

Science and Belief in the construction of the concept of Paleolithic Religion

Ciencia y creencia en la construcción del concepto de religión paleolítica

Eduardo PALACIO-PÉREZ

Instituto Internacional de Investigaciones Prehistóricas de Cantabria
Edificio Interfacultativo de la Universidad de Cantabria, 39005 Santander
eduardo.palacio@unican.es

Recibido: 04-12-2013
Aceptado: 01-09-2013

ABSTRACT

The study of prehistory established itself as a scientific discipline during the second half of the nineteenth century. The main issues discussed by this new science centered on the origins of humankind, society, technology, art and religion; this intellectual process of the creation of ideas, concepts and categories was projected on the archaeological finds. When archaeological evidence was found that could be interpreted as proof of the existence of religious beliefs in Paleolithic times, there were various reactions and interpretations among prehistorians. The clash between evolutionism and the Judeo-Christian religious tradition was a key element in the development of these different discourses; these two viewpoints implied opposite ways of thinking about human nature. This paper discusses this diversity of narratives, specifically in the context of France, through the contributions of four authors, each with different ideologies and socio-political circumstances: Gabriel de Mortillet, Émile Cartailhac, Salomon Reinach and Henri Breuil.

KEY WORDS: *Prehistory. Science. Religion. Mortillet. Cartailhac. Reinach. Breuil.*

RESUMEN

La prehistoria nació y se estableció como una disciplina científica durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. Esta nueva ciencia desencadenó intensos debates sobre los orígenes de la humanidad, la sociedad, la tecnología, el arte y la religión. Numerosas ideas, conceptos y categorías fueron proyectadas sobre los restos arqueológicos. En este contexto, se propusieron diferentes interpretaciones a propósito de la religión prehistórica. El conflicto entre evolucionismo y la tradición religiosa judeo-cristiana fue un elemento fundamental en la elaboración de los diferentes discursos porque se trataba de dos posiciones antagónicas desde las que pensar la naturaleza humana. El presente artículo analiza esta diversidad de narrativas a partir de las contribuciones de cuatro autores con diferentes ideologías y posiciones socio-políticas: Gabriel de Mortillet, Émile Cartailhac, Salomon Reinach y Henri Breuil.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Prehistoria. Ciencia. Religion. Mortillet. Cartailhac. Reinach. Breuil.*

1. Introduction

Several years after the birth of prehistory as a scientific discipline, the existence of some form of Paleolithic religiousness became accepted. Once this possibility was admitted, it did not have the same meaning for all prehistorians. This paper will focus on the situation in France for two reasons. First because France led the way both in debates about Paleolithic archaeology and in the foundation of institutions where these debates took place (Richard 1992, 2008: 97-110; Trigger 2006: 147-156). Second because it was in France where the first scientific reactions and debates arose about the material remains susceptible of being interpreted as proof of the existence of some form of religion in the Paleolithic. Some of these were the first evidence of burials (Lartet and Christy 1864: 24, Lartet 1869; Rivière 1872), and portable (Lartet and Christy 1864) and parietal (Sanz de Sautuola 1880; Harlé 1881; Rivière 1897; Capitan and Breuil 1901a, b) manifestations of art.

In the intellectual discourse that prehistorians projected on these material remains, the theoretical preconceptions they possessed about the origin and evolution of humans, and their attitudes towards religion in general, were decisive (Richard 2008: 148). However, this debate took place within the social tensions and political-ideological conflicts in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and in this context, the secularization process of European society was also a determining factor (Wilson 1969: XIV; Tschannen 1992: 293). Two main phenomena occurred in the case of the III French Republic: on one hand, the institutional separation of the Catholic Church and the French state together with the implementation of lay social morals; on the other, the establishment of religious freedom and different forms of worship (Baubérot 2004: 22-33). In this situation, religion could not be conceived as a private and intimate matter, but was a public and political affair. To be Republican required a certain degree of anti-clericalism, to be Monarchic and conservative implied a commitment to the Catholic Church. This social-political context shaped the different reconstructions of the most ancient history of humankind. The main clash occurred between traditionalist Judeo-Christian ideology and the free-thinkers who believed in evolutionism. However, it was more complex due to intermediate positions between the most radical Christian prehistorians, who did not accept the antiquity of humans, and the most belligerent anti-clerical evolutionists. Similarly, among the Christian authors, there were differences between Catholics and Protestants, and between churchmen

and laymen (Defrance-Jublot 2011; Richard 2008: 137-139). It is important to stress that French evolutionism was not based on Darwin's theory (Darwin 1859). In fact, darwinism represented a too materialistic approach to the problem of the evolution of species and, therefore, it did not have a great impact among French scholars. Instead, debates on evolutionism in France (*la théorie transformiste*) focused on the ideas developed by Lamarck (1809) and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1830) (see, for instance, Bowler 1983, Buican 1984, Conry 1974, Grimoult 1998, Laurent 1987, 1997).

This article explores the conceptual creation of Paleolithic religion and studies the diversity of this process for the period of time between the publication of the first evidence of burials and portable art attributed to the Reindeer Age (1864) and the development of the magic-religious interpretation of Paleolithic art, including parietal representations, in the first years of the twentieth century. Four French prehistorians have been chosen, who followed one another and partially overlapped in time: Gabriel de Mortillet (1821-1898), Émile Cartailhac (1845-1921), Salomon Reinach (1858-1932) and Henri Breuil (1877-1961). These researchers were heterogeneous from the sociological and ideological points of view, and therefore mark a certain succession of ideas regarding the existence of some form of religiousness in the Paleolithic. They equally reflect the diversity of opinions on this matter from a synchronic perspective.

2. Gabriel de Mortillet and 'primitive atheism'

In 1864 E. Lartet and H. Christy were the first to suggest the existence of funerary rituals in the Reindeer Age, based on the remains found at Aurignac (Lartet and Christy 1863: 24). In 1868 Louis Lartet documented a ritual burial dated in the Paleolithic at Cro-Magnon. From 1872 to 1875 Émil Rivière (1872) excavated in caves near Menton, where he found the remains of possible burials together with abundant Paleolithic material. However, many prehistorians at the time refused to accept this evidence; they alluded to problems with the stratigraphy that negated the Paleolithic age of the skeletons (Mortillet 1883: 471- 472) or they supposed the sites were the remains of accidents caused by roof collapses, as they assumed at Laugerie-Basse (Massenat, Lalande and Cartailhac, 1872: 1063-1064; Mortillet, 1883: 469-470).

The opinions of Gabriel de Mortillet, who led the way interpretatively in the field of prehistory until the mid-1880s, were decisive. All his life, G. de

Mortillet opposed the idea of any form of religious belief in the Reindeer Age (Reinach 1899a: 89, Bahn 1992: 343-345). This persistent rejection was due to his political ideology and his commitment to the ideals of *scientific materialism* (Defrance-Jublot 2011: 303-310, Richard 1989, 2008: 134-137). From the ideological point of view, he was a convinced Republican with a clearly active anti-clerical attitude. His scientific posture was based on a materialist conception of the universe, he defined experimental science as the only route to knowledge and he attacked any metaphysical approach. As a prehistorian, he was a fervent evolutionist from both biological and cultural points of view, which caused him to fight against any form of religious spiritualism projected on explanations of the origin of humans (De Mortillet 1875, 1896).

The ideas developed about the mental life of Paleolithic humans in the second half of the nineteenth century fluctuated between the two extremes separating animals from what was regarded as human (Pautrat 2000: 140-144). Some *fixist* authors like E. Lartet, A. de Quatrefages, M. Sanson, L. Bourgeois and J. Delaunay, who were influenced by their Christian beliefs, imagined that God created the primitive human with full intellectual capabilities, in which religion and morality were the aspects distancing humans from animals (Quatrefages 1875: 9). G. de Mortillet (1883: 476) and other materialists (e.g. Royer 1870: 205-25) strongly opposed this idea and maintained that religious behavior and a sense of morals were not part of humanity from the beginning, but were secondary and late traits in their historical evolution. G. de Mortillet envisaged an evolutionary history in which primitive humans, on an intermediate step between the great apes and *Homo sapiens*, slowly acquired the physical and mental attributes that made them into the ideal of civilized humankind. In this way, intellectual life in the Paleolithic was defined as unsophisticated and simple, from which it could be deduced that any true religious thought was impossible in primitive society: "It happens that as soon as religious ideas appear, funerary practices are introduced. However, there is no evidence of funerary practices in the Quaternary. Quaternary man was, therefore, wholly devoid of any feeling of religiousness" (De Mortillet, 1883: 476). In fact, he maintained until his death that *religiousness* was imported from Asia in the Neolithic, together with domesticated animals and plants (Reinach 1899a: 89). At the same time, Paleolithic portable art became defined as simple craftsmanship for amusement and decoration (Moro and González

Morales 2004). The representations of bone and antler objects found at Paleolithic sites in Dordogne (Christy and Lartet 1864) were hence conceptualized by Gabriel de Mortillet (1883: 415-421) as a lesser art form, craftwork that may well have been done by Paleolithic "savages" through an ingenuous reproduction of nature, but certainly foreign to any kind of symbolic-religious thought. He maintained this explanation until the publication of his last paper, in the middle of the debate aroused by the discovery of engraved and painted representations in the caves of la Mouthe, Pair-non-Pair, Chabot and Marsoulas, when he only accepted the age of the engravings at Pair-non-Pair because they more closely matched his amusement-decoration conception of Paleolithic art. They were imagined to be the creations of "a person with ingenuous sentiment" (De Mortillet, 1898: 22), foreign to any transcendental concern.

3. Émile Cartailhac: Paleolithic tombs

Émile Cartailhac was greatly influenced by his teacher G. de Mortillet and was reticent at first to accept the existence of burials in the Paleolithic; however, in 1886, after a detailed study of the human remains found at several sites, he finally attributed the existence of clearly-defined burials to the Paleolithic,

The skeleton thus prepared had been the object of the mysterious attention of the living, dressed with adornments, covered with red dust and probably hidden beneath a thin layer of earth and ashes [...] we have seen sites that reveal the same funerary rite. (Cartailhac, 1886: 460-470).

The idea that Palaeolithic humans possessed some form of religiousness and a solid belief in the other life began to take hold. E. Cartailhac's change of opinion may have been connected with several points. First, he was never as intransigent as G. de Mortillet, nor as intensely committed to the evolutionism and anti-spiritualism associated with scientific materialism (Richard 2008: 147). In fact, when he replaced G. de Mortillet as editor of the journal *Matériaux pour l'histoire positive et philosophique de l'homme* – which he renamed *Matériaux pour l'histoire naturelle et primitive de l'homme* – he avoided any anti-clerical controversies and allowed the publication of papers by some openly Catholic researchers (Defrance-Jublot 2011: 304-310). He maintained this line in later years when he co-edited the

journal *L'Anthropologie* in 1890 (Defrance-Jublot 2005: 76-78).

He had liberated himself from the ideas of his mentor G. de Mortillet earlier, in the 1880s, when he approached a group of researchers who had formed around the doctor and anthropologist Paul Broca (Blankaert 1989) at *La Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, which included Paul Topinard, Theodor Hamy and Marcellin Boule, among others. This group, motivated by the positivist ideal, was characterized by the search for evidence in the fossil record demonstrating the transformation of animal species, rather than the production of grand theories to explain the reasons for their transformation. They maintained a skeptical but moderate attitude towards the fixist proposals of Christian researchers.

Second, at least from the 1880s onwards, E. Cartailhac slowly began to question the rigid and negative view of the intellectual life of Paleolithic humans that G. de Mortillet maintained.: "It seems fair to admit [...] that they already possessed an important intellectual culture" (Cartailhac 1885: 63). In respect to this topic of prehistoric human mental capacity, the development of anthropological theories about the beliefs of so-called "savage populations" was relevant (Stocking 1987: 208-228). The diffusion of the ideas of British anthropologist E. B. Tylor to France was significant. In 1886 Tylor wrote a paper first formulating his theory of *animism* so as to explain the most primitive and basic expression of religion (Tylor 1866), which he did not hesitate to attribute to the most "primitive" humans (Tylor 1867: 707). Two years later, following Tylor's idea of animism, J.F. McLennan (1869 and 1870) defined *totemism* as the oldest animist belief and endowed it with a universal character. All these ideas spread amongst prehistorians (i.e. Cartailhac 1875: 73-85 and 415-424, 1876: 416, 1880: 491). However, some researchers, like G. de Mortillet, still refused to accept the existence of any form of religiousness in the Paleolithic, even while many of his colleagues in the commitment to scientific materialism, like Abel Hovelacque (1877), Paul Nicole (1887) and Charles Letourneau (1892), began to adapt a religious sentiment in the oldest human populations to their evolutionist approach: "If we consider [...] that religion is no more than the fear of the unknown, the immediate ancestors of man would undoubtedly have been religious [...] Only in higher levels of humankind do we find a truly irreligious man, the man of science." (Hovelacque 1877: 39).

It is interesting to note that this new discourse, mainly focused on funerary practices, did not involve a reinterpretation of Paleolithic portable art in symbolic-religious terms, or at least not directly.

For the existence of some kind of primitive religion to attain specific weight in the conceptualization of Paleolithic graphic activity, theoretical changes had to take place in conceiving the origins and nature of art (Palacio-Pérez 2010a).

4. Salomon Reinach: the religious interpretation of Paleolithic art

The conception of Paleolithic art underwent a profound change at the turn of the nineteenth century. At that time, the understanding of Paleolithic art as an amusement or decoration was replaced by a symbolic-religious explanation (Richard 1993: 60). This change affected the portable representations that were already known and also the parietal figures that were being documented in those years¹. The Hellenist, archaeologist and historian of art and religion Salomon Reinach played a key role in this process, particularly with his seminal paper *L'art et la magie* in 1903. He was the first to propose a magic-religious interpretation of Paleolithic art repeatedly and systematically (Reinach 1899 b: 478, 1903 a, b and c, 1905), although he was not the first researcher to suggest this idea. In fact, in the 1870s and 1880s it appeared in several texts (Bernardin 1876: 12; Bourgeois and Delaunay 1865: 92; Piette 1873: 414-416; Reinach 1889: 234), but they were isolated mentions with no continuity and did not succeed in breaking the amusement-decoration paradigm that then dominated the explanation of Paleolithic art. The reasons why S. Reinach systematized and insisted on this interpretation include both scientific and ideological concerns, closely connected with the study of the origin and definition of religious behavior (Palacio-Pérez 2010b).

Indeed, S. Reinach came to the interpretation of Paleolithic art through his interest in the history of religions. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, certain particularist and racialist (when not racist) ideas were present in historians and philologists' interpretation of different cultures and religions (Olender 1989; Todorov 1993: 140-143). S. Reinach introduced two new aspects in this context of the study of religion and culture. In the first place, he criticized the racialist approach to the study of religions that was based on contrasting Semites and Indo-Europeans (Reinach 1892: 2, 1893). He aspired to establish Jewish culture as a cornerstone of Western society and this encouraged his academic concern to dilute essentialist and racialist theories by advocating comparativism and the search for universals (Rodrigue 2004: 9-10). In the second place, he included the theories of

British evolutionist-anthropologists in his analysis of ancient religions. Tylor's concept of animism (1866), McLennan's idea of totemism (1869, 1870) and Frazer's definition of sympathetic magic (1890) often appeared in his writings from the late 1890s onwards.

This conversion to what he called a "system of anthropological exegesis" (1905: VI) involved espousing a series of ideas. First, he accepted the comparative procedure that connected the beliefs of "modern primitive people" with ancient religions and ultimately with the nature of religion in general. Second, he recognized an evolution in religious beliefs since prehistoric times, with the key to their interpretation in "contemporary savages" who had survived like true living fossils. Finally, he proposed that religious ideas did not appear in any one specific place from where they spread out, but that they could arise simultaneously in different places. They were born out of the psychological needs characterizing the whole species since its origins: "It is necessary therefore to seek the origin of religions in the psychology of man, but not of civilised man but of the one furthest removed" (Reinach 1905: I).

In this context, S. Reinach regarded the beliefs of contemporary primitive people as the main source to explain the origin and evolution of religious ideas. He also saw in them a way of explaining Paleolithic art. Reinach was inspired by a series of authors who applied these ideas to the explanation of the origins and nature of artistic activity. A series of treatises on aesthetics and art history (e.g. Grosse 1894; Hirn 1900), consulted and cited by Reinach (1903c: 259-263), looked at artistic activity as something with a utilitarian purpose and not purely aesthetic (Grosse 1894, 1897: 149-297; Hirn 1900: 149-297). These authors stated that magic and religious symbology were the main motivations of artistic activity in primitive and traditional societies (Hirn 1900: 283). Following this line of reasoning, S. Reinach went back to the very origins of religious thought, which he saw materialized in art: "The study of the birth of religion is mixed, in a certain way, with that of the origins of art. Born together, art and religion have remained closely linked over many centuries" (Reinach 1904: 8). In this way, Paleolithic art became the oldest symbolic-religious expression of humankind, with images displayed of many ideas that would appear later in other societies:

They show us mankind's first steps on the road that leads to the worship of animals (as in Egypt), then to that of idols in the form of humans (as in Greece) and finally to divinity conceived as a spirit. (Reinach 1904: 8).

His interpretation of Paleolithic art thus became a keystone in his scientific aspiration and ideological need to explain the history of religions from a universalist and comparativist point of view. It supported the idea of a single human nature based on the psychic unity of the whole species and reduced all religions to a common psychological phenomenon, which could be observed in even the remotest prehistory.

Reinach's perception cannot be separated from his ideological-political situation as a Jewish intellectual in France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. S. Reinach was a major figure in the Franco-Jewish political and intellectual sphere (Rodrigue 2004), especially after 1890 when ultra-nationalist and anti-Semitic attitudes began to acquire importance in the political life of the III Republic (Birnbaum 1994, 1996). This activity reveals his ideological commitment to the dominant lines of thought in the Franco-Jewish sphere at that time, characterized by the defense of universalism and Republicanism, emphasizing the liberal concept of citizen against any exclusivist principle based on race and religion (Marrus 1971). In this regard, he was a convinced defender of the freedom of worship and the emancipation of the Jews. In the debate over religion within Paleolithic studies, he always maintained an enlightened lay attitude; however, as a liberal Republican, he not only fought for the rights of the Jewish community, but was also committed to the reform of Jewish tradition, which in his opinion had to be adapted to modern society, new ideologies and the spiritual needs of the time. He therefore always displayed great interest in the history and evolution of religious thought, in order to identify the ideas and practices (taboos and prohibitions) that were simply the residue of a "prehistoric savage past", a culmination of superstitions that needed to be banished (Strenki 1997: 70-75).

5. Henri Breuil: Paleolithic human as *Homo religiosus*

Henri Breuil is one of the best examples of the generation of Catholic churchmen in the last years of the nineteenth century that took an interest in the study of prehistory and became brilliant researchers in the first half of the twentieth century (Coye 2006; Hurel 2003, 2011; Ripoll 1994). What is especially interesting is what results from the effort they had to make to adapt Christian dogma to the ideas arising from prehistoric archaeology. Breuil's career was very long and he often varied in his points of view; here we shall refer to his period of training and first

years as a prehistorian (1895-1910). This was a significant time, when he developed his conception of the biological and cultural evolution of human beings.

The young Henri Breuil's personal interest in prehistory coincided with a favorable atmosphere in which a Catholic priest could develop his research and integrate quite easily within the scientific community. This atmosphere was the consequence of different factors. First, after the first International Scientific Conference of Catholics, held in Paris in 1888, and the promulgation of Leo XIII's encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893), the Church's concern in scientific matters grew and they began to take an interest in adapting the ideas proposed by prehistorians to Catholic dogma. Together with the work of lay Catholic researchers like the Marquis of Nadaillac, Ernest d'Acy and Adrien Arcellin (Defrance-Jublot 2005: 76-78, 2011), the clergy also displayed this intellectual curiosity. For example, Father Jean Guibert, Head of the Natural Science Department at the *Petit Séminaire Saint-Sulpice* and teacher of H. Breuil, published the first prehistory handbook for seminarians in France in 1890, *Les Origines, questions d'apologétique* (1890). In this context, the overcoming of fixist ideas by some Catholic authors and the adaptation of the idea of evolution to Christian thought, giving rise to *spiritualist evolutionism*, were equally important. The work of the Christian geologist and paleontologist Albert Gaudry, *Essai de paléontologie philosophique* (1896), was seminal, above all because of its great influence on the ideas of M. Boule, H. Breuil, J. Bouyssonie, H. Bégouën and Teilhard de Chardin.

Second, a group of prehistorians belonging to the positivist school, led by P. Topinard and including M. Boule, L. Capitan and E. Cartailhac among others, founded a new scientific orthodoxy for prehistory, based on the principle of neutrality (Defrance-Jublot 2005: 81). This group believed that prehistorians should limit themselves to discussing the evidence they were studying, without concerning themselves with the chain of causes that generated them, especially the more remote and general causes (Boule 1896: 330). In this way, the great religious, philosophical and political issues were apparently left sidelined in scientific debates. In this atmosphere of neutrality, some members of the clergy, including H. Breuil himself, were warmly welcomed into the community of prehistorians.

A third, further element that influenced the young H. Breuil was the dissemination of new ideas in the Catholic Church, particularly within the so-called Modernist Crisis at the turn of the century. At this time, a movement for reformation known

as *theological modernism* tried to adapt Christian thought to new philosophical and scientific theories (Poulat 1996). In opposition to a traditionalist ecclesiastic hierarchy, reformist opinions like those of Alfred Loisy, Edouard Le Roy, and Marcel Hébert were made known. These authors tended to make a symbolic (not literal) interpretation of the Bible and claimed that the freedom of everyone to examine religion critically, solely with the use of reason, was a fundamental principle. In this way, dogma and historical criticism were pitted against each other and religion was reduced to belief and subjective sentiment (Kurtz 1986). We know through his correspondences (Hurel 2011: 69-83) that the young H. Breuil, together with other seminarians, shared certain modernist ideas during the years he spent in the *Petit Séminaire de Saint-Sulpice* and the *Séminaire des Carmes* (1895-1900).

Thus H. Breuil was subjected to the double yoke of faith and reason (Richard 2006; Hurel 2011) and this situation doubtlessly marked his way of perceiving evolution and the life of Paleolithic humans. Although he always attempted to maintain descriptive neutrality, trying to avoid any philosophical or religious tendency, his deepest perceptions about human nature and evolution can nevertheless be glimpsed in some of his texts. In this respect, he expressed his ideas about the existence of some kind of religious feeling in the oldest periods of prehistory. A good example of this is his article *Les plus anciennes races humaines connues* (1909a), with a second, scarcely-modified version published the same year (Breuil 1909b). In this text, he reflects briefly on the chronology and organization of the different hominid remains that had been found up to that time. He makes his scientific and philosophical positions about the conception of human nature and evolution quite clear. He identifies with the spiritualist evolutionism of Albert Gaudry, of whose work *Essai de paléontologie philosophique* (1896) he cites some important paragraphs, defining evolution as a great divine plan in which God is the creator of matter, life, the forces governing evolution, and human soul or conscience (Breuil 1909b: 101-102). H. Breuil was clearly committed to defending the homogeneity and single origin of our species, arguing that it belongs to a different evolutionary branch than that of the great apes (Breuil 1909: 99). He doubted the inclusion of fossil remains with the most archaic traits (the Mauer jaw and Java Man) within the human evolutionary line: "their complexion differs so much as to be unsure whether they are related to our humanity and it is even impossible to say if [...] they were endowed with the mental faculties, the industrial ingenuity that

characterises [...] humanity” (Breuil 1909: 75-76). He certainly presents Neanderthals, whom he looks on as the first representative of our evolutionary line, as intelligent and with a budding conscience that was expressed in their religious behavior: “they were [...] sufficiently penetrating to achieve higher beliefs of which the cult they rendered to their dead is undeniable proof” (Breuil 1909: 61). He expressed similar ideas in his interpretation of Upper Palaeolithic art: “these major works correspond to grave concerns” (Cartailhac and Breuil 1906: 242).

Indeed, the monograph he published with E. Cartailhac on the engravings and paintings in Altamira Cave, *La Caverne d'Altamira à Santillane près Santander (Espagne)* (1906), would follow in S. Reinach's steps (Cartailhac and Breuil 1906: 243) and used ethnographic analogies to explain the meaning of Paleolithic art. Three chapters of this book were devoted to the art of “modern primitives” in America, Africa and Australia (Cartailhac and Breuil 1906: 144-225). This compendium of comparative material was used to interpret Paleolithic art as the expression of a religious feeling that took the form of fetishism, totemism, hunting magic or mythical stories (Cartailhac and Breuil 1906: 236-238). This book marked the beginning of a way of interpreting Paleolithic art that Breuil would maintain throughout his life, with slightly nuanced variations (e.g. Breuil 1952: 23-24; Breuil and Lantier 1951: 327-328).

Breuil made use of vocabulary and took an approach in some descriptions that suggested certain analogies between prehistoric rites and beliefs and Christianity: “a collective manifestation, governed by traditionally established rules, in which perpetuity was perhaps ensured by a caste of people who transmitted and zealously guarded the rules of the art and the notion of its magic value” (Cartailhac and Breuil 1906: 135). In short, H. Breuil was concerned with demonstrating the religious character of Paleolithic humans and this concern was directly connected with his Christian and spiritualist conception of evolution and human nature.

6. Conclusion

By the early 1860s some researchers had already suggested the existence of religious thought in the Paleolithic; however, this theory was not widely

accepted by prehistorians. The degree to which they agreed to it depended on the conception each author held about human nature and religiousness itself.

Consensus about this point in the community of prehistorians was only reached when this idea was adapted to the evolutionist paradigm. This occurred as a consequence of two parallel processes that finally came together. The first was the idea of the appearance and development of religion within the concept of evolution, slowly developed by materialist evolutionists. The second was the entry of Christian authors, who had always defended the existence of a religious sentiment in the Paleolithic, into the debate. In the 1890s they abandoned fixist ideas and adapted evolutionism to the Christian dogma through particular philosophies, which can generically be grouped under the term ‘spiritualist evolutionism’.

It should be pointed out that despite the consensus reached in the early twentieth century about the existence of Paleolithic religiousness, this did not have the same meaning for authors with a materialist perception of human evolution and for those who understood it from a spiritualist viewpoint. Both materialist-evolutionists and spiritualist-evolutionists tended to establish continuity between the past and the present; however, they did this in different ways. For the former, the evidence of religious practices in Paleolithic times was evidence of another evolutionary step in the distance separating animals from humans, on the long journey towards progress. Paleolithic religion was considered the oldest symbolic-intellectual expression of humanity, the germ of many ideas that would appear later in other societies. It reflected an initial state of mind, based on superstitions and erroneous associations, which would only be reduced and overcome thanks to the development of scientific thought. In contrast, the latter tried to establish continuity between prehistory and the present in order to demonstrate the spiritual essence of human beings. According to their perception of the facts, archaeological evidence of Paleolithic religion showed that hominids, from the time that they could be considered human by science, had been aware of their spiritual nature and had intuited the existence of a supernatural reality. In short, depending on the way it was interpreted, the same material evidence was used to generate different narratives about the remotest past of humankind.

NOTES

1. After the discovery of Altamira (Sanz de Sautuola 1880) was discussed and forgotten by the early 1880s (Delporte 1989), Émile Rivière announced the discovery of the engravings in the cave of La Mouthe in 1895. One year later, Paul Raymond presented his conclusions about Chabot Cave. In the same year, François Daleou described the results of his research in the cave of Pair-non-Pair. All these finds were debated in the main French Prehistoric Societies (Richard 1993). Two communications presented by L. Capitan and H. Breuil (1901a and b), about the finds of engravings and paintings in the caves of Les Combarelles and Font-de-Gaume, acknowledged the Magdalenian age of these representations and attributed the same chronology to similar ensembles known at that time, including Altamira (Cartailhac 1902).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- BAHN, P.G. (1992): Expecting the Spanish Inquisition: Altamira's rejection in its 19th-century context. *Ancient images, ancient thought: the archaeology of ideology. Proceedings of the 23rd annual conference of the Archaeological Association of the University of Calgary, 1990* (S. Goldsmith, S. Garvie, D. Selin and J. Smith, eds.) Archaeological Association of the University of Calgary, Calgary: 339–346.
- BAUBEROT, J. (2004): Secularization et laïcisation. Une trame décisive, *L'histoire religieuse en France et en Espagne* (B. Pellistrandi, ed.) Casa de Velázquez. Madrid: 17–38.
- BERNARDIN, R.J. (1876): Les archives et les monnaies préhistoriques. *La Revue savoisienne*, 17^{ème} année: 11–13.
- BIRNBAUM, P. (1994): La citoyenneté en péril: Les Juifs entre intégration et résistance. *La France de l'affaire Dreyfus* (P. Birnbaum ed.). Éditions Gallimard, Paris: 505–542.
- BIRNBAUM, P. (1996): *The Jews of the Republic: A Political History of State Jews in France from Gambetta to Vichy*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- BLANCKAERT, C. (1989): L'anthropologie personnifiée: Paul Broca (et la biologie du genre humain (Préface). *Broca P., Mémoires d'Anthropologie*. J.M. Place, Paris: I-XLIII.
- BOULE, M. (1896): Guibert (abbé Jean), Les Origines questions d'apologétique, Letouzey et Ané. *L'Anthropologie*, 7: 330.
- BOURGOIS, L.; DELAUNAY, A. (1865): Notice sur la Grotte de la Chaise. *Revue Archéologique*, 12: 90–94.
- BOWLER, P. (1983): *The eclipse of Darwinism. Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades around 1900*. The John Hopkins University Press, London.
- BREUIL, H.; LANTIER R. (1951): *Les hommes de la pierre ancienne (Paléolithique et Mésolithique)*. Payot, Paris.
- BREUIL, H. (1909a): Les plus anciennes races humaines connues. *Revue Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, 3: 710–758.
- BREUIL, H. (1909b): Les plus anciennes races humaines connues. *Bulletin de la Société Fribourgeoise des Sciences Naturelles*, 17: 23–102.
- BREUIL, H. (1952): *Quatre cents siècles d'art pariétal*. Max Fourny, Montignac.
- BUICAN, D. (1984): *Histoire de la génétique et de l'évolutionisme en France*. PUF, Paris.
- CAPITAN, L.; BREUIL, H. (1901a): Une nouvelle grotte avec parois gravées à l'époque paléolithique. *Comptes rendus hebdomadaires de l'Académie des Sciences*, 133: 478–480.
- CAPITAN, L.; BREUIL, H. (1901b): Une nouvelle grotte avec figures peintes sur les parois à l'époque paléolithique. *Comptes rendus hebdomadaires de l'Académie des Sciences*, 133: 493–495.
- CARTAILHAC, E.; BREUIL, H. (1906): *La Caverne d'Altamira à Santillane près Santander (Espagne)*. Imprimerie de Monaco, Monaco.
- CARTAILHAC, E. (1875): Edward B. Tylor, Researches into the early history of mankind and the development of civilization. *Matériaux pour l'histoire primitive et naturelle de l'homme*, 2^{ème} série, 6: 73–85 and 415–424.
- CARTAILHAC, E. (1876): Edward B. Tylor, La civilisation Primitive. *Matériaux pour l'histoire primitive et naturelle de l'homme*, 2^{ème} série, 7: 416.
- CARTAILHAC, E. (1880): Congrès international d'anthropologie et d'archéologie préhistorique, 9^{ème} session, Lisbonne, septembre 1880. *Matériaux pour l'histoire primitive et naturelle de l'homme*, 2^{ème} série, 11: 489–495.
- CARTAILHAC, E. (1885): Ouvres inédites des artistes chasseurs de renne. *Matériaux pour l'histoire primitive et naturelle de l'homme*, 3^{ème} série, 2: 63–75.

- CARTAILHAC, E. (1886). Ossement et squelettes humains dans les cavernes et stations quaternaires. *Revue d'Anthropologie*, 3^{ème} série, 1: 448–470.
- CARTAILHAC, E. (1889): *La France Préhistorique d'après les sépultures et les monuments*. Félix Alcan, Paris.
- CARTAILHAC, E. (1902): Les cavernes ornées de dessins. La grotte d'Altamira, Espagne. 'Mea culpa' d'un sceptique'. *L'Anthropologie*, 13: 348–354.
- CONRY, Y. (1974): *L'introduction du darwinisme en France au XIX^e siècle*. Brin, Paris.
- COYE, N. (ED.) (2006): *Sur les chemins de la préhistoire. L'abbé Breuil du Périgord à l'Afrique du Sud*. Éditions Somogy, Paris.
- DE MORTILLET, G (1875): Les études préhistoriques devant l'orthodoxie. *Revue d'Anthropologie*, 4: 116–129.
- DE MORTILLET, G. (1883): *Le Préhistorique, antiquité de l'homme*. C. Reinwald, Paris.
- DE MORTILLET, G (1896): La Foi et la Raison dans l'étude des sciences. *Revue de l'Ecole d'Anthropologie*, 6: 1–14.
- DE MORTILLET, G. (1898): Grottes ornées de gravures et de peintures. *Revue de l'Ecole d'Anthropologie*, 8: 20–27.
- DEFRANCE-JUBLOT, F. (2005): Question laïque en Préhistoire. La revue *L'Anthropologie* (1890–1910). *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 87: 73–84.
- DEFRANCE-JUBLOT, F. (2011): La question religieuse dans la première archéologie préhistorique 1859–1904. *Dans l'épaisseur du temps. Archéologues et géologues inventent la préhistoire* (A. Hurel and N. Coye eds.). Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris: 279–314.
- DELPORTE, H. (1989): Notas sobre el conocimiento de Altamira en Francia. *Cien años después de Sautuola* (M.R. González Morales, ed.). Diputación Regional de Cantabria, Santander: 159–71.
- GAUDRY, A. (1896): *Essai de paléontologie philosophique*. Masson, Paris.
- GEOFFROY DE SAINT-HILAIRE, E. (1830): *Principes de philosophie zoologique*. Pichon et Didier, Paris.
- GRIMOULT, C. (1998): *Évolutionnisme et fixisme en France. Histoire d'un combat. 1800-1882*. CNRS, Paris.
- GROSSE, E. [1894] (1897): *The beginnings of art*. Appleton, London.
- GUIBERT, J. (1890): *Les origines question d'apologétique*. Letouzey et Ané, Paris.
- HARLÉ, E. (1881): La Grotte d'Altamira près de Santander (Espagne). *Matériaux pour l'histoire primitive et naturelle de l'homme*, 2^{ème} série, XII: 275-283.
- HECHT, J. M. (2003): *The end of the soul*. University Press, Columbia.
- HIRN, Y. (1900): *The Origins of Art. A Psychological and Sociological Inquiry*. Macmillan, London.
- HOVELACQUE, A. (1877): *Notre ancêtre. Recherches d'Anatomie et d'Ethnologie sur le précurseur de l'Homme*. Ernest Leroux, Paris.
- HUREL, A. (2003): Un prêtre, un savant dans la marche vers l'institutionnalisation de la préhistoire. L'abbé Henri Breuil (1877-1961). *La Revue pour l'histoire du CNRS*, 8.
- HUREL, A. (2011): *L'Abbé Breuil. Un préhistorien dans le siècle*. CNRS Éditions, Paris.
- KURTZ, L.R. (1986): *The politics of heresy: the modernist crisis in Roman Catholicism*. University of California Press, Berkeley (CA)
- LAMARCK, J. B. (1809): *Philosophie zoologique ou exposition des considérations relatives à l'histoire naturelle des animaux* (2 Vol.). Imprimerie de Duminiil-Lesueur, Paris.
- LARIET, E.; CHRISTY, H. (1864): *Sur des figures des animaux gravées ou sculptées et autres produits d'art et d'industrie rapportables aux temps primordiaux de la période humaine*. Didier et Cie, Paris.
- LARIET, L. (1869): Une sépulture des troglodytes du Périgord. *Matériaux pour l'histoire primitive et naturelle de l'homme*, 2^{ème} série, 1: 97–105.
- LATOURNEAU, C. (1892): *L'évolution religieuse dans les diverses races humaines*. C. Reinwald, Paris.
- LAURENT G. (1987) *Paléontologie et évolution en France. 1800-1860. De Cuvier- Lamarck à Darwin*. Comité des Travaux historiques et scientifiques, Paris.
- LAURENT, G. (ed.) (1997): *Jean-Baptiste Lamarck 1744-1829*. Comité des Travaux historiques et scientifiques, Paris.
- MARRUS, M. (1971). *The Politics of Assimilation: A Study of the French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

- MASSENAT, E.; LALANDE, P.; CARTAILHAC, E. (1872): Découverte d'un squelette humaine de l'âge du renne à Laugerie-Basse (Dordogne). *Comptes rendus hebdomadaires de l'Académie des Sciences*, 74: 1060–1063.
- MCLENNAN, J. F. (1869): The worship of animals and plants. *The Fortnightly Review*, 6: 407–582.
- MCLENNAN, J. F. (1870): The worship of animals and plants. *The Fortnightly Review*, 7: 194–216.
- MORO, O.; GONZÁLEZ MORALES, M. R. (2004): Towards a genealogy of the concept of 'Paleolithic mobiliary art'. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 60: 321–340.
- NICOLE, P. (1887): Histoire naturelle de l'Être suprême. Essai d'évolution religieuse. *L'Homme*, IV: 353-364, 394-400, 425-434, 481-495, 552-560, 584-598, 706-724.
- OLENDER, M. (1989): *Les langues du paradis: Aryens et Sémites, un couple providentiel*. Gallimard, Paris.
- PALACIO-PÉREZ, E. (2010a): Cave art and the theory of art: the origins of the religious interpretation of Palaeolithic graphic expression. *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 29 (1): 1–14.
- PALACIO-PÉREZ, E. (2010b): Salomon Reinach and the religious interpretation of Palaeolithic art. *Antiquity*, 84(325): 853–863.
- PAUTRAT, J. Y. (2000): De l'homme primitif, la vie, l'histoire. *L'Homme préhistorique. Images et imaginaire* (A. Ducros and J. Ducros, eds.). L'Harmattan, Paris: 139–157.
- PIETTE, E. (1873): La grotte de Gourdan, sur la lacune que plusieurs auteurs placent entre l'âge du renne et celui de la pierre polie, et sur l'art paléolithique dans ses rapports avec l'art gaulois. *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, 2^{ème} série, 8: 384–425.
- POULAT, E. (1996): *Histoire, dogme et critique dans la crise moderniste*. Albin Michelle, Paris.
- QUATREFAGES, A. (1875): *Natural history of man: A course of elementary lectures*. Appleton, New York.
- REINACH, S. (1889): *Antiquités nationales, Tome I, Epoque des alluvions et des cavernes*. Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie, Paris.
- REINACH, S. (1892): *L'origine des Aryens. Histoire d'une controverse*. Ernest Leroux, Paris.
- REINACH, S. (1893): Le Mirage oriental. *L'Anthropologie*, IV: 539-78.
- REINACH, S. (1899a): Gabriel de Mortillet. *Revue Historique*, 24^{ème} année, 69: 67–95.
- REINACH, S. (1899b): Paul Girop et Emile Massénat, les stations de l'âge du Renne dans les vallées de la Vézère et de la Corrèze. *Revue Archéologique*, 3^{ème} série 35: 476–8.
- REINACH, S. (1903 a): Gustave Chauvet. Notes sur l'art primitif. *Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, Année 1903: 47.
- REINACH, S. (1903 b): Gustave Chauvet. Notes sur l'art primitif. *Revue Archéologique*, 4^{ème} série, I: 290-291.
- REINACH, S. (1903 c): L'Art et la Magie, *L'Antropologie*, 14: 257-266.
- REINACH, S. (1904): *Apollo: Histoire générale des arts plastiques*. Librairie Hachette, Paris.
- REINACH, S. (1905): *Cultes, mythes et religions*. Ernest Leroux, Paris.
- RICHARD, N. (1989): La revue L'Homme de Gabriel de Mortillet. Anthropologie et politique au début de la Troisième république. *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris*, 1 (3–4): 231–155.
- RICHARD, N. (1992): L'institutionnalisation de la préhistoire. *Communications*, 54: 189–207.
- RICHARD, N. (1993): De l'art ludique à l'art magique. Interprétations de l'art pariétal au XIX^e siècle. *Bulletin de la Société Préhistorique Française*, 30(1–2): 60–68.
- RICHARD, N. (2006): «En quête des mentalités préhistoriques: Henri Breuil, l'ethnographie et l'art des cavernes». *Sur les chemins de la préhistoire. L'abbé Breuil, du Périgord à l'Afrique du Sud* (N. Coxe, dir.), Éditions Somogy, Paris: 83-97.
- RICHARD, N. (2008): *Inventer la Préhistoire. Les débuts de l'archéologie préhistorique en France*. Vuibert/Adapt-SNES, Paris.
- RIPOLL, E. (1994): *El Abate Henri Breuil (1877-1961)*. UNED, Madrid.
- RIVIÈRE, E. (1872): Sur le squelette humain trouvé dans les cavernes de Baossé-Roussé (Italie), dites grottes de Menton. *Comptes rendus hebdomadaires des séances de l'Académie des Sciences*, 74: 1204–1207.
- RIVIÈRE, E. (1897): La grotte de la Mouthe. *Compte rendu de l'Association Française pour l'Avancement des Sciences*, 26^{ème} Session: 669–687.
- RODRIGUE, A. (2004): Totems, Taboos, and Jews: Salomon Reinach and the Politics of Scholarship in Fin-de-Siècle France. *Jewish Social Studies* 10, 2: 1-19.

- ROYER, C. (1870): *Origine de l'Homme et des Sociétés*. Victor Masson et Fils, Paris.
- SANZ DE SAUTUOLA, M. (1880): *Breves apuntes sobre algunos objetos prehistóricos de la provincia de Santander*. Telesforo Martínez, Santander.
- STOCKING, G. (1987): *Victorian anthropology*. Free Press, New York.
- STRENKI, I. (2006): *Thinking about Religion: An Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden.
- TODOROV, Tz. (1993): *On human diversity: nationalism, racism, and exoticism in French thought*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA).
- TRIGGER, B.G. (2006): *A History of Archaeological Thought*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- TSCHANNEN, O. (1992): *Les théories de la sécularisation*. Droz, Genève/Paris
- TYLOR, E. B. (1866): The religion of savages. *The Fortnightly Review* 6: 71–86.
- TYLOR, E. B. (1867): Traces de la condition intellectuelle de l'home dans les âges primitifs. *Revue des tours scientifiques de la France et de l'étrangère*, 4^{ème} année, 45: 705–710.
- WARTELLE, J. C. (2004): La Société d'Anthropologie de Paris de 1859 à 1920. *Revue des sciences humaines*, 1(10): 125–171.
- WILSON, B.R. (1969): *Religion in secular society*. Penguin, Harmondsworth.