



Fig. 135.- El Buxu Cave. Buck, horse and fallow deer, engraved and painted.

Fig. 135.- El Buxu. Ciervo, caballos y gamo grabados y pintados.

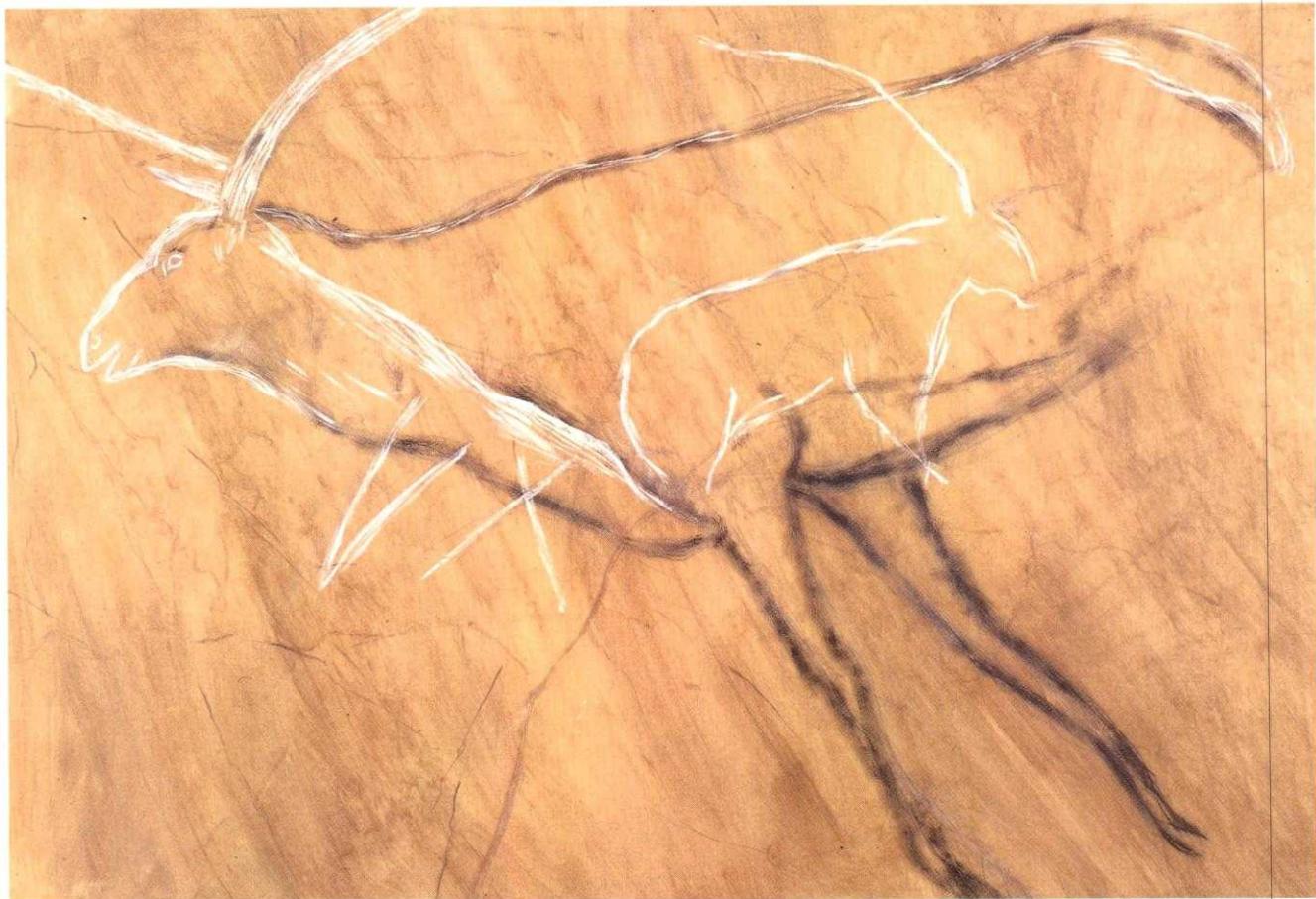


Fig. 136.— El Buxu Cave. Deer and goat engraved; the first of these has touches of paint and seems to be falling wounded from javelins piercing its chest.

Fig. 136.— El Buxu. Cérvido y cabra grabados, el primero completado con línea negra y tiene venablos clavados en el pecho.

bison with the lengthwise axis slanted toward the floor was discovered by José Manuel Quintanal. The stroke is one single continuous cut and it measures approximately 20 inches.

The Entrefoces Shelter

This shelter is located in the Morcín district and was also discovered and examined by the Polifemo Group in 1979. It has early Solutrean engravings showing the figures of a horse and

two does. These were discovered by J.M. Quintanal and J.L. Pérez.

It now becomes necessary to concern ourselves with two very important Prehistoric sites, whose appraisal only became known in relatively recent times. They are currently under study by the Department of Prehistory of the University of Oviedo under the direction of Javier Fortea, Professor and Director of the Department. This study has been designed to accomplish a project of wide scope, including

the Prehistoric population of the Middle Nalón watershed.

These are the *La Viña* shelter, near Sta. Eulalia de la Manzaneda, discovered as a Prehistoric site by A.J. Gavelas in 1978, and the *La Lluera* cave in Priorio, both belonging to the Oviedo district. The reason I must provide such a sketchy mention of these two deposits despite their great significance, is that as long as they are under exploration, obviously I should await the completion of the work and publication of the study by the people who are doing it.



Fig. 137.— El Buxu Cave. Bird figure carved on a bear fang.
Fig. 137.— El Buxu. Figura de ave entallada en un colmillo de oso.

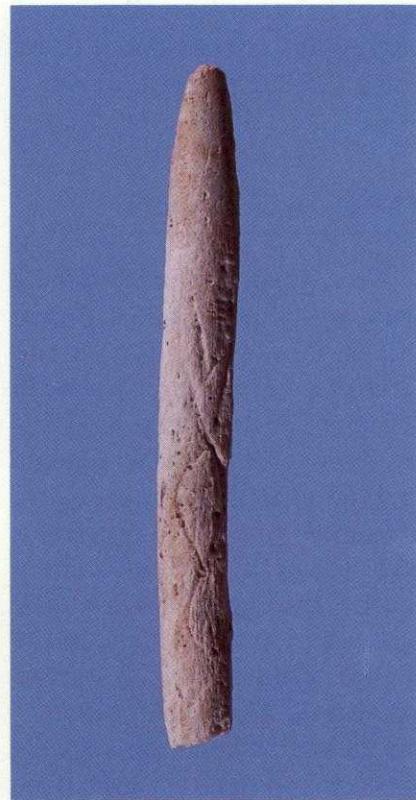


Fig. 138.— Sofoxó Cave. Bone shaft with abstract decoration.
Fig. 138.— Cueva de Sofoxó. Varilla de hueso decorada.

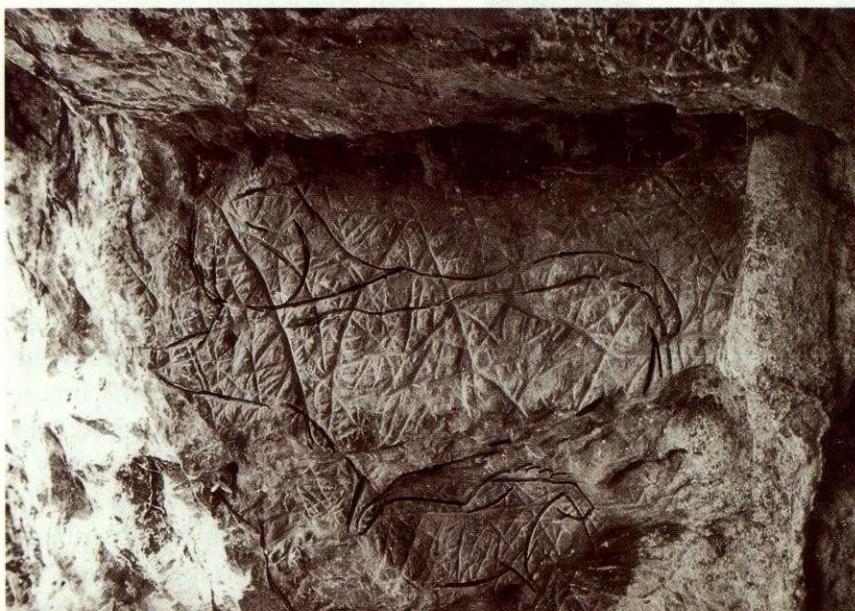


Fig. 139.— La Lluera Cave. Multiple superimposed engravings on a fragment of wall, where the figures of a deer, a bull and a small horse may be seen relatively clearly.
Fig. 139.— Cueva de La Lluera. Múltiples grabados superpuestos en los que se definen un cérvido, un toro y un caballo.

La Viña Shelter

The *La Viña* shelter has provided very interesting and beautiful pieces of mobiliary Art, and has broken the traditional scarcity of model examples which up until this point had characterized

the contributions of Asturian Prehistoric deposits. This site may turn out to reveal Aurignacian sculptural pieces to us. Its contribution in wall Art is no less extraordinary. Some one hundred feet of wall full of engravings that in principle and regarded by

me necessarily at a distance, could go all the way up the scale from the early Solutrean to a Cantabrian Middle Solutrean.

The La Lluera Cave

The *La Lluera* cave was investigated and appraised by the *Polifemo* speleological group in 1974 under the direction of José Manuel Quintanal. It possesses features similar to the *La Viña* shelter in its archeological deposit, and the same in its wall Art, which is all done in the shelter and is becoming a part of the so-called outdoor *sanctuaries*. The

age of its extensive collection of engravings is considered to be around 25,000 years (fig. 139).

The Cave of Godulfo

Now, going farther toward the West, at the place called Bercio in the Grado district, is the *Godulfo* cave made up of a group of five caves and one shelter, discovered by Rafael Estrada in 1965. The *Godulfo* cave was examined by *Polifemo* speleological group in 1978, also directed by José Manuel Quintanal who has been responsible for the recent studies on Asturian Prehistory. This group discovered an engraving at the entrance appearing to depict a goat. This was done in continuous line and the drawing is very schematic.

Our final wanderings along this route from East to West in Asturias in search of the artistic legacies of our Prehistoric ancestors take us to the cave known as *La Peña*, in San Román de Candamo.

The Candamo Cave

The Candamo Valley produces an exceptional range of fruits of the earth. It was a quirk of nature, for there, the sunlight has more honey; because the winds blunt their edge against the massive bulk of its soft hills; because the Nalón purrs like a kitten brushing itself against the green hillsides

and Benítez Mellado on one hand, and Count de la Vega del Sella on the other, made an examination of the *La Peña* cave. It had been discovered years before without knowing it was a Paleolithic site, and neither team knew of the other's visits. When Hernández Pacheco and the Count found out about this, they agreed that the former should handle the study and its publication.

San Román de Candamo's waiting room is a tiny railway station at one side of the main road plus a group of equally tiny houses that sprouted there in the shadow of the railway station. A steep road leads up to the shelf where the foundations of San Román were laid. This shelf was a geological bite that took a chunk out of the base of the huge bulk of *La Peña*.

The backdrop for San Román is *La Peña*, that cuts across the sky with its bluish-purple limestone peak some six hundred fifty feet high, along which winds a road providing a view of the valley as if seen from a plane, which actually takes us to with ease to the cavern itself a little over a mile away.

Even if there were no practical reason to do it, the selection of this place would be justified simply by the beauty of the landscape itself. But our ancestors were surely more interested

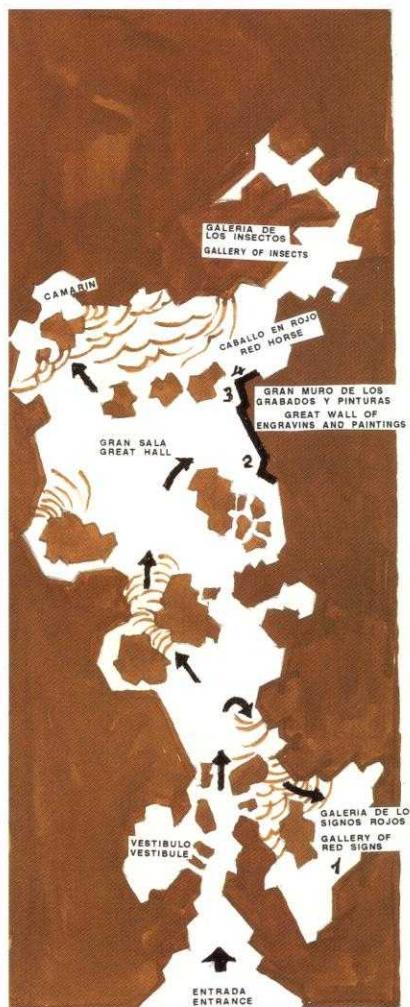


Fig. 140.— Candamo Cave. Schematic map of the cave.

Fig. 140.— Cueva de Candamo. Plano esquemático de la cueva.

of this valley garden. Because of all this, or for whatever reason, the tastiest and earliest fruit comes from Candamo. But even though this has made the name Candamo well known around the region, all of a sudden it acquired worldwide fame some seventy odd years ago together with the name of San Román, when Hernández Pacheco along with Cabré

Fig. 141.— Candamo Cave. "The Great Hall".
Fig. 141.— Cueva de Candamo. La "Gran Sala".

CHAPTER X. THE CAVERNS OF THE CENTRAL REGION





Fig. 143.—Candamo Cave. A drawing to clear up as much as possible the zoomorphic depictions on the "Wall of Engravings".

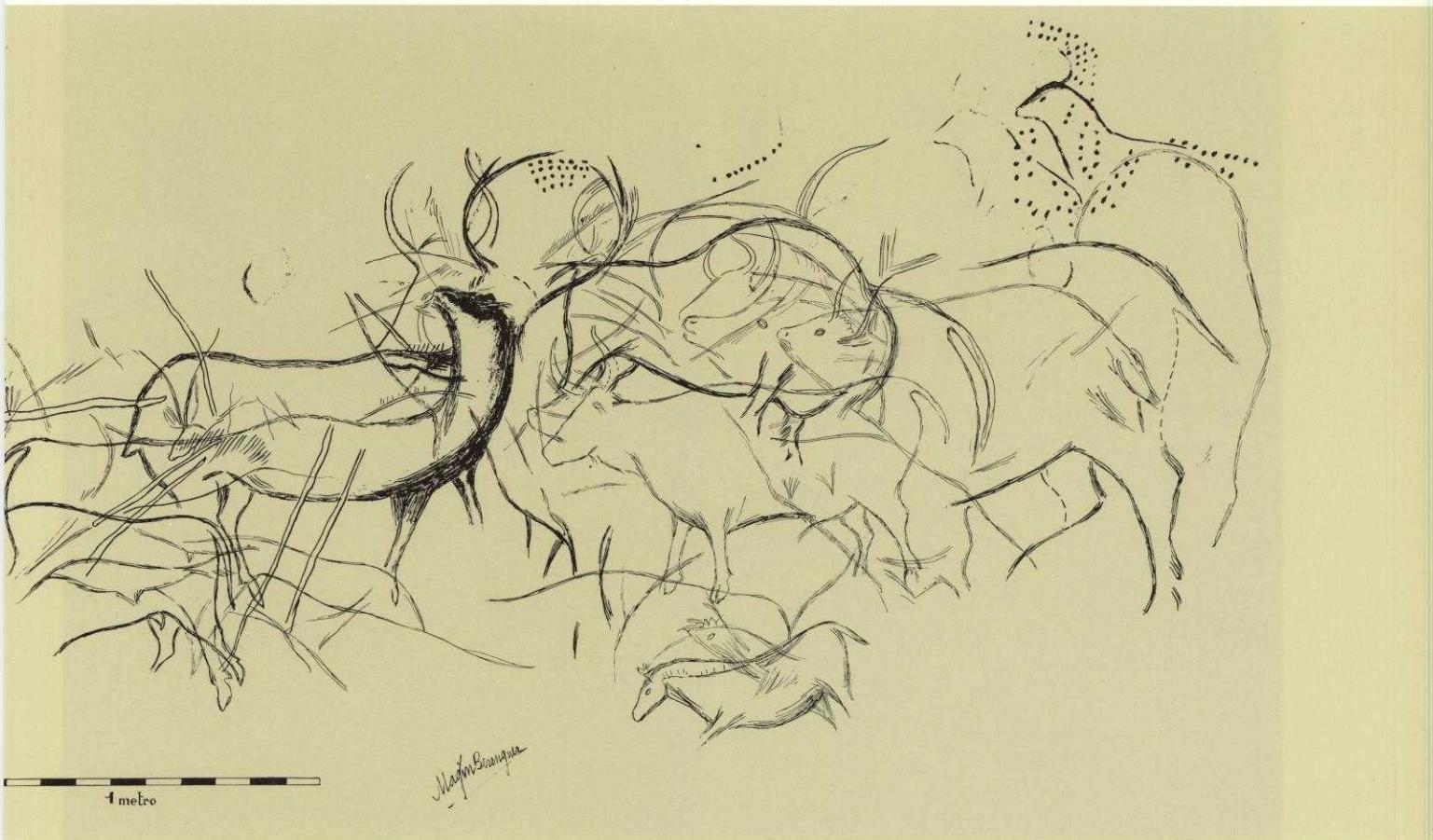
Fig. 143.—Cueva de Candamo. Dibujo que aclara en lo posible las representaciones zoomórficas inscritas en el "Muro de los Grabados".

in the good hunting and fishing in the Nalón which is clearly in view, encouraged by the favorable microclimate that still remains, and the shelter of the cave that back when it was inhabited, had its entrance and site to the South where utensils and kitchen remains were found when excavations were made. Later on, the underground connection to the *Great Hall* that was used as a *sanctuary*, where the abundant engraved Art collection was found and magical-religious celebrations would have been held, was blocked off by one of those

cataclysmic tremblings that were so frequent in post-glacial times.

As in almost all cases, the cave was created by spontaneous diversion or disappearance of a current of water running underground. This left us a hollow, dry route when the current went away. It dried up and thus was able to leave us a group of surprises of the most varied hues. The surprising nature of all of this begins before our entrance into the cavern which starts to grip us in a very special way even as we approach the entrance. It may be the lengthy

rosary of ponderings that come forth as we start to penetrate the milleniums; milleniums that remained silent and petrified in those long, thick stalactitic layers that spill out like incredible waterfalls or tapestries; or the strivings of the stalagmites seeming to pierce the ground, stretching their long neck upward in search of the stone flavored drip from the ceiling; or in collonades and fanciful architectural playfulness that could have only been used by the genius of a Gaudí to become rational elements by being divested of their impossi-



ble nature. Milleniums that had remained in silence, but yet transformed by the hand of mankind into a warm, living, expressive silence when he stamped the living reality of his endeavor upon them with these extraordinary collections of his paintings and drawings.

In 1955 I studied and reproduced the paintings and engravings of the cave and I am showing the results in the illustrations accompanying this book, which makes it clear that the craftsmanship of the Candamo artists possesses an exquisite sensitivity of line increas-

sing the explosive strength of these naturalistic figures. There are also some contributions in the results of my work to complete some of these figures and recover others, for example the horse in red line on the other side of the corner of the *Wall of Engravings* and the possible bird head.

As mentioned before, the current entrance to the cave is not the same as the one used back when it was inhabited by mankind (fig. 140). A few yards from the current entrance and to our right, at a deeper level that may be accessed by a very steep ramp, we

find a broad cavity called the *Hall of Red Signs*. Here, as indicated by the name, there is a series of drawings in red. These are schematized abstract figures lacking any artistic interest. They belong to the *ideomorph* classification and are probably the first paintings made in this cave. Today their meaning is unintelligible.

Following this path flanked by fantastic slim columns of stalactite origin linked with others that are stalagmites, there is a narrow stairlike passage leading to the *Great Hall* (fig. 141). This measures some 80 feet long, 65

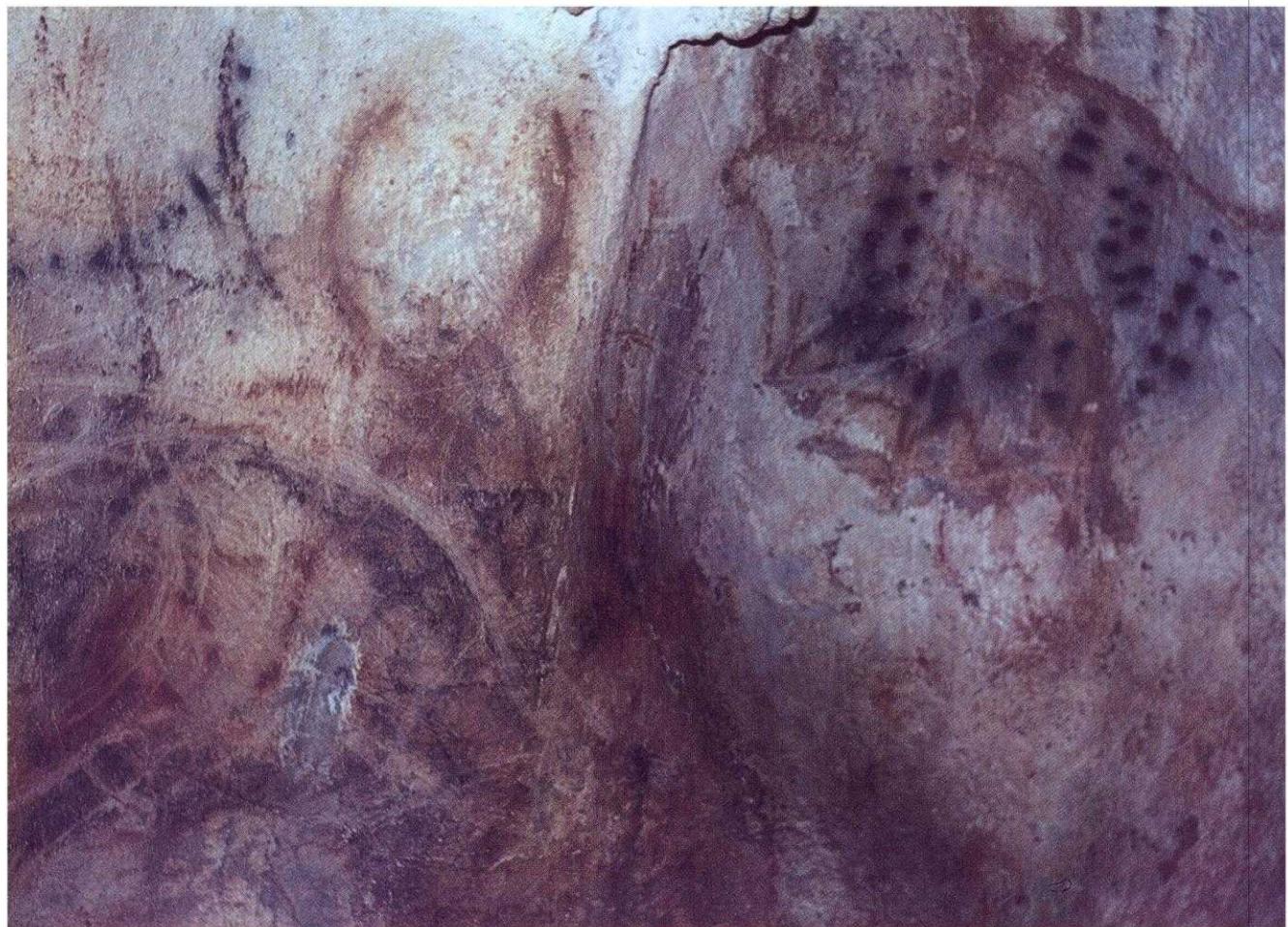


Fig. 144—Candamo Cave. Bull figures in sepia with puctuations in black.

Fig. 144—Cueva de Candamo. Figuras de toro en color sepia con puntuaciones en negro.

wide and 50 high up to the center of the roughly domed-shaped ceiling. The surface of these areas is literally jammed full of decorative surprises because added to what the artist Nature left upon it, is the Art legacy of mankind. There, where the baroqueness of this natural sculpture of the *retablo* tradition left a few empty spaces, man took advantage of these few places where there is smooth stone and created a massive display of his compositions. Therefore, when we view

the *Wall of Engravings* (fig. 142) on a length of about 25 feet of wall by almost seven feet high, the first thing we notice is the repeated superimposing of engraved figures. Mankind had to send a lot of S.O.S. messages to the good spirits and therefore had to repeat his important pleas again and again, one on top of another. Now that we are this far along, I must stop to consider again whether these engraved figures may have had magical value by the mere fact that they had been

made. If you will pardon my analogy, it is like a mental prayer without stopping to meditate, which does not happen in the case of painted figures, which are only rarely on top of each other, and never cover the entire figure but only small areas without hindering their appearance.

The *Hall of Engravings* (fig. 143) starts from the right of the observer with two drawings of bulls in sepia line, and between these, there is a series of punctuations in black pigment (fig. 144).

Starting from there to the left, there is an incomplete depiction of a deer, with only the outline drawn in red. There are some bovine horns also outlined in the same color, and some figure fragments. Over toward the left end of the panel there is also a small *anthropomorph* painted in black. There are two deer standing out among the most visible figures. The one to the right is turning its head back to observe a possible attacker, because its body is wounded by at least six weapons drawn in engraving. The figure of the deer is also drawn in multiple stroke engraving and is enhanced in some parts with black paint. The other deer, located off to the left of this panel, has its neck erect and thrust forward and its mouth open as though it were bellowing. It also has a weapon piercing its body and is engraved with multiple strokes and black paint retouching as the one before. Also standing out in this area to the left is a fragmented, large size bovine figure. Altogether it measures about eight feet long, and is done in multiple stroke engraving. At the other end, to the right, there is another large bovine figure also engraved with the profile facing the opposite direction from the one above. Bulls, horses, goats and deer



Fig. 145.— Candamo Cave. Panel with several zoomorphic figures and a possible hunting mask, or incomplete bison head.

Fig. 145.— Cueva de Candamo. Panel con varias figuras zoomórficas y posible máscara de caza o cabeza de bisonte incompleta.

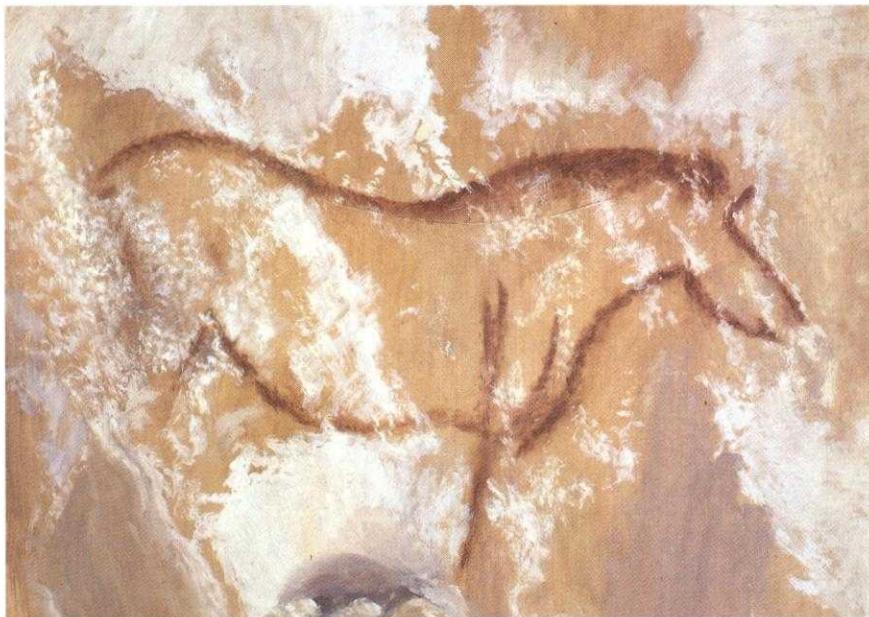


Fig. 146.—Candamo Cave. Horse figure painted in red and partially engraved beforehand.
Fig. 146.—Cueva de Candamo. Pintura de caballo en color rojo y, en parte, previamente grabada.

make up this whole tangle of engravings that are jumbled up and superimposed in this mural. We shall leave the task of sorting them out to the patient reader, with the help of the small scale color illustrations in this book (fig. 142) and the schematic drawing (fig. 143).

Near the corner of this panel and higher up, there is a series of figures where a very thin layer of clay tinting the stone was taken advantage of in creating very impressive decoration, using at times the fine, multiple engraving technique with skillful touches of scraping and sometimes use of color (fig. 145). From top to bottom, these consist of two engraved deer, a bison and what could be a hunting mask painted black, without discarding the possibility that it may really be an incomplete bison head. After this we

have the figure of a pregnant female chamois judging from its distended stomach. This drawing is engraved and reinforced with black paint in some areas. To the left there is another engraving appearing to represent a horse head. Drawn in single cut engraving on the body of the above described chamois there is another anthropomorph (?) of a craf-

ting similar to that of the one painted in black on the *Wall of Engravings*. Lastly, on the bottom, there is the head and neck of another chamois in multiple stroke engraving, shaded with line on the bottom of the head and front of the neck. This drawing is exquisitely sensitive: head erect, sniffing the wind with its flaring nose; this is perhaps one of the best figures depicted.

Going back to the corner of the *Wall of Engravings* (Nº 4 on the map), there is a figure of a horse at a certain height painted in dark carmine that has some retouching in engraving. The drawing is of great simplicity; however, at the same time, it is also very expressive (fig. 146). Under this figure there is the head of a bird drawn in black along with other black lines (fig. 147). During my work in 1955, I retrieved these two figures from the invisibility in which they had been submerged under a layer of calcite.

On a thick cauliflower-shaped stalagmite that springs up near

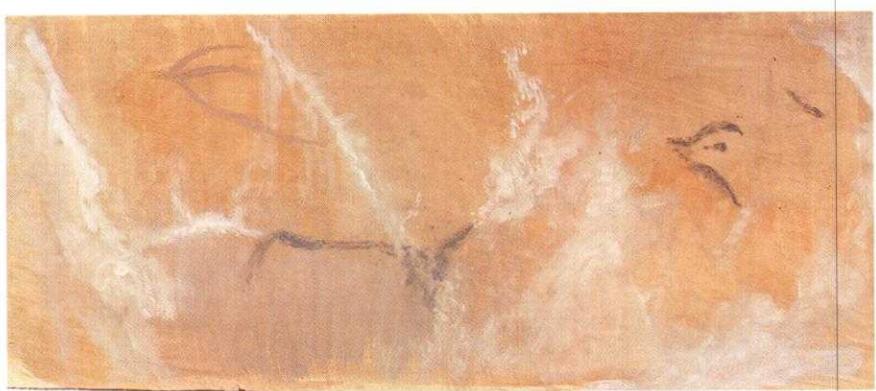
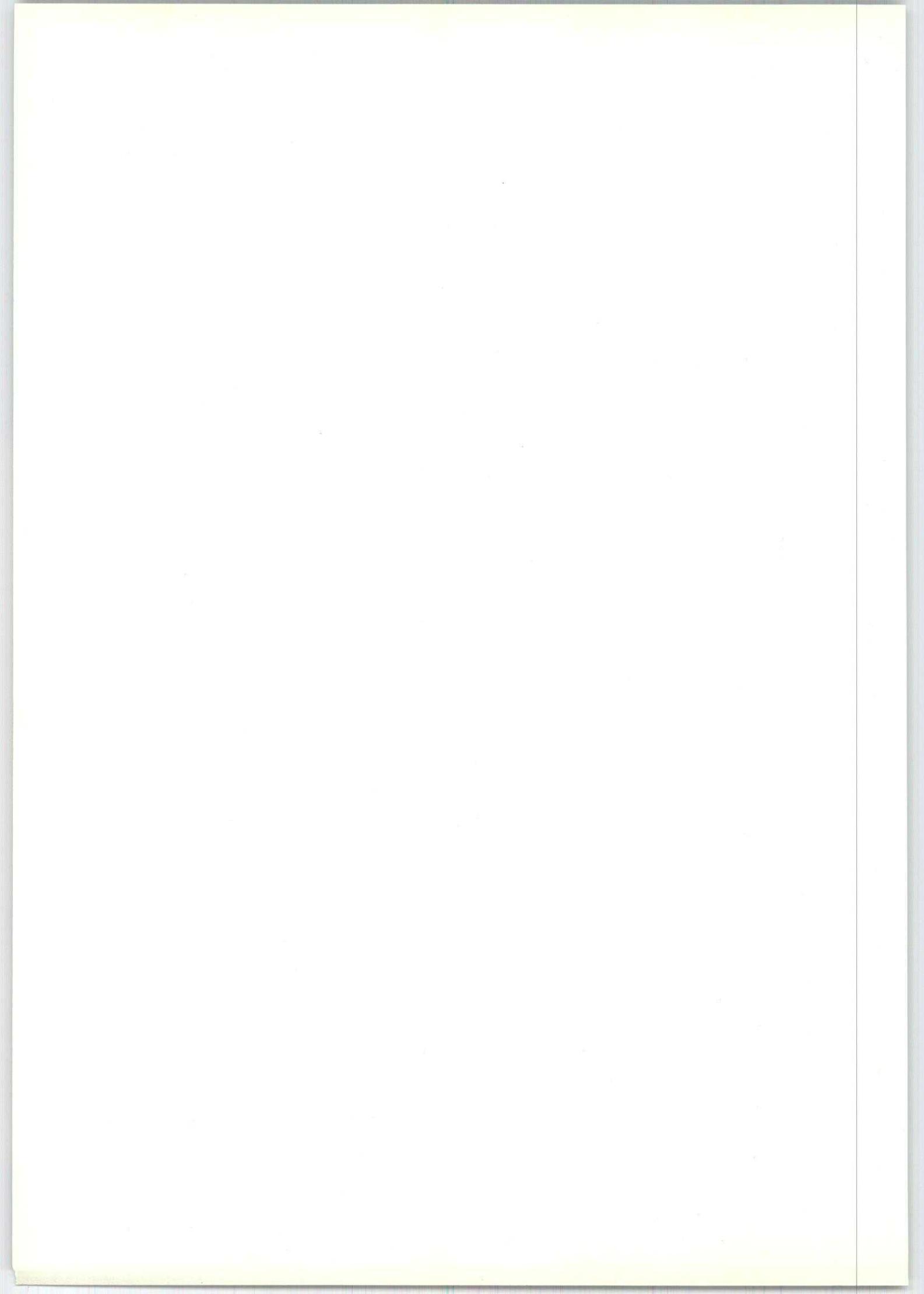
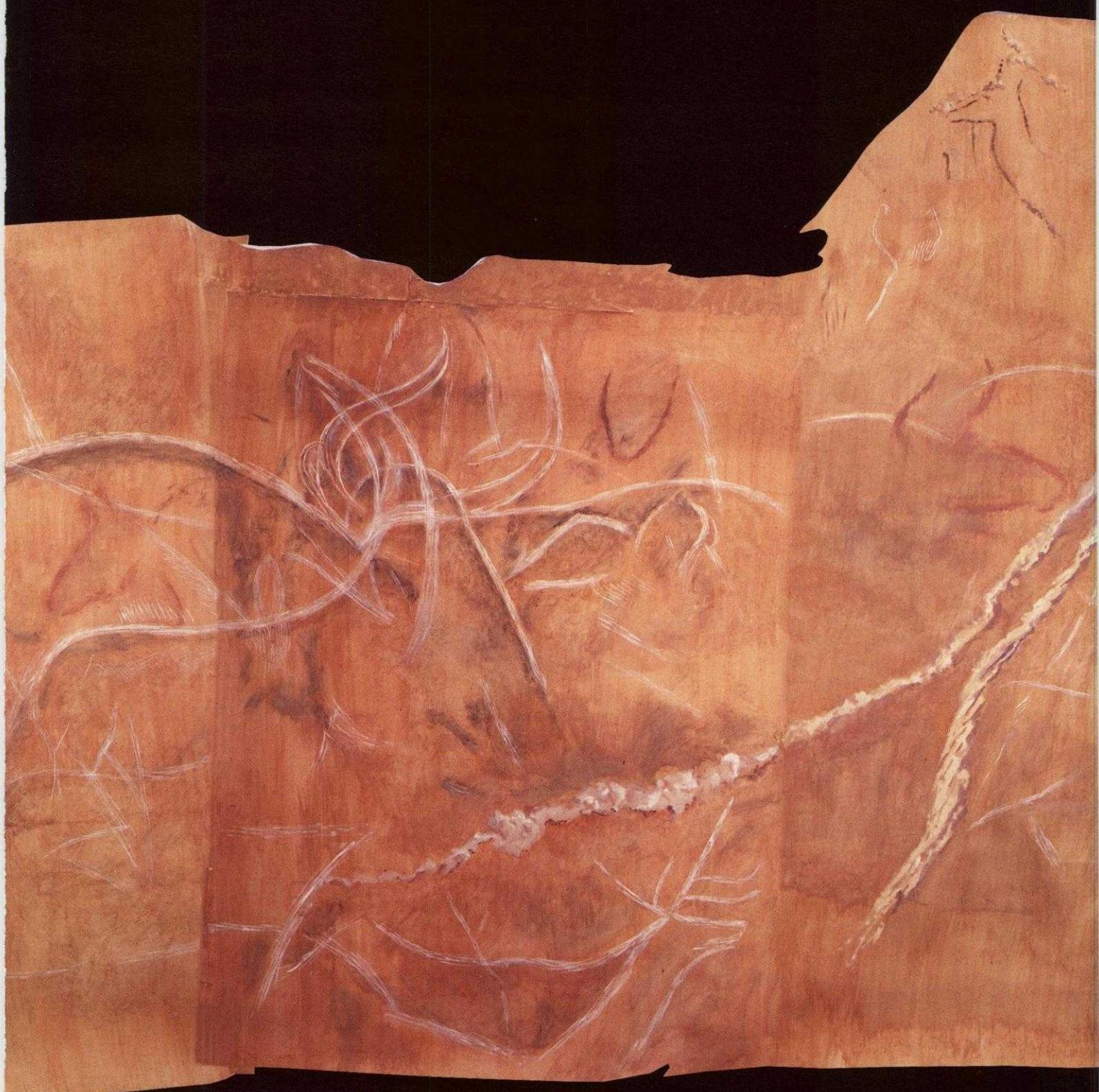


Fig. 147.—Candamo Cave. Bird head painted in black and other strokes in black.
Fig. 147.—Cueva de Candamo. Cabeza de ave en color negro y otros trazos del mismo color.







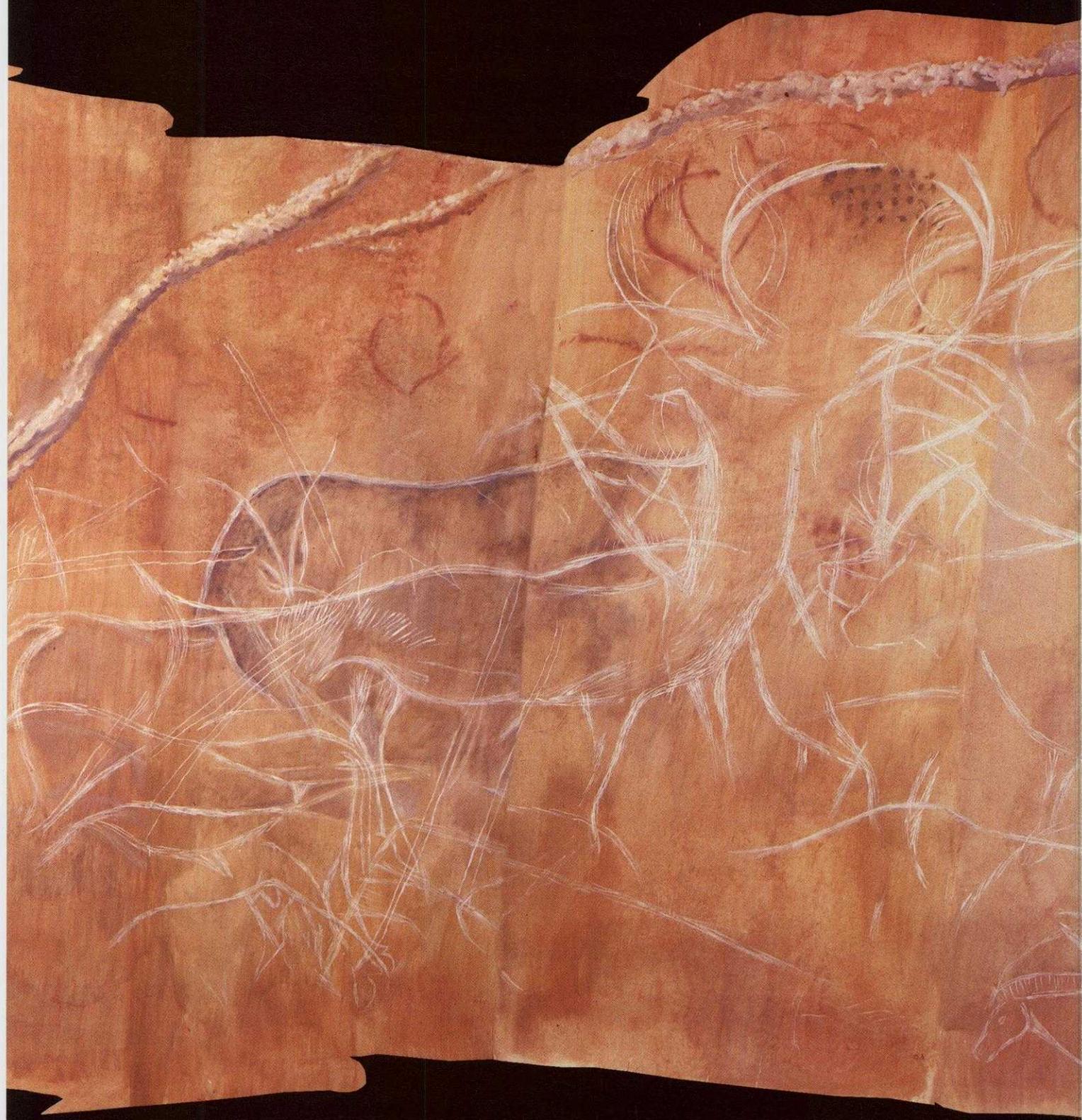




Fig. 142.— Candamo Cave. «The Wall of Engravings». According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 142.— Cueva de Candamo. «El Muro de los Grabados». Según Magín Berenguer. Págs.



Fig. 148.—Candamo Cave. Horse figures and a possible doe.

Fig. 148.—Cueva de Candamo. Figuras de équido y de una posible cierva.

the *Wall of Engravings*, and on the side facing it, there were several single, deep, wide groove engravings representing horse figures and another more confusing one that looked like a deer. They disappeared more than thirty years ago. I had already made the reproduction illustrating this work beforehand. Other isolated strokes remain, one of which is similar to the shape of a harpoon (fig. 148).

Now we come to the description of the paintings in the so called *Camarín* or small room. The *Camarín* attracts attention in a very special way due to the scenery-like layout surrounding it. Its location opposite the access to the *Great Hall*, high up near the domed ceiling, gives it an air of presiding over the entire cave. It is a hollow with its mouth framed by a series of stalactite outcrops attracting attention to it. Painted on the back wall (fig. 149), there is a

fragment of a bovine, a horse head, two mares and what could be a wild boar with the lengthwise axis of the trunk perpendicular to the ground. The identification of this figure is very doubtful, because the paint on it was very blurred when the cave was discovered. The outstanding ones in this group are the two mares, of a very contrasting type. One of these, the one painted in black, is slim, has a long, graceful neck and small head; the other, in sienna, has a short, broad neck and a large head.

Without doubt this group of paintings is one of the most impressive of all Prehistoric Art, mainly due to its location. This makes one think that this *Camarín* must have been a very significant room among the environmental accoutrements with which man must have surrounded the practice of his magical rites.

All that remains for us to mention is the painting in black

of a goat, that is done in a sort of vaulted niche to the left of the *Camarín* and is also connected to it (fig. 150).

From the excavations made in the cave deposit, it has become evident that individuals from the Middle Solutrean and Lower Magdalenian stayed there. However, this does not mean that Aurignacian people may not have visited this initial *sanctuary* chosen by them as such, for there is evidence of their having stayed at other sites of the Nalón valley, and in the wall Art of the Candamo cave there are indications of Aurignacian artistic traits. Examples of these could be the abstract signs in the cavity located on the lower floor a few yards from the entrance. Going on from this almost sure initial base, the fragmented figures painted in red toward the center of the panel would follow: horns and heads of bovines and horses. Also included in this group would be the horsehead in the *Camarín* plus other depictions, which could belong to an Aurignacian-Solutrean period. In engravings, the ones with wide, deep grooving such as the horseheads on the knob close to the wall, some of the bovines on the *Wall* itself, the bulls painted in brownish red on the first part of it and the short mare in the *Camarín*, which is probably a work created during the Cantabrian Lower Solutrean period.

The head of the chamois located on the bottom of the vertical group ending the left part of the



Fig. 149.- Candamo Cave. Figures painted in the Camarín or "Small Chamber".

Fig. 149.- Cueva de Candamo. Figuras pintadas en el "Camarín".

panel, the bison in this same area and most of the bovines could have been done on the *Wall of Engravings* during a cycle that would include the Middle and

Upper Solutrean. The figures first engraved and then retouched with black paint, such as the female chamois, the two deer, etc. would now be Magdalenian

creations. The rest of the figures of the *Camarín*, the goat, the anthropomorph and the supposed bison head or hunting mask would belong to the final stage.



Fig. 150.—Candamo Cave. Figure of a goat painted in black.

Fig. 150.—Cueva de Candamo. Figura de cabra pintada en color negro.

We would summarize by saying that this entire artistic creation was done in the Upper Paleolithic, from its beginnings in the Aurignacian to Cantabrian Middle Magdalenian. We have tried to make a detailed classification of it with natural reservations, because on these panels where there are so many figures all put together, intertwined and jumbled up such as on the *Wall of Engravings*, the mere task of just trying to visualize these drawings is quite complicated. Needless to say, the men who made this beautiful Art collection of the *La Peña de San Román* cave in Candamo possible, lived in times ranging between fifteen and twenty thousand or more years ago.

And so in this cave, the Westernmost of the region, our story of Prehistoric Art in the Upper Paleolithic age in Asturias ends.

Throughout the pages we have written on this subject, what comes most to mind is the extraordinary wealth of their wall Art as both a quantitative and qualitative model, for our region possesses one of the most significant collections in the world. It not only ranges through the entire period of its development, but also contains specimens of an artistic quality level that is difficult to equal.

We cannot say the same in mobiliary Art, or at least not yet. Excavations are now in progress which may possibly provide us

with very pleasing surprises in this area; but as of today, the material that has been retrieved is rather scanty and lacking in pieces attaining the same level of perfection and originality that has been found in other sites outside the region.

With certain nostalgia we now take leave of this world of the underground *sanctuaries*, decorated with inimitable mastery and petrified in the milleniums. Their enigmatic and unshakable appearance is nonetheless saturated with the human qualities that made them possible as they continue to convey to us what our senses are still incapable of understanding, despite all efforts made.

CHAPTER XI

FINAL COMMENTS

With the conclusion of this volume, I wish to make a brief final comment now that the stages I have gone through have provided me with a view of distant horizons. Upon the most distant of these, almost hidden in the mist, appear the blurry profiles of a dawning mankind which upon drawing closer to our perspective, acquires substance and clarity in form, though still surrounded by a most lonely and ancient silence so rich in millennia that permeates the adventure of Prehistoric man.

However, he has attempted to overcome this silence by calling out to us from the walls of the caves through symbols and representations in black, ochre and earthen shades. He calls out to us and at times even cries out in despair, anxious to make contact, so as not to disappear ignored in this coded anecdote; in the enigma. We may admire his Art, and through it, we may become aware of the high levels attained by his sensitivity and intellect, but the Sibylline wall still hides its mystery within. Is it friendly magic; mythology, ritual? A supplicant invocation, totemic representation or an iconographic protective mantle for the voyage to the next world after death? Or is it all of the above?

The who, how and when may be answered. We have shown

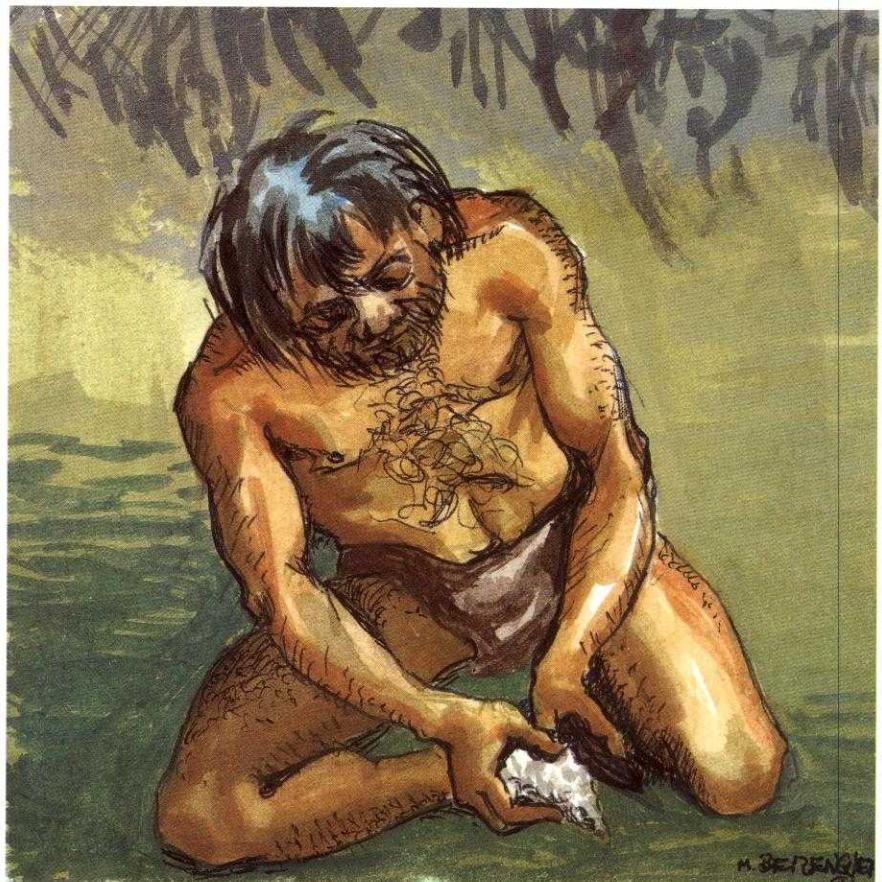


Fig. 151.— Man manufacturing one of his tools.
Fig. 151.— Hombre elaborando uno de sus útiles.

them throughout the pages of this book; but the code to this complicated and fancy plot, which we believe has been continuously enriched during its long voyage through millennia, still remains silent. In this horde of images there is a jealously guarded bit which seems to be only his.

The continuation of this flourishing artistic era goes into crisis. The ideological repertoire and philosophy serving as its

inspiration run out, because a change of climate has come about and this fact will disturb human lives. They leave behind the darkness of the caves and reclusive peace of deep *sanctuaries* to dwell among the flowers under the warm sunshine, which beckons them to efficient and comfortable development of the material means of living, to the detriment of that spiritual impulse that was capable of pro-

viding admirable art lessons back there in the reclusive peace of cave sanctuaries.

In that «afterwards», already protohistoric, when the poor pictorial samples that have been salvaged have lost their mystery and quality and have become almost narrative scenes; the warrior, the herder and symbolic dance now represent the changes born of this disturbance, with dullness and scarcity of examples. Here and there, exist still some pieces retaining their arcaneness: paintings at the dolmen of Cangas, or the idol of Peña Tú. But the change that has been experienced is reflected in these weakened examples. The defense of a permanent territory, control and assurance of protein as a result of the domestication of animals and cultivation of the land, and dance as an expression of the ritual, all show that their material lifestyle has become stable and has acquired comfortable means. Agriculture is plentifully satisfying these material needs. Human society is no longer trusting to luck in finding its next meal; it has created its own guarantees.

Therefore, prayers for mediation of so many small issues, no matter how great their importance in the risky lifestyle up until that time, are no longer required. As a result, their repertoire of prayerful pleadings becomes impoverished. On the other hand, the real scenes defined by the clear light of the sun lack imagination and sensitivity compared to the suggestive and

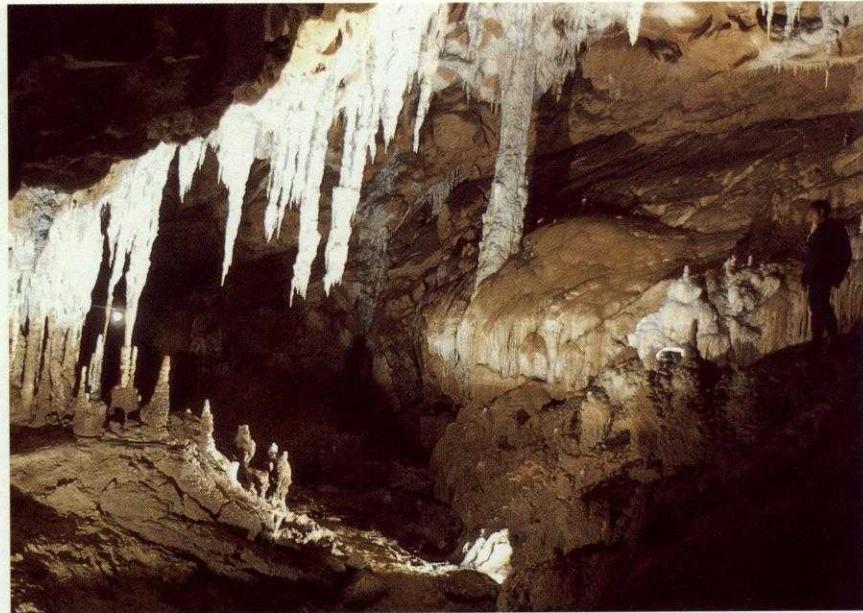


Fig. 152.— Tito Bustillo Cave. A view of the Long Gallery.

Fig. 152.— Cueva Tito Bustillo. Un aspecto de la Galería Larga.

mysterious images from the bowels of the caverns.

But the great mystery of life after death never leaves mankind or will ever leave mankind in peace, throughout the entire history of Humanity. That restlessness, always alert to whatever goes on past the limits, added to that constant watch for whatever comes from the invisible beyond, consumes all of man's attentions, covering him with shivers of cold and fears. Are there other fields? Are there other waters? Is all sunshine different from one moment to the next? Absence of pain?

Therefore, as long as some remains of the dead still last, they shall be protected; either under the cyclopic watch of the dolmens or in the tombs where ashes are preserved. And they shall continue on in their

voyage, taking with them their symbolic baggage: weapons, food, ornaments and tools shall go with them to the afterlife and on to an awakening rebirth.

Monumental art comes into play and not too long thereafter, architecture and urban planning, with small fortified villages now built in stone, showing that mankind's adventure is alive and has become imprinted on time along with the ongoing ritual of death.

Pottery, metal and human ingenuity define the minor artistic accessories that go along with Architecture. If there were any pictorial representations, they have been lost along with the evidence they held. There are, of course, some attempts of sculpture in stone and small metal figures and pottery that are enriched by ornamental elements



Fig. 153.—Tito Bustillo Cave. Fragment of the «Great Panel».
Fig. 153.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Fragmento del «Gran Panel».

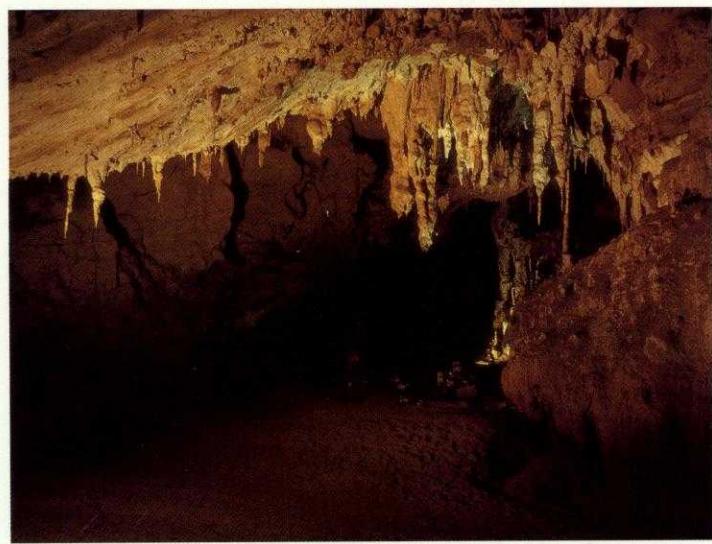
and engravings from a long tradition of drawing.

And still later, the leveling roller of the Romans; but a worn

out roller, with its cylindrical surface rough and pitted from the long road traversed all the way to this outpost of the Empire. Poor

mockery and dull imitation; a coal that burns out from being cast too far from the fire.

Magín Berenguer
Oviedo, August, 1988



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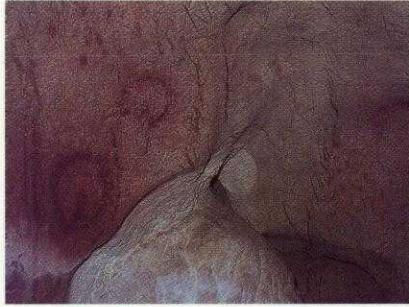
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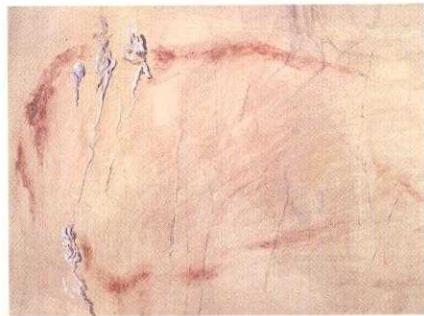
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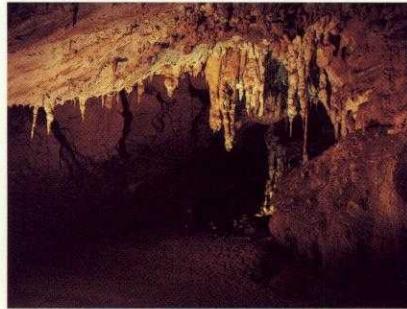
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INDEX AND TEXT OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. A.– Human with head of an ornithic dinosaur, holding a Minotaur's body in a Harlequin Costume, by Picasso.

Fig. B.– Relief from Ashurnasirpal II's palace at Nimrud, representing a winged human with an eagle's head.

Fig. C.– Human with bird's head and erect penis before a speared bison. Lascaux.

Fig. D.– Drawing of a cave man by Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 1.– Portrait of Jacob Boucher de Perthes. (Drawing by Magín Berenguer).

Fig. 2.– Portrait of Marcelino Sanz de Sautuola. (Drawing by Magín Berenguer).

Fig. 3.– Altamira Cave. Painting representing a bison. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 4.– Altamira Cave. Painting representing a hind. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 5.– Portrait of Count de la Vega del Sella. (Drawing by M. Berenguer).

Fig. 6.– Asturian cutting tools. According to Count de la Vega del Sella.

Fig. 7.– Glacial remains in the Peaks of Europe. According to the Count de la Vega del Sella.

Fig. 8.– Peaks of Europe. Valley carved out by a glacier in its time, which now serves as the channel of the Duje River; in the background is Peña Vieja (Photo by Ana Berenguer).

Fig. 9.– Peaks of Europe. Glacial valley, channel of the Duje River. In the foreground, remains of glacial moraine (Photo by Ana Berenguer).

Fig. 10.– Acheulian hand-axe. H. Obermaier in «El hombre fósil». Madrid, 1925.

Fig. 11.– Man using the «hand axe» to break sharp splinters off a bone. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 12.– Fully developed Upper Acheulian hand axe. According to H. Obermaier.

Fig. 13.– Cave of Lazaret (Nice). Reconstruction of the supposed structure of the cabin. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 14.– Lazaret Cave. Reconstruction of the cabin. Drawing by Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 15.– Acheulian bifacial stone from Bañugues (Gozón). Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 16.– Limestone folds in the mountains, a favorable place for the formation of grottoes and caverns (Photo by José Manuel Suárez).

Fig. 17.– Gallery of the Tito Bustillo Cave (Ribadesella). (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 18.– Limestone formations in the Peaks of Europe (Photo by Ana Berenguer).

Fig. 19.– Folded limestone along the eastern coast of Asturias (Photo by Ana Berenguer).

Fig. 20.– Mousterian tip and scraper from the Forno or Conde Cave. Santo Adriano (Asturias). Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 21.– Schematic map of Europe, showing Quaternary glaciations. White areas show areas of permanent ice (Drawing by Ana Berenguer).

Fig. 22.– Common fallow deer, quite plentiful in the Quaternary era (Photo by E. Junco).

Fig. 23.– Asturcon horse, a type that is often found depicted on prehistoric art walls. (Photo by E. Junco).

Fig. 24.– Brown bear, some of which still survive in Asturian forests (Photo by E. Junco).

Fig. 25.– A chamois; plentiful in the Cantabrian Range (Photo by E. Junco).

Fig. 26.– Wild cock which despite all odds, still survives in the forests of Asturias (Photo by E. Junco).

Fig. 27.– Chatelperron or Lower Aurignacian type tips. According to Obermaier.

Fig. 28.– Gravette tips. According to H. Breuil.

Fig. 29.– Aurignacian tools. According to H. Breuil and H. Obermaier. 1, 2, 3 & 4 are blades with much edge retouching; 5 & 6 are blades with hollows; 7, 8 & 9 are keel-shaped scrapers; 10 is an engraving tool with transverse retouching; 11 is a center point engraving tool.

Fig. 30.– Aurignacian split bone tips. According to H. Breuil.

Fig. 31.– Collars from a prehistoric collection, one of which is made from bear teeth and another from sea snails.

Fig. 32.– Collar belonging to a Motilón Indian. Note the inclusion of medals with images of saints (Berenguer Archives).

Fig. 33.– Solutrean tips: (a) and (b) are laurel leaf; (c) is notched. According to H. Obermaier.

Fig. 34.– Cueto de la Mina Shelter (Llanes). Tips of a type from the Upper Solutrean. According to Count de la Vega del Sella.

Fig. 35.– Cova Rosa (Ribadesella). Solutrean tips. Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 36.– Cova Rosa (Ribadesella). Decorated lance. Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 37.– Cueto de la Mina (Llanes). Solutrean tips. Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 38.– Cueva del Cierro (Ribadesella). Decorated assegai. Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 39.– Development of Magdalenian harpoons. According to H. Breuil, (a) and (b) archaic; (c) and (d) with just one row of teeth; (e) and (f) with two; (g) and (h), predecessors of the Azilian harpoon.

PREHISTORIC CAVE ART

Fig. 40.– Toothed arrows used by Motilón Indians (Berenguer Archive).

Fig. 40A.– Tito Bustillo Cave. Magdalenian harpoons. Archeological Museum of Asturias. (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 41.– Tito Bustillo Cave (Ribadesella). Magdalenian shafts. Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 42.– Tito Bustillo Cave. Magdalenian palette and pendant. Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 43.– Fancied scene of magical rites associated with hunting as performed in prehistoric cave sanctuaries. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 44.– One of the simple ways of getting up to be able to paint on surfaces high up above a man's reach. According to Magín Berenguer. P. 74.

Fig. 45.– Schematic map of Asturias, with the location of caves with wall art. The most important ones are pointed out with asterisks. According to Magín Berenguer. P. 72/73.

Fig. 46.– El Pindal Cave. Inlet in front of the entrance to the cave (Photo by Víctor Berenguer).

Fig. 47.– El Pindal Cave. Schematic map of the cave (Berenguer Archive).

Fig. 48.– El Pindal Cave. Horse head painted in red. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 49.– El Pindal Cave. Drawing to show the location of the depictions on the wall. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 50.– El Pindal Cave. Shield shapes painted in red, and other signs. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 51.– El Pindal Cave. Engraving showing an incomplete figure of a horse. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 52.– Wild boar painted in red, facing what appears to be a lance point, and a horse head painted in the same color. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 53.– El Pindal Cave. Bison engraved and painted, including three colored dots on its body. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 54.– El Pindal Cave. Engraved figure of indefinite nature; could be a depiction of a wild boar. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 55.– El Pindal Cave. Engraved bison with painted red spots signs. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 56.– El Pindal Cave. Engraved mare and a human hand painted in red. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 57.– El Pindal Cave. Fragment of engraved horse, appearing to be caught by the muzzle in a trap. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 58.– El Pindal Cave. Incomplete figure of a horse engraved with lengthwise axis perpendicular to the floor. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 59.– El Pindal Cave. Painting in red depicting a doe and bison engravings with color retouching and some Solutrean type tips. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 60.– El Pindal Cave. Painting of the doe with the rock outcrop also decorated in red. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 61.– El Pindal Cave. Horsehead engraved and tinted in red. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 62.– El Pindal Cave. Large size engraving of a bison, with what appears to be an axe painted in red over the right shoulder. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 63.– El Pindal Cave. Engraving showing a fish with three red spots inside. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 64.– El Pindal Cave. Elephant painted in red with a spot in the same color on the left shoulder. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 65.– El Pindal Cave. Photograph of a fragment of the main panel with paintings and engravings (Photo by Víctor Berenguer).

Fig. 66.– El Pindal Cave. Painting in black showing two bucks and engraving of two horses. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 67.– El Pindal Cave. Ideomorphic painting, showing a branch shape. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 68.– El Pindal Cave. Ideomorphic painting, showing a wavy line with perpendicular lines on it. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 69.– La Loja Cave. Panel of engravings. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 70.– Cueto de la Mina shelter. Magdalenian engraved assegai and bone. Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 71.– La Riera Cave. Magdalenian lances with ideomorphic line engraving. Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 72.– Coímbre Cave. Magdalenian assegai. Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 73.– Llonín Cave. Wide, deep cut engraving of unknown meaning. According to magín Berenguer.

Fig. 74.– Llonín Cave, layout map. According to Marino Fernández Canga.

Fig. 75.– Llonín Cave. Paintings and engravings on the main panel. According to Magín Berenguer. P. 104/105.

Fig. 76.– Llonín Cave. Decoration in red paint. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 77.– Llonín Cave. Detail of the female anthropomorph (Photo by José Manuel Quintanal).

Fig. 78 - 79 A y B.– Llonín Cave. Some of the engraved figures, drawn flat to be better able to see their details. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 80.– Llonín Cave. Group of engraved figures. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 81.– Llonín Cave. Panel of paintings in black. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 82.– The Sella River where it empties into the sea, and the town of Ribadesella (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 83.– Cave of Les Pedroses, inside the cave (Foto Nebot).

Fig. 84.– Cave of Les Pedroses. Decorated wall. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 85.– Tito Bustillo Cave. Asturian Underground Exploration Group, ready to make one of their first descents into the cave (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 86.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Map of the cave. (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 87.- Tito Bustillo Cave. End of the tunnel and beginning of the «Long Gallery» (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 88.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Engraved does and bovine. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 89.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Signs painted in red and partially engraved. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 90.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Engraving depicting a horse and ideomorphic sign inscribed on it. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 91.- Tito Bustillo Cave. One complete bovine engraving and another partial one. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 92.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Red painting of signs (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 93.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Vulvar signs painted in red (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 94.- Tito Bustillo Cave. A view of the «Long Gallery» (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 95.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Deer head (?) painted on the «chimney» going from the La Moría or Lloseta Cave (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 96.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Goat head painted on the «chimney» going to La Lloseta or Moría Cave (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 97.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Engravings representing horses and a bovine inscribed in a hollow of the «Long Gallery». According to Berenguer.

Fig. 98.- Tito Bustillo Cave. A view of the «Great Hall» (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 99.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Horse painted with dark carmine-violet stain on a wall of the «Great Hall» (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 100.- Tito Bustillo Cave. General vision «Great Panel» paintings.

Fig. 101.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Deposit ... (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 102.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Deer (?) painted in black line, first figures of the «Great Wall». (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 103.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Head of «Fat Horse». (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 104.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Small reindeer figure (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 105.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Paintings on the «Great Panel». According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 106.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Hind figure painted in black line (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 107.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Partially destroyed painting showing a horse located to the right of the photo, and underneath, painting of a deer in a running position with its head turned back (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 108.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Schematic drawing of several examples of deer antlers in prehistoric paintings. According to Magín Berenguer.

1. Buck in Tito Bustillo Cave, reconstructed. 2. Lascaux Cavern. 3. Candamo Cave.

Fig. 109.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Detail of reindeer and horse facing each other (Photo Nuño).

Fig. 110.- Tito Bustillo Cave. The complete painting of the black horse (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 111.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Polychrome painting depicting a reindeer Nale (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 112.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Painting of female reindeer or doe, also polychrome; this is very similar to the doe painted on the ceiling of Altamira (fig. 4) and even the measurements are very similar (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 113.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Painting of horse in light colors outlined in black line (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 114.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Horse painted in violet with black zebra stripes on feet (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 115.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Horse painted in grey (Photo Nuño).

Fig. 116.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Engraving depicting the horse with zebra stripes painted to the right of it, with profile facing the opposite direction (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 117.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Horse head painted in black line (Photo Nuño).

Fig. 118.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Cow figure painted in black line (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 119.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Bison figure painted in black line (Berenguer Photo Archive).

Fig. 120.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Pendant carved in the shape of a goat head. Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 121.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Fragment of Magdalenian perforated staff. Archeological Museum of Asturias (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 122.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Magdalenian needles. Archeological Museum of Asturias. (Photo by Lorenzo Arias).

Fig. 123.- El Buxu Cave. Schematic map of the cave. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 124.- El Buxu Cave. Engraving of a horse. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 125.- El Buxu Cave. Two deer painted in black line. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 126.- El Buxu Cave. Hind figures painted in black with one also engraved. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 127.- El Buxu Cave. Ideomorphic engraving. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 128.- El Buxu Cave. Engraving depicting two horses. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 129.- El Buxu Cave. Ideomorphic and goat engravings. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 130.- El Buxu Cave. Ideomorphic paintings and engravings and fragment of a goat in black paint. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 131.- El Buxu Cave. Engraving of a horse. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 132.- El Buxu Cave. Engraving of two horses. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 133.- El Buxu Cave. Engraving of a horse. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 134.- El Buxu Cave. Bison figure, engraved with touches of black paint. According to Magín Berenguer.