

# Pre-historic

Cave paintings

40,000-15,000 years old



In El Castillo cave, hand stencils join a red disk (not pictured) that may be Earth's oldest cave art. Of the 11 subterranean sites the team studied along northern [Spain](#)'s Cantabrian Sea coast, the cave called El Castillo had the oldest paintings—the oldest being a simple red disk. At more than 40,800 years old, "this is currently Europe's oldest dated art by at least 4,000 years,"

Known as "the prehistoric Sistine Chapel," the Lascaux Caves, a cave complex in southwestern France, contain some of the most remarkable paleolithic cave paintings in the world, from at least 15,000 years ago.







## **Robot the famous dog**

Lascaux France, September 1940

The cave was discovered on 12 September 1940 by four teenagers, Marcel Ravidat, Jacques Marsal, Georges Agnel, and Simon Coencas, as well as Ravidat's dog, Robot







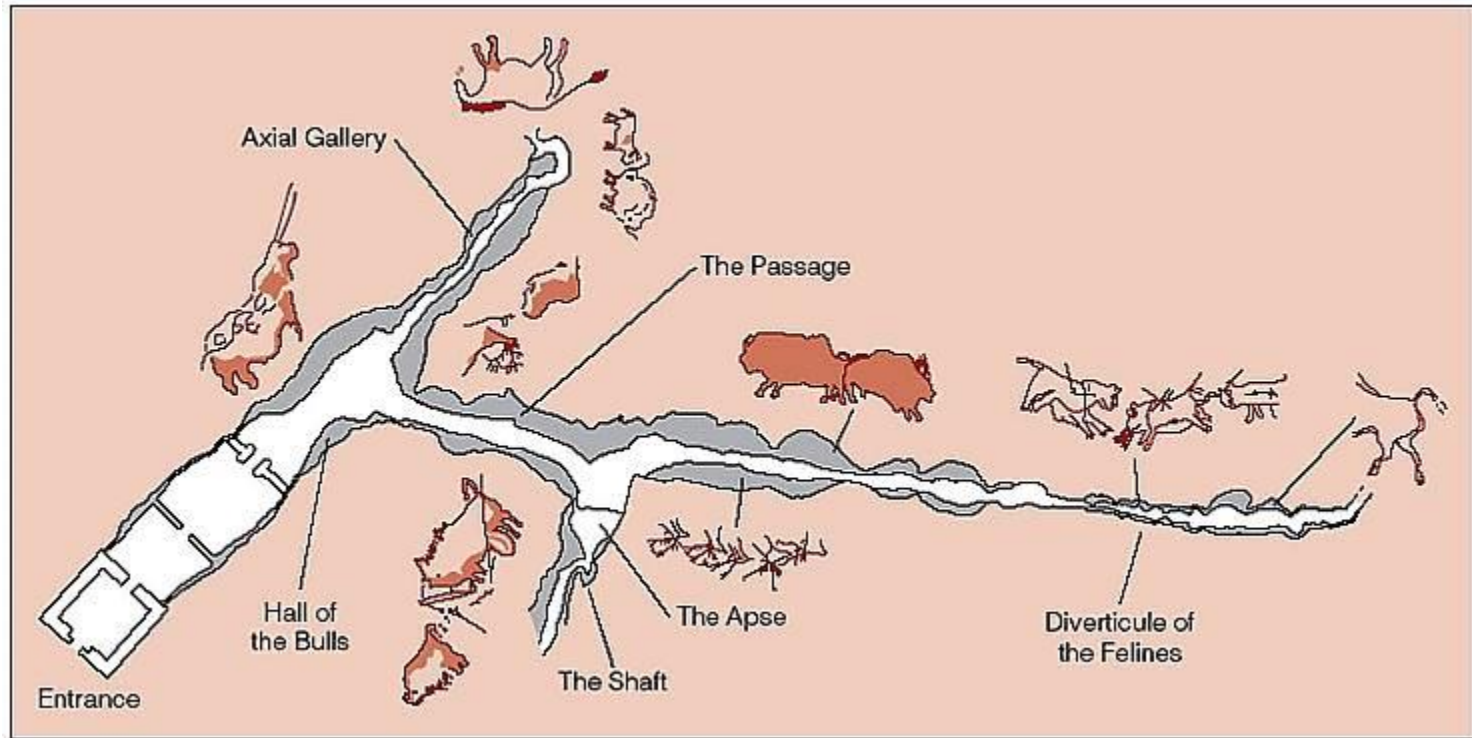
**The Lascaux grotto was opened to the public in 1948 but was closed in 1963 because artificial lights had faded the vivid colors of the paintings and caused algae to grow over some of them. A replica of the Lascaux cave was opened nearby in 1983 and receives tens of thousands of visitors annually.**



Lascaux







[http://www.lascaux.culture.fr/site\\_map.php?lng=en](http://www.lascaux.culture.fr/site_map.php?lng=en)

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Did people live in the caves?





**WHY?**

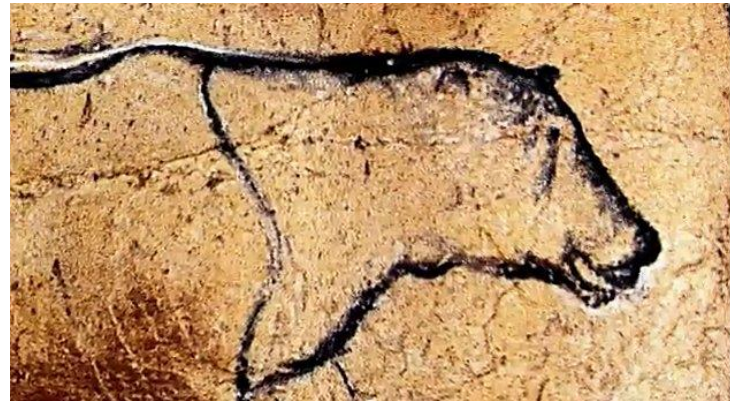
# WHY?

In the past, some have thought that the paintings were made to insure a successful hunt, this is no longer believed accurate.

The people ate mostly reindeer and fish but the animals depicted are mostly bison and horses.



Although there is one human image (painted representations of humans are very rare in Paleolithic art; human shaped sculptures are more common), most of the paintings depict animals found in the surrounding landscape, such as horses, bison, mammoths, ibex, aurochs, deer, lions, bears, and wolves.



The depicted animals comprise both species that would have been hunted and eaten (such as deer and bison) as well as those that were feared predators (such as lions, bears, and wolves). No vegetation or illustration of the environment is portrayed around the animals. Though fish were a main part of the diet, there are no fish paintings.

Most of the paintings are located at a distance from the cave's entrance, and many of the chambers are not easily accessible. This placement, together with the enormous size and grandeur of the paintings, suggests that the remote chambers may have served as sacred or ceremonial meeting places.

Some have noticed that the drawings are made where the space echoes best. This might be part of the storytelling.



## Lascaux: materials used and application...





The paintings are made with minerals, bits of dried earth that create colours ranging from yellow to brown, ochre, and red. They also used black charcoal which can be dated and helps archaeologists discover how old the drawings are.

No brushes have been found, so in all probability the broad black outlines were applied using mats of moss or fur, or even with chunks of raw color directly.

The surfaces appear to have been covered by paint blown directly from the mouth or through a tube; color-stained, hollowed-out bones have been found in the caves.







The fabulous caves of Altamira are located near Santilliana del Mar in Cantabria, Northern Spain. As is so often the case they were discovered by chance. In 1868 a hunter stumbled across them but they were not properly explored until 1875 by a nobleman but it was his daughter, Maria de Santuola who discovered the wonderful cave paintings of Altamira in 1879.

However they were so well preserved that specialists doubted their authenticity and sadly the discoverer was dead before they were officially acknowledged as genuine.

At the beginning of the 20th. century they were finally accepted as authentic after similar remains from the stone age were discovered in the area. However the cave paintings of Altamira remain the most exceptional evidence of Magdalénian culture (between c. 16,500 and 14,000 years ago) in southern Europe.



Altamira Caves

The Chauvet Cave is located in the Ardèche region, southern France.

It became famous in 1994 after a trio found that its walls were richly decorated with Paleolithic artwork.

It contained the fossilized remains of many animals, including those that are now extinct, and that the floor preserved the footprints of animals and humans.



# Chauvet Caves





# Chauvet Caves



# Review

They used minerals and charcoal to make the colours.

They applied the colours with moss, fur, by hand or blowing pigments out through hollow bones.

Where it echoes they find more images.

People did not live in the caves. They were likely gathering places used for special ceremonies.

These ceremonies may have been initiation or coming of age.

The caves may have been used in ceremonies where many different tribes gathered and stories were told to explain the cosmos. In other words, human beings have always asked big questions like why are we here?, who is in charge? Today science and religion answer those questions. In pre-historic times, the images on these caves may have been part of the stories that explained those answers.

We call these stories 'a grand narrative'.





The paintings were made by very skilled artists. They used line and shading and often used the natural rock formations to create realistic looking animals.

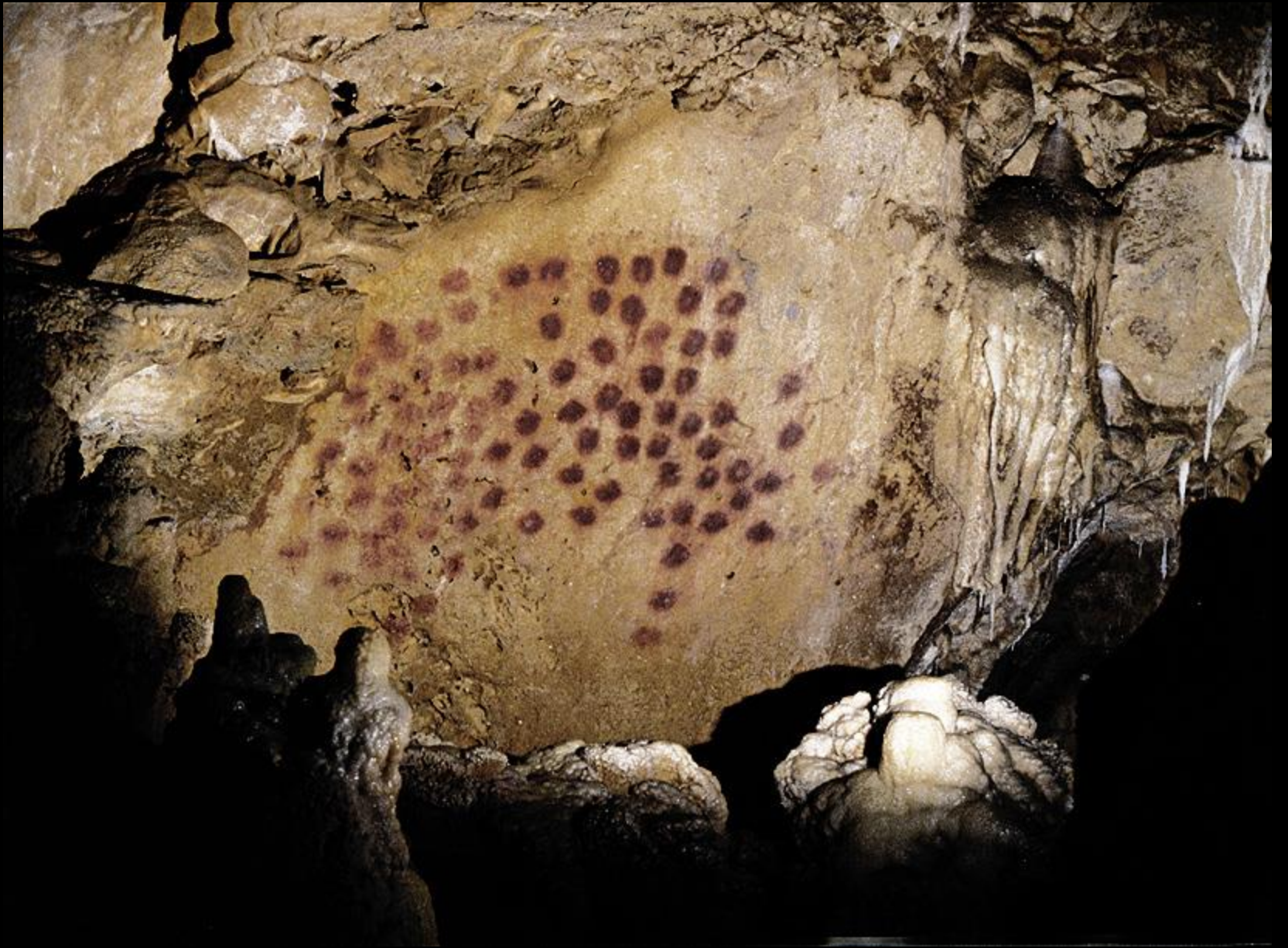
The paintings were made by different people over time. People painted on top of other people's images.







There are also some mysterious shapes such as circles and squares. These occur in all the cave locations.



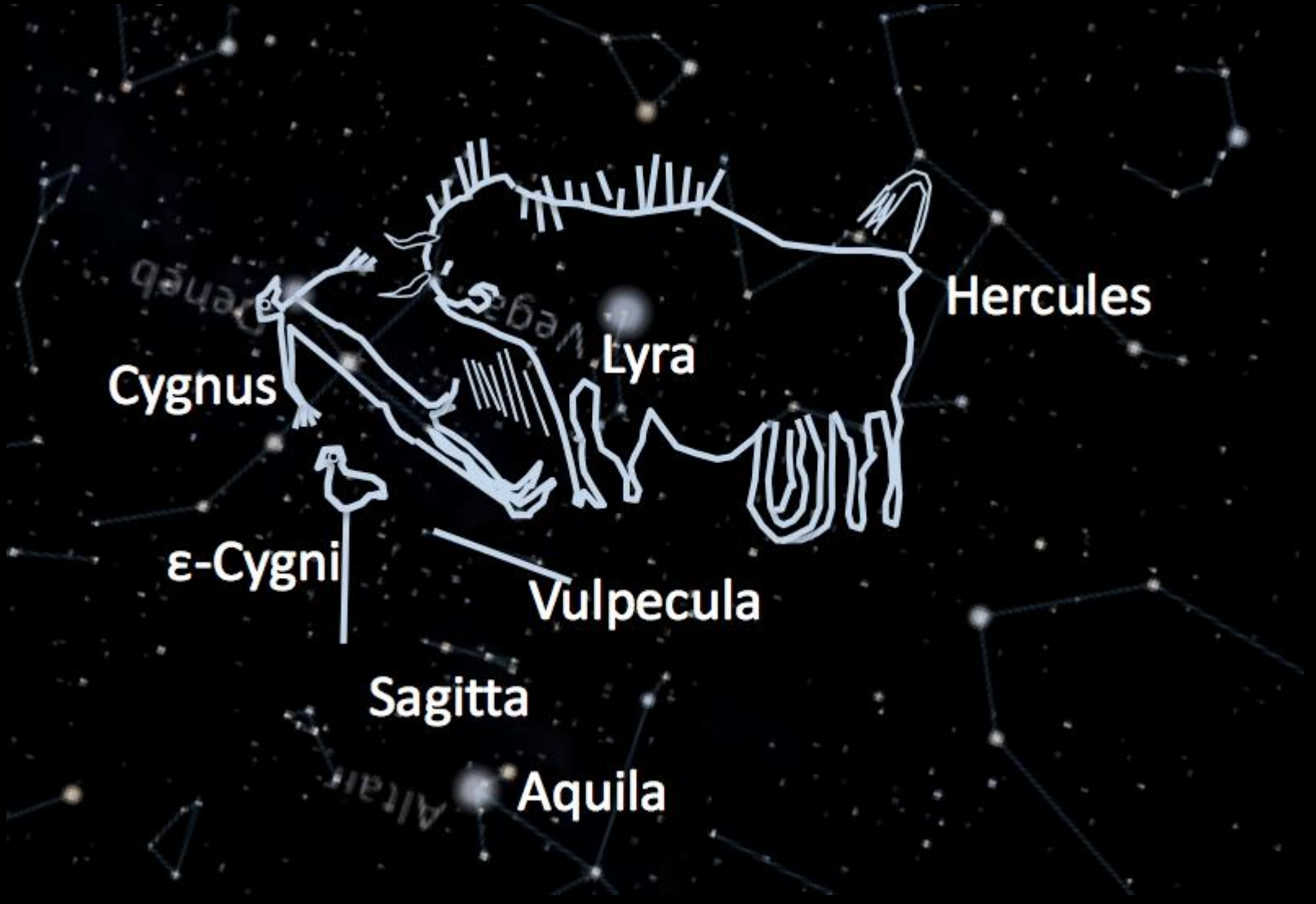






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Cygnus

Lyra

Hercules

ε-Cygni

Vulpecula

Sagitta

Aquila

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εεεεε

εεεεε

WHY?

No one really knows...

the end