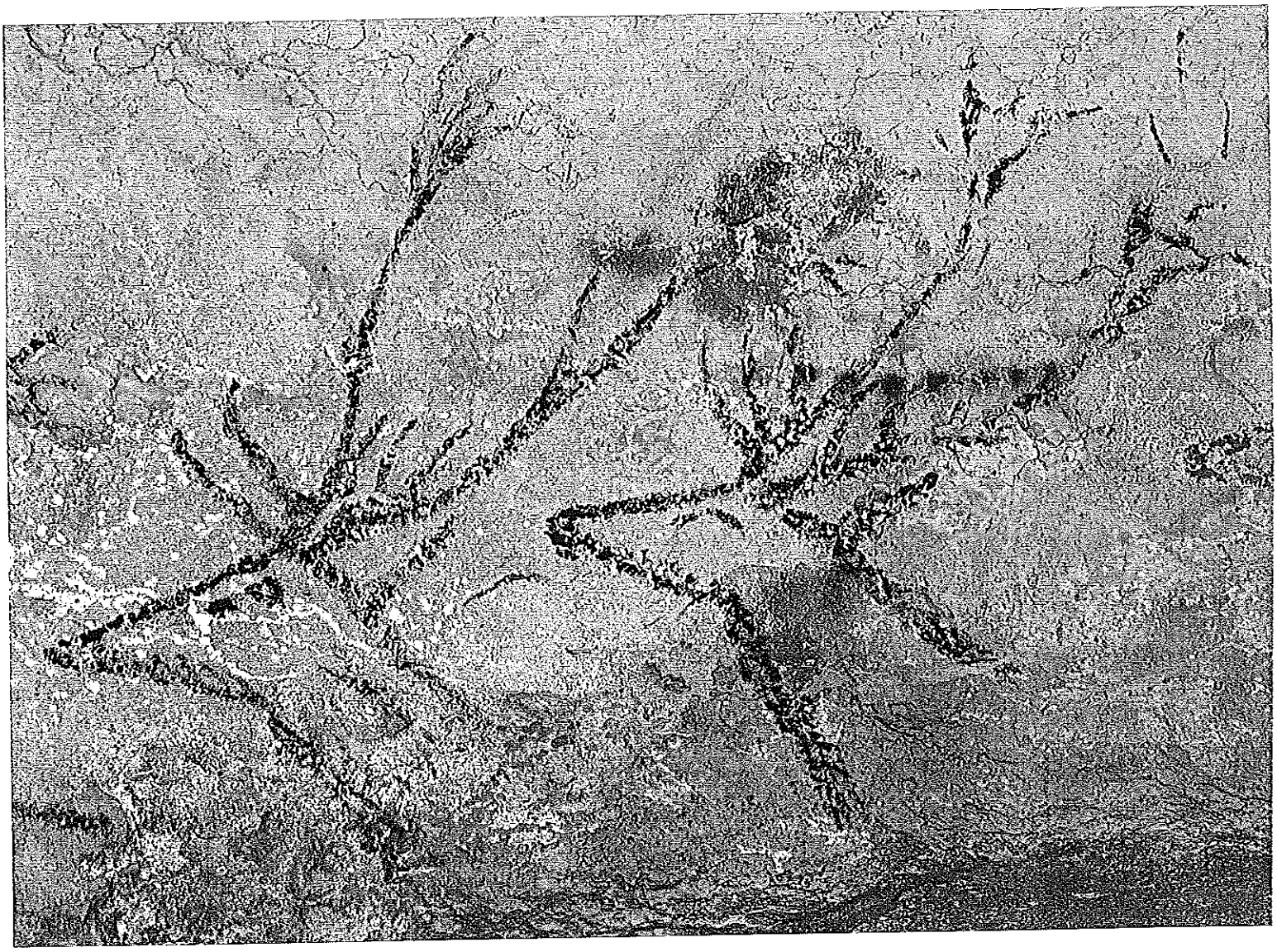




FRIEZE OF DEER HEADS (PAGE 106), LEFT PART. NAVE, RIGHT WALL. No. 64.

erotic, and blind (figs. p. 104 and 105). On the wall opposite the bison, and above a slight relief in the rock, swing five deer heads in a gently curved line; as though emerging from a shallow river, these graceful creatures file towards the Nave's depths. They are simply drawn in heavy strokes, black in the case of the first four, bistre in the case of the last. These too must be late figures: they are superimposed upon traces of a bistre horse emphasized in black, token of the time when this part of Lascaux was decorated with horses only. By themselves lovely figures, serene and gentle, the frieze of deer heads further adds to the great variety of paintings, and also of moods, in the Cave (figs. p. 24, 93, 95, 106 and 107).

The Nave terminates in a narrow corridor down which a stout man has no easy time edging his way. This corridor dwindles to a low tunnel; one has got to crawl on

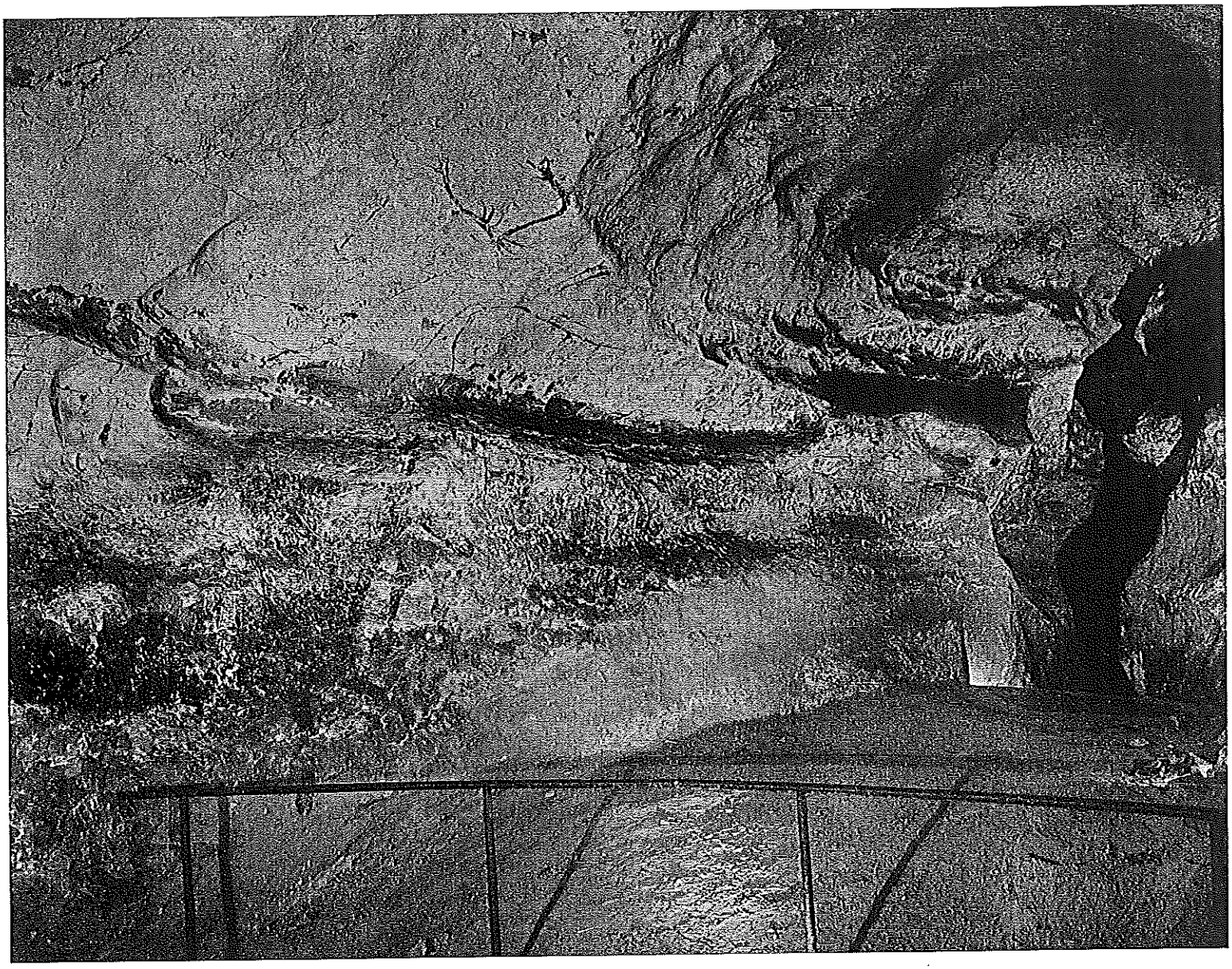


FRIEZE OF DEER HEADS (PAGE 106), RIGHT PART. NAVE, RIGHT WALL. No. 64.

hands and knees to get through; one then emerges near the foot of an abrupt, slippery incline which, a few yards higher, brings the visitor to the "Room of the Felines", the name designating a small cove near the exit of the tunnel and not far beyond which the Cave widens anew before finally terminating in a veritable gulf.

What is most interesting about this "Room" is the way it brings out the essentially discreet character of figurations artists chose to lodge (or, as one is tempted to say, to hide) in almost inaccessible places. On the left, shown pierced by arrows, are etched presumably feline animals; on the right as one leaves the Room, a frieze of painted and graved little horses seems to be a further reminder and a new version of the two horse groups in the adjoining Nave.

ENGRAVED DEER (TOTAL HEIGHT: 38 INCHES) (PAGE 110), DETAIL. APSE. No. 55.



GENERAL VIEW OF THE APSE (PAGE 109); IN THE CENTER, FAINTLY SHOWN, IS THE DEER REPRESENTED ON THE PAGE OPPOSITE THIS; IN THE BACKGROUND IS THE ENTRANCE TO THE WELL (PAGE 110).

THE APSE AND THE WELL

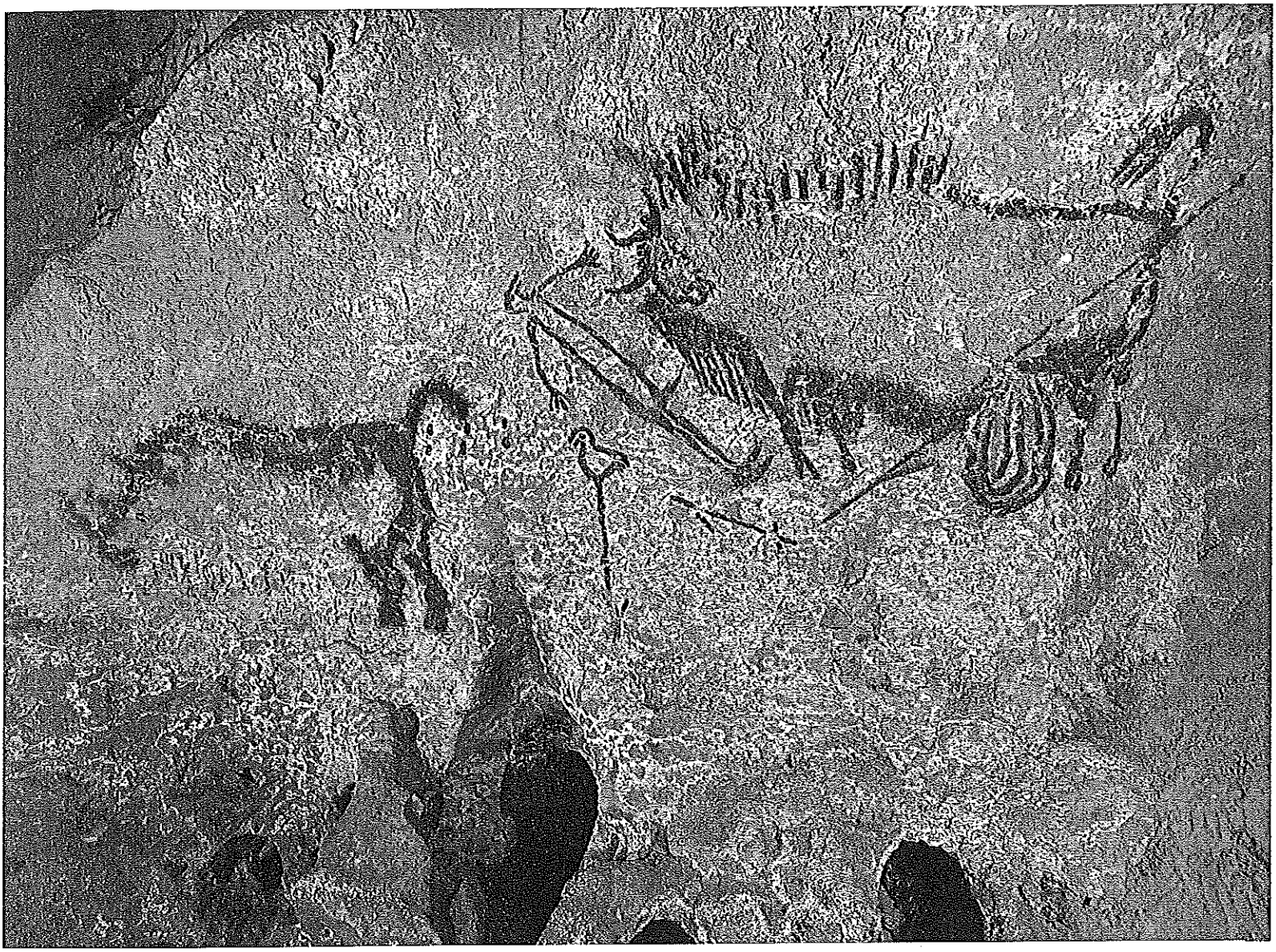
We have now to retrace our steps. In the intervening space between Passage and Nave, a chamber swells out to the right; finishing in a semi-dome, it may be compared to an apse and so it has been called (fig. p. 109). This area is surely one of Lascaux' most unusual, even though it contains nothing beyond a jumble of partially effaced paintings and a swarming network of countless etchings. Nothing short of years of meticulous labor will be required to winnow out the precious archeological data this

confused maze may harbor. The ensemble of paintings and engravings by itself declares the immense activity, the devotion of men who must have toiled unendingly over these minutely decorated surfaces: right and left, across the ceiling, every available patch of space has been used and sometimes used several times over. Save perhaps in the Trois Frères cave, one cannot anywhere obtain a more arresting image of the importance figurative representation had in the life of the men of that time. In Lascaux' great paintings resounds the cry, there glitter the outstanding moments of those men's creative activity, but these engravings' accumulated abundance alone expresses not only a restless activity but a constant preoccupation that wove itself everywhere into their life. Considered as a whole, with what regards the spectacular these figures in the Apse may be, indeed definitely are disappointing. But a very handsome hind (fig. p. 108) suffices to show the fervor of the men who drew them. The incessant, ant-like activity would be carried on by one generation after another; starting in afresh, newcomers would submerge the expression their elders had for a brief space given to life: but they etched their figures with all the determined, implicit conviction of men laboring in behalf of eternity.

From the Apse one has access to another astonishing part of the Cave, the one known as "The Well" (or, in at least one commentary, as "The Crypt"). It contains only one small group of pictures: whilst perhaps not the most skilfully wrought of all those in the cavern, Lascaux has none that are stranger.

Today, the Well is easy of access. At the far end of the Apse opens a deep hole. One may get down into it by means of the iron ladder fastened to the rock; but in prehistoric times, the descent, perhaps facilitated by a rope, surely called for acrobatics. Actually, one has no need to go all the way to the bottom: midway down, four yards or so below the floor of the Apse, a narrow platform brings one opposite a rock shelf (below which the Well continues to plunge) bearing images, on one side, of a rhinoceros and, on the other, of a bison; between them, falling or supine, is a bird-headed man; below him, a bird poised on an upright stick (figs. p. 111 and 113). The enfuriated bison's hair literally stands straight on end, it lashes its tail, intestines spill in thick ropes from a gash in its belly. A spear is painted diagonally across the beast's flank, passing over the place where the wound has been inflicted. The man is naked and ithyphallic: drawn in a puerile fashion, he is shown as though just felled by the bison's two projecting horns; the man's arms are flung wide and his four-fingered hands are open.

This prehistoric enigma which has aroused so much commentary (p. 139) introduces a dramatic element into an art where drama, though latent everywhere, seldom takes form. In later pages I shall report the various and often conflicting interpretations that have been proposed. I have no new one of my own to add. The impact of the scene, its value as well, are intensified by its ambiguity.



"THE WELL SCENE" (PAGES 110/113 and 139). WELL. No. 52a.

TWISTED PERSPECTIVE AND THE RELATIVE AGE OF THE PAINTINGS

The manner in which the Bison of the Well is rendered is at once brusque and expressive. Like the nearby figures, it is not polychromatic but rather laid out in broad dark strokes. No more than the rock's native ochre is used to supply it with warmth and animation.

I wish to insist upon this picture's mingled awkwardness and strength of expression. Its awkwardness draws attention to a characteristic common to the Lascaux paintings as a whole: they are rendered in "twisted perspective". In profile, that is to say, but as though in order to draw them better one had deliberately twisted certain parts:

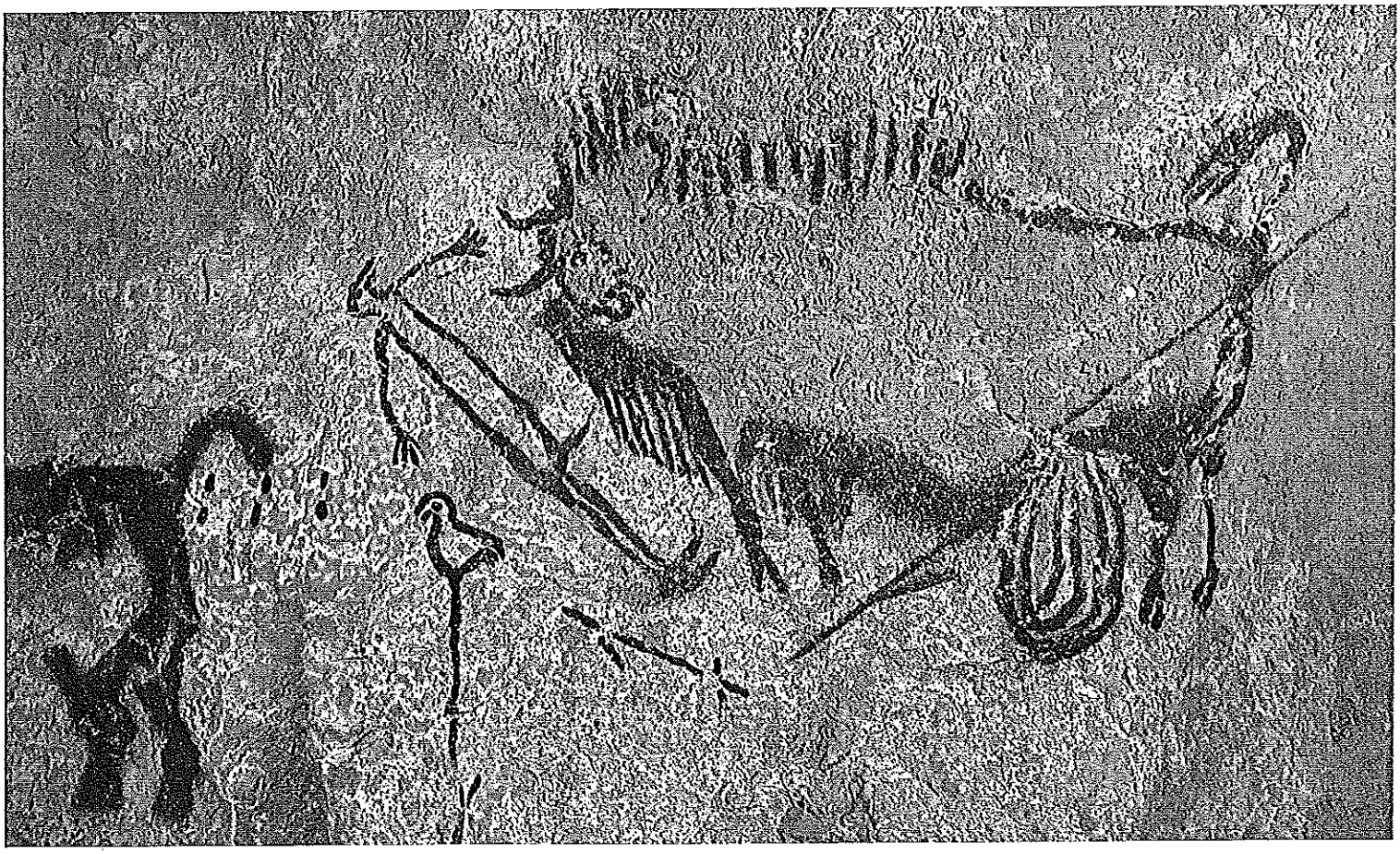
RHINOCEROS (LENGTH: 46 INCHES) (PAGE 110). WELL. No. 52a.

feet, ears, horns (or antlers). Although these animals are presented in profile, their feet, ears and horns are seen full-face, or three-quarter: the bison's hoofs are cloven and its two horns, instead of being parallel or coinciding as one, describe the shape of a lyre.

Prehistorians for the most part divide the Upper Paleolithic Age into three periods. Aurignacian, Magdalenian, and Solutrian. I have already drawn attention to the difficulties the use of the word *Aurignacian* raises; but, by and large, it would be possible thus to formulate a characteristic aspect for each of these periods: in the Aurignacian, twisted perspective is the rule; in the Solutrian, cave art is mainly represented by sculpture while painting is on the whole absent; but in the Magdalenian, feet and horns are normally depicted full-face (save, it is true, south of the Pyrenees where twisted perspective remains in currency). These distinctions enable Abbé Breuil to situate the figures we have just described in the Middle and Upper Aurignacian Periods: all these figures are in twisted perspective (save perhaps the Nave's pair of bison whose hoofs are shown full-face and which are provided each with a single horn).

To be sure, this manner of classifying is subject to discussion: for, by adhering to it, one must assign some of the Lascaux paintings to the Magdalenian period. Breuil's opinion seemed contradicted when analysis of carbonized fragments found at the bottom of the Well gave a date of 13,500 B.C.—students usually agree that the Magdalenian Period ended 15,000 years ago... But modern science's perfection of carbon analysis, while permitting us to date more recent finds, seems to be somewhat less accurate when employed to determine the age of prehistoric objects. We have good grounds for moving the marvelous fairyland of Lascaux back to beyond the Solutrian Period; and thus we have a strong right to consider it contemporary with the dawn of the mankind we know and of which we are a living part. But were we obliged to ascribe a more recent date to it, nothing would be appreciably changed. For, it must be remembered, evolution then was infinitely more gradual than it is in our day. And that is the very reason why some doubt persists: from the beginning to the end of the Upper Paleolithic Age, modes of life seem to have continued practically unchanged and the documents that have come down to us from the various Upper Paleolithic phases often prove exceedingly difficult to tell apart.

DISEMBOWELLED BISON (LENGTH: 44 INCHES), PROSTRATE MAN, AND STICK TOPPED BY A BIRD (PAGE 110). WELL. No. 52a.



THE REPRESENTATION OF MAN

MAN CLAD IN THE GLORY OF THE BEAST

WE BEGAN with this fact: one day, near a town in the Dordogne, some young lads happened across an Arabian Nights treasure. This enigmatic, totally unexpected treasure resounded with the glad din of one of this world's most remote feast-days. All of a sudden fetched from hiding, the Cave's majestic paintings, not only looking as though they could have been painted yesterday, had also a matchless charm and from their scattered composition emanated a breath of wild and graceful life.

Until that moment nothing had ever conveyed the *sensible* presence of those first, new-born men, so far away from us in time, yet so closely our kin. There before us stood something nearly of flesh and blood... and also something paradoxical that is characteristic of all prehistoric art. It is not men we see in the traces that distant mankind left us as a mirror of itself. With exceedingly few exceptions, the representations are all of animals. These Lascaux Men forcefully transmitted to us the fact that, being men, they resembled us, but as a means for telling us so they left us innumerable pictures of the animality they were shedding—as though they had felt obliged to clothe a nascent marvel with the animal grace they had lost. These non-human figures, wrought with youthful strength, declare not only that they who painted them became full-grown men by painting them, but that they chose animality rather than themselves to give the image that suggests what is fascinating in humankind.

The animal paintings of Lascaux as though aloud repeat that choice again and again expressed in other caves dating from about the same time and discovered before Lascaux. But on that day in 1940 when Lascaux was found and its eloquence found a new hearing, this earliest of paradoxes attained a kind of apotheosis.

What brings us to an amazed, bewildered halt and holds us there is this extreme self-effacement of man before the animal—and of man just turning into a human. The fact the represented animal was man's prey and food does nothing to lessen this humility. Reindeer Age Man left us an at once wondrous and faithful picture of the animal, but wherever he pictures himself he almost always conceals his features behind an animal mask. He achieved positive virtuosity as a draughtsman, but disdained to portray his own face; if he confessed to having the human form, he hid it the same instant—as though he were ashamed of his face. As though when wishing to designate himself he had instantly to put on the mask of another.

This paradox—that of the man who clads himself in the glory of the beast—is seldom formulated with all the emphasis it requires. The transition from animal to man was, foremost of all, man's abjuration of animality. Today, as though to the essential, we cling tenaciously to the dissimilarities that set us apart from the animal. Anything that recalls the animality subsisting in us, appalls us unfailingly and, quite like a prohibition, makes us recoil in horror. But from the outset the men of the Reindeer Age seem to have had our own shame of inhering animality. They put on foreign dress and figured themselves naked, exposing what we scrupulously conceal. During the *sacred* moment of figuration they seem to have veered away from the humane attitude. But that was the attitude of profane time, the attitude adopted during the time of work.

THE MAN IN THE WELL

THE Lascaux "Man in the Well" is one of the most significant of the earliest known figurations of the human being. Whereas others of the same period are sculptured, in the round or in bas-relief, or engraved if done on wall surfaces, the Man in the Well is an unusual exception. Painted, at least traced, in heavy black lines, it is easy to make out: here, no indefiniteness hinders interpretation. But the stiff, childlike manner unsettles one, the more so because of the bison's realistic execution—the bison is in every sense alive. Breuil has called this a dead man "fallen upon his back" before the wounded bison: the "dead man", *ithyphallic*, is provided with a diminutive head "resembling that of a straight-billed bird". Man and bison are not simply juxtaposed, painted independently one of the other, as were the greater part of the parietal figures. The rhinoceros itself may only very arbitrarily be dissociated from the group. Bison and rhinoceros, man and bird betray the same touch, the same stroke, the shining black paint is the same, they have the same frosted, rimy look. Save that the bison is wounded and the man inert, we can say nothing that is not conjectural about the scene confronting us. Although simply leaning backward, the man is stretched out, legs wideflung and hands opened emptily. Underneath the man is a traced bird, less awkward but no less childishly drawn; long-legged but without feet, this bird perches atop a kind of rod, like a weathercock.

This scene has been responsible for varying and hardly reconcilable hypotheses. I will have occasion to say more about them (p. 139) and also about the scene, but I wish at once to stress one undeniable point: the difference in the presentations of the man and of the beast. The term *intellectual realism* could apply to the bison. As against most of the Lascaux animal figures, rather than a faithful, naturalistic imitation of appearance, in the bison we have only the naive and intelligible schema of form. All the same, the bison seems naturalistic in comparison with the man, equally schematic but awkward to the point of extreme and similar to children's simplifications. Many children would do a drawing like this one of the man; not one would attain the vigor and suggestive force of the bison picture, laden with the rage and baffled grandeur of an imminent death-agony.

On the whole, Reindeer Age human figures, insistently acknowledging that profound but paradoxical separation between man and animal, seem almost to imply a systematic effort to preserve man from the naturalism which, when it was a question of representing animals, achieved astonishing perfection.

AURIGNACIAN FIGURES OF MAN

ODDLY enough, the rare human—or, if one prefers, semi-human—figures of the same by and large Aurignacian period sometimes remind one of the Lascaux bird-headed "dead man". In general, they are ill-formed, or formless, even if in style they are less wooden than the Lascaux example. The Aurignacian silhouettes on the ceiling at Altamira (p. 133 and below), Abbé Breuil writes, seem to be masked—although one cannot be certain, for they are nearly illegible. (Indeed, even when the drawing is well preserved and clear, it is still impossible to say whether the animal head is fictive or figures a real mask.) Breuil has related these Altamira engravings to the Hornos de la Peña man "whose bearing and look of a monkey is accentuated by a pinned-on tail" (p. 134). The ambiguous Hornos creature is ithyphallic, as is "the horrible anthropoid" of La Peña de Candamo (p. 134) with its "knock-kneed legs and distorted, curled feet." At Pech-Merle, one figure—feminine, by rare exception—apparently has a bird's head; there is a suggestion of clipped wings or their stubs in the silhouette (p. 134). The human, or more nearly inhuman, figures of Los Casares are far more recent. They are "grouped in the most suggestive scenes; all the men have grotesque faces, as at Hornos and on the Altamira ceiling. They are associated with figures of fish and frogs" (p. 134). Only one little piece of carved bone, the head with the flowing beard that comes from Péchialet (p. 134), offers a naturalistic likeness without any element of the hybrid.

All in all, the persons represented in these figures are ill-made, semi-animal, or grotesque. They were done with seeming carelessness and we are unable to give any conclusive reason for their presence in the caves.

MAGDALENIAN FIGURES

With the exception of the bird-woman of Pech-Merle, the female figures dating from the same epoch as Lascaux are very different and call for some other interpretation. Before coming to them, I should like to cast a glance at the Magdalenian figures of man which, save for a few non-essential features, resemble Aurignacian figures. Magdalenian art seems to have been a starting from scratch, the rebirth, after a long period of interruption, of the art we broadly term Aurignacian. Magdalenian art quite exactly follows footsteps that were laid down previously. With regards to style, to intentions, to implicit concepts, the modifications are unimportant, and the relative attitudes towards representing man and animal are the same in either period. So enduring a permanence would seem to imply unchanged conditions of life and the same outlook upon the world. (Elsewhere, in the perhaps more recent but in part contemporary "Spanish Levant", techniques evolve, life changes and the figures of man and of animal cease to attest the strange opposition we spoke of: the men are still schematized, but their rapid movements are rendered with considerable force; animals now become schematized; the human and the animal are no longer poles apart.) At any rate, the Aurignacian and Magdalenian are relatively homogeneous and we may rightfully consider the latter period the complement of the former. Existing in greater quantity, Magdalenian paintings now and then shed light upon what is left in shadow by the scarce Aurignacian examples. At Combarelles (p. 134), at Marsoulas (p. 134), elsewhere, numerous engravings carry on the series of ill-formed heads and silhouettes I mentioned apropos of the Lascaux "Dead Man". Caricature made its appearance in the Aurignacian, it is heightened in the Magdalenian. From the Caverne des Combarelles near Les Eyzies, Abbé Breuil describes "an entire series of anthropoid figures which may be representations of masks. Among the most striking one could cite a strange human silhouette whose head affects the shape of a mammoth and whose arms extend into two lengthy appendices, quite possibly meant to be tusks. Further on, an obese man seems to be following a woman; here and there, animal heads wearing human faces are engraved in the rock." The Marsoulas figures, one may say, stress the comic note in inconsistent and numerous compositions, "above all of faces and sometimes of grotesque and infantile profiles".

Were it not for the marvelous Grotte des Trois Frères (whose engravings, unhappily, are jumbled, crowded, very hard to discern clearly), the realm of the Magdalenian, on the plane we are discussing, would be merely the Aurignacian's continuation. But the Trois Frères introduces something decidedly new.

Apart from Lascaux—and leaving aside the Spanish Levant and the splendid Altamira grotto whose paintings, tending to fade, lack the sharpness of Breuil's water-color copies—, the Reindeer Age has left us but one capital monument: the immense tangle of engravings in the Trois Frères cave is remarkable for its beauty, human significance and richness. As in the case of Altamira's painted bisons, these parietal engravings are, practically speaking, known to us only through Abbé Breuil's renderings.

His studies are necessary when reading about Altamira; however, we can ourselves see the painted bisons if we make the trip. But the Trois Frères engravings are another matter, and Breuil's studies prove of greatest usefulness even when we are on the spot. One is faced by a maze of undecipherable lines: even under sharp light, sifting figures from the confusion demands guesswork: Breuil's splendid work of deciphering (only part of which has been published in *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal*) required long years of patience. Thanks to these studies' exactness, the Trois Frères half-human figures have a sensible impact possessed by almost none of the others we have mentioned hitherto. One of them, lost in a dense crowd of animals—overlapping horses, ibexes, bison—, fairly leaps in a burst of wild energy (p. 135). The obscure, thick pell-mell provides a tremendous accompaniment to the arrival on stage of the human form's foolish, camouflaged shape. According to Breuil, this bison-headed ithyphallic man, springing, dancing, may be playing upon a "musical bow". Indirect, reconstructed though it is, the drawing has an obsessing quality; I know of few more stunning figurative works than this infinite symphony of animals secreting furtive humanity: the promise, probably, of man's eventual triumph, to be his upon condition, however, that he wear a mask.

A second figure among the Trois Frères engravings (p. 135) also presents the ambiguous appearance of an ithyphallic man from the waist down and of a bison from the waist up.

But it is chiefly that other figure, long known as "The Sorcerer" but which today Abbé Breuil prefers to call "The God of the Trois Frères" (p. 136), that compels our attention. This is the cave's only "painted figure": it was first engraved, then heightened by paint. Unfortunately, it photographs poorly and the only way of obtaining a good reproduction is by copying; unfortunately also, the figure's complex execution lends itself less readily to a sketch than does the simpler bison-headed dancer.

Apparently, this isolated "god", situated highest up upon the rock, "presides over all the beasts, accumulated in incredible number and often in terrible confusion... Shown full-face, the head has round-pupiled eyes between which descends the nose-line ending in a little arc. The ears are a stag's; a pair of sturdy antlers... grow upon the head... There is no mouth, but a long striated beard falls down to the chest. The forearms are flexed and juxtaposed... A broad black stripe outlines the entire body, thinning down the back and flank, widening at the hindlegs, which are bent... The feet, including the toes, are no less carefully drawn and move in a dance similar to 'the cakewalk'." The virile member is accentuated and erect but, paradoxically, points not forward and up, but backward and down (it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to make it visible in any other way). At any rate, it is "well-developed", protrudes "beneath a flowing tail (a wolf's or horse's) ending in a little tuft..." "Such evidently," Abbé Breuil concludes, "is the figure the Magdalenians considered the most important in the cave and which we judge to represent the Spirit ruling over the abundance of game and the hunt's success."

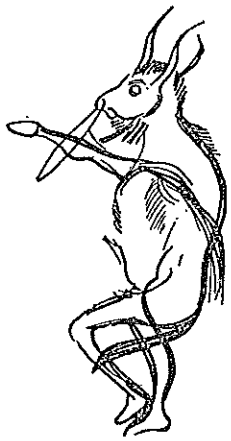
No sounder conjecture could be offered; we can only amplify it with references to the "spirit-masters" of Siberia discussed by Eveline Lot-Falck in her *Rites de chasse.*

I doubt, though, whether we can come to any definitive conclusion. Taken as a whole, these images relate to the hunt, and to the hunt this antlered man (or rather god) overlooking the disordered animal throng obviously bears some kind of relation. The fugitive, over-rich reality I find in these pictures is my only answer to the hypotheses based upon ethnological researches. However much it may be warranted, perhaps every definition has the fault of missing the essential: here, what is essential seems to me more tortuous, more vague: inextricable, the essential may reside in an indivisible whole. Whether or not this "god" figure was invested with the government of operations which for the Magdalenians were of the greatest practical importance, bypassing these material ends, so like those of our machines, I may focus upon very different aspects: for all his useful influences, this dream-begotten creature is no less a most remarkable negation of whatever has to do with man's everyday life. This sorcerer, this god, or this spirit-master, before presiding over the activities whence man got his living, like one sign to its antithetical sign stood in contradiction to the life and attitudes upon which these activities were dependent. In placing itself under this figure's sign and suasion, ordinary life could not prosper save upon condition it rejected, denied *what it was*, espoused, affirmed *what it was not*. Generally regarded, the hybrid man signifies the complex interplay of sentiments and attachments that went into the elaboration of humankind. It was constantly a question of saying *no* to the man-who-works and who, in working, calculates the effectiveness of his material actions; it was a question of saying *no* to care-bound, work-bound man and, at his expense, *yes* to a divine, impersonal element associated with the animal that neither reasons nor works. Mankind must have had the feeling it was destroying a natural order when it introduced work's reasoned processes into the world; mankind acted as though having to make amends for this calculating deliberation that won it a real power. Whence the concern for magical powers, which stand opposite the behavior directly enjoined by interests of practical welfare. Beginning from the time of hominids, work was conducted logically, not at the blind haphazard ascribed to the "primitive mentality" which, some contend, was "pre-logical". However, that behavior termed "primitive" and "pre-logical" (actually secondary and *post*-logical), magical or religious behavior, simply translates the trouble and distress that beset man who has been acting reasonably, in conformance with the logic all work implies. This behavior reflects the deep uneasiness inspired from the very first by a world whose spiritual make-up was jolted and disturbed by work.

Most surely, the Magdalenians (whom the Aurignacians must have resembled) sensed that, being animals no longer, having become men, they now possessed might, power, a position of command. If their efforts obtained worthwhile results, these, they knew, were achieved with the aid of labor and calculation, of which animals are incapable. But to animals they attributed other powers—powers connected with the world's intimate functionings—which, compared to the puniness of human industry, seemed to exert an incomparable force. Hence, to them, it appeared best not to stress their own humanness, signifying no more than the weak power of work, but, to the contrary, to stress an animality glowing with the omnipotence of an impenetrable world:

that world's marvelous hidden strength, it seemed to them, effectively nullified, at least in the most decisive manner outweighed all this exhausting toil. As progressively they shook off its crushing burden, they had the feeling of acquiring these superior forces. And so, whenever they could, they sought to evade the monotonous, the stifling regularity of the human order; they would revert to that other world of wildness, of darkness, of bewitching animalism; fervidly, anguish-stricken, they figured that world, struggling for a moment to forget this daylight clarity, this prosaic down-to-earth efficacity that was being born in them. We too will now and again suddenly feel the oppressive dead weight of a civilization of which we too are proud. We suddenly languish, thirsting after another truth, and we ascribe our lassitude to some error incult in the privilege of reason. We are led to balk at and then cry down the values that derive from stolid application to work; old prohibitions symbolized these values, since rationalized, but what they did in the first place, they are doing still: imposing rules upon sensual forces, limiting the disorders which proclaim the power of death, in a word checking the tumult of passions which unrestricted animality releases.

Such were the sentiments which, more strongly than they do us, swayed an emergent humankind that gave to the divine a value it refused to reason. To the divine... which, to express its infiniteness, assumed animal form, the precise opposite of the practical and limited aspect that is characteristic of man.



THE FEMININE FIGURES

THUS, the paradox of from the outset granting a pre-eminence to the animal form appears to be one aspect of the impulse to transgress. In my opening pages, I noted an impression that, at Lascaux, one finds a humane reflection of the transgression that exists universally. But, one may ask, could not faulty or insufficient evidence be the cause of our paradox of man represented in animal form? However, does not this hybrid man, often grotesque, often concealing himself behind animal features, seem the sign and proof of that festive outburst in which he cast aside the rules he ordinarily observed? Become boisterous, man turned his back upon hard-headed common sense and the hard-worker's abilities a naturalistic rendering of his everyday visage could easily have expressed. Animated by the spirit of transgression, he grew drunk, waxed violent; thrusting the human aside, he threw off subordination to the humble labor *(the everyday job)* involved in objects and making them. Violence, the divine beckoned to him—the divine which, at heart, is animal: as such the godhead made its earliest appearance, animality deeply stamps the gods of ancient Egypt and Greece. From the first, divine animality overshadowed all the great works of man; that, and what we discover at Les Trois Frères, contains the secret of Lascaux.

But before we can proceed further, we must first glance at the problems raised by another category of figures: the Aurignacian sculptures representing women.

They form a distinct group, opposed to both the early Reindeer Age's ambiguous rendering of man and to its naturalistic picture of the animal. These for the most part extraordinary statuettes emphasized maternity: we would perhaps even call them idealistic were it not that, here, idealization tends in the direction of what to us is deformity. At any rate, they have none of the masculine figurations' relaxed, childish treatment that in the Magdalenian period still prevailed everywhere save at the Trois Frères: painstaking naturalism applies to the male, deformed idealism to the female figures. These steatopygous Aphrodites, with their voluminous breasts, prominent hips and protruding buttocks have been for a long time out of style...

A desire for increase and fertility used to be the perfectly logical explanation given to account for these abundant forms. The breasts and vulva are usually exaggerated. But such an argument based on the figures' alleged magical properties, strays away from the realm of efficacious action and towards that obscure, profound disorder that is the heart and essence of the realm of the sexual. Of the intention behind these images it is hard to say anything that is not vague. But they have one feature in common with the masculine representations. Although they never take on any appearance of the animal, they do in a sense tend away from the human.

Some are headless. Most have a face, but more often than not it is a sheer surface, without eyes, mouth or ears. The head of the Willendorf "Venus" (p. 136) is a regular globe, featureless, covered by rows of little pits or pockmarks, and resembling a large mulberry. The famous Lespugue "Venus" (p. 136) has the shape of a smooth oval

melon. Likewise, the Grimaldi statuettes have a prominent sex and flattened face. Like the first, the second Willendorf "Venus" (p. 136) has a smooth-surfaced spherical head. Of the few remaining figurines that have been found in various places, the majority lack, or virtually lack, true faces. The Laussel bas-relief (p. 136) has a flat face, a kind of pancake devoid of features. We might suppose that paint once supplied what is missing, but the even granular texture of the Willendorf "Venus" discourages that hypothesis. Now and then, it is true, figurines show signs of having been painted, but no features added as an afterthought could have humanized this complete absence of facial structure.

However, there is one exception to the rule and, what is more, it dates back to the early Aurignacian. A tiny head of a young woman, carved in mammoth ivory, was discovered in the nineteenth century at Brassempouy, in the Landes (p. 136). The mouth and nose are so skilfully formed that this minute face (known, inappropriately, as "The Mantled Figurine": her head is covered only by carefully arranged hair) gives an impression of youth, of beauty, of feminine charm. Were proof of it needed, the Brassempouy figurine could demonstrate that the art of that time would have been fully able, had it so chosen, to represent human beauty. But this head cannot nullify evidence of a fixed decision, which became common, to deny what it is usual to affirm, to show what is ordinarily veiled.

Shrouded in completest silence, the figures of women are enigmatic, perhaps even more unintelligible than the male figures. These at least allow us a glimpse of the spell the animal exerted over man. We speculate upon fertility; but, woman remaining closer than man to nature's blind forces, we still find ourselves in a world where reason cannot even indirectly lay claim to pre-eminence. About these representations, the most ancient of the human figure, we can say only that they consistently leave in shadow those very aspects of human appearance which we highlight today.

THE ANIMAL ART OF LASCAUX

"THE ANIMALS AND THEIR MEN"

UNTIL NOW, I have in a necessarily vague manner dealt with the conditions that surrounded earliest man's activities. I have chiefly undertaken to develop the antithesis of animality and work. In what I have proposed, the rôle played by hypothesis is perhaps less important than it seems. When scanning man's origins, we must surely find, on the one hand, a way of viewing things that was determined by the work man performed, and, on the other, the notion of another world that lay outside the bounds of the banal world in which man toiled. No less surely, the Lascaux paintings are the works of men in whom this antithesis was a living one. There are several ways of exploring it: mine is not necessarily the best, but it is preferable to the misappreciation or the ignoring of an elementary principle.

We have at least been able to shed some light upon one group of facts; I wish now to use it upon another, and to relate the foregoing to the attitudes and behavior which certain tribes of hunters, living today, observe towards animality.

The preceding chapter concerned itself with the attitude Reindeer Age Man adopted whenever the question arose of how to represent the human figure. I must now consider this attitude's implications: his way of viewing animals and the sentiments expressed in the figurations that have come down to us.

As a means to interpret one pattern of behavior, one is ill-advised to employ the pattern we observe in other domains. Transfers are rewarding and comparisons useful only if they are made between exceedingly similar civilizations. But the behavior I shall discuss has, wherever it is found, a uniform character and meaning: it is basically that of all the societies which still largely rely (or until recently relied) upon hunting for their livelihood. Not that it is necessary to arrive at the conclusion that Lascaux Man had the same reactions the Siberians of pre-Soviet days shared in common with other archaic societies of hunters. But this Siberian lived under conditions which in many respects reproduced those of the Reindeer Age: a comparison is therefore possible and, if we bear in mind the antithesis I spoke of, it assumes a major importance.

This passage in Eveline Lot-Falck's *Rites de Chasse chez les Peuples Sibériens* seems to me of particular interest: "The hunter," she writes, "regards the animal as at least his own equal. Like himself, the animal hunts to procure its food, has, he believes, a life like his own, and the same sort of social organization. Man's superiority appears only in the sphere of techniques, to which man has contributed the tool. In the sphere

of magic, he will grant the animal a prowess no less considerable than his own. On the other hand, the animal outdoes man in several characteristics: it is the better in its physical strength, in agility, in its keen senses of hearing and smell, qualities a hunter appreciates. He will allot an even higher value to the spiritual powers he associates with these physical qualities... The animal is in more direct contact with the divinity, it is closer than man to the forces of nature, which readily incarnate themselves in the animal. 'Wild game is like man, only more godlike,' says the Navajo, and the phrase would not be out of place on a Siberian's lips."

The relationship between man and animal, hunter and prey, thus seems very far indeed from what we usually imagine it to be. "The death of the animal depends, at least partially depends, upon the animal itself," continues the author of *Rites de chasse*. "In order to be killed, it must first have consented to die, as it were becoming an accomplice to its own killing. Therefore, the hunter deals circumspectly with his prey... eager to keep on the best possible terms with it. 'If the reindeer does not like the hunter,' the Youkaghir say, 'the hunter will not be able to kill him.' The bear is never a victim save of its own free accord and itself indicates the place where the mortal blow should be delivered. The striped squirrel of the Oirotes knowingly slips its head into the snare's noose, and the Keto and Ienisseiens hold that, when its time has come to die, the bear goes in quest of a hunter."

The relationship between hunter and prey is not unlike the one between the seducer and the woman he desires. Both sets of actors play their parts with equal hypocrisy—and the behavior of each helps in understanding the other. But we are a long way from the herdsman's feeling of superiority over the animals he tends: this feeling comes much later, above all resulting from a more advanced civilization in which the herder is himself an inferior and in which livestock are thought of as the meanest, most neutral of objects.

We cannot, as I say, hope to determine whether Lascaux Man held towards the animals he fed upon the same attitude held by the Siberian or Navajo of today. But the quoted passages give us a closer view of the world where, clothed in an unimpaired dignity, the animal towers above scurrying, bustling humanity: at Lascaux, the animal ranks on the level of gods and kings. It is at this juncture we should remember that, in history's most ancient days, supremacy, sovereignty (the condition describing that which alone is an end unto itself) belonged to the king, that king and god were one, and that the god was not readily distinguishable from the beast.

Les Animaux et leurs Hommes—"The Animals and their Men"—is the title Paul Eluard gave to a collection of his poems. Perhaps this formula, left us by a very great French poet, is the key we need to open the Lascaux Cave. Poetry yields only to a deeper, a more just understanding of man; it is in that coin one must pay if one wishes to heed what this voiceless underground place has to say.

HUNTING, WORK, AND THE BIRTH OF A SUPERNATURAL WORLD

One may glimpse a causal connection between an activity such as hunting—or fishing—and the notion that the world is governed by magical or religious powers. Malinowski links the perception of the supernatural to man's feeling of helplessness before the unpredictable outcome of these undertakings. Man was able to exert and sometimes enforce his will upon nature, but he could do nothing to guarantee the hunter's success. The capture, it seemed, depended upon something beyond the scope of work and technique, upon some other world whence man was shut out, shut out at least while working, while imbued with the notions and rhythms of logical efficacity. Very rapidly, it occurred to man that he might be able to act upon this other world's powers, but not in the way he acted upon stone, with a hammer. To this new world he imputed a profound, an intimate existence similar to his own: to it he ascribed impulses of desire and hate, jealousy, affection. He believed in the possibility of influencing it, not as he influenced things, by working, but as he influenced other men, by entreating or obliging them.

Never more than while hunting did he feel such urgent need, nor notice it so widely shared by his fellows, to break into this inaccessible, tormenting domain upon which, he thought, depended success or failure, a life of abundance or the sufferings of hunger.

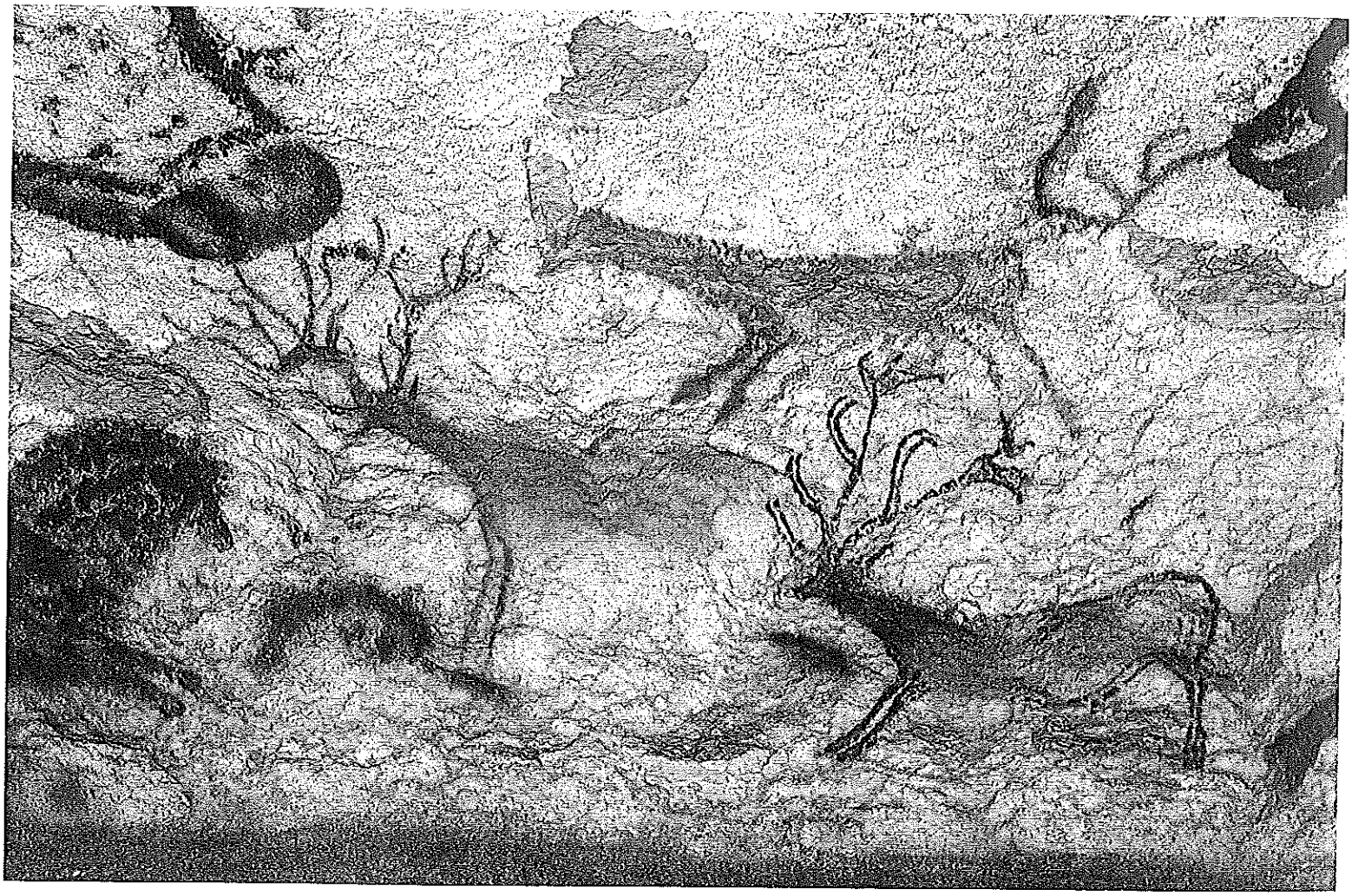
And there begin magic's ambiguities—which enabled Frazer, most unreasonably, to include it among techniques. When, to be sure, man has recourse to magic, he seeks a practical result; but this activity is practical only insofar as he admits his own powerlessness to get unaided what he is seeking. The magic-maker imputes omnipotence to the world in which technique is unavailing, useless, the world of inscrutable, indomitable forces that control chance. The making of magic does indicate a stubborn seeking after practical results, but it also signifies the acknowledgment of a hierarchy of values: in it, the sacred stands above the profane, the disorders precipitated by desire above reasonable right-acting, luck above humble merit, and the end above the means. Man, in his status of the worker, of the technician, is by and large reduced to the size of the *means* whose *end* is the animal being, never subject to work, never technically skilled. Otherwise phrased, profane activity is the means whose end is the sacred moment: from the start, the human's innermost meaning was the divine. Magic-making is part of the behavior of a man who ascribes more might and truth to the realm of the divine end than to the drudging world of means: this man bows before a force which surpasses him infinitely, which is sovereign, so very foreign to work's human attitude that the animal may be used to express it.

These magic-makings, these figures (probably made capriciously, not at the sole behest of dire necessity), correspond very poorly to our usual idea of means—of implements, tools. These figures expressed the moment during which man acknowledged the higher value of the *sanctity* belonging to the animal—which, perhaps, he sought

to befriend, thereby dissimulating the naked desire for food that impelled him. That hypocrisy has its deeper meaning: it was the recognition of a sovereign value. This behavior's ambiguity conveys an important feeling: man considered himself incapable of attaining the end he aimed at unless he first contrived to rise to a level of parity with it. He had at least to feign equality with a power which surpassed him, which calculated nothing, never toiled, was always at play, and whose animality was not distinct.

No, we cannot deduce Lascaux Man's customs and attitudes from those of modern Siberians. But neither can we suppose that their two worlds were radically unalike. And while we have got to be content with only a vague understanding of Lascaux Man's behavior, we may nevertheless conjecture that it was marked by the same ambiguity, and say that the near to supernatural beauty of the Cave's animals expresses that ambiguity. This art is naturalistic, true, but naturalism attained, by exactly rendering it, what is marvelous in the animal.

THREE SMALL DEER (PAGE 62). MAIN HALL, LEFT WALL. No. 11.



LASCAUX' PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF ART

THE PICTURES of Lascaux—and it is this that distinguishes them—had an integral part in the rites. Of the rites we know nothing, but we may believe that the actual painting of the pictures was one of their elements. The drawing of a figure probably did not, alone, constitute a ceremony, but it was part of a larger religious or magical *operation*. It is not probable that the painted, or engraved, images were simply meant as a durable kind of decoration, which was the meaning expressly given them in the temples and tombs of Egypt as well as in the sanctuaries of Greece or medieval Christianity. The overlapping of the figures indicates that, to the contrary, former decorations were considered of lesser importance when a new one was to be laid down: if the new one obliterated an older and perhaps more beautiful painting, that was of but secondary consequence. There is plain evidence at Lascaux—in the Main Hall and the Axial Gallery—of a concern for overall effect. But, without question, that concern was also secondary. The actual *doing* embodied the entire intention. In time, the Cave's splendor gradually appeared—an as though chance or god-given splendor.

This way of surpassing a definite conscious intention ties in closely with the essential impetus behind this art that springs not from routine habit, but from the spontaneity of genius. I have referred to a fundamental incertitude, a hesitancy, which, in their behavior, profoundly separates these authentic "primitives" from those with whom we have become acquainted through ethnology. While it is true that a Siberian environment and climate render comparisons less absurd (the universality of hunting peoples' elementary judgments is, let us remember, what authorizes us to enter these Siberian tribes into the discussion), the still more unrigid, more spontaneous character of Reindeer Age Man prevents us from overstressing it. Doubtless, the Reindeer Age was not an era of rapid change. The Aurignacian and Magdalenian are much alike despite the many thousand years separating them. Those ages knew no swift evolution comparable to the one that today, unceasingly affects every fibre, every facet of our life. But neither was there, in those ages, a rut blocking change, enquiry, and sometimes even innovation.

This point is crucial: Reindeer Age art was informed not by tradition, but by nature: its rule was faithfully to imitate nature. Just *what* rules it received may be of no great importance. But this is: the norm came from *outside*. Which means that, in itself, the work of art was free, not hinged to, not yoked by the methods and manners which might have determined its form from *within*—and which would have trimmed it to fit convention. Similarly, associations of standard ideas, conventional notions, clichés, can, from within, shape literary expression, hamstring it, eviscerate it, seal it into a mould, squeeze out the unexpected, eliminate the extraordinary, the marvelous. But there always remains the possibility of some sudden imperious call from without, and of a response to it: then the established, the expected are shattered. The Reindeer Age which by and large saw few changes in ways of living, seems primarily to have

responded (but not in compliance with convention) to the fundamental and exterior idea of nature. Ways of doing and making things existed and, without any doubt, the men of those times handed them down from one generation to the next, but they did not dictate the work of art's form or breathe life into it. That routine weighed so lightly need not surprise us if we remember that these were earliest steps: no rut had yet formed to imprison the adventurer. In its beginnings, art had unavoidably to summon forth that leap of free spontaneity which we usually call genius. At Lascaux it is this free movement we sense most deeply, and that is why, writing about cave-art, I have spoken of art's beginnings. We can do no better than roughly date these paintings. But whatever their real date, they were something new: out of nothing, they created the world they figure.

In the Reindeer Age there was no innovation in the working of stone. Those men carried on and little by little bettered earlier technical practices (which Neanderthal Man had already utilized). But in the behavior associated with art, in ritual practices and attitudes as well as in art itself, Reindeer Age Man's waverings and doubting instability distinguish him from the archaic tribesman of our times. He was perhaps a creature of routine, but routine's grip upon him was less secure.

We must not for an instant neglect this element of innovation in our attempt to situate Lascaux in the perspective of history. Lascaux points away from the art of backward peoples. It points towards the art of the most restless, most eloquent, most subtle civilizations. At Lascaux, gazing at these pictures, we sense that *something is stirring, something is moving.* That something touches us, we are stirred by it, as though in sympathy with the rhythms of a dance; from this passionate movement emanates the beauty of the paintings. They are, we recognize, the individual's free communication with the world around him, they are man's reaching out to touch his kind whose inner wealth he is just discovering. This intoxicating emotion of dance was always strong enough to lift art above the subordinated tasks which man accepted to perform at the behest of religion or magic. Conversely, the harmony of the individual with the world around him invites him to undertake the transfigurations of art—and they are the transfigurations of genius.

There is thus a secret kinship between the art of Lascaux and the art of the most vibrant, the most profoundly creative of later periods. Lascaux has its echo in each of those other new-blooded, fresh-sprung arts which vigorously broke free of inertia's chains. It sometimes happened quietly... I am thinking of early Egyptian art, of Sixth Century Greece... But at Lascaux nothing had to be broken, nothing needed undoing: Lascaux was the first doing, the first step, the beginning.

NOTES AND DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL

REFERENCES TO PREHISTORIC FIGURES CITED

THE DISCOVERY OF THE CAVE

THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE CAVES AND OF THEIR PAINTINGS

TECHNIQUES OF PREHISTORIC PAINTING

THE VARIOUS EXPLICATIONS OF THE WELL SCENE

TENTATIVE CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE – MAPS

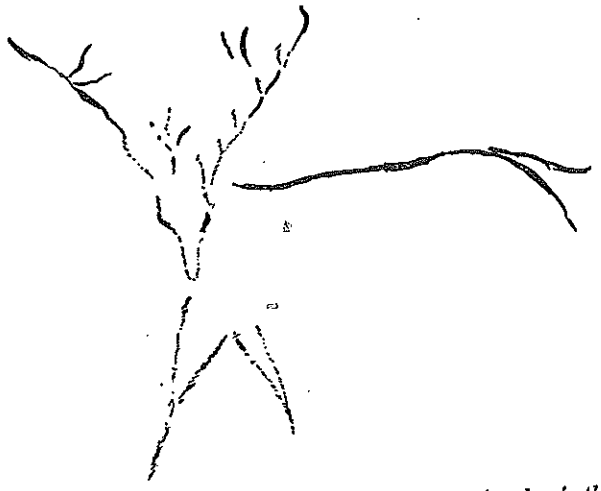
REFERENCES TO PREHISTORIC FIGURES CITED (ELSEWHERE THAN IN LASCAUX)

THE ORIGINS OF ART

Page 35 – ... *Sometimes these lines describe figures...*

Groups of paintings traced on the rock by paint-moistened fingers are found at La Baume-Latrone (in Provençal, "The Cave of the Thieves"). This cave, situated near the Pont du Gard, lies 14 kilometers from Nîmes. From Abbé Breuil's copy (above), one can make out a small elephant and, above it, a long snake.

See BREUIL, H., *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal*, pp. 211-2.



Page 35 – ... *the splendid deerlike animal of the Grotte Bayol...*

Like La Baume-Latrone, this grotto is situated not far from the Pont du Gard. The picture is formed with the aid of the rock surface's natural relief, upon which strokes of dark paint were added. In the sketch (above), made by Dr. E. Drouot, the parts supplied by relief are indicated by dotted lines.

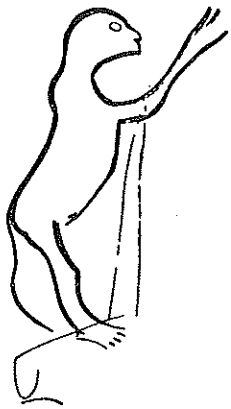
See DROUOT, Dr. E., "Les peintures de la Grotte Bayol à Collias (Gard)", in *Bulletin de la Société Préhistorique Française*, 1953, Nos. 7 and 8, pp. 392-405, fig. 8.

THE HUMAN FIGURES

Page 118 – ... *The Aurignacian silhouettes on the ceiling of Altamira...*

The engraved figures (left; height: 19 inches. See too page 118) in which the head seems to be a bird's, are reproduced after H. Breuil and E. Cartailhac, *La caverne d'Altamira à Santillane près Santander (Espagne)*. Monaco, 1906.

See BREUIL, H., *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal*, pp. 64-5. – SACCASYN-DELLA SANTA, E., *Les figures humaines du Paléolithique supérieur eurasiatique*, No. 1 (fig. 1), No. 11 (fig. 12), No. 12 (fig. 13), Nos. 48-53 (figs. 48-53).



◄ Page 118 – *... the Hornos de la Peña man...*

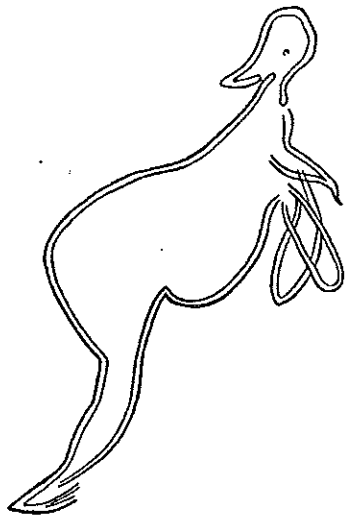
The Grotto of Hornos is situated 8 kilometers from Torrelavega (Santander). Breuil notes that, when doing his study (reproduced, left), he "omitted the erected member, not being certain it belonged to the original picture." After H. Alcade del Rio, H. Breuil and L. Sierra, *Les Cavernes de la Région cantabrique.* Monaco, 1911.

See BREUIL, H., *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal,* p. 355.

Page 118 – *... "the horrible anthropoid" of La Peña de Candamo...*

Cave situated near San Roman (Asturia).

See SACCASYN-DELLA SANTA, E., *Les Figures humaines du Paléolithique supérieur eurasiatique,* No. 14, figs. 15 and 16. — BREUIL, H., *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal,* pp. 385-6.



◄ Page 118 – *... At Pech-Merle, one figure...*

The Cave of Pech-Merle, or the David Cave, lies near Cabrerets (Lot). We reproduce (left) one of a number of figures (length: 21 inches) after A. Lémozi, *La grotte temple de Pech-Merle. Un nouveau sanctuaire préhistorique.* Paris, 1929.

See SACCASYN-DELLA SANTA, E., *Les Figures humaines du Paléolithique supérieur eurasiatique,* No. 5 (fig. 6, reproduced opposite); No. 81, fig. 79; No. 215, fig. 199; No. 216, fig. 200. — BREUIL, H., *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal,* p. 273, fig. 307.

Page 118 – *... The human, or more nearly inhuman, figures of Los Casares...*

The Cave of Los Casares is in Spain, in the province of Guadalajara.

See BREUIL, H., *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal,* p. 391 and fig. 512.

Page 118 – *... the head, with the flowing beard that comes from Péchialet...*

Piece of bone, half sculptured and half engraved, found by Abbé Fayol at Péchialet (Dordogne). Abbé Fayol Collection. (Height: 9.5 cm.)

See SACCASYN-DELLA SANTA, E., *Les Figures humaines du Paléolithique supérieur eurasiatique,* No. 148, fig. 143.

◄ Page 119 – *... At Combarelles...*

This grotto, near Les Eyzies (Dordogne), contains "thirty-nine human or semi-human drawings, some of which seem to represent masked figures"— Abbé Breuil. We reproduce (left) the "human silhouette whose head affects the shape of a mammoth", after H. Breuil, L. Capitan and D. Peyrony, *Les Combarelles, aux Eyzies.* Paris, 1924.

Page 119 – *... at Marsoulas...*

Cave situated near Marsoulas (Haute-Garonne). Abbé Breuil points out its "abundance of elementary figures, with grotesque and infantile faces and sometimes profiles."

See SACCASYN-DELLA SANTA, E., *Les Figures humaines du Paléolithique supérieur eurasiatique,* No. 65, fig. 62; No. 152, fig. 146; and No. 154, fig. 148. — BREUIL, H., *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal,* p. 245.

▲

Page 120 – ... *One of them... fairly leaps in a burst of wild energy...*

The Caverne des Trois Frères is at Montesquieu-Avantès, in the Ariège. Reproduced (above) after Breuil's study, this half-human figure (visible at the extreme right) measures 8 inches high.

See BREUIL, H., *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal*, pp. 176-7 and figs. 129 and 139.

Page 120 – ... *A second figure also presents...* ►

Height: 12 inches. Reproduced (right) after Breuil.

See BREUIL, H., *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal*, p. 177 and fig. 133 (and fig. 128, bottom).

◀ Page 120 – ... *that other figure, long known as "The Sorcerer"...*

Height: 30 inches. Reproduced (left) after Breuil's study.

See BREUIL, H., *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal*, p. 176 and fig. 130.

Page 123 – ... *The head of the Willendorf "Venus"...*

The sculpture was found in Lower Austria. Museum of Natural History, Vienna. Height: 11 cm. Oolithic calcareous stone. Traces of red paint.

See SACCASYN-DELLA SANTA, E., *Les Figures humaines du Paléolithique supérieur eurasiatique*, No. 121, figs. 117 and 118.

Page 123 – ... *The famous Lespugue "Venus"...*

Sculpture found in 1922 at Lespugue (Haute-Garonne). Musée de l'Homme, Paris. Mammoth ivory. Height: 6 inches.

See SACCASYN-DELLA SANTA, E., *Les Figures humaines du Paléolithique supérieur eurasiatique*, No. 120, figs. 115 and 116.

Page 124 – ... *the second Willendorf "Venus"...*

Museum of Natural History, Vienna. Ivory statuette. Height: 10 ½ inches.

See SACCASYN-DELLA SANTA, E., *Les Figures humaines du Paléolithique supérieur eurasiatique*, No. 122, fig. 119.

Page 124 – ... *The Laussel bas-relief...*

Laussel lies near Les Eyzies, in the Dordogne. Lalanne Collection at Bordeaux. Height: 23 inches. Traces of red paint.

See BREUIL, H., *Quatre Cents siècles d'Art pariétal*, Nos. 279-80 and fig. 317.

Page 124 – ... *The Brassempouy figurine...*

Sculpture found in 1894 at Brassempouy (Landes). Musée des Antiquités Nationales, Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Ivory. Height: 3.7 cm.

See SACCASYN-DELLA SANTA, E., *Les Figures humaines du Paléolithique supérieur eurasiatique*, No. 164, fig. 155.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE CAVE

ON THURSDAY, September 12, 1940, the Cave of Lascaux was discovered by four Montignac boys: Marcel Ravidat, then eighteen years old, Jacques Marsal and Simon Coencas, both fifteen, and Georges Agnel, sixteen. It had been Ravidat's idea to explore the hole left, perhaps as long as thirty years before, by an uprooted tree. An old woman, who had once buried a dead mule there, had long maintained that the hole was the mouth of a medieval underground passage. This passage, she assured her hearers, led to the little chateau situated at the foot of a hill near Lascaux. Finding themselves in the neighborhood and with nothing else to do, the four boys decided to take up Ravidat's idea; he had indeed brought along a lamp, hoping they would have opportunity to carry out his project. The other version, according to which the youngsters, off on a hunt, followed their dog down into the hole, seems to have been invented by journalists to whose questions the lads replied "yes" without attaching much importance to what they were saying.

The hole was about three feet across and three deep. But at its bottom opened another, much narrower shaft: pebbles dropped through it were heard to fall a long way. Ravidat dug the shaft wider, then plunged straight in, head first... and landed on the pile of loose dirt below. He lit his lamp and called to his companions to join him. They proceeded to explore the Cave, soon discovering markings, then figures of animals. They conferred, agreeing that they had discovered a prehistoric grotto and that their fortunes were made. In the account he drew up a few days later at the request of Monsieur Laval, a schoolteacher, Marcel Ravidat wrote: "Our joy was beyond description, a bunch of wild Indians doing a war-dance wouldn't have equalled us." They decided to say nothing to anyone. Nevertheless, they returned the next day, a fifth boy in tow. This time they were equipped with ropes and completed the exploration, going even to the Well. In no time a good dozen people were in on the secret, among them a gendarme who suggested that M. Laval be advised, for he was known to have an acquaintance with prehistoric questions. Exceedingly skeptical from the outset, considerable persuasion was needed to induce M. Laval to undertake the descent; but when he entered the Main Hall, all his doubts vanished.

Abbé Breuil was then living at Brive in the household of Abbé Bouyssonie. Notified on September 17, Abbé Breuil reached Montignac on the 21st. "The discovery once made, two of the boys camped... beside it; no one descended save accompanied by them, and if hundreds of visitors from Montignac and the vicinity did not despoil the Grotto, it is owing to the devotion of those lads."

THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE CAVES AND OF THEIR PAINTINGS

FOLLOWING an incident that occurred not long ago in the Pech-Merle Cave at Cabrerets (Lot), doubts were raised about the authenticity of the prehistoric parietal paintings. During the summer of 1952, the French writer André Breton visited Pech-Merle and, wishing to ascertain the state of one painting, ran a finger across it. An altercation ensued, charges were leveled, and M. Breton had subsequently to pay a fine. But wet paint had adhered to his finger and he believed he had detected a fake. The Société des Gens de Lettres took up the question and composed a written request that a wide enquiry be launched to establish the authenticity, not only of Pech-Merle, but of the painted caves as a whole. Abbé Breuil, reporting upon this request to the Commission Supérieure des Monuments Historiques, qualified it as "inadmissible" and "presumptuous".

Without being in the slightest way ill-disposed towards M. Breton, whose good faith no one questions, Abbé Breuil's point of view has got to be shared by any sufficiently informed person.

Very early on—indeed, in 1879, when the Altamira Cave was discovered by Marcelino de Santuola —the problem of the painted caves' authenticity was posed. The paintings met with the by and large unanimous skepticism of specialists. There was even talk of a conspiracy of Spanish Jesuits

who, fearing lest the safety of Biblical facts be threatened by the findings of prehistorians, had (it was thought) concerted a fraud in order to discredit them. Twenty years were needed to allay these suspicions. At the start of the century, comparable engraved figures at Combarelles and painted ones at Font de Gaume obliged skeptics to revise their opinions, and the majority of prehistorians finally to acknowledge the paintings' authenticity. But all the same, one heard doubts expressed everywhere and peculiar hypotheses abounded. For example: Combarelles and Font de Gaume were the work of "some who refused to submit to Imperial conscription". Abbé Breuil was even accused of "going down there to make copies when really he took down the stuff to make the originals."

This skepticism had been long out of fashion at the time of the Cabrerets incident; but now the discovery of *fresh* paint seemed to justify new alarms.

The sensational detection of the Piltdown scandal, publicly revealed in England on November 25, 1953, further fortified distrust. If for forty-two years the world's most learned anthropologists had been taken in by some fossilized bones which finally turned out to be faked, why could not prehistorians have been duped in the same way? What was one to make of this wet paint on a picture that, by science's conservative estimate, was said to be 15,000 years old?

The Piltdown fraud, in the words of H. V. Valois, had been "meticulously prepared, brought off by someone who had access to specialized collections, and perpetrated with amazing Machiavelian cheek. Such a fraud," Valois concludes, "... was a masterpiece of its kind." This masterpiece, possible to accomplish in a laboratory, could not feasibly be duplicated in a cave where the scheme of figures must be laid out point by point. A fossil such as the Piltdown skull was of extraordinary interest and had inevitably to give rise to all sorts of exploratory studies. And so in a certain sense, the hard job of faking it was worthwhile. Admitting for a moment that a hoax could have been contrived in the painted caves, the labor involved—minutely detailed and innumerable falsifications—would have been out of all proportion to the sought-after result; since the slightest extravagance would betray it, a false painting could do no more than lose itself amidst the crowd of authentic paintings.

Had the Société des Gens de Lettres doubters but opened the book Abbé Breuil published in April 1952, a few months before André Breton's "find", they could have read (in the chapter treating the recognition of the caves' authenticity, on page 15 of *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art pariétal*) these remarks concerning the copies made in 1902: "Tracing-paper was out of the question. Having the consistency of a thick paste, the paint would have stuck to the paper. To have tried by these means to copy the Altamira ceiling figures would have been to destroy them." Indeed, what with the cave's uatural dampness, it is hardly surprising that the paintings never dried.

In a note published (in the *Bulletin de la Société Préhistorique Française*, 1952, pp. 465-466) following the Breton episode, Abbé Breuil discusses the authenticity of Pech-Merle. Upon this occasion he also speaks of Lascaux, alluding to the differences one sometimes discovers between an actual painting and the photographs of it one has seen previously. "Have we not observed," he remarks, "that the Lascaux man"—the "Dead Man" of the Well—"we saw reproduced in *Illustration* after the photograph taken in 1940 by M. Ichac, had a scarcely visible virile member, and that, as time passed, it underwent a distinct growth? Myself a witness of the state of things at Lascaux in the days shortly after its discovery, I can give assurance that nothing of the sort happened, and that *Illustration* blurred this detail in order to spare its modest readers' sensibilities. And they are not to be ignored!..."

The circumstances of Lascaux' original discovery, which I have related in an earlier note, of course lend their support to the paintings' authenticity. But for those who are not to be swayed save by the most solid evidence, additional proof exists. As I mentioned above (p. 97), at the entry to the left side of the Passage one sees traces of two large cowlike figures. All, however, that remains of them are lower legs and a little of the belly which the rock's sweating preserved from crumbling in the way, higher up, the sandy calcareous stone fell to pieces. As Abbé Breuil writes *(Bulletin de la*

Société Préhistorique Française, 1950, p. 359), these traces "are fully visible beneath an efflorescence of whitish calcite which fixed the paint and hardened the surface; all the rest crumbled away, grain by grain: *here is absolute proof of the antiquity of the splendid neighboring figures*, perfectly preserved and of the same technique." (The italics are Abbé Breuil's.) The vestiges of the cowlike animals are in every point identical to the corresponding parts of the Hall's great bulls.

TECHNIQUES OF PREHISTORIC PAINTING

THE ART of painting in those earliest ages attained a refinement and a richness of means that is both extraordinary and disconcerting. To be sure, there was not much choosing amongst surfaces to paint upon: the painters simply used the smoothest areas of the rock walls. It is not likely that Upper Paleolithic Franco-Cantabrian artists did out-of-doors rupestral painting. On the other hand, they could have, and all they did could have vanished; we incline, however, to think the contrary, for more or less numerous examples of out-of-doors painting have survived from the Spanish Levant whose art was roughly contemporary with the northerly region's.

Pigments were employed just as they came from their natural sources, ground fine and thinned with water or mixed with fatty substances. Paint was either liquid or paste-like. Most colors were based on mineral oxides: blacks and browns were furnished by manganese, red ochre by iron oxide. These substances, furthermore, had been utilized as far back as the Middle Paleolithic by Neanderthal Man, and we imagine he employed them for painting his body. But only in the Upper Paleolithic did man begin to use these materials in the representation of natural forms. At the very beginning, fingers applied the paint. Later on, a variety of means was used: pads or wads of vegetable matter, tufts of hair, the chewn or shredded ends of sticks. Besides these, Reindeer Age Man, particularly at Lascaux, very certainly employed a process still in use amongst the Australian aborigines of today: it consists in putting colored powder into a hollow tube and in blowing it over a moistened surface. It was thus early painters produced the stencilled hands which are fairly frequently met with in most of the caves: one hand was pressed flat against the wall, and the color was blown on around it. At Lascaux this process was commonly used for applying flat shades to a surface—one thinks especially of the horses' manes which look vaporous, whose edges are not sharp. We do not know how they managed in this way to compose whole masterfully executed groups. They may have used hollow bones or reeds. Such bones, filled with pigment, have been found in the course of excavations.

The outline was sometimes sketched with the aid of a very fine dark line. But this contour delimiting a flat painted area may just as well have been put in afterwards. At any rate, when at Lascaux a form was circumscribed by an engraved outline, that outline came last. Figures were sometimes gone over again long after they had been done for the first time: form and color might then be modified. (See too page 35.)

THE VARIOUS EXPLICATIONS OF THE WELL SCENE

TWICE I had occasion to mention the Well and the Scene painted in it: first when giving the Cave's general description (p. 110), then when discussing the "Dead Man", by no means the Scene's least remarkable figure (p. 117).

In all of Franco-Cantabrian art there is nothing else quite like it. Only the Spanish Levant's rupestral art—doubtless in part contemporary, but also in part later, and in any case having its own distinct style—affords what we may call real scenes like this in the Lascaux Well. In that Spanish region we find hunting scenes, indeed scenes of warfare and, in one instance, of everyday life:

a man busy gathering wild honey is attacked by a swarm of bees. But the Lascaux Scene is a good deal harder to interpret than these others, and has given rise to commentaries which I have thought best to cite in an appended note.

Abbé Breuil has analyzed it as an anecdotal scene representing a rather complex incident: this, he feels, is "a painting perhaps commemorating some fatal accident that occurred in the course of a hunt."

The man, hence, has been mortally wounded by the bison. But the bison, which seems to have touched the spear drawn obliquely over the wound whence its entrails are spilling forth, could not have been disembowelled by the thrust of a spear: such a weapon would not have caused this gaping wound. "The rhinoceros quietly moving away to the left... furnishes the explanation; it seems to be stalking off with a contented air, having just destroyed what annoyed it before." The "short object fitted with a crotch and at the other end with a kind of grip" at the bison's feet could be a dart-thrower for casting the spear. As for "the pole with the barb at the lower end" surmounted by "a conventional bird, without feet and almost without tail", it reminds Abbé Breuil of "the funeral posts of the Alaskan Eskimos and the Indians of Vancouver."

Save perhaps for the bird and the rod it perches upon, Breuil's conjectures seem likely enough. F. Windels and Alan Brodrick have adopted them.

G. Lechler, in an article printed in *Man* ("The Interpretation of the Accident Scene at Lascaux", *Man*, 1951), sees the bird and its perch as a kind of dart-thrower similar to other carved examples we have discovered. The bison's entrails suggest to him some kind or other of obscure sign—to which he ascribes the form of an Hebraic letter...

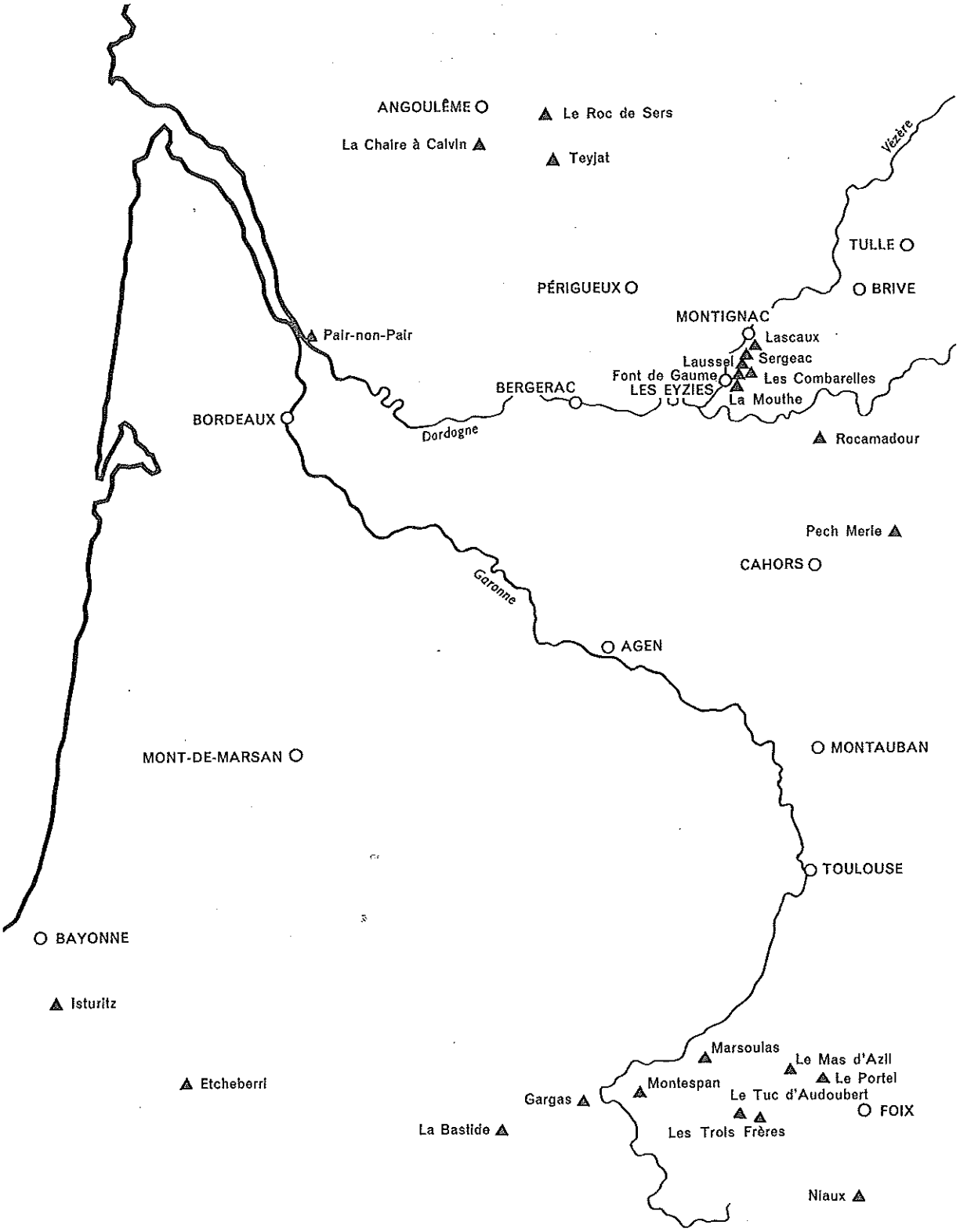
The most unusual if not the most convincing interpretation is H. Kirchner's. In his long article ("Ein archäologischer Beitrag zur Urgeschichte der Schamanismus", *Anthropos*, 1952), it is not at all a question of a hunting incident, the prostrate man is not dead; rather, thinks Kirchner, he is a medicine-man shown in the throes of an ecstatic trance. Kirchner admits the idea of a relationship between Lascaux civilization and the Siberian civilization of our own times. The thing is by no means improbable: in the Upper Paleolithic, Siberia could well have had a civilization similar to that of Western Europe, and it is equally conceivable that it has survived without thoroughgoing changes until modern times. Kirchner compares the Well Scene to Sierozewski's representation of the sacrifice of a cow by the Yakuts (*Iakuty*, St. Petersburg, 1896; reproduced in Lot-Falck, *Rites de chasse...*, plate VII, p. 96). Oddly enough, in front of the cow are figured three posts, each topped by a carved bird like the one in the Lascaux Scene. The Yakut sacrifice synchronizes with a medicine-man's swooning away in ecstasy. The posts serve to mark the road to heaven, to which the medicine-man will guide the sacrificed animal. The birds are auxiliary spirits without whom the medicine-man could not undertake his aerial journey, a journey that is accomplished while he is unconscious. This part played by the birds in the medicine-man's trance is very general; he himself would, in principle, possess something of a bird's nature. He sometimes dresses in "bird clothes" and, Kirchner supposes, the bird's head on the Man in the Well is like in meaning to a costume. This costume, however, is incomplete; but the medicine-man is indeed in a trance, indeed carrying out a rite, and his nudity is not cause for surprise. His rigidity—nearly a *rigor mortis*—would itself be characteristic of such an exercize.

But the author seems to have overlooked the bison and his wound; that is to say, is it probable that, in a sacrifice, a bison would be disembowelled? and has not Kirchner's theory forced him to view the rhinoceros as independent of the rest of the Scene? However, if one inspects the actual Scene at Lascaux, one quickly discovers the group's unity and similarity in treatment. But Kirchner's hypothesis surely has at least this one merit: it emphasizes the strangeness of the Scene. Abbé Breuil's hypothesis seems the soundest, but leaves the bird and bird mask unaccounted for—and they are the strangest parts of the Scene. We may perhaps go this far: the rhinoceros disembowelled the bison, the bison killed the man—but that is not, indeed, very far, nor very satisfactory.

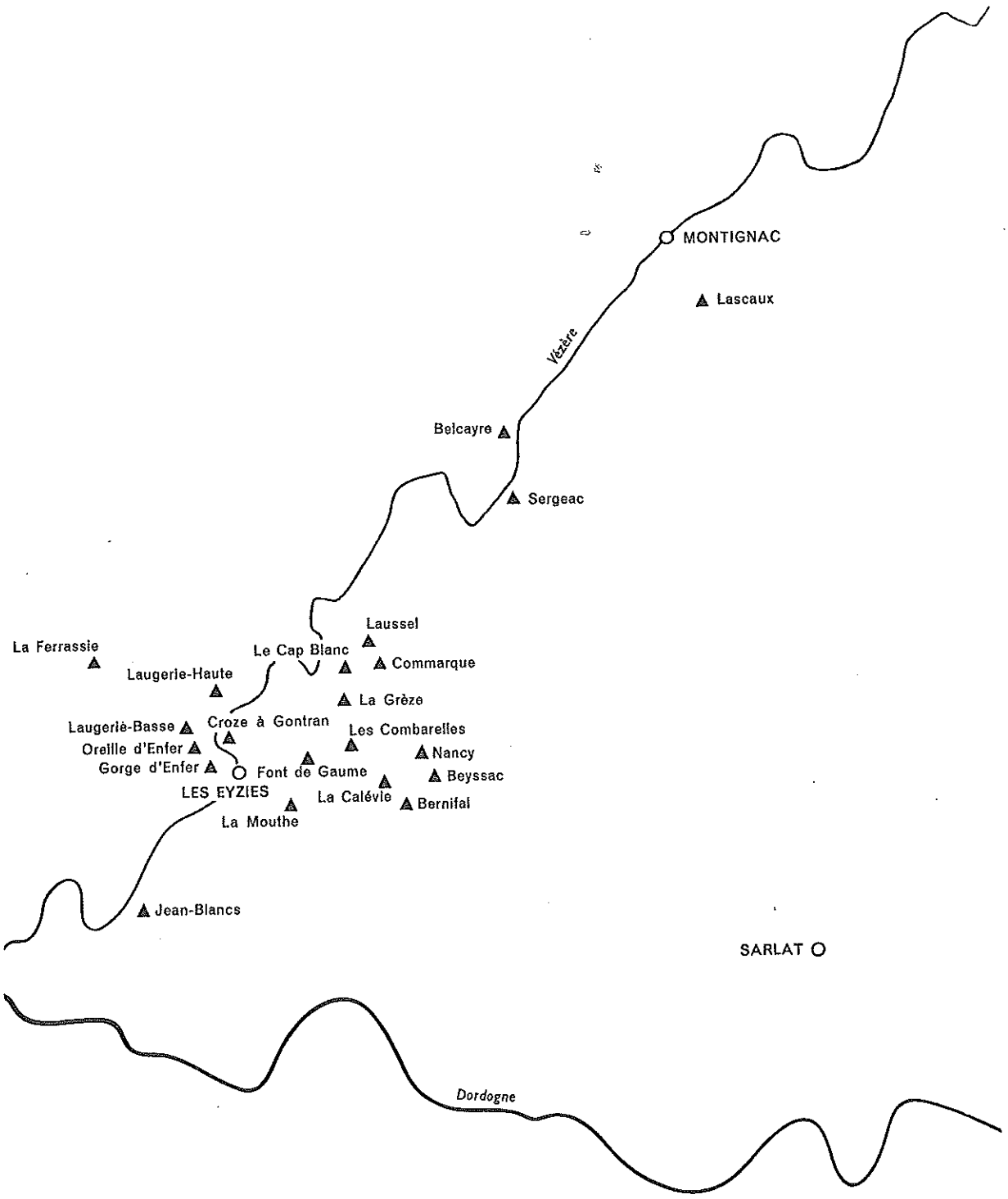
TENTATIVE CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

Geological Period	Prehistorical Period	Division according to Tool-Styles			Anthropological Correspondents	Climatic Correspondents	Approximate and conjectured Dates (B.C.)	Corresponding Works of Art
		Terminology employed in this book	Terminology employed by D. Peyrony	Terminology employed by D. Garrod				
Tertiary						Günz Glaciation	600,000 550,000	
		Abbevillian			Pithecanthropus Sinanthropus	Interglaciary Period		
	Lower Paleolithic	Acheulian			Pre-Neanderthalians and Ancestors of *Homo Sapiens*	Mindel Glaciation	480,000 440,000	
						Very Long Interglaciary Period		
						Riss Glaciation	240,000 190,000	
						Interglaciary Period		
						Würm Glaciation	120,000	
	Middle Paleolithic	Mousterian			Neanderthal Man		30,000 or 40,000	
Quaternary		Lower Aurignacian	Perigordian I.	Castel-Perronian				Brassempouy Head Lespugue "Venus"
		Middle Aurignacian	Typic Aurignacian					
		Upper Aurignacian	Evolved Perigordian	Gravettian				The Principal Lascaux Paintings
	Upper Paleolithic or Reindeer Age				*Homo Sapiens*			
		Solutrian						Roc de Sers Sculptures
		Magdalenian						Altamira Ceiling
							15,000	

DECORATED CAVES OF THE UPPER PALEOLITHIC AGE
IN SOUTHWEST FRANCE



DECORATED CAVES OF THE UPPER PALEOLITHIC AGE
IN THE LASCAUX REGION



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