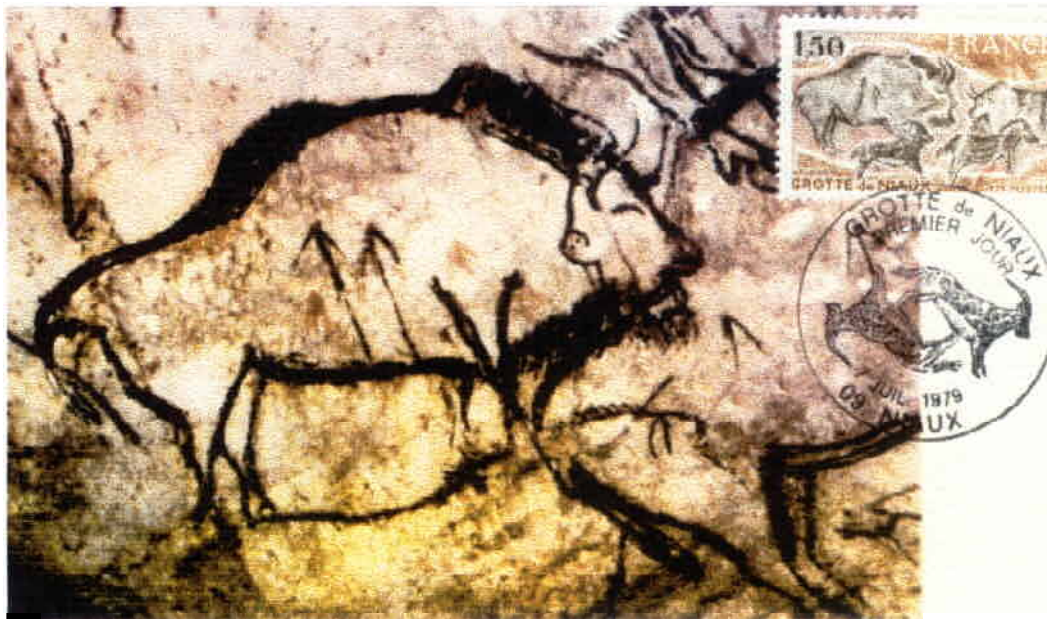




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Niaux— A Giant

By
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Among the caverns celebrated for paleolithic art, none is more splendid than *Niaux* which the Abbé Henri Breuil, "Father of Prehistory" considered one of the giants.

The magnificent Grotte de Niaux was honored in 1979 by the issuing of a 1.50 franc stamp. FDC's were obtained from a temporary office set up in the mairie of the tiny commune of Niaux in the high Pyrénées. The community is served by the main post office in nearby *Tarascon-sur-Ariège*. The horizontal stamp, printed in intaglio, is brown, dark red, and bister. (Scott 1642)



The cavern itself is so grand and richly endowed with stone-age art that this writer is taking the liberty of offering a short account of a visit.

Monsieur René Clastres, the conservateur of the cavern, had planned to escort my wife and me to see the ancient paintings, but was obliged to cancel the arrangement because of the critical illness of his father. He extended the services of his son, a university student, who was a qualified guide.

About eight-thirty that night, my wife and I drove with young Clastres four kilometers out from Taras-

con to a tiny path that leads from the road to the cave. This area, like the town, is dominated by majestic mountain peaks. A steep thirty-minute climb up the rocky trail brought us to the heavy iron door which protects the entrance.

Inside the cave there is no concession to convenience. Monsieur Clastres lit two carbide lamps taken from the stack on the ground. He carried one of these and gave me the other, cautioning against turning it onto myself or the paintings. Proceeding over the rocky ground under the invisible ceiling, we were at once swallowed up in the bigness and awed by the conformations about us. Two hundred fifty meters

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