



PREHISTORIC ART

Paleolithic and Neolithic
Art, Architecture, and Artifacts



WHAT IS PREHISTORY?

How does it affect our understanding
of art from this period?

ANSWER

Prehistory is the time period prior to the written word. We do not have an accurate account since there are no written documents to study. Even when writing begins in Sumer, we still have to fill in many missing facts to see a true picture.

PALEOLITHIC ART IN EUROPE

The following slides show detailed images of animals in cave paintings, but notice how humans are depicted without much detail.

Notice also as early humans create small sculptural art, they exaggerate certain features. A good example is the Woman (Venus) of Willendorf.

This time period is known as prehistoric since there is not any written documentation. Once writing is developed, then human history is recorded (and, thus, history begins).



Title: Map 1.1 Prehistoric Europe

Artist: n/a

Date: n/a

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a

CHAUVET CAVE

Chauvet Cave was discovered in the Ardèche valley (in southern France) in December 1994 by three cave explorers, after removing the rubble of stones that blocked a passage.

The cave is extensive, about 400 meters long, with vast chambers. The floor of the cave is littered with archaeological and palaeontological remains, including the skulls and bones of cave bears, which hibernated there, along with the skulls of an ibex and two wolves. The cave bears also left innumerable scratches on the walls and footprints on the ground.

CHAUVET

Read more:

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chav/hd_chav.htm

Citation

Clottes, Jean. "Chauvet Cave (ca. 30,000 B.C.)." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000—. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chav/hd_chav.htm (October 2002)



Reconstruction of Chauvet Cave

EXCERPT FROM SMITHSONIAN ARTICLE

As I descend a footpath through subterranean gloom, limestone walls tower 40 feet and plunge into a chasm. Gleaming stalactites dangle from the ceiling. After several twists and turns, I reach a cul-de-sac. As I shine my iPhone flashlight on the walls, out of the darkness emerge drawings in charcoal and red ocher of woolly rhinos, mammoths and other mammals that began to die out during the Pleistocene era, about 10,000 years ago.

Read more: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/france-chauvet-cave-makes-grand-debut-180954582/>



Title: *Lions and Bison*. End Chamber, Chauvet Cave.

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 30,000-28,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a



Title: *Long-Eared Owl*, Chauvet Cave. Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, Ardeche Gorge, France

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 30,000-28,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a



Title: *Three bears*, Recess of the Bears, Chauvet Cave. Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, Ardeche Gorge, France

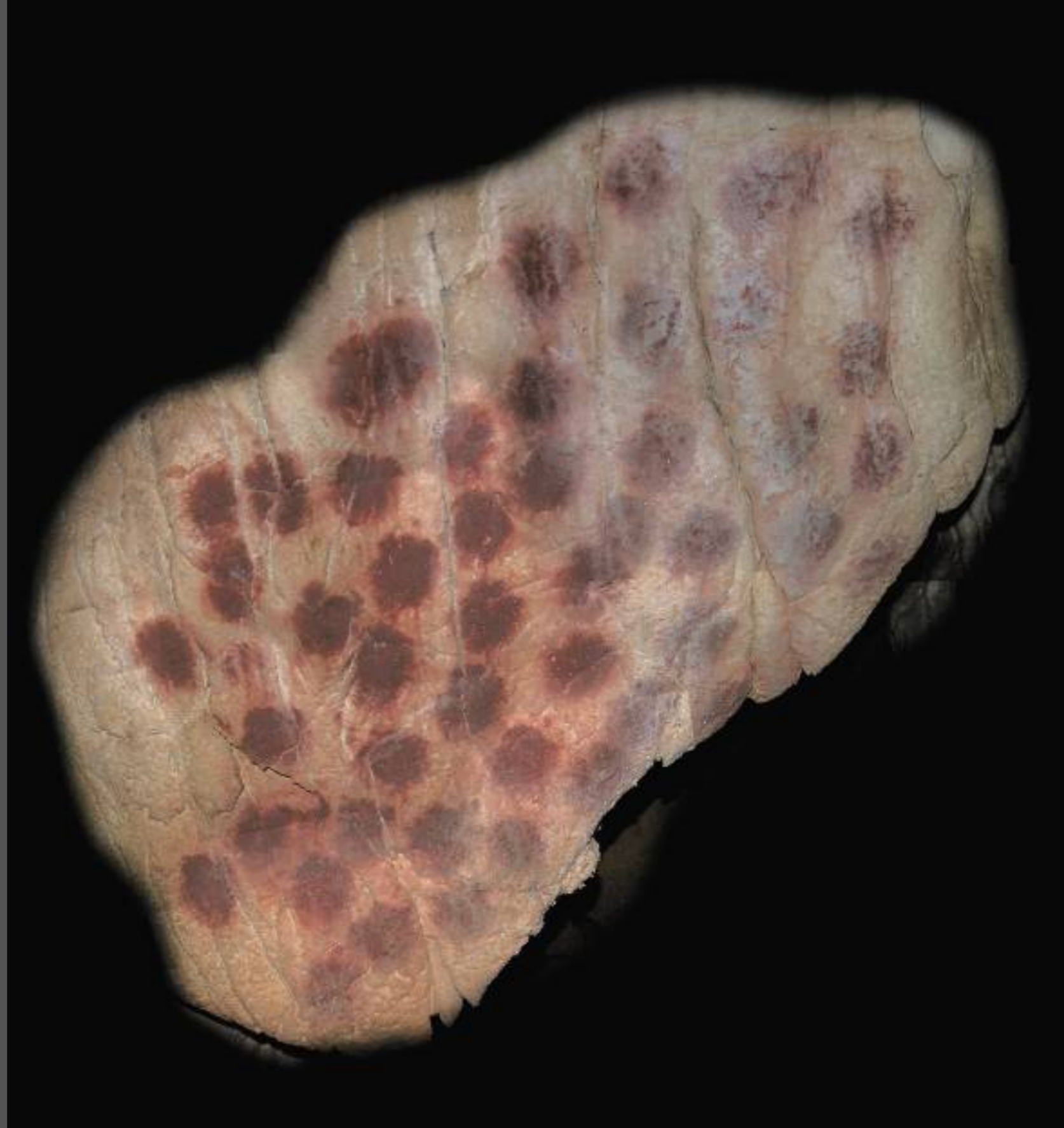
Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 30,000-28,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a



Title: Hand Dots in the Brunel Chamber at Chauvet, large dots were made by covering the palm with paint and applying it to the wall. In places, fingers are just visible.

Artist: n/a

Date: n/a

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a

LASCAUX

A virtual revolution occurred in the creation of art during the period of the Upper Paleolithic in Europe. Beginning around 40,000 B.C., the archaeological record shows that anatomically modern humans effectively replaced Neanderthals and remained the sole hominid inhabitants across continental Europe. At about the same time, and directly linked to this development, the earliest art was created.

LASCAUX

Lascaux is famous for its Palaeolithic cave paintings, found in a complex of caves in the Dordogne region of southwestern France, because of their exceptional quality, size, sophistication and antiquity. Estimated to be up to 20,000 years old, the paintings consist primarily of large animals, once native to the region. Lascaux is located in the Vézère Valley where many other decorated caves have been found since the beginning of the 20th century (for example Les Combarelles and Font-de-Gaume in 1901, Bernifal in 1902).

LASCAUX

Lascaux is a complex cave with several areas (Hall of the Bulls, Passage gallery) It was discovered on 12 September 1940 and given statutory historic monument protection in December of the same year. In 1979, several decorated caves of the Vézère Valley - including the Lascaux cave - were added to the [UNESCO World Heritage Sites list](#). But these hauntingly beautiful prehistoric cave paintings are in peril.

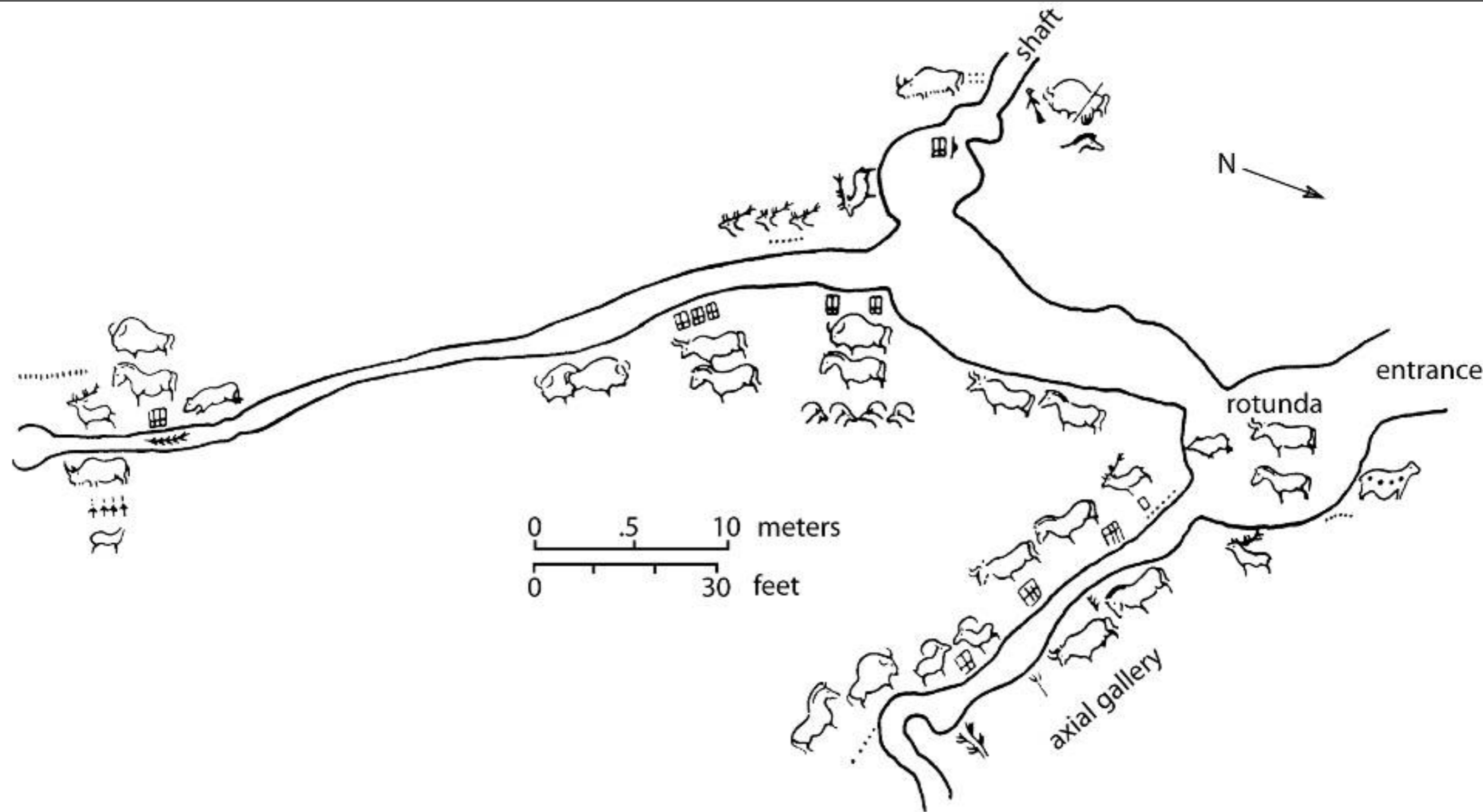
LASCAUX

These initial creative achievements fall into one of two broad categories. Paintings and engravings found in caves along walls and ceilings are referred to as “parietal” art. The caves where paintings have been found are not likely to have served as shelter, but rather were visited for ceremonial purposes. The second category, “mobiliary” art, includes small portable sculpted objects which are typically found buried at habitation sites.

LASCAUX

Read more:

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/lasc/hd_lasc.htm



Title: Schematic plan of Lascaux Cave system (based on a diagram by the Service de l'Architecture, Paris)

Artist: n/a

Date: n/a

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a



Title: Rhinoceros, Wounded Man and Bison. Lascaux Cave. Dordogne, France

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 15,000-13,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a



Title: *Chinese Horse*. Lascaux Cave. Dordogne, France

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 15,000-13,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a



Title: *Rhinoceros, Wounded Man and Bison.* Lascaux Cave. Dordogne, France

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 15,000-13,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a



Title: *Spotted horses and Human Hands*. Pech-Merle Cave. Dordogne, France

Artist: n/a

Date: Horses ca. 16,000 BCE; Hands ca. 15,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: limestone

Size: approximate length 11'2" (3.4 m)



Title: Overlapping animal engravings. Les Trois Frères, France. Rubbing of the panel done by Abbé Breuil from Begohen Collection

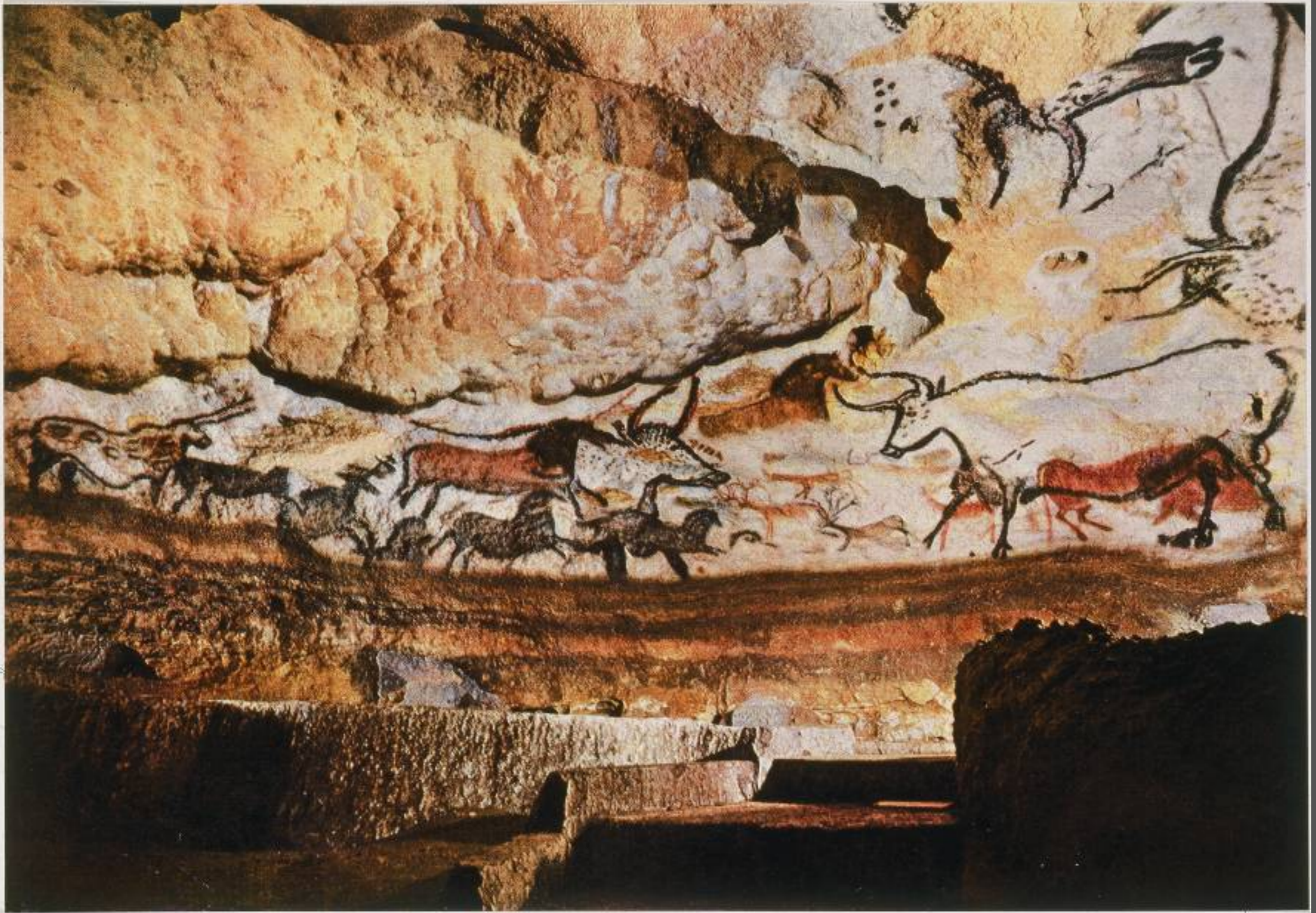
Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 40,000-10,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum:

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a



Title: *Hall of the Bulls*. Lascaux Cave. Dordogne, France

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 15,000-10,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a



Title: *Two Bison*. Tuc d'Audoubert Cave, Ariège, France

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 13,000 BCE

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: clay

Size: length 23 5/8" (60 cm)

MOBILIARY ART

A general term used to describe the small and portable objects produced by artists during the Upper Palaeolithic period. These included carved or engraved stone, bone, ivory, or antler, and small crudely fired clay models.

Artifacts include figurines, artists' trial pieces, decorated weapons, tools, and ornaments. The distribution extends from Siberia to Spain. Mobiliary art is usually found in archaeological layers and can therefore be dated. The earliest pieces probably date to about 35,000 years ago and they continued being made throughout the Upper Palaeolithic to c 10,000 BC.

Read more:

<https://www.archaeologists.com/w/mobiliary-art/en>



Title: Hybrid figure with human body and feline head. Hohlenstein-Stadel (Baden Wurtemberg), Germany.

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 40,000-28,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: Ulma Museum

Medium: mammoth ivory

Size: height 11" (28.1 cm)



Title: *Horse*. Vogelherd Cave, Germany.

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 28,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: Institut für Urgeschichte, Universität Tübingen

Medium: mammoth ivory

Size: height 2" (5 cm)



Title: *Woman of Willendorf*

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 28,000-25,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna

Medium: limestone

Size: height 4 3/8" (11.1 cm)

Read more:

<https://www.pbs.org/howartmadetheworld/episodes/human/venus/>



VENUS OF HOHLE FELS
Germany, 35,000 BCE



VENUS OF GALGENBERG
Austria, 30,000 BCE



VENUS OF DOLNÍ VĚSTONICE
CZECH REPUBLIC, 28,000 BCE



VENUS OF LESPUGUE
France, 26,000 BCE



VENUS OF WILLENDORF
Austria, 24,000 BCE



VENUS OF MORAVANY
Slovakia, 23,000 BCE



VENUS OF BRASSEMPOUY
France, 22,000 BCE



VENUS OF YULIYEVICH
Russia 16,000 BCE



VENUS OF MONRUZ
Switzerland 11,000 BCE



Title: *Dame à la Capuche* (or *Woman from Brassempouy*). Grotte du Pape, Brassempouy, France.

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 22,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: Musée des Antiquités Nationales, Saint Germain-en-Laye

Medium: ivory

Size: height 1 1/2" (3.6 cm)



Title: *Dame à la Capuche* (or *Woman from Brassempouy*). Grotte du Pape, Brassempouy, France.

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 22,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: Musée des Antiquités Nationales, Saint Germain-en-Laye

Medium: ivory

Size: height 1 1/2" (3.6 cm)



Title: *Spear Thrower with Interlocking Ibexes*. Grotte d'Enlène, Ariège, France.

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 16,000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: Musée de l'Homme, Paris

Medium: reindeer antler

Size: 3 1/2 x 2 3/4" (9 x7 cm)

NEOLITHIC ART IN EUROPE

The following slides show actual human skulls from Jericho made to look real by adding plaster and paint. The bodies of relatives would be buried below floor level and the heads would be visible above the floor. We do not know the reasons for this.

We also see the first monumental architecture constructed in Jericho and modern day Turkey. These fortifications are for early communities coming together after major climate change around 10,000 years ago. The communities began to domesticate animals and plants. They also needed a good source of water to survive.

Again, because we lack any written documents, we know little about these Neolithic (prehistoric) people, their communities, and beliefs.

JERICHO

Natufian hunter groups settled in this spot in 12,000 BCE before it became the city of Jericho. Towards 9,400 BCE, the settlement had more than 70 houses with around a thousand inhabitants and something unprecedented: a 3.5 meter high and almost two meter thick wall as well as a stone tower that reached a height of 8.5 meters.

Read more: <https://www.thearchaeologist.org/blog/ancient-jericho-the-first-walled-city-in-history>

Ancient Jericho

Towns became bigger as their populations increased. This made their architecture and urban planning more complex and they required more space to expand. The possibility of storing food surpluses meant that part of the population quit agricultural activities to devote their time to other things. Artisans, priests, traders... The wealth of flourishing cities attracted greed of the nomadic tribes and forced their inhabitants to build protective walls around their cities. This was the case of Jericho, in the West Bank, Palestine. With a history of more than 11,000 years, this was the first fortified city known ever and, up to the present day, it is considered the first city in history.

Jericho, the first one

Natufian hunter groups settled in this spot in 12,000 BC before it became the city of Jericho. Towards 9,400 BC, the settlement had more than 70 houses with around a thousand inhabitants and something unprecedented; a 3.5m high and almost 2m thick wall and a stone tower that reached a height of 8.5 m.

7000 BC
The round houses made with adobe, similar to igloos, were substituted by rectangular ones. Sanctuaries and ovens appeared.

Glory and collapse

The apparition of the Canaanites implied changes in house planning. This people absorbed the original culture and took Jericho to its most glorious times. According to archeological records, the city was destroyed by 1500 BC to be re-founded in the 9th century BC.

Houses
They had stone foundations, clay brick structure, 50 cm width walls and the roofs were covered with a mixture of reeds and clay.

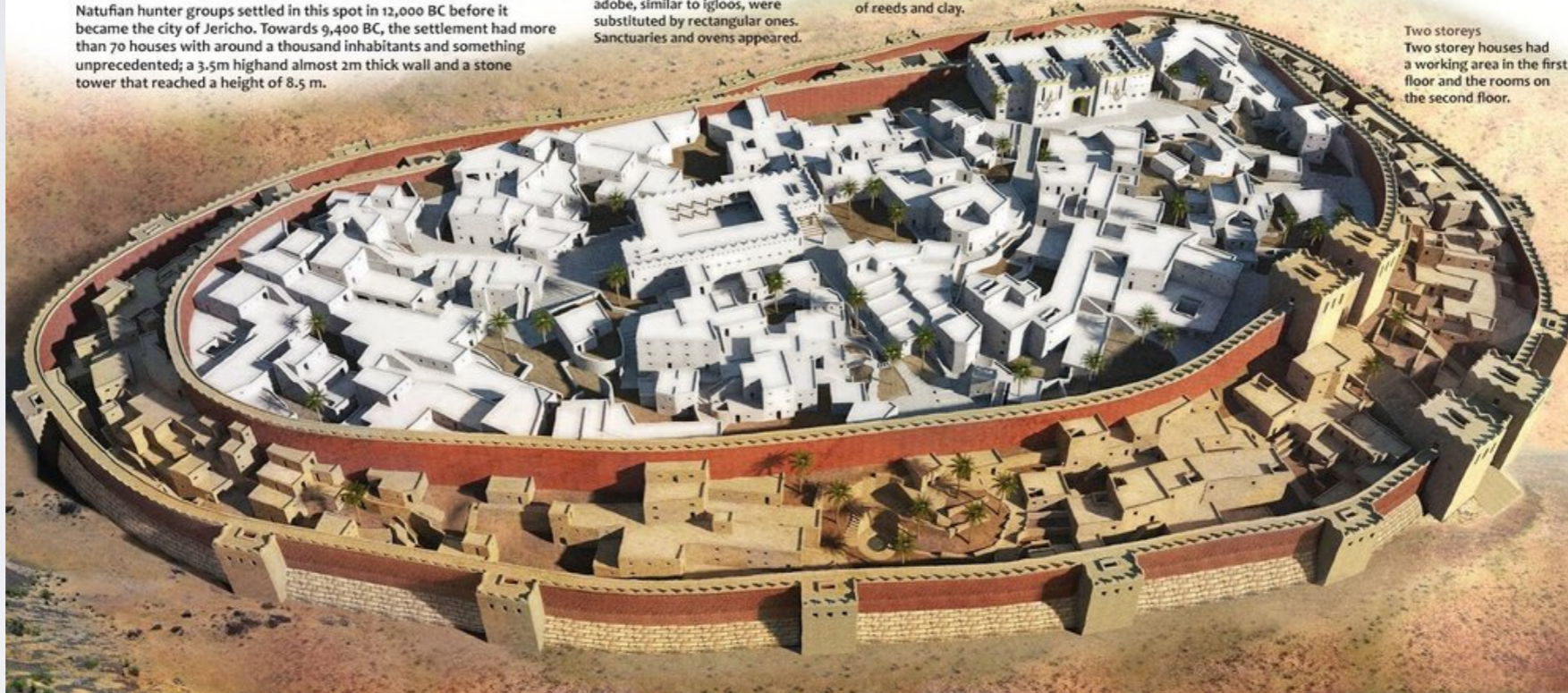
Courtyards
The buildings usually had a 7 metre square courtyard used to cook and preventing smoke from entering inside the house.

Double fortification
Similar to medieval fortifications, these were 3 m wide and more than 4 m high by 1700 BC. They were reconstructed at least 15 times.

Resources
There is evidence of cultivated plants and possible sheep breeding since 7220 BC. There was a water canal system.

The Jordan River
Jericho was favored by the river and trade. Its walls became thicker and were surrounded by a moat.

Two storeys
Two storey houses had a working area in the first floor and the rooms on the second floor.





Title: Early Neolithic wall and tower, Jericho, Jordan

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 7000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a



Title: Neolithic plastered skull. Jericho, Jordan.

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 7000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: Archaeological Museum, Amman

Medium: n/a

Size: lifesize

PLASTER SKULLS OF JERICHO

In some cases, the skulls of their dead were removed and covered with plaster in order to create very life-like faces, or death masks, complete with shells inset for eyes and paint to imitate hair and moustaches. The flesh and jawbones were removed from the skulls in order to model the plaster over the bone and the physical traits of the faces seem specific to individuals, suggesting that these decorated skulls were portraits of the deceased.

PLASTER SKULLS OF JERICHO

The subtle modelling used to create the life-like flesh is impressive in itself, keep in mind that this was achieved by combining plaster and iron oxide to give a skin-like color, but even more so given the very early date of these artifacts. They included details such as eyebrows or chins molded in plaster, shells were used for eyes, and it is believed that hairstyles and facial hair were then painted onto the plastered skulls. Evidence suggests that the skulls were then displayed or stored with other plaster skulls.





Title: Human figures. Ain Ghazal, Jordan.

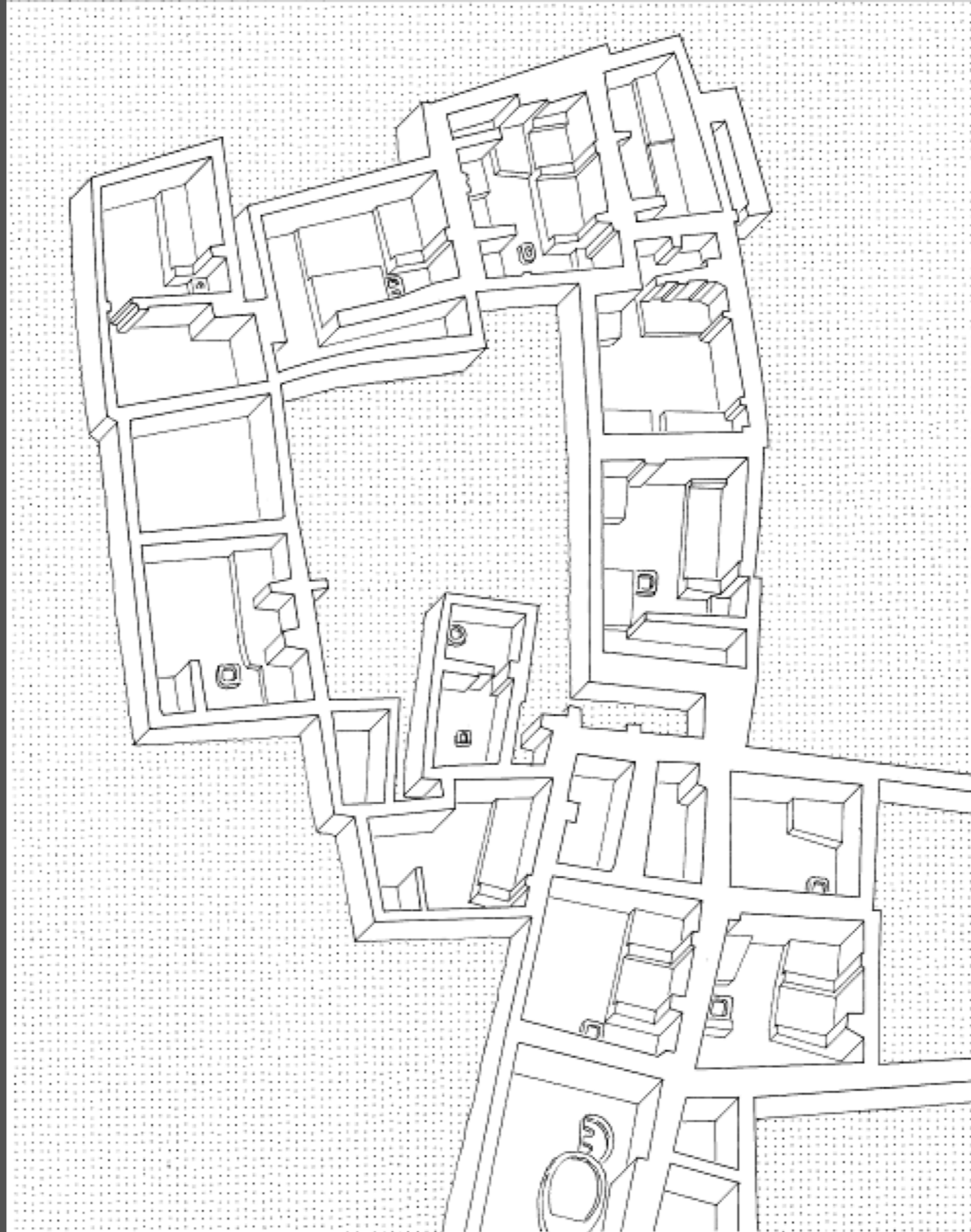
Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 6750-6250 BCE.

Source/ Museum: Department of Antiquities, Amman

Medium: n/a

Size: height of larger figure 33" (84 cm)



Title: Reconstruction of Çatal Hüyük, Turkey

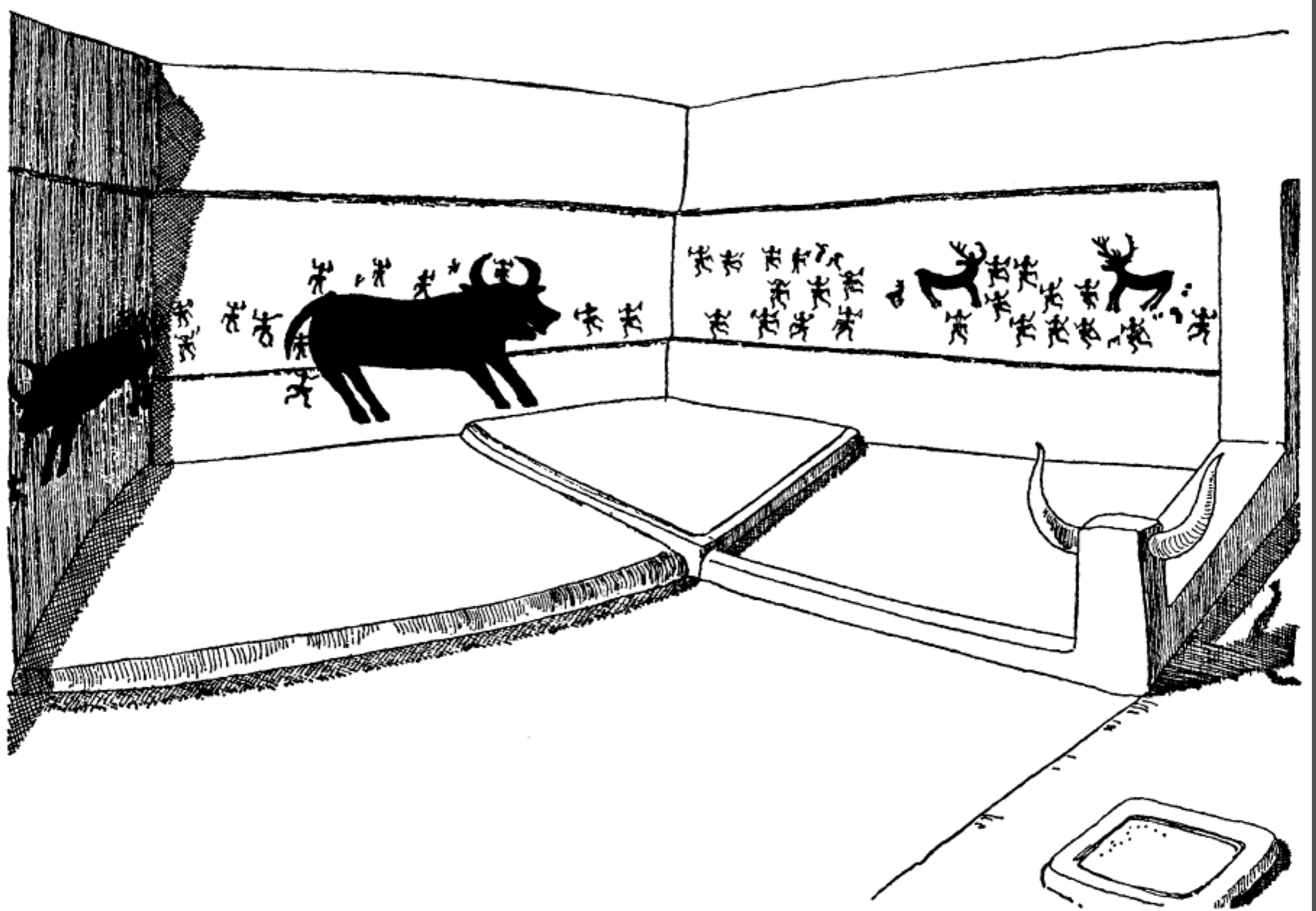
Artist: n/a

Date: n/a

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a



Title: *Animal Hunt*. Restoration of Main Room, Shrine A.III.1. Çatal Hüyük (after Mellaart)

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 6000 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: 27 x 65" (68.5 x 165 cm)



Title: View of Town and Volcano. Shrine VII.14. Çatal Hüyük

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 6000 BCE

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: wall painting

Size: n/a



Title: Male and female figures.Cernavoda, Romania.

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 3500 BCE.

Source/ Museum: National Museum of Antiquities, Bucharest

Medium: ceramic

Size:



Title: Male and female figures.Cernavoda, Romania.

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 3500 BCE.

Source/ Museum: National Museum of Antiquities, Bucharest

Medium: ceramic

Size: height 4 1/2" (11.5 cm)

MENHIRS



MENHIRS

A menhir, standing stone, orthostat, or lith is a large human-made upright stone, typically dating from the European middle Bronze Age. They can be found individually as monoliths, or as part of a group of similar stones. Menhirs' size can vary considerably, but they often taper toward the top.

MENHIRS AT CARNAC

Supposedly, Saint Cornély (the patron saint of cattle), pursued by a legion of Roman soldiers and finding no other means of escape, had hidden in the ear of an ox and turned the legionnaires to stone. Needless to say, this isn't the true origin of the Alignments. Aside from the unlikely transfiguration, the standing stones predate the Roman Empire by at least 3,000 years. But in a superstitious time, this was probably a plausible explanation for a mystery that baffles experts to this day.

Read more: <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20220914-carnac-alignments-brittanys-mysterious-standing-stones>



Title: Menhir alignments at Ménez, Carnac, France

Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 4250-3750 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a

Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites

Stonehenge and Avebury, in Wiltshire, are among the most famous groups of megaliths in the world. The two sanctuaries consist of circles of menhirs arranged in a pattern whose astronomical significance is still being explored. These holy places and the nearby Neolithic sites are an incomparable testimony to prehistoric times.

Read more:

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/373/>

STONEHENGE

While many modern scholars now agree that Stonehenge was once a burial ground, they have yet to determine what other purposes it served and how a civilization without modern technology—or even the wheel—produced the mighty monument. Its construction is all the more baffling because, while the sandstone slabs of its outer ring hail from local quarries, scientists have traced the bluestones that make up its inner ring all the way to the Preseli Hills in Wales, some 200 miles from where Stonehenge sits on Salisbury Plain.





Title: *Stonehenge* (aerial view), Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire, England

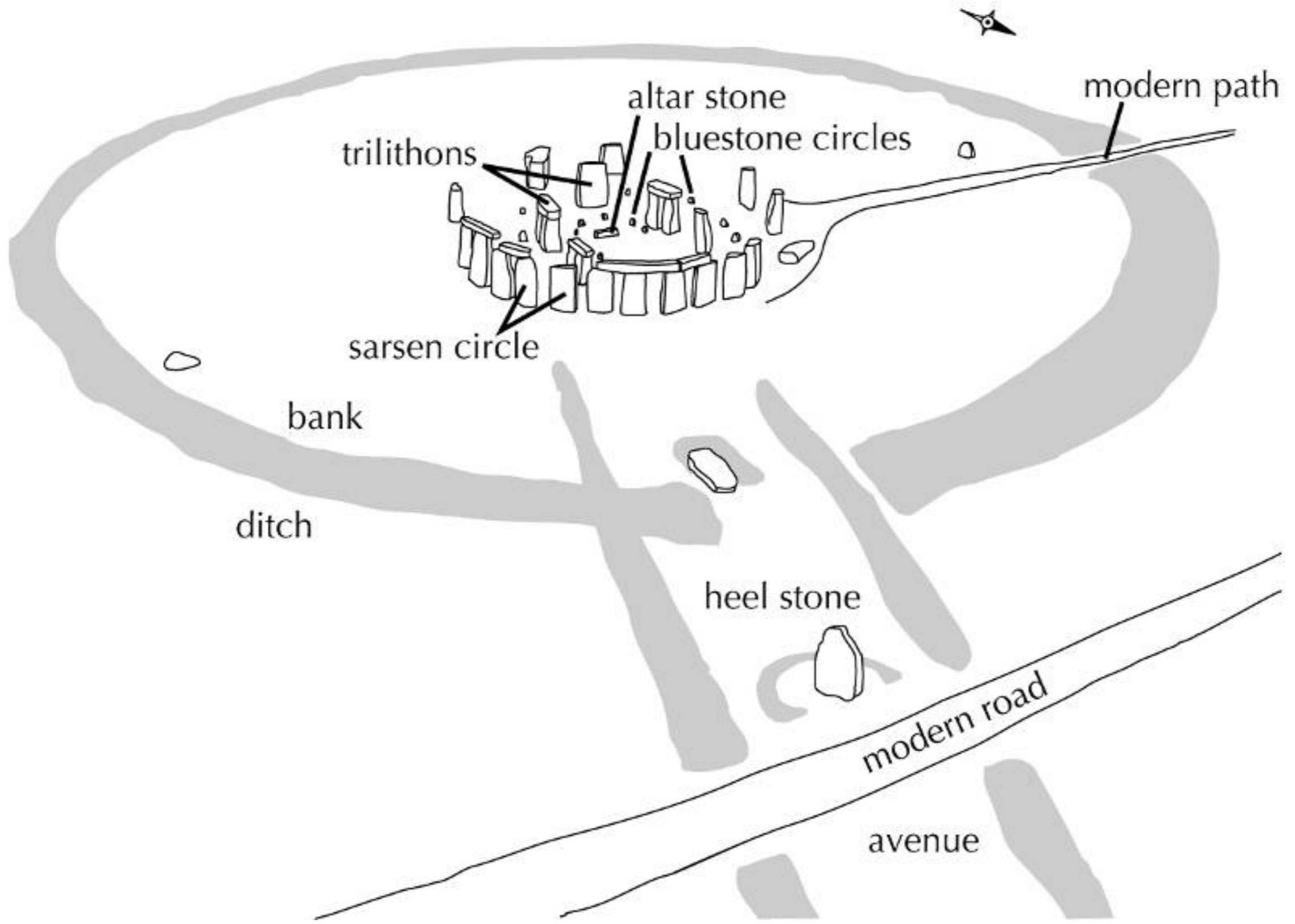
Artist: n/a

Date: ca. 2100 BCE.

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: diameter of circle 97' (29.6 m)



Title: Diagram of original arrangement of stones at Stonehenge

Artist: n/a

Date: n/a

Source/ Museum: n/a

Medium: n/a

Size: n/a

THE END