

The Role of American Archeologists in the Study of the European Upper Paleolithic

Lawrence G. Straus, Editor

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Reviewed by Marta Camps

Human Origins Laboratory, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution

This volume stems from a colloquium organized within the XIV UISPP Congress in Liège (Belgium), in 2001. It was quite clear to those who attended that the subject was not only an interesting and important one, but far richer than the short session could accommodate. Fortunately—particularly after notable absences among the scheduled speakers—this volume was successfully compiled and stands as a good, reliable source of information for scholars working on the European Upper Paleolithic or on the historiography of this research topic.

Before commenting on the individual papers, I think it is necessary to highlight the originality of its focus, which is seldom a subject of study in itself. At first, it may look like the recollection of personal anecdotes, from American researchers who work in Europe and Europeans who are working with American colleagues in joint projects, but it soon becomes obvious that it is much more than just “their personal stories.” The way in which we understand the European Paleolithic at present has been shaped in part by many of the events, differences, and combinations of the two perspectives that the contributions mentioned below portray.

Straus offers an extremely detailed account of the historical development of American participation in European projects since the late 19th century. At that time, the purpose of American visits was not only the collection of material, but also to train young workers. That phase ended with the onset of the Spanish Civil War and the First World War. East Coast institutions (such as the Smithsonian Institution), and France (particularly the Périgord area) were the main players in Upper Paleolithic research during the second stage, from the last 1940s to the mid 1960s, when new methods were introduced and new perspectives were proposed. A clear and apt example of this era is the work of Movius, especially at the site of Abri Pataud. During the third period, spanning from the late 1960s and throughout the 1990s, the original geographical foci were expanded, which subsequently included all of the United States, not only those institutions on the East Coast, as well as European areas outside France. There was a progressive sense of collaboration and understanding of the other side’s perspectives, such as the definition of terms like culture, and so forth. The impact of this collaboration in Europe is analyzed in greater depth than its consequences within the realm of American academia, which is a pattern that can be observed in most of the papers included in this volume.

White focuses on the details of foreign workers in the Périgord during the post WW I years, when an economically depressed Europe was a good and inexpensive source for providing material to build some of the most important American museum collections. American money, diplomacy, and lack of interest in area/field-based positions were an advantage and were favored and assisted by important local figures. In contrast, there were other individuals who, despite having the money, lacked that degree of savoir-faire or the “appropriate” nationality and contacts. Socio-political matters were also an important factor. All these

issues collectively laid the foundations for later cooperation, taken up after archaeological work in France became legally regulated.

A good example of such work, as mentioned above, was that of Movius, and Bricker's paper provides a personal recollection of that collaboration. He offers an insight into the excavations at Abri Pataud, and some of the objectives of Movius' students. He also recalls the difficulties of working on attribute analysis without the help that computers and software packages offer today. Bricker's conclusion is that their attempts at applying that methodology would have been more successful if they had taken place some ten years later. He also identifies specific methodological differences between American and French researchers' approaches and procedures, which he thinks are different, but which run in parallel fashion.

Other personal accounts from American workers with a extensive experience in working in Europe are those of Clark and Harrold. Clark emphasizes the different approaches that New and Old World workers take in relation to concepts such as culture, and issues, such as their concern with the logic of inference, to name but two. He overtly criticizes the European (especially the Latin area) research traditions, and uses the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition as a case-study where researchers from both sides of the Atlantic have interacted for a long time. While his contribution raises the awareness of serious problems and provides ideas on how to solve them, one might conclude that the American tradition is not as critically examined as its European counterpart, and that these two large entities—American and European—encompass a great number of (sometimes) radically different approaches. An important example of this is the traditional textbook generalizations that characterize the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition. These are endorsed by references from two authors who would appear to belong to the "wrong side," as one is British and the other, American. Surely these generalizations are believed by many scholars (European and American alike), but at the same time, several European archeologists believe them to be completely flawed and inapplicable to the areas where they work. However, this point is not mentioned in the paper.

Harrold's paper highlights the reasons and conditions that facilitated the interest and contribution of American anthropologists to the Paleolithic research of the Old World. This author makes the point that when it comes to fieldwork, both traditions tend to proceed in very similar ways. Their divergences are mainly confined to the theoretical sphere. He also stresses the complexity and internal variation of approaches within the two traditions. The fact that the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition is again the example chosen to illustrate episodes during which the two perspectives have interacted makes one think that this is possibly one of the main—if not the most important—topics benefiting from the varied input that the work by scholars from both traditions have produced.

There are also accounts from European workers, some of whom experienced the American influence personally, such as Bicho, who was a research student under North American supervision. He agrees with Harrold in stating that the main differences are found in theoretical issues, and his historical introduction complements Straus and White's, in other words, it offers information on early Paleolithic research outside the Périgord area.

Along the same lines, according to Svoboda's brief contribution, early American interest in the region of Moravia was centered around the site of Dolní Vestonice, and dates to the 1920s. This would seem to contradict Straus, regarding the fact that during those years, American scholars focused exclusively on Southwestern France, although Svoboda mentions that consistent work in the area did not start until the

1970s. Collaboration is currently ongoing in different aspects and discussions, which sometimes become criticisms (not always justified) that tend to focus on empirical factors rather than paradigmatic issues. This clearly differs from the pattern seen in Western Europe, reported by Harrold and Bicho, in which differences are found when examining methodological and theoretical matters. Apparently, American methods and perspectives were welcomed by Moravian scholars.

Regarding the two different perspectives, thoroughly explained by Clark, is the European reply by Kozłowski and Otte. On one hand, Kozłowski contributes a view which, despite his acknowledgement that both sides are complementary and indispensable, defends concepts based upon diffusionist explanations (e.g., migrations), a point of view harshly denied by some American scholars. Kozłowski clarifies that when such terms are applied to the Upper Paleolithic, they imply different chronological and geographic scales than their historical parallels.

On the other hand, Otte highlights the differences between both traditions and praises the stronger methodological drive and the accuracy and rigor of the American side, in contrast with the more romantic and historical European approach. He advocates the continuation of this complementary process because he sees the existence of multiple perspectives as an enriching factor more than a problematic divide that should be solved, as other authors are inclined to imply.

Street and Haidle's contribution offers a detailed insight into the particulars of current American researchers focusing on Germany. It is clear from their paper that, of the four universities that have a chair in Paleolithic Archaeology, Tübingen is the center that has concentrated the largest number of American researchers. The division of scholars between the Institut für Urgeschichte and the Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte und Archäologie des Mittelalters seems to be based on chronological factors related to the history of these entities, more than differences inherent to the different topics studied.

To a person unaware of the important role of American scholars in the study of the European Upper Paleolithic, the title of this book may appear to be evidence supporting unfair stereotypes that portray Americans as thinking of themselves as different and better than the rest of the world. This volume, however, will undoubtedly change the reader's mind and do justice to the important contribution that American researchers' work has made to this field of study, especially from the 1950s onward.

Adding a personal note, as a European researcher, trained in both traditions and currently based in America, I recommend reading this book. I feel that it could have benefited from the inclusion of a brief historical introduction outlining the socio-political conditions present in Europe at the time when American scholars arrived and their causes. This would have facilitated easier comprehension by the reader (especially non-European) of the origins and influences that formed the European tradition and made it so different from the American one.

I also think it is important to highlight the fact that, under the label of "European tradition," there are an array of different perspectives, which in some cases have very little in common. Compare, for example, the perspectives from two countries, one in mainland Western Europe and the other in the East, or any of them and the study of the European Upper Paleolithic in England. Such a grouping of so many different

approaches would also imply that all the researchers in each country have similar perspectives, which is clearly not the case.

On the whole, I think this book is a very informative work, which fills in a very important gap, and clearly shows the significance of considering the different perspectives that have played such an important role in shaping our current understanding of the European Upper Paleolithic.