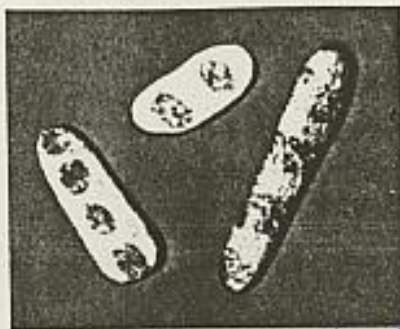


its foundations, which have been recently uncovered, clearly show its layout: seven towers, a number of connecting fortified walls and a large enclosure into which the houses were crowded. All this was built 4,000 years ago without the aid of cement: the irregular stones were filled in with rubble, and the enclosure walls were made of a double thickness of rock. The towers were spaced some 25 yds apart and stood on the perimeter which measured about 50 by 75 yds. The houses or huts averaged 22 by 11 ft. One of them, much larger than the others, had a sort of roofed recess behind a hearth, in which human and animal bones have been found - suggesting cannibalistic rites. It is surprising that this is the only known castle in existence dating from this period, as the people of Lebous could well have had many imitators.

When invaders equipped with bronze arms occupied the region they managed to take Lebous, as the occupants had only slings to defend themselves. Impressed by this stronghold the invaders buried their chiefs in the towers, where their remains have recently been found.

Le Mas-d'Azil

(16 miles north-west of Foiz). During the course of excavations in the famous cave at Le Mas-d'Azil several thousand painted pebbles were discovered. They date from around 12,000 years ago, the period of tran-



Le Mas-d'Azil. Painted pebbles.

sition between the Old Stone Age and the New Stone Age.

They are almost all oval shaped, ringed by a line of paint and decorated on one side with an abstract sign - a cross, a circle, a stripe and so on. Some of the signs call to mind characteristics of Aegean, Phoenician and Cypriot writings, while others resemble signs that can be seen on some of the earliest cave paintings, which date back almost 20,000 years.

What were these pebbles used for? Were they pieces of a game, coins, or stones endowed with magical power? The French prehistorian Edouard Piette, who discovered them at the end of the last century, believed that they were some form of primitive writing.

Provins

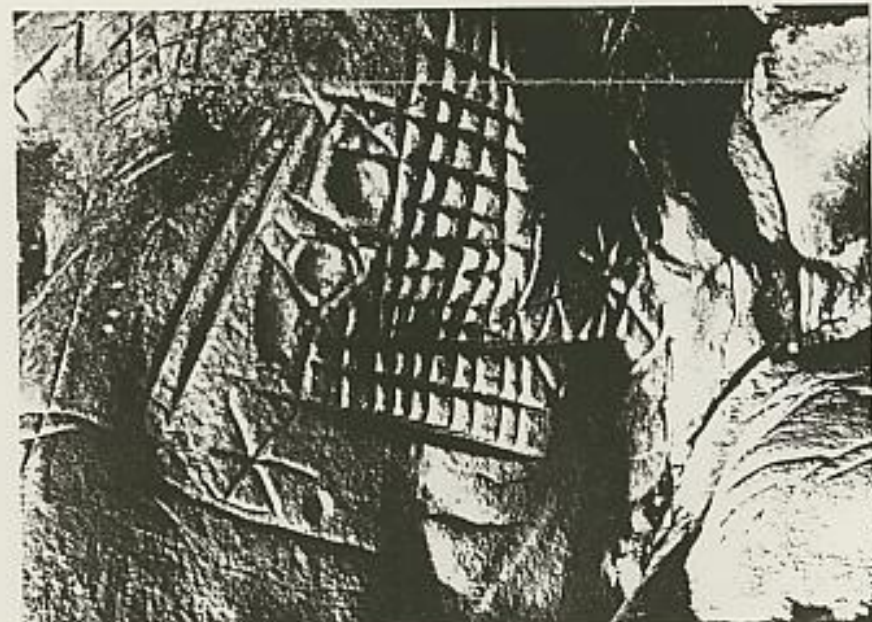
(45 miles south-east of Paris). At Provins there is a town under the town. A maze of corridors leads to

large arched rooms 16 ft high and decorated with numerous columns. The soot which covers some of the walls indicates that these rooms, or caves, were inhabited for some time. But who lived in them - and in what circumstances?

Some of these rooms must have served as warehouses for storing food in case of siege. These date back to the Middle Ages and are not particularly mysterious. On the other hand there are others, situated beneath them, of whose existence the medieval builders must have been unaware. They dug just above these earlier caves without breaking through to them, otherwise they would surely have taken advantage of the extra space.

These older caves are quite unlike those situated above them and consist of great halls more than 200 yds long which do not intersect or meet. On the walls there is graffiti similar to that drawn by Bronze and Iron Age people: suns, concentric circles and similar designs. However, fish and skulls have also been drawn on the walls and some signs have been deliberately scraped out.

What was the reason for this? Were the caves a pagan centre, later occupied by primitive Christians who attempted to obliterate the magic signs and drew the fish symbol used by members of the first Christian communities? It is not known why these great halls do not connect with one another.



Forest of Fontainebleau. Latticework and other designs incised into rock.

Galapagos Islands

(About 600 miles west of the coast of Ecuador). In support of his thesis that the peopling of the Polynesian islands resulted from a migration from the east, the Norwegian Thor Heyerdahl has proved with his raft, the *Kon-Tiki*, that a very primitive ship can reach Polynesia from the coast of South America.

On the Galapagos Islands shards of unquestionably pre-Columbian pottery have been unearthed dating from about 2,000 years ago. There are about 2,000 pieces, and although it is not known how many unbroken items these pieces represent it is unlikely that there would be enough to prove a prolonged settlement. On the other hand, one or more ships could have run aground on these islands or taken refuge for some reason.



