

MARCELINO SANZ DE SAUTUOLA

*BREVES APUNTES SOBRE
ALGUNOS OBJETOS PREHISTÓRICOS
DE LA PROVINCIA DE SANTANDER*

(Traducciones al inglés, francés y portugués)

Presentación

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Introducción

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ENGLISH VERSION

Marcelino Sanz de Sautuola's «Brief Notes on some Pre-historic Artifacts from the Province of Santander», heralded a major change in the study and awareness of the Prehistory of Humanity.

The discovery in 1879 of the paintings preserved in the Hall of Polychromes in the Caves of Altamira, now called the Sistine Chapel of Paleolithic Art, was no coincidence but the result of the investigative thirst and perseverance of a studious man, gifted with the necessary intuition to be ahead of his time.

This work, a copy of which we are presenting today, was the subject of great controversy, as discussed by the specialists José Antonio Lasheras and Carmen de las Heras in the following pages. As in the case of many other major initiatives, the author did not live to see his breakthrough acknowledged. But his prudence and the generosity with which he offered the world his discoveries were finally rewarded.

This edition is a tribute to his memory.

EMILIO BOTÍN

THE DISCOVERY OF MAN'S FIRST ART. COMMENTARY ON THE
BRIEF NOTES... BY MARCELINO SANZ DE SAUTUOLA

José A. Lasheras and Carmen de las Heras*

Sautuola was well aware of the beauty, importance and significance of the find that he made some one hundred and twenty-five years ago in Altamira. Whilst researching the most distant prehistory of his region, he found a series of painted figures that turned out to be the first great site of Man's earliest artistic manifestations, and he did so when no other similar painting of its kind had yet been discovered in the entire world. He identified the animal species represented in the cave, the techniques used to depict them, he deduced their precise chronology and presented the existence of this original art *par excellence*, the oldest art in existence, the first art, with absolute scientific rigour. Although twenty years passed before the value of his find was finally recognized, his *Brief Notes* constitute a remarkable scientific jewel for the study of the prehistoric era, whilst Altamira is now recognized throughout the world as a master-piece within the universal history of art.

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THE DISCOVERY OF THE CAVE IN ALTAMIRA

The prehistoric era in Altamira ended thirteen thousand years ago. It was then that natural causes led the first six metres of the sunlit cave entrance to collapse. This was the age in which this site was inhabited by Man during the Paleolithic period. The collapse of all the upper layers of earth closed off the mouth of the cave (measuring some fourteen metres in width and up to three metres in height) and the cave was entirely sealed. Shortly before this occurred, peoples of Magdalenian culture had lived there and had produced the last paintings, perhaps the small bison depicted in black that appear between the coloured paintings, on what we now call the Great Ceiling. From that distant moment on, the cave was plunged into absolute darkness. Several millennia had to pass until the cave was accidentally discovered during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The discovery of these, the most beautiful paintings of the prehistoric era, constitutes an interesting story and forms an important part of the cave's history. A number of curious coincidental and anecdotal aspects make this an especially exciting story, whilst the method and perseverance displayed by the main participants in the find and the scientific and artistic repercussions of their discovery also make it especially interesting.

Sautuola was a man of academic training, a graduate of Law, whose scientific curiosity led him to study both regional history and the natural sciences, and also to collect antiques, fossils and minerals. Among other initiatives that reveal his wide-ranging interests and broad-minded approach, we might recall that he introduced the cultivated eucalyptus tree to Cantabria, suggesting that this could be a financial resource of regional significance.¹ He was also Vice-Chairman of the Provincial Monuments Committee for many years.

Around 1870-1872, a labourer called Modesto Cubillas came across a crevice through which it was possible to gain access to the cave. In a letter he wrote to King Alfonso XII in 1881, during the king's visit to the cave, he requested some kind of reward – “some assistance,” he wrote – for having been the person who discovered the cave and showed it to Sautuola, who owned a large house in the village of Puente San Miguel, close to the cave. Knowing of Sautuola's hobbies and interests, Cubillas must have informed him of the existence of this cave. It was Sautuola's naturalist interests that led him to visit the cave for the first time in 1875. On this first occasion, Sautuola investigated the whole cave (over

¹ Manuscript entitled “Apuntes sobre la aclimatación del *Eucalyptus globulus* en la provincia de Santander,” in M. Sanz de Sautuola, *Escritos y documentos*, Santander, 1976, p. 55 and ff.

270 metres), even dragging himself along the ground to gain entry to the lowest gallery. His sense of curiosity and interest in geology were intense indeed! It was perhaps for this reason that when, almost at the end of the cave, he saw some strange black drawings he did not pay any particular attention to them at that time or grant them any importance.

In 1878 Sautuola went to Paris, to the Universal Exhibition. He visited the pavilion devoted to Anthropology several times, featuring an exhibition of prehistoric items that had recently been discovered in France. Spurred on by this visit – “led by my enthusiasm for such studies and my considerable interest in the numerous and fascinating collections of prehistoric artifacts that I was fortunate enough to be able to peruse” [p. 3]*, is how he put it – he decided to undertake some research in his own region. He planned to investigate various different caves and resolved to return to Altamira for what would be his second and final visit, lasting, we might suppose, several days. He informed the Academy of History, of which he was a corresponding member, of his visit, although he did not mention anything about the paintings in his letters, perhaps because he had not yet discovered them when he wrote the letters, or, more probably, because he

* The pages referred to between brackets correspond to the original facsimile of the *Brief Notes* ...

wished to preserve a prudent discretion while he had an opportunity to analyze and adequately evaluate the findings and to reach a number of precise conclusions.

As anecdotal and coincidental aspects of the discovery, we might highlight the participation of Sautuola's daughter, María, in the find, having accompanied her father as a girl during his visit to the cave. She was the first one to actually see the paintings: "Papa, oxen!" were her exact words, as she related later on as an adult. This is a charming although unimportant detail that, through its having been cited repeatedly and excessively, is prone to trivialize the real merit of this scientific discovery, a merit that corresponds solely to Sautuola and his *Brief Notes*.

AT THE DAWN OF PREHISTORY

The study of Man's most remote past began to develop in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, using the discoveries made within the fields of Geology and Palaeontology as a basis. This new analytical trend, labelled "naturalist," progressively replaced a certain "erudite" model that had dominated up until that time. The erudite tradition was based on the idea that the origin of the universe was exactly as described in the Book of Genesis, God having created Man in his own image, perfect and supreme. Thinkers who supported this belief came

to be known as “creationists.” In their view, the stories of the Old Testament and the events relating to what were known as the “four Empires” (Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome) constituted Mankind’s most distant past, the study of which simply required a knowledge of the Bible, Ancient History and Classical languages. However, these beliefs began to be questioned following a series of discoveries that had taken place since the eighteenth century. The fields of Geology and Palaeontology emerged from a new “Genesis,” based on reason and not on faith, farremoved from the idea of Paradise and firmly set within the mineral and animal kingdom.

This new approach to the origins of Man began to take shape after 1809, when the work of the biologist Jean Baptiste Lamarck, *Zoological Philosophy*, was published, in which he set out the principles of “transformism,” a process designed to explain the evolution of living beings. This shift in the scientists’ outlook developed further with the publication of two essential works: *Principles of Geology*, by Charles Lyell in 1833, and the work by Jacques Boucher de Perthes, *Antiquités Celtiques et Antédiluviennes*, in 1847. These two works are essential within the field of early prehistory. Boucher de Perthes described the discovery of man-made stone instruments associated with animal remains, located in very old geological layers, which proved that Man’s origins stretched back many years before the date established in the

biblical story of Genesis (in spite of the evidence to the contrary, the debate surrounding this question was prolonged by some advocates of that Spanish movement for preserving national traditions and ways of life, *integrismo*, until well into the twentieth century). Shortly afterwards, in 1859, Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*,² in which he explained the guiding principles on which the origin of species was based and the mechanisms that made it possible, essentially the process of natural selection. The appearance of a new work by Lyell that same year entitled *Geological Evidence of the Antiquity of Man* provided irrefutable proof that the theses of Boucher de Perthes and Darwin were correct regarding the history of Man. In 1867, the prehistoric period was analyzed at the recently inaugurated Musée des Antiquités Nationales de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, as well as at the Grand Universal Exhibition of Paris, whilst a Congress was staged featuring the participation of some of the first Spanish historians of prehistory, such as Juan de Vilanova,³ this being a desirable although rare example of Spanish science reaching out to new developments in Europe. A year later, John Lubbock, in his work *Prehistoric Times*, coined

² *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life.*

³ The first Professor of Geology and Palaeontology at a Spanish Univer-

the terms “Paleolithic” and “Neolithic” and these were rapidly accepted and adopted by historians of the prehistoric era. In 1871 Darwin published his work *The Descent of Man*,⁴ in which he took into account various aspects relating to prehistoric archaeology and, in 1872, Gabriel de Mortillet established the succession of the various Paleolithic periods. In short, we might state that, in Europe, the study of the prehistoric era began to emerge as a discipline in its own right, independent of the sciences of Geology and Palaeontology, during the second half of the nineteenth century.

AND IN SPAIN?

In spite of the considerable progress and popularity that prehistoric studies had enjoyed abroad, this discipline remained virtually unknown in Spain. The fact is that the country’s economic and social backwardness and political instability hardly favoured the development of the sciences.

The restoration of the monarchy in 1875 meant that the Church was able to maintain and even increase its power and

sity. In 1872 he had published his work *Origen, Naturaleza y Antigüedad del Hombre*, and he was the figure that Sautuola consulted in order to obtain information concerning his find.

⁴ *The Descent of Man, and selection in Relation to Sex.*

influence within society and all spheres of public administration. As a result, one of the traditional conflicts that had plagued Spanish society was rekindled, the battle between the clericalists and anticlericalists. The clericalists encompassed some of the most conservative sections of society – Catholics and extreme Spanish nationalists – who either rejected or were ignorant of the cultural and social achievements that Europe had enjoyed since the French Revolution. The anticlericalists included the liberal bourgeoisie, the progressives, federalists and republicans, all of whom were in favour of establishing a secular society. One of the most significant concessions to clericalism was made within the field of teaching, instigated by the Minister for Development, the Marquis of Orovio, in 1875. This is known as the *Segunda Cuestión Universitaria* or “Second University Issue” and prohibited the teaching of any postulates that contradicted the rules of the Church and Catholic doctrine. A number of professors resigned their posts and others were relieved of their university chairs. A number of these academics, with Francisco Giner de los Ríos at the head, founded the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (“Free Teaching Institution”) in 1876, based on freedom of thought and an interest in science and innovative lay teaching.

The conflict between religion and science within the field of education was hard-fought and took many years to resolve.

Thus, the participants of the Third Spanish National Catholic Congress that took place in Seville in 1892 demanded a chair “devoted exclusively to teaching real Catholic prehistory,” and it was recommended that all Catholic writers who tackled the subject should declare their faith at the beginning of their works and proclaim themselves to be contrary to “any kind of evolutionist and transformist pantheism and avoid the use of words that may lead their readers to confuse them with this School.”

From the above we can deduce that the general situation in the Spain of 1880 provided little cause for celebration when it came to scientific explanations of the origins of Man and prehistory. Within this context, the discovery of the Altamira paintings and their attribution to the Paleolithic period – a word still rarely used in Spanish publications – represented an assault on the two pillars of the country’s social structure: the Church, on the one hand, and the Academic traditionalists and other scientific institutions, on the other. As if this were not enough, the recognition of primitive Man’s artistic capacity seemed to go against the principles established by the evolutionary theorists, who found it difficult to attribute to Paleolithic Man – Man of the “antediluvian era” or “Age of the Reindeer” as it was also known – such a capacity or degree of intellectual development. We can understand this difficulty in matching the principles of

evolution with the few Paleolithic remains that had been discovered at that time when we bear in mind that many parts of the puzzle known today regarding the evolution of the *Homo* species since his appearance two and a half million years ago in Africa were unknown to scientists at that time. These circumstances and considerations led to the controversy and subsequent oblivion into which the Altamira cave was immersed until the twentieth century, when other caves featuring Paleolithic art began to be studied in France. It is curious how disparate currents of thought so bitterly opposed at the time should come together in denying the evidence: clericalists and anticlericalists, creationists and evolutionists all had something to say on the matter in their own defence and in response to other interpretations. Contrary to what might have been expected, the most prestigious scientific support for Sautuola's thesis regarding the ancient origin of the figures in the Altamira cave came from a creationist and convinced Catholic: Juan de Vilanova. Vilanova sought to marry the Biblical version with the discoveries of prehistoric science and to do so without belligerence or any form of radicalism. Vilanova may have believed that the perfection of these paintings provided proof enough of the fact that Mankind, from the very beginnings of his creation, possessed all his intellectual gifts, although there is no record that he ever argued such a case based on the discoveries at

Altamira. Furthermore, Sautuola explicitly refused to enter that debate in his own name or that of Vilanova⁵: that was not the issue at stake in the case of Altamira and its paintings.

We have sketched out the context in which this Paleolithic art was discovered. However, it is important to briefly recall the actual discovery itself in order to adequately evaluate the scientific rigour and merit of the *Brief Notes* and its author.

A GREAT SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY

In 1879 Sautuola searched for the Paleolithic where he believed it might be found: in caves and the soil and sub-soil [p. 3]. He returned to the cave of Altamira and rigorously and precisely described all of its main features. In addition to his accidental discovery of a cave with paintings and the scientific discovery of Paleolithic art, we should also mention his rational analysis of the facts and the model exposition of his thesis.

Sautuola distinguished between the cave's different shape and accessibility in prehistoric times and in the modern era [p. 11]; once inside, he described it in sections, noting down

⁵ Article published by M. Sanz de Sautuola in the newspaper *El Eco de la Montaña*, Santander, 7 October, 1880.

the cave's dimensions and main characteristics, moving from outside to inside the cave, unlike geologists, and creating the model followed ever since. Rather than excavating the site, he must have simply turned over the surface of the entrance area, which is where he found the remains of the animal-life that served as food for the cave-dwellers (the bones of large herbivores, shells that he classified correctly as *Patella*) and stone and bone tools (flint and bone spear-heads, needles, pendants...), whilst indicating the absence of pottery [a detail he repeats on p. 15]. He compared some of the items with those that “are still used today by some tribes that have not progressed very far along the road to civilization” [p. 13]. This was a precise and exquisite definition of those who were habitually and pejoratively described as “savages” because they belonged to non-industrial and non-urban cultures, a term that would be considered morally unacceptable today.

He then went on to describe the paintings and drawings he found throughout the entire cave, moving from the exterior to the interior and placing special emphasis on the pictures he found on the great ceiling of the first gallery: the coloured paintings. He referred to the *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* by the Comte de Buffon in order to identify the animal species depicted in the paintings [p. 15] as the virtually extinct European bison; he noted down the number of figures and the dimensions of the most important ones,

whilst also highlighting the variety of postures depicted. He then went on to analyze the artistic execution of the paintings: “the artist produced them with considerable skill [...] each feature was produced with one clean stroke” [p. 16]; the difficulty of their execution; the possible impact of natural light, bearing in mind the original shape of the cave – a highly important detail and a factor that was taken into account when creating the facsimile reproduction of the cave at the Museum of Altamira – and the necessary use of artificial light; the way in which the artist made use of the natural relief of the rock surface in order to create the figures, this being a current line of research regarding the interpretation of Paleolithic art, concluding that “the author possessed a developed aesthetic sense” [p. 17].

This statement is quite exceptional if we bear in mind the formal characteristics of the dominant artistic trends of the time in which Sautuola was writing. A certain worn-out academicism, a certain realism (social or historical) or the virtuosity of Mariano Fortuny did not exactly facilitate this reading that can only be explained by the intellectual openness, culture and lack of prejudice of Sautuola himself. We should also recall that the exhibition of the Impressionists in Paris had only taken place a few years prior to Sautuola’s discovery, in 1874, and that Auguste Rodin did not shoot to fame until 1880. We might also compare Sautuola’s reading with

that of the art expert and Head of the Spanish National Chalcography Institute, E. Lemus y Olmo. During the controversy that followed the publication of the *Brief Notes*, the latter stated that the figures were “the work of a mediocre disciple of modern art who neither knows how to pretend nor anything about the prehistoric period: it seems they wanted to simulate this period and [...] recruited the least appropriate artist to do so.”⁶

In his final evaluation, Sautuola noted the discovery of red ochre in the archaeological deposits, which he associated with the execution of the paintings [p. 21]. He compared these to the small engraved and sculpted items in the shape of animals that he had seen personally in France and with those items that had already been discovered and presented in the published works of Lubbock and Vilanova,⁷ making the following observation: “It would not, therefore, be going too far to suggest that if such perfect depictions could be engraved on hard surfaces, then it would have been perfectly within Man’s capabilities to produce the paintings in question at such an early stage in his development” [p. 22]. Sautuola’s great discovery is reflected in his conclusion,

⁶ M. Sanz de Sautuola, *Escritos y documentos*, Santander, 1976, p. 193.

⁷ J. Lubbock, *L’Homme Préhistorique*, Paris, 1876, and the already cited work by J. Vilanova.

based as it was on a scientific knowledge obtained from wide reading on the matter and a methodical analysis of what he saw. He stated that the paintings “undoubtedly belong to the period of history known as the *Paleolithic Era*,” using a term that had only been recently coined (it is no coincidence that he noted the absence of any pottery, as we mentioned above).

Sautuola also concerned himself with preserving the paintings by taking “the necessary measures” [p. 24]: he installed a door in the cave at his own expense, a door that could be locked, and he requested that the Local Council of Santillana del Mar should guard and protect the cave with its resources and staff. This was duly carried out until the creation of the Administration and Exploration Committee of the Cave of Altamira, which we now consider forerunner of the current National Museum and Research Centre of Altamira and of its Board of Trustees.

A LONG-LASTING CONTROVERSY

The very fact that Sautuola simultaneously published in the same pamphlet details of his findings in other caves he had investigated, indicates that he was perfectly aware of the importance Altamira would acquire and the difficulties there would be in achieving a general acceptance and recognition

of these findings. There he found nearly thirty large coloured figures, some of natural size, and many other drawings produced by early Man. Altamira was no isolated phenomenon: Man's presence in Cantabria since the Paleolithic era was recorded in various caves, a fact proven for the first time as a result of Sautuola's tenacious interest.

It was the geologist Juan Vilanova y Piera, a professor at the University of Madrid, whom Sautuola turned to for advice, and who took on the task of presenting – with varied intensity and no success whatsoever – Sautuola's discovery at congresses on prehistory in Portugal, Germany, France and Spain, and at various scientific conferences and meetings throughout Spain. However, these remarkable scientific contributions were rejected.

The toughest and most irrational controversy, featuring something of a personal campaign against Sautuola, was created by the regional scholar Ángel de los Ríos in the Cantabrian press. His radical stance reflected the conservative bias of a certain type of “expert,” who, like him, combined erudition with religious beliefs. This controversy took on slanderous overtones and rumours of falsification began to overshadow the discovery. De los Ríos attributed the cave pictures to a mute painter of French nationality called Paul Ratier, whom Sautuola had entrusted with producing a copy of the paintings [now on show at the Museum of Altamira,

and perhaps the model for Plate 3] and who consequently visited the cave on a regular basis.

Outside Cantabria, a report drawn up by members of the prestigious *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (“Free Teaching Institution”) would once again contest the prehistoric nature of the Altamira paintings. Incapable of reconciling their stance as evolutionists with the conceptual and technical quality of the works and the dates attributed to them by Sautuola, these scholars concluded that the paintings had been produced by Roman soldiers who had sought refuge inside the caves during the Cantabrian wars (29-19 BC).⁸ The debates that took place under the auspices of the Spanish Natural History Society also ended by denying the primitive character of the works (we have already highlighted the decisive intervention of E. Lemus in this respect).

In France, where the most highly reputed scholars of prehistory were found, the reaction to Sautuola’s discovery and the pamphlet that described it varied between one of prudence and one of disdain. Why should this have been the case? Because everything seemed rather too excessive: the age of the works, their magnitude, the state of preservation and the artistic quality of the paintings. It all happened too soon and

⁸ M. Sanz de Sautuola, *Escritos y documentos*, Santander, 1976, p. 258 and ff.

it took everyone by surprise. Only Sautuola and Vilanova in Spain and the Frenchman H. Martin (in a letter addressed to Sautuola,⁹ but never made public) were capable of accepting that the paintings of Altamira were Paleolithic, many years before any other similar cave paintings were discovered.

Emile Cartailhac (the most eminent expert on prehistory of the age) sent the palaeontologist E. Harlé to produce a report on the paintings. After carrying out a detailed analysis, Harlé concluded that although the archaeological deposits undoubtedly dated from the Paleolithic era, the paintings were modern.¹⁰ From that moment on, all reference to the Altamira paintings was omitted from scientific publications. The matter was effectively closed and, as a result, this masterpiece of primitive art was condemned to a period of ostracism lasting over twenty years.

RECOGNITION OF ALTAMIRA AND SAUTUOLA

The discovery and analysis of various caves featuring primitive art in the South of France, such as those of La Mouthe

⁹ M. Sanz de Sautuola, *Escritos y documentos*, Santander, 1976, p. 48.

¹⁰ E. Harlé, “La grotte d’Altamira, près de Santander, Espagne,” in *Matériaux pour l’Histoire Naturelle et Primitive de l’Homme*, XVI, 1881, p. 82 and ff.

(1895), Pair-non-Pair (1896) and, subsequently, Les Combarelles and Font-de-Gaume (1901), whose paintings were exceptional, ended any kind of reasonable doubt. In 1902, Cartailhac was obliged to publish – with a certain dose of humble pie – an article entitled “Les cavernes ornées de dessins, La grotte d’Altamira (Espagne). *Mea culpa* d’un sceptique.” In this article he recognized that he had participated in “an error, committed twenty years ago, an injustice that it is essential to publicly acknowledge and make amends for [...] It is necessary to face the reality and, as far as I am concerned, I must do justice to M. de Sautuola.”¹¹ However, this acknowledgement never reached the Spaniard: Sautuola had passed away in 1888. In 1902 Cartailhac and the young Abate Breuil visited the cave for the first time and introduced themselves to María Sanz de Sautuola, who, as a girl, had been the first person to see the coloured figures. These two scholars produced the first great monograph devoted to Paleolithic art, focusing on Altamira and published under the patronage of Prince Albert I of Monaco.¹²

¹¹ “Les cavernes ornées de dessins. La grotte d’Altamira, Espagne. *Mea culpa* d’un sceptique”, in *L’Anthropologie*, vol. XIII, Paris, 1902, p. 348 and ff. Textual quotation on p. 352.

¹² E. Cartailhac and H. Breuil, *La Caverne D’Altamira a Santillane près Santander*, Monaco, 1906.

For many years Sautuola was the only person who had no doubts, who was convinced that the paintings he had discovered belonged to the Paleolithic Era, a period considered at that time to be synonymous with the origins of Man. Negative reactions must have come as no surprise to him, although he was angered by the unfounded criticism and rejection he suffered at the hands of the local press, as mentioned above. The fact that he was able to foresee these reactions of skepticism and rejection may explain the formal and insistently modest tone of his *Brief Notes*: “I was led [...] to undertake some research of my own in this province. Although lacking in scientific rigour and carried out by a mere enthusiast who lacked the required knowledge ...” [p. 3]; “I leave it to other more illustrious minds to carry out a rigorous study of the facts that I have briefly outlined here” [p. 24].

Combined with this courtesy and unnecessary modesty, Sautuola’s rigorous analytical methods, bibliographic documentation and ability to find the information he required regarding the discovery, enabled him to convert a coincidental find into a scientific discovery of the first magnitude, placing him above the sterile controversies of his fellow countrymen and representatives of the world of academia. He may well have understood the skepticism and discretion of which French and Spanish scientists towards to his findings, but he must have been surprised and somewhat disap-

pointed by their arrogance, mistrust and the frivolous manner in which they rejected his evidence.

If Altamira finally came to occupy its rightful place in the History of Art and Prehistoric Studies, the same certainly cannot be said for the man who discovered the cave, Marcelino Sanz de Sautuola. Early works on Paleolithic art tend to play down his achievement – consisting of scientifically deducing that the Altamira paintings were Paleolithic and publishing the fact – and his worth. Following the books published by Cartailhac and Breuil, other studies have focused little on Sautuola's contribution, especially when we bear in mind that, in France, other caves with paintings and engravings were known that were neither attributed to the Paleolithic period nor described in published material until some fifteen years after Sanz de Sautuola did so. These studies have also tended to highlight the errors made by J. Vilanova in defence of the thesis propounded by his Spanish colleague, or have pointed to the modest nature of Sautuola's publication entitled *Brief Notes...*, an unjust observation, given that the publication presented the habitual quality of the day and, in terms of both its format and illustrations, matched the numerous contemporary scientific or specialized journals and publications.... This unfair and, above all, incorrect evaluation has persisted for some strange reason in some recent

works, which have refused to recognize the fact that Sautuola attributed his important discovery to the Paleolithic era¹³. The objective reasons that explain this historiographical state of affairs may be connected to the insufficient dissemination of Sautuola's pamphlet and, above all, a rapid and biased reading of his *Brief Notes*, something which this new edition will contribute to amend.

* * *

Altamira profoundly changed our perspective on Prehistoric Man. Recognition of his art, of Paleolithic art, played a decisive role in bringing about a shift from the archaeological study of objects to a study of the culture sustained by the groups of humans who produced these items. The *Brief Notes* by Marcelino Sanz de Sautuola constitute a veritable treasure for any book-lover and represent a landmark in the historiography of Art and Prehistory. Altamira itself is a universal cultural icon.

¹³ See, for example: A. Leroy-Gourham, *Préhistoire de l'art occidental*, Paris, 1965, p. 30; Breuil, *Quatre cents siècles d'Art pariétal*, Paris, 1974, p. 15, and M. Groenen, *Pour une histoire de la Préhistoire*, Grenoble, 1994, p. 318.

Bibliographic note

For further information regarding Altamira, we refer you to the work by José Antonio Lasheras (ed.) entitled: *Redescubrir Altamira*, Turner, Madrid, 2003.

BRIEF NOTES
ON
SOME PREHISTORIC ARTIFACTS
FROM THE
PROVINCE OF SANTANDER

by

MARCELINO S. DE SAUTUOLA

Member of the Spanish Royal Academy of History

SANTANDER, 1880

Print and lithographs by

Telesforo Martínez

BLANCA, 40

The pages in the margin correspond to the page in *Brief Notes...*

PREHISTORIC ARTIFACTS FROM THE PROVINCE OF SANTANDER

Suspecting that various artifacts dating from prehistoric times could exist in this province, and in spite of the fact that no previous findings were known, as confirmed by the reports that I had attempted to compile, I was led by my enthusiasm for such studies and my considerable interest in the numerous and fascinating collections of prehistoric artifacts that I was fortunate enough to be able to peruse on repeated occasions during the Universal Exposition of 1878 in Paris to undertake some research of my own in this province. Although lacking in scientific rigour and carried out by a mere enthusiast who lacked the required knowledge (although not the will and determination), this research was meant to at least provide a starting-point for more competent individuals to pierce the impenetrable veil of ignorance that continues to conceal the origins and habits of the earliest inhabitants of these mountains.

p. 3

Guided by this purpose, I began my research in a spirit of adventure and I must confess that I was not disappointed with the results.

p. 4

Having learned that a series of caves existed in the municipal district of Camargo, located some six to eight kilometres away from the city of Santander, I visited this site straight away and, it must be said, with such fortune that as soon as the excavations began I came across everything I could have ever hoped to discover.

The cave I am referring to is situated within the district of the town of Revilla, on the south side, two-thirds of the way up a hill of no great height. It can be reached after a steep climb and its dimensions are small rather than large: running north to south it measures approximately seven and a half metres, and east to west little more than five metres, with the entrance measuring almost the same. The cave is four to five metres high. The inside of the cave presented nothing of great interest to the eye, not even limestone formations. Some parts of the cave wall presented dark patches, as if they had been licked by flames in the not too far-distant past, and on the floor I observed some recent ashes and straw.

However hard I endeavoured to discover from the local inhabitants whether they had heard of any stone of a particular shape or any bones ever having been found there, I received nothing but negative responses. Nevertheless, keen to discover for myself all that the cave might conceal, I gave the order for the excavations to commence. I was amazed

when, just 30 centimetres below the surface, a number of carved flints mixed with bones began to appear. This discovery was highly promising and my high expectations later proved to be wholly justified.

Continuing the excavation over a number of days and by sifting through the earth with extreme care, I managed to gather together several hundred items, including stone tools in varying shapes, numerous pieces of rock crystal, teeth and molars of different kinds of animals, a large number of bones – many of them split along their length, as if to extract, according to established opinion, the marrow that served as nourishment to Man in that period – , quite a few sea shells of the genus *patella* – much larger than the ones that can be found on this coast today – some oyster shells, two pieces of brick and tile and only a few earthenware fragments.

p. 5

Among the stone artifacts, consisting of an endless variety of rock types, the majority of which were not local varieties found in this province, an extremely large number were very difficult to classify, being either broken pieces or the pieces from which more perfect tools were carved. The most important items found included the following:

- 1.° A large number in the form of a knife. Almost without exception, these present a single surface on one side, and on the other, which appears to be the upper side, two or three chamfers or different bevelled surfaces. Others present four

surfaces of this kind and a few have up to six, with various items standing out due to the strongly curved shape of one of the ends (see numbers 1, 2, 3, 7, 8 and 12 on Plate 1. Item 2 measures thirteen centimetres in length).

p. 6

2.° Various burins of varying length, some extremely pointed (numbers 4, 9 and 10).

3.° Some in a variety of shapes, that may have served as arrow-heads, among which we can see some that could be mistaken for knives. However, I would include them in this group due to the fact that their lower edge is different from that of the knives (numbers 11, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17).

4.° Another item (number 6) that is very different from the rest, with the lower part presenting a single surface that is not concave as in the case of the knives, and three bevelled surfaces on the upper side. The point is broken. In my opinion this could have been used for a spear, in spite of the fact that it is not very thick.

5.° Finally, in order to complete this brief listing, I would mention another item (number 5), which presents a unique shape. The teeth that run along one side would seem to indicate that it was used as a rather primitive saw, whilst its pointed end may indicate that it was used as an offensive and defensive weapon when attached to a wooden pole¹.

¹ The illustrious Juan Vilanova, in his interesting work on the origins of

I also found, mixed up with the artifacts mentioned above, a large number of teeth and molars of different sizes (numbers 19 and 22) belonging to different animal species, among which *equus primigenius* and deer seem to be quite common².

As we mentioned above, among the bones were found a large number that had been split along their length, along with other pieces of bone charred by fire, some bearing evident signs of having been carved and others with a pointed end, that may have been used as arrows. The findings also included a number of long and pointed bones and another, unique example, that seems to present a finer finish (number 18) in order to be attached to a pole. All of the figures that appear in Plate 1 are of natural size, except item numbers 1 and 2, that are presented here in three-quarters of their real size. All of the figures are seen from the side.

It is worth mentioning that, in the same way as occurs in other countries, we were unable to find any complete animal

Man, page 387, provides a detailed description of the stone artifacts discovered at Argecilla. For the most part, his list could also be applied to the findings at the cave in Camargo.

² At first sight, some teeth appeared to be similar to the incisor teeth mentioned by Casiano Prado in his illustrated report on the province of Madrid (folio 152), belonging to *Anchitherium aurelianense* (Cuvier). However, upon closer comparison some differences can be observed.

skull in this cave, although quite a few jawbones replete with teeth and molars were found.

p. 8

Among the pieces of brick, tile and earthenware that were found mixed together with the stone and bone tools, four earthenware fragments were discovered which, due to their blackish appearance, could date from prehistoric times, unlike the other fragments of brick and tile that, in spite of being found among these ancient items, should be considered to be rather more contemporary. Upon closer examination, they showed no indication of being especially old, making it difficult to understand why they were covered by a layer of more than sixty centimetres of earth. It could be that these items, having been left on the surface, progressively sank into the earth, either because the floor of the cave was softened by rain that had filtered through or because carnivorous animals had dug down into the earth in search of the bones deposited there. However, no indications were found to support either of these conjectures, given that the earth was compact and firm and, in spite of the fact that the surface was composed of a clay-like earth, it was necessary to replace our hoes with picks at a certain point. This layer, some thirty to forty centimetres thick, contained various limestone boulders of average size and, underneath these, a large number of stone and bone artifacts. However, the majority of the earthenware fragments were found in the

next layer down, consisting of much looser and darker earth, featuring very clear signs of ash.

After everything we have described above, the following question arises: What was the purpose of this cave? Did it provide shelter for Man at some time in his history or was it used as a workshop to produce stone tools? It is difficult to provide a categorical answer to this question, although, in my humble opinion, there are grounds that enable us to provide a sensible explanation of the purpose this cave may have served in distant times.

p. 9

This cave was probably not used as a dwelling, given that, in addition to its small size, the actual location of the cave would have made it difficult for the dwellers to defend themselves from attacks by carnivorous animals. On the one hand, the entrance is almost as wide and high as the rest of the cave, making it difficult to defend from attacks from outside. What is more, to the left of the main entrance there is another smaller opening on one side. On the other hand, the large number of bones that have been found in the cave would seem to be the remains of food. This may indicate that the chamber was used as a dwelling or that it was used as a workshop. The latter is supported by the fact that hundreds of carved stone artifacts have been found, a large number of which seem to be broken, whilst others are of uncertain shape or appear to be unfinished. The orientation and loca-

tion of the cave also supports this theory, since the very reasons that would seem to make it inappropriate for habitation, recommend it as a workshop: it faces south and the entrance is as high as the cave itself, which means that the cave would be lighted enough for working.

p. 10 Readers uninitiated in prehistoric study and research may well read the conjectures contained in these brief notes with some incredulity. However, without wishing to claim a greater erudition in these matters than is actually the case, I could happily write a dissertation on those studies that are unfortunately little known in Spain, citing some of the details and texts contained in works written on this subject by the learned geologist Juan Vilanova, by John Lubbock, by Boucher de Perthes and others, who have managed to raise our knowledge of these matters to heights that would have been difficult to conceive just thirty years ago. The fact is that there have been so many discoveries of a similar nature in so many different countries that it has long ceased to be controversial to state that the first tools used by Man were made of stone and bone and that natural caves provided his first dwelling quarters.

p. 11 I shall now go on to discuss another cave that I would consider to be much more exceptional due to the circumstances surrounding it and, therefore, worthy of a more detailed study. It is located in the mountains, at a site named after

Juan Mortero within the area of Vispiéres and municipal district of Santillana del Mar, (this site was recently renamed Altamira, after a nearby meadow). The entrance to the cave faces north and was so thickly covered in undergrowth that it was difficult to make out, although now it is frequently visited. According to reports about this cave, its very existence was unknown until eight to ten years ago when some boulder fell away and the entrance became larger. The descent towards the cave is tiresome, but not difficult, due to the rocks that must have fallen away. Inspecting the cave from inside, we suspect that the entrance was much lower and that almost level access would once have been provided by a depression in the land. Once inside, the observer finds a gallery that stretches south-south-east, which we shall call the main gallery. This area is thirty-eight metres long and between nine and thirteen metres wide, with the height varying from two metres to thirty centimetres at the back. Upon entering, the visitor will find another larger gallery to the right, that we shall call Gallery Number 2 and extends southwest. This gallery leads to another, Gallery Number 3, which is longer and measures up to ten metres high in some places. From this gallery we descend to another cave of regular dimensions, Gallery Number 4, that is about 4 metres lower than the previous cave. Turning back north in Gallery Number 3 we come across a spring that flows down from the ceil-

ing and disappears through the floor. Leaving behind a well (a natural well it would appear) to the left, formed by an opening in the rocks, that plunges down some four metres before the water level is reached, the observer will enter a last cave, Gallery Number 5. Below I shall describe each of these galleries separately.

p. 12

Closest to the entrance, the main gallery presents a series of rocks and boulders that have fallen away from the cave ceiling, most of which had not fallen four years before when I visited the same cave for the first time. Close to these stones begins a bank or layer of earth almost one metre thick in some places, consisting of a large number of *patella* shells (see numbers 1 and 1 of Plate 2), sea snails, bones of all imaginable sizes, teeth and molars from different animals, similar to those found at the cave in Camargo, a large variety of horns, numerous split river boulders, quite a few pieces of rock crystal and some carved stone tools, all mixed together in a kind of black earth similar to ash. Among the bones we found various carved and worked items, some featuring artificially-made marks, a pattern also found on some horns (see numbers 2 to 13, Plate 2). We might highlight numbers 8 and 10 in particular, the first of which, almost entirely white in colour, presents quite a well executed finish. The marks appear on the side indicated by the figure which represents the side-view. The purpose of

this artifact is open to debate, although from the points that exist on either end we might deduce that it was used for sewing the skins that probably would have been worn at that time. Neither would it be going too far to suggest that it was an adornment for the hair, similar to the ones that are still used today by some tribes that have not progressed very far along the road to civilization. Item number 10 is even more interesting, consisting of a bone needle featuring a perfect eye, whose point was unfortunately broken when removing it from the matter that surrounded it. We might also mention item number 11, that consists of an extremely fine bone burin, as depicted in the corresponding figure, featuring a finish as smooth as ivory, no doubt the result of the continuous use that was made of it. Item number 14 is a piece of slate-like stone featuring a hole with which it could be hung. This item may have served as an adornment at that time.

All the figures presented in Plate 2 correspond to their real size.

p. 14

The carved flint objects that were found seem to have been less finely worked than those that were discovered in the cave at Camargo. At this site we might remark upon the large number of boulders that were found that had been split quite roughly, as if this were the preliminary stage for more delicate work later on.

All of this matter containing animal remains was covered with a stalagmitic layer almost one centimetre thick. Very slender stalactites were also found, the largest measuring about 10 centimetres in length, whilst some stalagmites measured up to eight centimetres in length, presenting some very interesting conglomerations of different materials in their lower sections, consisting of shells, bones and carved stone objects. We should record the fact that no ceramic remains have been discovered in this cave so far.

All of these deposits lie over a layer of stones and rocks that seem to have fallen from the cave ceiling. In some places we can find clear signs that up to two layers have fallen away, which makes it certain that these rocks fell to the ground before the deposits were formed.

In relation to the considerable mass of animal remains that was found, consisting of an endless number of shells, its composition strongly recalls that of the deposits that were discovered off the coast of Denmark, known as KJÖKKEN-MÖDDINGS, which means mass or agglomeration of shells.

p. 15

The Danish deposits included a number of carved stones, although not quite as many, split bones that had been worked and carved, and an innumerable number of sea shells. The only items lacking in the Spanish deposits for the comparison to be complete would be fragments of earthenware pots and fish bones. We might also highlight the fact that our cave

also differs in that it is not located near the coast. In the strictest sense this is true, although it can be no more than two or three kilometres from the coast. What is more, in Denmark various deposits of this kind have been found that are several thousand miles inland.

Continuing our investigation of the first gallery, precisely where the deposits containing bones and shells come to end, the observer will be amazed to find a large number of animal paintings on the cave ceiling (see Plate 3, which depicts them in the same position as they appear in the cave). Of large size, these paintings seem to have been produced with black and red ochre and the majority depict animals that, from their humpbacked shape, would seem to be similar to bison³, of which two are depicted complete and from the side, whilst others have no head and some are depicted in incomprehensible postures. We can see only traces of others, given that the colours that gave them form have faded to a greater or lesser extent. We can also see an entire doe which is depicted very skillfully, and a head that seems to be that of

³ In an article on the bison, the naturalist Buffon claims to have found evidence of wild oxen in the desert regions of Europe in previous ages, some bearing a hump and some without. We might suppose that the former are the type depicted in the cave paintings, given that although these paintings are similar to the bison and the zebu in terms of their humpbacked shape, there are many other differences that in fact differentiate them.

a horse. In all, there are twenty-three paintings, not counting those that present mere outlines. We might highlight the two paintings mentioned above, that measure over one metre twenty-five centimetres in height and one metre fifty-five centimetres in length. The doe is two metres twenty centimetres long and one metre forty centimetres high. By examining these paintings carefully we can see that the artist produced them with considerable skill; he had a steady hand and there are no signs of vacillation. On the contrary, each trace was produced with one clean stroke, in spite of the irregular surface of the cave ceiling and whatever the tools the artist may have used to depict the animals. No less worthy of consideration are the endless number of postures that the artist must have adopted, since in some places he can hardly have been able to kneel on the floor and in others he would have been unable to reach even by stretching his arm to its full length. We should also bear in mind that all the paintings would have been produced with artificial light, given that we cannot pre-suppose that any natural light reached this part of the cave, even in the unlikely case that the entrance was in fact very large. The last third of the gallery, which is where the paintings are, would hardly have received any natural light at all. What is more, the paintings stretch towards the left, and this part of the cave would have received a very weak source of reflected light. We might also

note how a large number of the figures were painted in such a way that the convex protuberances of the cave ceiling did not interfere with the images being depicted, which seems to prove that the author possessed a developed aesthetic sense.

The only special feature of Gallery Number 2 is the corner at the back where the paintings presented in figure numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 on Plate 4 are located. The second painting is on the ceiling, presenting only black outlines, whilst the rest are on the cave walls, finished in black for the long lines and red for the shorter lines.

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There is nothing especially notable about the third gallery, except for the large number of rocks that have fallen from the cave ceiling and the painting represented in figure number 5 of Plate 4. At the entrance to the fourth gallery and inside the gallery itself we find the paintings depicted in figures 6 and 7 on the same Plate 4.

The entrance to the fifth gallery is rather difficult to negotiate, requiring us to crawl along on our hands and knees in order to enter the chamber, taking great care not to knock our heads on the ceiling. However, this gallery is rather more worthy of our attention than the three previous ones. Having passed this low section, the cave rises up little more than one metre sixty centimetres, with the chamber measuring one metre thirty centimetres in width. The side-walls, made of stone, are covered with an infinite number of scratch marks,

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that seem to have been made with a very sharp-pointed tool, although there are no particular shapes or signs that draw our attention. We might suppose that these marks had been made by bats, except for the fact that they appear in places that make this theory clearly impossible to entertain.

We can also observe how the rocks that jut out from the walls, especially on the curved sections of wall that mark the various turns the gallery takes, feature a smooth and shiny surface, as if this had been caused by the constant rubbing of people or animals. This would seem to indicate that the entrance to this gallery was somewhat more accessible at that time than it is today. This theory is supported by the fact that the floor is covered in an unequal and sandy surface layer, which tells us that fast-flowing waters had passed through this part of the cave. This may also explain why deposits containing various bones were discovered here, the most important of which, due to its large size, was a vertebra.

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The ceiling, made of stone, also attracts our attention. A large part of it appears to be covered in a thin clay-like layer, on which we can observe some grooves, that appear to have been made with the fingers of a hand. These marks appear to have been repeated throughout the entire surface of the ceiling.

On the gallery's walls we find the paintings represented in figure numbers 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 on Plate 4. The first three paintings can't have ever consisted of more than the black

outlines, whilst number eleven presents an object featuring a sharp, fine point. The paintings that corresponding to figure 12, which consist of nothing more than black outlines, are located in the same position as indicated by the plate, although it is difficult to determine exactly what they represent. The original paintings depicted on Plate 4 are much larger than the figures.

When passing through all the galleries we have mentioned, except for the first, on the right and on the left we notice a series of black lines, with those on one side almost always corresponding to those on the other. An inexperienced observer might suppose that they were made in order to mark the way through the caves. However, this idea is inadmissible given that, in this case, the marks probably would have been made within hand's reach and not in out-of-reach places removed from the path they were meant to indicate. Furthermore, some are so numerous and so often repeated that it is difficult to explain the existence of others in the third gallery located among a series of smaller marks in one corner, that are not easy to see and which might lead us to suppose that they were made before the rocks fell away.

Everything we have described above leads to the inevitable conclusion that the cave was inhabited, either for a considerable period of time or by a large number of people, which explains the considerable abundance of animal

remains, these being the leftovers of the food they survived on. The residents of these caves must have inhabited them for a considerable period of time, as indicated by the artifacts we have described that testify to their incipient industry, as well as the differing state of preservation of many bones and horns, since although some are in quite good condition, others crumble away however carefully they are extracted from the matter that contains them.

With regard to the paintings that were discovered, there is no doubt that those of the first gallery are considerably finer than those of the remaining galleries. In spite of this, a close examination of all the paintings leads us to believe that they were all produced at around the same time. It is rather more difficult to ascertain whether they all correspond to the remote era in which the inhabitants of these caves created the extensive deposits that have been discovered at this site. However unlikely this may seem in view of their fine state of preservation after so many centuries, we should mention that various pieces of red ochre were found among the bones and shells which could quite easily have been used to produce these paintings. Although the rather fine execution of the paintings in the first gallery would seem to indicate that they were produced in a more modern era, we have incontestable evidence from many different findings such as this one that Man, as cave-dweller, was quite capable of depicting not only

his own form⁴, but also that of the animals he saw, on spears and elephant tusks. It would not, therefore, be going too far to suggest that if such perfect depictions could be engraved on hard surfaces, then it would have been perfectly within Man's capabilities to produce the paintings in question at such an early stage in his development. Some commentators might deduce from what we have stated above that there have existed humpbacked oxen or bison (if this is what the pictures actually portray) in this province at some time in its history, although we have found no proof or record of it up until now. However, there is no reason to deny the possibility of their existence, certainly in the light of the fact that bison have been shown to have existed in various parts of Europe. As for the humpbacked oxen, Buffon has attested to their existence and he is an authority in the matter. The only decisive proof that, in my opinion, would definitively resolve this question, would be the discovery of some remains of these ruminants among the many other remains located in the cave.

⁴ In the work published by Lubbock, on pages 303, 304 and 305, various-figures of animals are depicted engraved on reindeer antlers, not to mention a mammoth on a piece of ivory. Vilanova, in his interesting work on the origins of Man, also presents a plate that depicts the image of a bear on a piece of stone, as well as a piece of ivory showing the silhouette of a mammoth.

I am not unaware of the fact that it may have crossed the minds of many of my readers that the marks and paintings I have described, and that I believe are worthy of detailed study, are simply the work of a contemporary Apelles. Anything is possible, but this theory does not stand up to serious and cold examination. This cave was completely unknown until just a few years ago, when I entered it for the first time, being certainly among the first to have ever visited it. Paintings number 12 already existed in the fifth gallery, being quite noticeable given that they begin some two feet from the ground and consist of a series of repeated black marks. I did not discover the paintings in the first gallery until last year, 1879, because I did not really examine the cave ceiling carefully enough during my first visit and because in order to see them it is necessary to find the correct viewing points, especially if there is little light. In this respect, even observers who knew of their existence have failed to see them when standing right underneath them. I have no doubt in my mind that all of the paintings and marks are extremely old; in the case of the fifth gallery, because it is difficult to believe that someone would crawl into that chamber in order to produce a series of indecipherable marks just for the sake of it; in the case of the first gallery, because although, as I have said, they do not appear to be that old, it is difficult to believe that someone had the urge to shut themselves up in that cave in

order to paint a series of animals unknown in this country in the days that I am writing.

From everything we have written above, we can confidently conclude that the two series of caves we have mentioned undoubtedly belong to the period of history known as the *Paleolithic Era*⁵, that is to say, the Age of Carved Stone, this being the period that corresponds to these mountains.

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I leave it to other more illustrious minds to carry out a rigorous study of the facts that I have briefly outlined here. As the author of these quickly sketched lines, I am only glad to have had the satisfaction of having brought together such a large number of interesting artifacts that have a bearing on the history of this country and to have taken the necessary measures to prevent an imprudent curiosity from erasing the evidence of other no less important discoveries. I also hope that I have given men of science reason enough to turn their attention towards this province, which I believe to be worthy of more detailed study than has been the case up until now.

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⁵ From a chronological point of view, the Prehistoric period is divided into four different periods: the Age of Carved Stone or Paleolithic Era; the Age of Polished Stone or Neolithic Era; the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. Vilanova, in his work entitled *Orígen del hombre* (“The Origins of Man”), establishes other divisions according to which the objects I have described would correspond to the Mesolithic Era, that is to say, three eras before the Iron Age.

Complementing the above, I would also like to record the fact that I have had the opportunity to visit other caves in this province. For those who are interested, I shall describe these visits in as brief a manner as my trips were to them.

Within the municipal district of Santillana del Mar, in a place called La Venta del Cuco, there is a cave that, observed from the outside, does not encourage us to believe that it may have been used as a dwelling. It is located in a hollow that brings together the waters that flow down from the neighbouring hills, with this cave providing the sole outlet. The entrance, which is rather small, faces south and the entire appearance of the inside of the cave confirms the idea that it has never been inhabited, due to the erosion and sharp ravines produced by the effect of these waters. However, when examined closely, to the left of the entrance and located quite close to it, I discovered a layer of shells of the genus *patella*, which were not very large and were almost all covered by a relatively thick stalagmitic layer. This discovery led me to change my initial impression. Following the course of the gallery, which is quite extensive and dangerous at some points, I found a number of shells and bones, and in a rather out-of-the-way corner, sheltered from the abundant waters, I found a small deposit of carved bones, shells, animal teeth and various carved stone artifacts, all mixed up in a layer of blackish earth, which proves

that Man must have lived in these caves for some period of time.

Another cave exists in the municipal district of Camargo, near the village of Escobedo, that is known as San Pantaleón and is worthy of being visited due to its marvellous entrance, adorned as it is with old ivy and other foliage. It is difficult to climb down to it, due to the large boulders that have fallen away from the entrance. What is more, there is a steep slope that leads down to the bottom of the cave that must mark a drop of over thirty metres. Half the way down this slope, I found a bank of dark earth containing a large number of bones, some carved, along with animal teeth and various carved flint artifacts, whose discovery also attests to the fact that these caves were inhabited by Man.

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Finally, I shall mention another cave in a place known as Cobalejo, located within the district of Piélagos, that was investigated some months ago by my friend Eduardo de la Pedraja. This cave presents a rather special shape. The inside, which would measure some 13 to 14 metres running east to west and 20 metres north to south, looks like a stage when seen from the front, given that the façade, if we can call it that, is almost as high and wide as the inside of the cave. What is more, the cave has the unique feature that the entrance is on the side, formed by an opening little larger than an ordinary door. Without this entrance it would be dif-

p. 26

difficult to visit the site, given that access from what we have called the façade, facing south, would be quite difficult. Almost the entire surface of the cave presented a large mass of material several feet high, consisting of clay-like earth mixed with split and carved bones, a large number of teeth and molars belonging to various animals and quite a few carved stone tools, that were not in such perfect condition as those found in the cave at Camargo. Some bones covered in a stalagmitic layer were also discovered deep down, creating in some areas veritable concentrations of bones. However, the artifact that I believe makes this cave an important discovery and that has been retrieved by my friend, Eduardo de la Pedraja, is a grain stone that was found on its end between two large boulders. It is twenty-three centimetres long – on average, given that its shape is irregular – by twenty-four centimetres wide and seven centimetres thick. On its surface it has two hollows some six to seven centimetres long by four and half centimetres thick and two to three centimetres deep, presenting at one end, that is broken, half of another hollow such as the ones we have described. As a whole, it recalls similar stones discovered in other countries that have been classified as polishing stones. I do not believe that the artifact I am referring to served this purpose, given that the length of the hollows is rather too short for polishing. I am more inclined to the view that it would have been used for

grinding or crushing grain for food. Whatever the case may be, there is no possible doubt that both the items discovered in this cave, as well as the other artifacts I have mentioned above, categorically prove that Man lived in these caves for some period of time. What is more, there are grounds for hoping that these are not the last traces of evidence that attest to the fact that the original inhabitants of these mountains date from the remotest period in Man's history.

Plates

1. Prehistoric artifacts from the province of Santander
Discovered in a cave located in the district of Camargo.
2. Prehistoric artifacts from the province of Santander
Discovered in a cave located in the district of Santillana del Mar.
3. Prehistoric artifacts from the province of Santander
Paintings on the ceiling of a cave located in the district of Santillana del Mar.
4. Prehistoric artifacts from the province of Santander
Paintings on the wall of a cave located in the district of Santillana del Mar.