

Périgord Prehistory

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TOURISTIC GUIDE
DISCOVERING ■



ÉDITIONS SUD OUEST

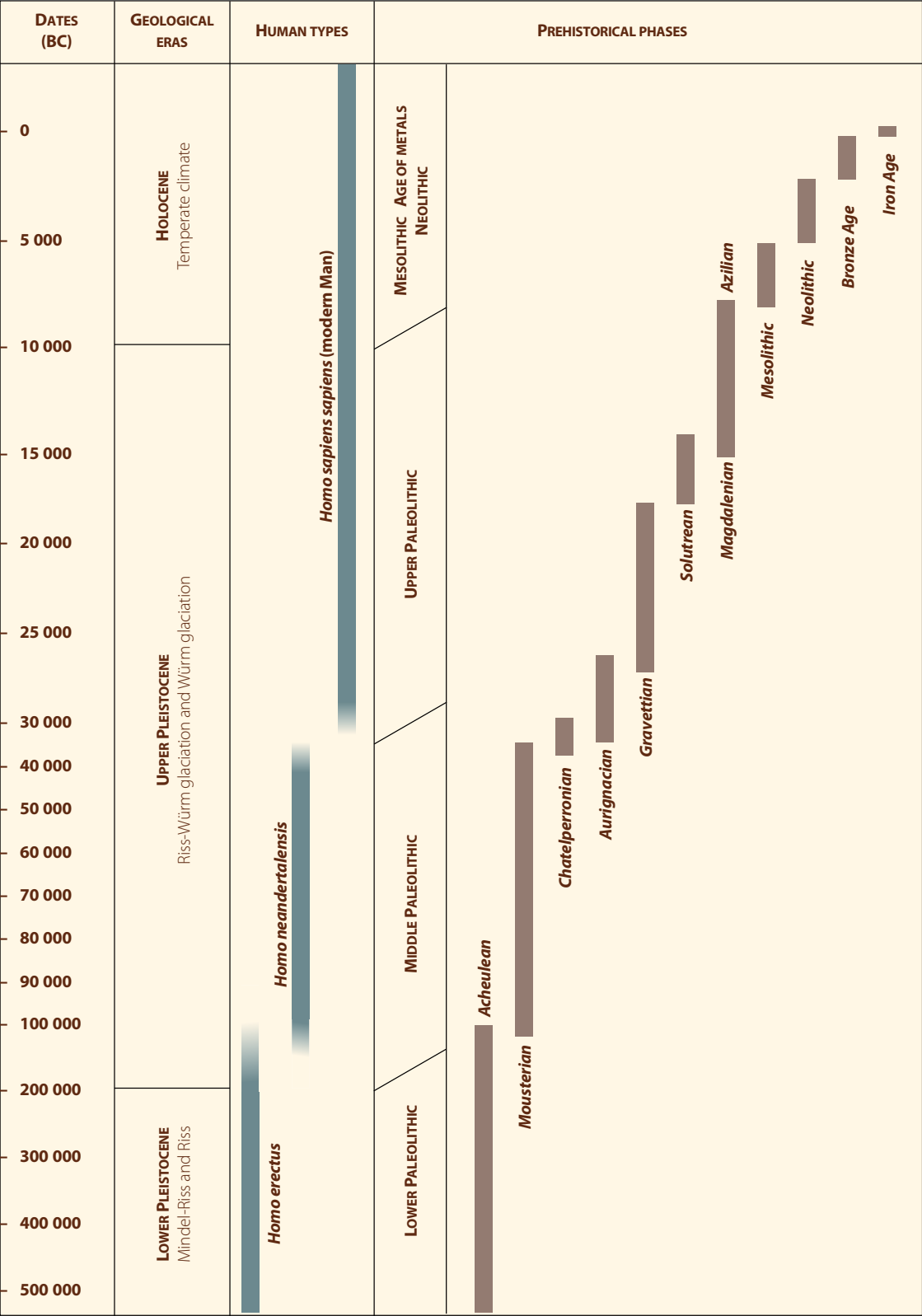
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Translated by Angela Caldwell and Stanley L. Olivier



ÉDITIONS SUD OUEST



Exploring Prehistory in Périgord

Wherever humans have lived, they have left bones, tools and weapons made of stone, animal bone or metal, a few grams of charcoal, small pebbles and virtually invisible grains of plant pollen. However, these odds and ends would be of little importance if we could not breathe life back into them.

This is the work of the prehistorian (or protohistorian for periods closer to recorded history). To understand human history, you have to be able to distinguish between Christopher Columbus and Karl Marx, between Gutenberg and Napoleon Bonaparte. To understand prehistory and protohistory, you have to show a great deal of patience, advancing one step at a time along the paths of knowledge. Otherwise, it would be too easy to get lost.

It is, then, a succession of periods in prehistory that we invite you to explore with us, without travelling too far from Périgord since, with the exception of our oldest ancestors, people from every period of prehistory have lived here in turn.

The dawn of time

A few dizzying facts and figures:

- The Earth was formed 4 billion years ago.
- Life (in the form of small blue algae) appeared 2 billion years ago.
- Dinosaurs walked the Earth 200 million years ago.
- The first man appeared 2.5 million years ago in Africa.
- Humans have only been living in Périgord for 450,000 years.
- The most distant ancestors of modern man, *Homo sapiens*, appeared 200,000 years ago in Africa.
- *Homo sapiens* arrived in France only 35,000 years ago. This was Cro-Magnon man, responsible for the cave paintings in Lascaux 17,000 to 18,000 years ago. Quite recently, in fact.

Dividing up prehistoric periods

Geological periods are divided into eras – primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary. One of the main features of the end of the tertiary era and the entire quaternary era is the presence of Man. Three major periods succeeded each other during the Quaternary era – the Palaeolithic (Lower, Middle and Upper) or Carved Stone Age, the Neolithic or Polished Stone Age and the ages of metals. Each of these major periods is divided into a number of ages, usually reflecting the appearance of the implements made by Man. Each age took

its name from a major site in which extensive traces of the period have been found. The site is then described as “eponymous” - Aurignac and the Aurignacian Period, La Gravette and the Gravettian Period, Le Moustier and the Mousterian Period etc.

Setting the date!

Chronology is calculated using a range of physical and chemical methods such as Carbon 14 dating for items no more than 40,000 years old. The dates are indicated either as B.P. (before present), fixed by convention as 1950 A.D., or B.C. (before Christ). For the Palaeolithic Era, dates are generally given as B.P. when

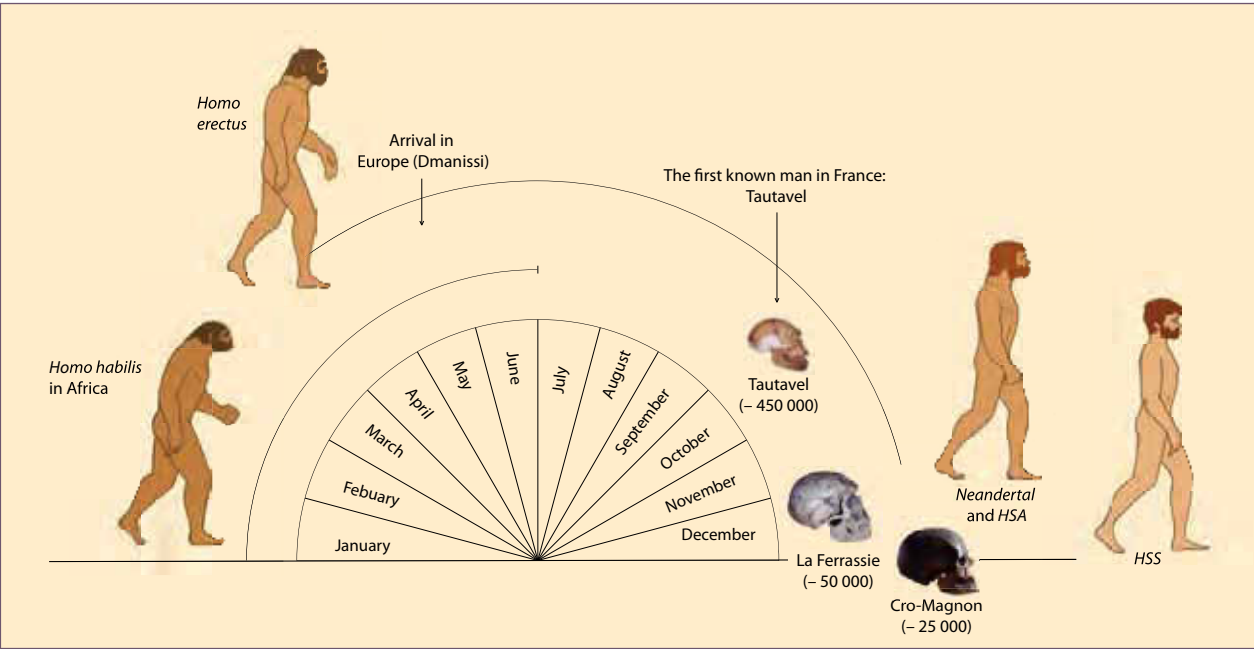


The calendars of the Palaeolithic Era

Father Henri Breuil was photographed by his assistant, Father André Glory, in Laussel circa 1954. He was at the pinnacle of his career, a member of the Institute and referred to as the “Pope of Prehistory”. He is thought to have made his first visit to Laussel on 15th April 1908, as part of the committee that came to decide whether or not the Solutrean was more recent than the Aurignacian. The committee carried out the same task, on the same day, in Le Ruth. Father Breuil is also famous for having defined the six subdivisions of the Magdalenian Era ■

eras dates within the protohistoric period tend to follow the calendar i.e. B.P. or B.C. Dates obtained using the Carbon 14 dating method are slightly more recent than the ones obtained using other methods and may sometimes be subject to correction.

The famous “hut” in La Mouthe (Les Eyzies)
This painted and engraved outline, whose meaning is still unknown despite its name, is among the cave art in La Mouthe. When it was discovered in 1895, the entrance to the decorated gallery was completely blocked by archaeological deposits left by several encampments during the Early Palaeolithic Era. This means that the drawings are older than the upper layers of deposits ■



2.5 million years of human evolution compared to a reference year

Let's start on 1st January. The reference year begins with the first hominid, *Homo habilis*, who remained in Africa until the end of June. *Homo erectus* was born in the middle of April, also in Africa. These men reached the gateways to Europe and Asia early in May. One of them, the pre-Neanderthal *Homo erectus* from Tautavel in the Pyrénées-Orientales who is the first known man in France, lived at the end of October. The first inhabitants in Périgord were *Homo erectus*. These people are known to have lived at this period although no traces of their skeletons have been found. All that has been uncovered are traces of their encampments and tools. In mid-December, *Homo erectus* dies out, replaced by Neanderthal Man and the oldest *Homo sapiens*. The first examples of modern man, our direct ancestors, do not reach France until Christmas Day. They are *Homo sapiens sapiens*, or Cro-Magnon Man as they are usually called. Périgord has a large number of traces of Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon Man – skeletons, encampments, tools and works of art. Using our scale, History, which came into being with the invention of writing, began on New Year's Eve, 31st December, in the late morning ■

Successive prototypes

Men and apes have a common ancestor. Man developed from a slow evolutionary process which became individualised some 7 to 8 million years ago. This was when some distant ancestors appeared, in Africa.

The Hominids of the Tertiary Era were small with poorly developed brains but the ability to walk upright. They were followed by *Australopithecus* from South and East Africa. One of them, who is 3.5 million years old, has become quite a celebrity. Her name is Lucy and she was named after one of the Beatles' songs.

Homo habilis

The first human was *Homo habilis*, or "skilful man". He produced stone tools and lived by hunting small easily captured animals (lizards, small birds) and gathering berries etc. He made a few stone tools that were used to cut, scrape, hammer and dig. This "skilful man" was small in stature (under 1.50 metres) with a fairly small brain (650 cubic centimetres, only half as large as ours) but his morphology proves that he walked upright and his teeth resemble ours more than they do those of apes. He had no forehead but possessed a heavy brow ridge and his jaw was strong. He had no chin. *Homo habilis'* language is believed to have been very basic and his skin colour is, of course, unknown. This group of hominids appeared in Eastern and Southern Africa 2.5 million years ago and they are known to have stayed there for some one million years.

Homo erectus

These hominids succeeded *Habilis* almost 2 million years ago in Africa and spread into Europe and Asia. *Homo erectus* was slightly taller than his ancestors. His skull retained more or less the

same primitive characteristics but his brain was larger (1,000 to 1,200 cubic centimetres, two-thirds the size of ours). Endocasts taken of the inside of skulls show that these humans had an articulate language. The oldest skeleton found in France was a *Homo erectus* who lived in the Arago cave in Tautavel at the eastern end of the Pyrenees. These humans discovered the use of fire some 400,000 years ago. They lived in huts made of branches, as they did in Terra Amata, near the port of Nice. Apart from flints, their tools consisted of little more than a single tool but it is very ingenious. It is a biface, or hand ax, a more or less flat, oval or almond-shaped piece of flint. It was used for hitting, cutting and spiking. In fact, it was an all-purpose tool. Like *Habilis* before him, *Erectus* was also a hunter. Over this long period, the climate consisted of alternating cycles of cold and hot weather. The last examples of *Homo erectus* lived in La Micoque at Les Eyzies. They were the first people to live in Périgord, almost half-a-million years ago, but no skeletons have yet been uncovered. They lived here in the Lower Palaeolithic Era.

Neanderthal Man (*Homo neanderthalensis*)

The descendants of *Erectus* were somewhat rustic but very strong individuals. At 1.60 metres, they were slightly taller with a very large brain (1,500 and even 1,600 cubic centimetres instead of 1,000), a well-developed occiput, a sloping forehead, prominent brows but no chin. These were the Neanderthals who lived in Périgord between 100,000 years and 30,000 years B.P. They were by no means brutes. In fact, they perfected their stone tools, showed a liking for colour and collections, and buried their dead in rock shelters like the one in La Ferrassie or in caves like the one at La Chapelle-aux-Saints in Corrèze. They lived in the Middle Palaeolithic Era.

Homo sapiens

The last and most recent in this lineage was *Homo sapiens*, also known as Cro-Magnon Man, who appeared here some 30,000 to 35,000 years ago. Cro-Magnons were every bit as human as we are, no more attractive or intelligent than we are today. Of course, they were hunter-gatherers and they did not have our cultural knowledge but they were able to produce a range of tools using blades fashioned from large pieces of flint, make objects out of bone or deer antlers, and create weapons for hunting. They learned to sew. They made jewellery and bric-a-brac. They invented drawing, engraving and painting on rocks and on cave walls. They sculpted and modelled small statuettes. Theirs was the Upper Palaeolithic Era.



Neanderthal Man

This is not the skull of one of our direct ancestors; it is the skull of a Neanderthal man. He lived in the Les Eyzies area some 40,000 years ago. The skull was discovered in La Ferrassie, with a dozen others of adults and children. The Neanderthals are descendants of the *Homo erectus* who came from Africa some one million years ago. Approximately 30,000 years ago, they coexisted with *Homo sapiens* – 1% to 4% of the genetic makeup of European and Asian *Homo sapiens* comes from Neanderthal Man ■



Cro-Magnon Man

This skull belongs to the most famous of our direct ancestors and it is approximately 27,000 years old. This *Homo sapiens* is one of the five people discovered in 1868 in the small Cro-Magnon rock shelter in Les Eyzies. Called "the Old Man", he was probably no more than 50 years old but that was a good age in those days. This type of human, who resembles us, did not appear first in the Les Eyzies region. He is known to have had ancestors in the Near East 100,000 years ago and even in Ethiopia 200,000 years ago ■

Prehistoric Man’s environment

Over these hundreds of thousands of years, the climate varied. There were at least four long periods of extreme cold known as ice ages, separated by periods of warming, the interglacial periods.

Hot and cold

The last two ice ages are named after the Riss (300,000 to 125,000 B.P.) and Würm (115,000 to 10,000 B.P), two tributaries of the Danube in which the glaciers of the river basin were studied.

During the last of the ice ages, the climate was much colder than it is today (5 °C cooler,

on average), reminiscent of present-day Scandinavia with typical periglacial flora and fauna in tundra dotted with more or less dense tree growth. During these cold spells, however, the climate varied depending on altitude and latitude, proximity to the sea or mountains and also the years and centuries. A small rise in temperature produced a marshland forest of alders, birch and pines, a taiga. A few more degrees and the climate resembled our own, not unlike the interstadial of Lascaux, 17,000 to 18,000 years ago. The flora and fauna changed accordingly.

Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons lived through the Würm glaciation but it would be a mistake to imagine them living on pack ice among polar bears, suffering through blizzards and long polar nights. They were not Inuits.



Reindeer migrations
Some 20,000 to 25,000 years ago, Les Eyzies underwent a period of intense cold, the last Ice Age. Reindeer were well adapted to the cold and they would migrate over huge distances depending on the season. These were the days of mammoths, woolly rhinoceros and musk oxen. They were actively hunted because reindeer filled the larders, toolboxes and jewellery boxes of Cro-Magnons (drawing by Eric Guerrier, Le Pataud rock shelter Museum). Man, though, did not feed solely on reindeer. Humans were omnivorous ■

It is the study of animal bones (large herbivores, small mammals and birds), plant pollens, wood and mineral sediment that allows us to reconstruct the climate.

Countless caves

There are numerous caves in the limestone areas of Périgord. The rock contains natural fissures in the form of diaclasses (vertical cracks) or stratification joints (horizontal cracks) that have been widened by underground streams which gouge out galleries, some wide, some narrow. These passages were later partially filled in with clay soil and calcite concretions (stalactites, stalagmites, flows etc.).

Man used cave mouths as homes, or as the last resting-place of the deceased. Cro-Magnons, especially from the Lascaux period onwards (17,000 or 18,000 years ago), pushed deep into the galleries and passageways where, by the flickering light of tallow lamps, they painted the walls. These decorated caves

were places of worship, underground sanctuaries. Some of the caves, like the one in Saint-Cirq, are fairly close to the surface but most of them are deep underground and sometimes difficult to access e.g. Font-de-Gaume, Lascaux, les Combarelles, Bernifal, Bara-Bahau and Villars in Dordogne; Pech-Merle and Tucnac in Lot; Chauvet in Ardèche; Niaux in Ariège and Altamira in Spain.

A few of them are vast, running over a distance of several miles. One such is the cave in Rouffignac which visitors tour on board a small electric train.

Homes for prehistoric hunter-gatherers

Very early in human development, Man built houses – huts with frames made from branches (or even from the tusks of mammoths in the great plains of Russia) covered with hides and carpeted with furs. These homes were either erected in the open, or beneath the overhang of a cliff forming a rock-shelter, or at the mouth of a cave.

OPPOSITE PAGE
Cold and heat
The ice of a very cold winter turns the natural environment white at the foot of a cliff in Les Eyzies while, in the foreground, the heat of the sun reveals recent work in the field. The same image, in fact, reflects the chill temperatures of the Reindeer Age and the transition into the milder temperate days of the Farming Age. During the Würm glaciation, the mean temperature was 5°C lower than it is today. The climate was harsh but not polar ■



A WIDE RANGE OF ANIMALS

- Like plants, wildlife also varies with the climate. During very cold periods, musk oxen, mammoths and woolly rhinoceros, reindeer, wolves and certain small animals (such as lemmings, hares and polar foxes, ptarmigan and snowy owls) all thrive in a landscape filled with typical flora. Forests, especially deciduous woodland, recede, leaving only mosses and lichens during the very coldest periods, with a few copses of willows and dwarf birch.
- When the climate warms slightly, elk, bison, reindeer, mammoths and woolly rhinoceros graze beneath the trees while huge herds of reindeer, horses and aurochs roam the wide open spaces during massive, regular periods of migration. Ibexes and chamois leap from rock to boulder, having not yet sought refuge in the high mountain ranges. Felines hunt mainly at night and bears retire to caves to hibernate, drop their cubs or die. During the Mousterian Era, there were cave bears; in the days of Cro-Magnon man, there were brown bears.
- What happened when the climate heated up a little more? Temperate forest appeared, with oaks, hazels, Norway pines, juniper and sometimes even walnut trees. Between the woodland were meadows full of hares, aurochs, stags and hinds, roe deer, wild boar and the species of small animals (birds and small mammals) that we still see around us today.

Cro-Magnon Man sometimes had huts in the open with paved flooring, as was the case in the Lower Isle Valley. Contrary to legend, these people never actually lived in dark, damp caves which would quickly fill with smoke. They did, however, venture inside, sometimes over a considerable distance, to paint and engrave pictures on the cave walls. At that time, Man was a hunter-gatherer and

fisherman, living off the land without farming or breeding livestock. People led a semi-nomadic life, settling briefly in one area then moving on in search of game, following the migration of reindeer and the course of salmon swimming up rivers.

For 100,000 years, they buried some of their dead, sometimes in rock shelters near their homes.

The first farmers

Their successors some 12,000 years B.C. lived in a milder climate and huge herds of reindeer headed northwards again. During the Neolithic and metal Ages, Man liked to settle in rock shelters, at cave mouths or in the open air. They buried their dead beneath dolmens then in burial caves. Since crop and animal farming, metalworking and ceramics aroused

a degree of envy, they made weapons to defend themselves against other men, and built the first fortifications. By convention, Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul in 52 B.C. marks the end of the prehistoric period and the beginning of the great history of France and its people.

OPPOSITE

Chamber of Paintings Villars Cave

Dordogne has thousands of caves and several dozen of them were decorated during the Palaeolithic Era. Sometimes, they are difficult to access. Lascaux is superb, with its walls coated in an immaculate veil of calcite, and it was undoubtedly selected as the site of an exceptional sanctuary. Palaeolithic Man, though, did not live in dark, humid caves that would quickly fill with smoke ■

Dates and people

Prehistory proceeded by trial and error for nearly two centuries before becoming recognized as a true science. Today, it is taught in our universities. Several dates will illustrate the principal steps along the path to progress from the early 19th century, a time when the very ancient history of humankind had not yet been recognized.

A historic excursion
When Edouard Lartet and Henry Christy arrived in Les Eyzies in August 1863, they headed straight for this small opening known as the Richard Cave. It was there that a fragment of an archaeological layer had been found. Its inclusion in an exhibition in Paris in 1862 had encouraged them to make the trip. Located in the cliff overlooking the Beune Valley, this small cave in Les Eyzies was lived in for a short period during the Solutrean but was a more important settlement in the Upper Magdalenian ■

The precursors
1810-1816. A professor and occasional letter-press printer, François Jouannet, explored Écorneboeuf, which overlooks the town of Périgueux and the ancient “city” of Vésone. There he found flint arrowheads, and flaked polished axes which were attributed to the Ancient Gauls at that time. He then explored the Pech de l’Aze cave near Sarlat and Combe Grenal cave near Domme, finding large quantities of worked flints and animal bones.
1834. Discussing the Badegoule cave near Le Lardin, Jouannet suggested the existence of a Worked Stone Age that predated the Polished Stone and Bronze Ages.



A fossilised floor. Hardened by infiltrations of water with a high lime content, the archaeological layer in the Richard Cave could be cut into blocks and slabs. Lartet and Christy sent samples to several museums. This “breach” in the Richard Cave contained flints worked by humans, pebbles, the bones of animals that the inhabitants had hunted and eaten (mainly reindeer) and, sometimes, by chance, small stone or bone artefacts decorated with engravings (Périgueux Museum) ■

1847-1860. The publication of *Les Antiquités celtiques et antédiluviennes*, (“Celtic and Antediluvian Antiquities”) by Jacques Boucher de Perthes marked the official coming-of-age of Prehistory thanks to the geological, palaeontological and archaeological discoveries made in the Abbeville region in Somme.
1863-1864. Édouard Lartet, a magistrate in South-Western France, and English industrialist Henry Christy, Lartet’s friend and patron, arrived in Les Eyzies in August 1863. For several months, they walked along the banks of the Vézère and explored some of the most prestigious sites: the Richard cave in Les Eyzies, Gorge d’Enfer (one of its rock shelters now bears Lartet’s name), Laugerie-Basse, Laugerie-Haute, La Madeleine, Le Moustier etc. This period saw the beginning of intensive digs in the region.
1868. Several human skeletons were found during roadworks, with a number of Aurignacian flints, at a small Cro-Magnon rock shelter in Les Eyzies, near the railway station. In 1874, Armand de Quatrefages and Ernest-Théodore Hamy used these skeletons to define a new fossil race – Cro-Magnon man.

1874. Founding of the *Société historique et archéologique du Périgord* (Périgord historical and archaeological society). It has published countless works on the region’s prehistory right up to the present day.
1888. Maurice Féaux and Michel Hardy dug up a Magdalenian skeleton just outside the small Raymondén cave near Chancelade. Numerous mobile works of art were also discovered there.
The days of Peyrony and Breuil
During the second half of the 19th century, several archaeologists excavated known sites and discovered still others. Gradually, a more exact chronology of prehistoric periods was developed (by E. Lartet, Gabriel de Mortillet, and Edouard Piette). However, the research was often too hasty and poorly-organised; many sites were damaged for ever. It was not until the 20th century that digs were properly conducted, notably by Denis Peyrony. It was also at this time that Palaeolithic cave art became known and acknowledged, thanks to the work and writings of Father Henri Breuil.
1895. Engravings and paintings were discovered in La Mouthe cave in Les Eyzies. It was the first decorated cave discovered in the Périgord, and the third in Europe as a whole, after Altamira in Spain and the Chabot cave in Gard.
1901. On 8th September, Louis Capitan, Henri Breuil and Denis Peyrony were exploring the cave at Les Combarelles when they found some engravings on the walls. Four days later, D. Peyrony found paintings and engravings in Font-de-Gaume. Following on from the discoveries made at La Mouthe, these two significant finds contributed to the official recognition of the age of cave art which, until then, had been contested by certain archaeologists. In the following year, D. Peyrony discovered the Bernifal cave and its engravings.



1908. A Swiss archaeologist, Otto Hauser, who was making money from the sites in Périgord, uncovered a Neanderthal skeleton in Le Moustier and immediately sold it to the Berlin Museum.
1909. D. Peyrony, who had been exploring La Ferrassie since 1902, found the first of many Mousterian human burials. Significant deposits dating from the Upper Palaeolithic era would continue to be uncovered there until 1921.

Two great names
Teacher Denis Peyrony (centre) and Father Henri Breuil (right) were the two great names in Prehistory in the Vézère area in the early 20th century. They it was who undertook meticulous studies of large sites and the great decorated caves. Here, on 15th April 1908, they can be seen in Le Ruth near Le Moustier in the company of E. Cartailhac (left). They have just checked that the Aurignacian Era preceded the Solutrean, a fact that had previously been contested by Gabriel de Mortillet, author of the first chronology of prehistoric times. This marked a victory in the “Battle of the Aurignacian” ■

A few years before the Great War
In 1908, a learned doctor from Bordeaux named G. Lalanne had his workmen conduct a huge dig under the Laussel rock shelter 6 kilometres from Les Eyzies, in the Beune Valley. This view of the archaeological dig, taken circa 1911-1912, speaks volumes. However, other archaeologists, notably D. Peyrony, conducted more scrupulous and more meticulous digs at that time ■



La Mouthe: the bison
This engraving of a bison was the first such decoration noticed on 11th April 1895 by G.

Berthoumeyrou after the entrance to the gallery had been cleared. It is located more than 100 metres from the mouth on the wall of a small chamber, and is surrounded by 9 other bison, 2 mountain goats and a stag, as well as various other markings. The style of the figures dates them from the Early Magdalenian; they still have some archaic features. The horns are shown almost from the front and it is clear that the horns of prehistoric bison were much longer than those of their modern counterparts. The cave contains countless other engravings ■

1909. The excavation at the Cap Blanc rock shelter in Marquay revealed an animal frieze carved on the walls. It was the first time carvings had been found in a cave.

1910-1913. D. Peyrony undertook a state-funded dig in La Madeleine.

1911-1912. Bas-reliefs of human beings were discovered in the Laussel rock shelter. A carving of a fish was observed on the roof of a rock shelter at Gorge d'Enfer in Les Eyzies.

1913. 31st December. A law was passed to protect historic monuments, including all present and future prehistoric sites. The same year, at Peyrony's suggestion, the government bought the ruins of the Château des Eyzies for use as a museum. The first exhibition opened in 1918, and the museum was officially inaugurated in 1923.

1921-1935. D. Peyrony conducted a dig at Laugerie-Haute. This major site enabled the experts to establish an exact chronology for several phases in the Upper Palaeolithic Era.

1931 and 1933. Twenty-seven bronze axes were discovered nearby. They were listed in 1943.

Modern times

Digs became more precise and the increased popularity of archaeology led to the discovery of some superb decorated caves.

1940. Discovery of the Lascaux cave by Marcel Ravidat and his three friends. The cave was immediately authenticated by Father Breuil. Extensive work on the interior allowed the cave to be opened to the public in 1948.

1941. 27th September. A law was passed to regulate archaeological digs, during the time of the Vichy government. It was not validated until 1945. After that, digs required authorisation from the State.

1952-1963. Father André Glory traced the 1,500 engravings in Lascaux and carried out digs in the Well in 1960-1961.

1952. Publication of Father Breuil's *Quatre cents siècles d'art pariétal* (Four hundred centuries of cave art).

1952. Discovery of prehistoric engravings in the cave in Saint-Cirq.

1953-1964. Hallam L. Movius explored a major Aurignacian and Gravettian site in Pataud and it became the benchmark for this period. The dig was taken up again in 2005 by Laurent Chiotti and Roland Nespoulet (from the *Muséum national d'histoire naturelle*).

1953-1965. François Bordes conducted a dig at Combe Grenal, a major Acheulean and Mousterian site.

1956. Led by Charles Plassard, Louis-René Nougier and Romain Robert, archaeologists discovered prehistoric drawings in the Rouffignac cave which had first been reported by 1948 by the Spéléo-Club de Périgueux (pot-holing club).

1958. Prehistoric paintings were found in the Villars cave by the Spéléo-Club de Périgueux and A. Glory.



Speleologists. At the end of the Second World War, potholing became increasingly popular, leading to the discovery of numerous decorated caves. The Spéléo-Club de Périgueux notified the authorities of drawings in the cave in Rouffignac, in particular the Rhinoceros Frieze which it photographed in 1948 when camping in the cave. The prehistorian responsible for the cave said the paintings had been done by members of the French Resistance Movement. They were not officially recognised as the work of prehistoric artists until 1956 ■

1959. Henri Delporte conducted a dig at the Facteur rock shelter and uncovered a female statuette dating from the Gravettian.

1963. Lascaux cave was closed to the public after natural changes to the interior threatened the existence of the paintings.

1965. Publication of *Préhistoire de l'art occidental* (Prehistory of Western Art) by André Leroi-Gourhan.

1967. F. Bordes conducted a dig at Le Pech de l'Aze (where he had first worked in 1948).

1969-1981. Jean-Philippe Rigaud conducted a dig at the Vaufray cave near Domme.

1984. Publication of F. Bordes' *Leçons sur le Paléolithique* (Lessons on the Palaeolithic).

2000. The Cussac cave was discovered by speleologist, Marc Delluc.

These are the main dates that have marked the history of research in Périgord. To them should be added many other discoveries of cave art, methodic studies of decorated caves



Modern digs in the Pataud cave. From 1953 to 1964, an American team under Hallam Movius, Professor at the University of Harvard, conducted some methodical digs in one of the few intact sites in Les Eyzies. From the explored section of this major site, he dug up two million objects (human and animal bones, flint and bone tools, knapping waste, objets d'art and jewellery etc.). Pollens and charcoal enabled him to date some forty successive periods of occupation and specify the corresponding climatic conditions ■

(by Claude Barrière, Brigitte et Gilles Delluc, Alain Roussot), and new digs or the relaunch of earlier digs such as the one at La Ferrassie by H. Delporte (1968-1973), Le Flageolet by J.-Ph. Rigaud (1960-1984) and the Castanet rock shelter by Randall White since 1994 etc.



A new decorated cave in Upper Périgord

Having observed a column of steam rising from rock, the members of the Spéléo-Club de Périgueux uncovered the entrance to the vast, superb Villars Cave in 1953. In 1958, they discovered the drawings decorating the walls. The cave soon attracted the attention of prehistorians H. Breuil, A. Glory, F. Bordes and (here) A. Leroi-Gourhan ■

The Early Palaeolithic

It is difficult to specify when the first humans settled in Périgord. The discovery of primitive-looking tools in very old alluvial deposits has occurred here and there by chance, especially in the Isle valley.

The all-purpose tool
A biface is a block of flint, or sometimes a pebble or a large piece of stone, retouched on both sides. Its tip is more or less pointed and the opposite end, the heel, is more or less rounded. The earliest bifaces were used in Africa in very ancient periods. In Europe, they are typical of the Early Palaeolithic and Mousterian and their shapes vary from one era to another. They also differ in size and may have been used to break bones, cut branches or perhaps scrape skins. They had no handles ■

It was not until the third period of glaciation – called Riss – that real settlement sites existed in this region, at Pech de l’Aze, La Micoque, and at Grotte Vaufray where lower strata date to 450,000 years ago. These layers contain industries characterized by bifaces – stone tools worked on both faces – and tools made using retouched flakes such as points, scrapers, notched tools, backed knives, etc. These industries bear the name Acheulean (from Saint-Acheul on the outskirts of Amiens in the Somme valley where they were first defined in 1872).

Several varieties of Acheulean industries are defined on the basis of distinctive shapes of bifaces, the presence or proportions of certain tools, and the knapping technique used. Acheulean variants include Southern

Acheulean, Clactonian (as defined in Clacton-on-Sea in England), which is equivalent to the Tayacian described by Peyrony at La Micoque, Micoquian (which is an offshoot of Final Acheulean also found at La Micoque), and others.

The controlled use of fire dates from the Acheulean period. We know this because of the many organised, structured fire pits discovered by F. Bordes at Le Pech de l’Aze.

In Périgord, no human remains have been recovered from this period. There were not yet any organised grave sites. However, the Tautavel cave in Pyrénées-Orientales, has yielded numerous human bones, including a large number of skulls mixed with worked tools and animal bones. These were the bones of pre-Neanderthal *Homo erectus*.

Man had already acquired a taste for the beautiful by the Acheulean period. Some of the bifaces show high-quality craftsmanship and regularity in form, suggesting that the craftsman went beyond the need to merely create an efficient tool.

This period ended some 100,000 years ago.



LA MICOQUE

This famous site, which opens in a south-westerly direction, is located on the right bank of a stream called the Manaurie, 500 metres above its confluence with the Vézère, just upriver from Laugerie-Haute. It is not a rock-shelter, but rather an open-air site at the base of a small limestone cliff about fifteen metres above the present course of the stream and its bank of river pebbles.

Discovered in 1895 by E. Rivière, the site was excavated indiscriminately by several archaeologists, then intensively by O. Hauser between 1906 and 1914. He it was who coined the name “Micoquian” in 1916 to describe an industry peculiar to this site. This term was used again by H. Breuil, following digs by D. Peyrony between 1929 and 1932, after the site had been purchased by the State.

In 1956, Bordes conducted a test dig at La Micoque. In 1969, H. Laville and Jean-Philippe Rigaud completed a detailed stratigraphic study, and in 1983 a multi-disciplinary team of researchers conducted an in-depth study of the site.

The stratigraphic data from La Micoque is important, since the six successive Acheulean occupations there correspond to the Riss and Early Würm glaciations.

The top layer of the site contains Micoquian industries (Final Acheulean) characterized by elongated bifaces with wide bases, fine points, and slightly concave edges. Recent digs have not found any more Micoquian items.

■ The exterior of the site is open to the public. For a guided tour, book at the visitors centre in Font-de-Gaume: Tel. +33 (0) 553 068 600; email: fontdegaume@monuments-nationaux.fr



A very old settlement in La Micoque

For more than 200,000 years, various Acheulean groups lived on the banks of the Manaurie stream a short distance from the Vézère, at the foot and in front of a small rocky escarpment. The archaeological layers are superimposed to a depth of almost 10 metres and the last one, from the Late Acheulean, contained elongated bifaces with finely-retouched tips and slightly concave edges. They were referred to as “Micoquian bifaces” ■

LE PECH DE L’AZE

Between Sarlat and Carsac, a road and a dis-used railroad track follow the small Font de Farge valley. There are four prehistoric sites at the foot of a limestone outcrop that crowns Pech de l’Aze hill (it means “Donkey Hill” in the local vernacular).

Pech I and II are located at the two extremities of a 70-metre cave which passes through a limestone outcrop. The first entrance is of historic importance because it was probably the first prehistoric site to be explored in Périgord (by Jouannet in 1815). In the 1818 issue of the *Calendrier du département de La Dordogne*, he expressed his amazement at the bones that had accumulated in the cave together with small fragments of black flint.

Later, a number of archaeologists visited the cave including Lartet and Christy in 1863. More recent digs were undertaken by Peyro-

(Contd. on p. 19)

The Middle Palaeolithic

At the end of the Riss glaciation, industries diversified and pointed the way to the Mousterian period.

Typical tools
Bifaces, points and scrapers are the three “benchmark fossils” of the Mousterian but some sixty other types of tools have been described. In addition to flint, hyaline quartz (rock crystal) was sometimes worked, as it was here in Laussel. At the bottom right is a Levallois core (Aquitaine Museum, Bordeaux) ■

The Mousterian, the days of Neanderthal Man, developed during the Riss-Würm interglacial period and Early Würm glaciation, some 115,000 to 35,000 years ago. It was discovered in 1863-64 by Lartet and Christy at Le Moustier. In 1869, G. de Mortillet proposed to name comparable industries “Moustier Types” and in 1872 he called the corresponding period the “Mousterian”.

The Moustier site was explored more thoroughly in the early 20th century by Peyrony, and its industries were studied more closely around 1950 by François Bordes and Maurice

Bourgon. The Mousterian consists of a complex industrial period with several distinct aspects distinguished by their technology and typology. Bordes defined five major groups.

Cordiform or triangular bifaces were still present in some places (Mousterian of Acheulean tradition). A range of tools was made from flakes including more than sixty, well-defined, more developed types. Points and above all scrapers were the most characteristic.

A means of knapping known as the Levallois technique was developed in the Acheulean. This procedure consisted of shaping a block of raw material (a core), such that a flake of predetermined shape could be detached, then possibly altered to make a tool.

Neanderthal Man occupied much of Périgord at that time, often living outdoors on the



ny in 1908, by René Vaufrey in 1929, and by François Bordes and M. Bourgon in 1948 and 1951. The latter two discovered the second entrance to the cave or Pech II. From then on, Bordes dedicated several years to the dig in Pech de l’Aze, exploring a small nearby cave (Pech III), and discovering a vast collapsed rock-shelter, Pech IV, 100 metres downstream (the dig has been directed by Harold Dibble since 2000).

The entire complex made a major contribution to a deeper understanding of the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic in the region, from the Acheulean of the Mindel-Riss interglacial period to the Mousterian at the beginning of the Würm glaciation. Over such a long timespan, the climate, fauna, and flora varied with the climate, which fluctuated from warm periods to cold or extremely cold periods when there was a good supply of reindeer.

Pech II contained hearths dug into the ground, some of them surrounded by fire-reddened stones, proving that Man knew how to make fire during the Acheulean period.

Several scraped chunks of iron oxide and magnesium oxide were recovered from Mousterian strata. Some of them were even cut into a “pencil” shape. In one of the strata, Peyrony and Capitan also discovered a single, crushed skull of a four-year-old child.

■ The Sarlat-Carsac cycle path 5 kilometres from Sarlat on the Sarlat-Gourdon road passes both entrances to the cave.

LE RÉGOURDOU

The discovery of the site and of the Mousterian grave in Le Régourdou was amusing, to say the least. Some five hundred metres from Lascaux, on the edge of the plateau overlooking the Vézère valley and the town of Montignac, Roger



A complex dig
Just 100 metres from the Pech I and Pech II cave, Pech de l’Aze IV is a major Mousterian site in the form of a bank of earth up against a wall of rock. It was discovered and explored by F. Bordes (centre of the photograph) who uncovered more than twenty archaeological layers, some of them subdivided into several levels. On a site like this one, it is difficult to dig in the same layer over the entire area. Because of this, the dig is conducted one square metre at a time and the data carefully recorded so that they can then be collated on plans and elevations, layer by layer ■

Constant, a resident of the small hamlet of Régourdou, had been assisting Father A. Glory for several years in his studies of Lascaux. He had even provided Father Glory with board and lodging for a while. R. Constant was convinced that there was another entrance to the Lascaux cave, in addition to the one already known about (which was indeed the prehistoric entrance). He began extensive excavations in (Contd. on p. 20)



A strong jawbone
Several items were uncovered in the Neanderthal burial site in Le Régourdou, in particular upper limbs, the spine and the sternum, all of them very well preserved. The skull and lower limbs have disappeared. However, the splendid jawbone is impressive for its proportions and the quality of the teeth (Périgueux Museum) ■

front of his small farm. He did not find the entrance to Lascaux but he did find a Mousterian site and a human grave in September 1957. The Régourdou site (visible on the spot) is actually a vast rock shelter whose roof collapsed onto the archaeological contents. Following a chance discovery in 1957, the dig was entrusted to two prehistorians, Eugène Bonifay and Bernard Vandermeersch, who worked from 1961 to 1965. Once the rubble from the overhang was cleared, they found several levels of occupation containing Quina-type Mousterian artefacts, mainly scrapers with flaked retouch that dated back to the beginning of the Würm glaciation. The human burial was in a shallow pit, carefully capped by a flagstone and surrounded by a small wall of rubble. The body lay on its left side, the head facing North, with the knees bent under the chin and the hands raised towards the head. A fairly large limestone flagstone covered the trunk, while stone blocks and sand covered the rest of the burial. All that now remains of the skeleton is a far from negligible number of bones in good condition, including the sternum. Unfortunately the skull has disappeared but the impressively strong jaw has survived, with all its teeth, intact and scarcely worn down (Périgord Museum of Art and Archaeology, Périgueux). Adjacent to this human burial, there were also dry stone structures containing the skulls and bones of brown bears. A bear cult was suggested at one time, based on earlier discoveries in Swiss and Italian caves, but the idea was

sharply criticised by A. Leroi-Gourhan. Carbon dating gave an age of some 45,000 years.

LE MOUSTIER

The small village of Le Moustier is flanked by the bayonette-shaped course of the River Vézère as it flows past the superb cliff known as La Roque-Saint-Christophe and through the Vimont Valley that runs down from Plazac further north. There is a limestone promontory here broken up by terraces and shelters set one above the other, and topped by a shallow cave called “Le trou du Bréchou”.

The classic rock shelter halfway up the cliff was explored in 1863-1864 by E. Lartet and H. Christy. It was this rock-shelter that later gave its name to the Mousterian period and industry. Ten metres lower, a second rock-shelter was excavated in the early 20th century, first by O. Hauser in 1907 then by D. Peyrony after the French government purchased the site in 1910.

Unfortunately for French archaeology, it was Hauser who, in August 1908, discovered the skeleton of a very young Neanderthal lad which he named *Homo mousteriensis hauseri*. The remains were sold, at a high price, to the Berlin Museum where the skull was put back together at least four times, never with any success. It was believed that the skull had been smashed by bombs during the Second World War but it reappeared a few years later in a laboratory in Lena, in the former East Germany. It might well be studied in greater detail one day, but no reliable information is available on the burial site itself.

However, we do know something about the human occupation of the upper shelter, and even more about the people who lived in the lower shelter, thanks to the digs conducted by



M. Bourgon and D. Peyrony in 1905 followed by D. Peyrony in 1910. Information was also provided by the study of industries undertaken by F. Bordes and the observations of layers of rock and sediment made by H. Laville and J.-Ph. Rigaud in 1969.

The Mousterian occupation occurred in the first two stages of the Würm glaciation and was followed by brief occupations in the Châtelperronian and Aurignacian at a time when the two rock-shelters were nearly completely filled. At all these times, the accommodation extended well beyond the rocky overhang. D. Peyrony, and more especially F. Bordes, defined several types of stone tool industries in Le Moustier characterized by tool types and their proportions compared to the tools as a whole. The different shapes do not seem to correspond to different populations but rather to varying activities.

■ The exterior of the site is open to the public. For a guided tour, book at the visitors centre in Font-de-Gaume: Tel. +33 (0) 553 068 600; email: fontdegaume@monuments-nationaux.fr.



Le Moustier

Le Moustier lies at the confluence of the Vimont Valley and the Vézère, on the right bank of the river. The houses in the village are built on rocky terraces in the limestone at the corner of the two valleys. Two superimposed rock shelters have been explored here since 1863 and the industries have been recognised as typical of the Mousterian ■

Stratigraphic sequence in Le Moustier

Some of the filling from the lower shelter has been preserved and, today, a mould of the layers displayed on the site shows the superposition of several layers from the Mousterian, topped by two layers from the Upper Palaeolithic (Aurignacian then Châtelperronian). The site was occupied between 50,000 and 70,000 and 32,000 years ago approximately ■

Cultural sites

(other than caves and prehistoric rock shelters)

The International Prehistory Centre ("PIP") in Les Eyzies, whose resolutely modern architecture forms a beautiful contrast to the cliff above it, is very attractively laid out ■



Beynac • Archaeological park The everyday life of farmers and metalworkers from the Stone Age to the days of the Ancient Gauls. Tel. +33 (0) 553 29 50 40.

Bordeaux • Musée d'Aquitaine Bas-reliefs of human figures from Laussel. Sculpted bison from Cap Blanc. Large series of collections from sites in Périgord. Tel. 05 56 01 51 00.



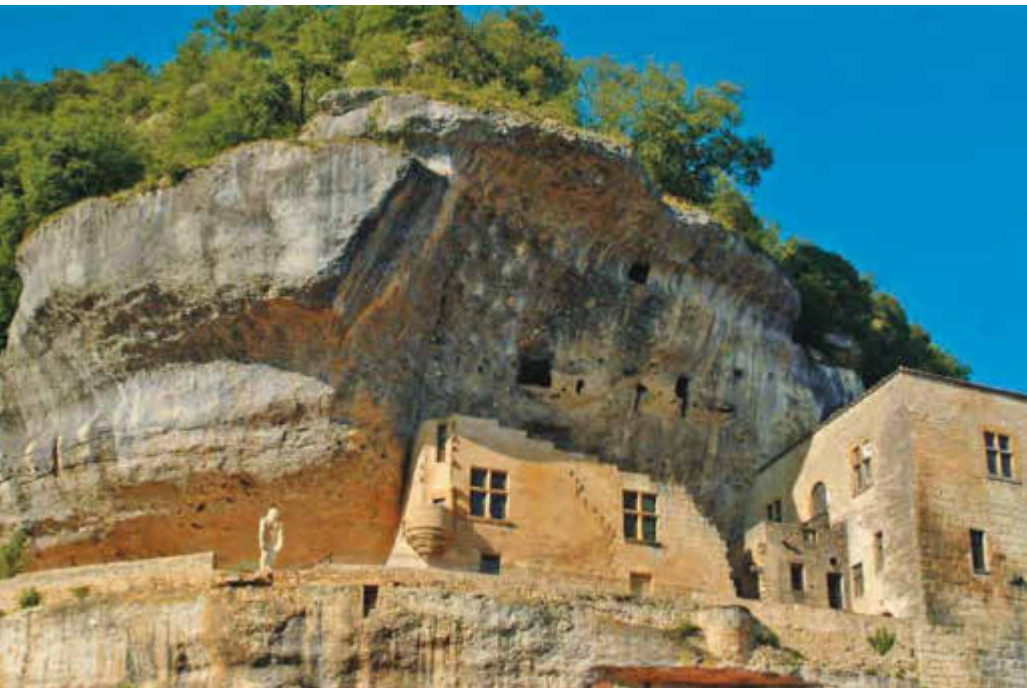
The Prehistoparc in Tursac: one of the scenes from prehistory. Men hunting a mammoth trapped in a pit ■

Brantôme • Musée Fernand-Desmoulin Prehistoric collection of industries and art objects from Rochereil. Tel. +33 (0) 553 05 80 63.

Les Eyzies-de-Tayac • Musée national de Préhistoire The national museum of prehistory reflects contemporary archaeological research and is the *in situ* emanation of the exceptionally rich prehistoric past of the "open-air museum" that is the Vézère Valley, with its plethora of prehistoric settlements and cave-sanctuaries, some of which have been placed on Unesco's World Heritage list. Its unique collections (6 million artefacts of which 18,000 are on display) make it a global benchmark for the last four hundred millennia. They fill 1,500 sq. metres of museum in a brand new building inaugurated in 2004. Items from the collections from the national archaeology museum in Saint-Germain-en-Laye near Paris were recently brought to the museum in Les Eyzies for display, in particular decorated tools from La Madeleine and a pink sandstone lamp from Lascaux. Prehistoric collections from Périgord can also be seen in other French and foreign museums. Tel. +33 (0) 553 064 545.

Les Eyzies-de-Tayac • Pôle international de Préhistoire Visitors centre. Tel. +33 (0) 553 069 281.

Les Eyzies-de-Tayac • Roc de Cazelle A life-sized re-



The National Prehistory Museum in Les Eyzies-de-Tayac ■

construction of the daily life of cave dwellers from prehistoric times to the present day. Tel. +33 (0) 553 594 609.

London • British Museum Christy Collection, part of the artefacts found by Lartet and Christy in 1863-1864: tools and works of art from caves in Les Eyzies, Gorge d'Enfer, Laugerie-Basse and La Madeleine. Reverdit Collection: decorated bone ring from La Tuillière in Saint-Léon-sur-Vézère. Tel. +44 (0)20 7323 8299.

Montignac • Lascaux II See boxed text, page 47. Tel. +33 (0) 553 056 565 (Sémitour).

Périgueux • Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie du Périgord Portable art (notably from Raymonden), and Aurignacian paintings and engravings on stone blocks. Human skeletons from Régourdou (Mousterian) and Raymonden (Magdalenian). Stone Age and Bronze Age collections. Tel. +33 (0) 553 064 070.

Saint-Germain-en-Laye • Musée de l'Archéologie nationale Items from the most significant sites in Périgord. Tel. +33 (0) 139 101 300.



Thonac • Le Thot See boxed text, page 47. Tel. +33 (0) 553 056 565 (Sémitour).

Tursac • Préhistoparc Life-sized tableaux showing the everyday life of Neandertal and Cro-Magnon hunter-gatherers. Tel. +33 (0) 553 507 319.

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E. Guerrier: p. 9.

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Périgord Prehistory



Lascaux: the Bull Chamber ■



The mountain goat in the Pataud rock-shelter ■



Tools from the Gravettian period ■



The cliff at La Madeleine (Vézère Valley) ■



Rhinceros in Rouffignac ■



The Laussel Venus ■

This book describes the most significant and unusual aspects of prehistoric times in Périgord. Man has been living here for 500,000 years. Of course, the appearance of the earliest humans in Africa is five times older but it was in Périgord that Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon Man developed in the most spectacular way. It was also in Périgord that the first archaeological digs were carried out. For the past two centuries, the research has continued and there have been a number of exceptional discoveries, especially in the mysterious caves. With hundreds of settlement sites, more than fifty decorated caves and rock-shelters and dozens of dolmens, the region is now internationally famous. In fact, Unesco has included the caves in the Vézère Valley in its World Heritage list.

BRIGITTE AND GILLES DELLUC are doctors in Prehistory and researchers with the Paris Museum of Natural History. They specialise particularly in Palaeolithic art and the life of Cro-Magnon man.

ALAIN ROUSSOT, Honorary Head Curator of Heritage, has written many works on prehistory, particularly prehistoric art.

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Front cover: one of the "Chinese horses" in Lascaux.

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