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N. K. Sandars

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CAMBRIDGE  
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1957

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107475427](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107475427)

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First published 1957

First paperback edition 2014

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-107-47542-7 Paperback

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## PREFACE

...All the arts of things necessary, useful, convenient and even in large part those of human pleasure were invented in the poetic centuries before the philosophers came.

VICO, *Axioms* LII, 217.

PREHISTORY, like history, is concerned with the individual man, who may be anonymous but not a cipher. Prehistory is algebra to the arithmetic of history: it calculates in unknown quantities but the processes of calculation are the same. Moreover, historical movements may deepen a furrow pushed often and long before: monks of the Thebiad travelled to Ireland the old megalithic route; pilgrims to Saint James of Compostella were repeating a prehistoric journey.

In the archaeological record the 'individual inventor' of all the arts already plays principal, though at such a distance that, after one forward step, he loses himself in his background, his environment. In the following chapters he may seem altogether lost, but he is only hidden because of the bluntness of our perceptions and the rudeness of our techniques. Moreover, because a certain environment has been the scene of exceptional human actions which can be observed archaeologically, we expect it always to be accompanied by such actions; but, though favourable environment is an essential condition, the originator is in the last resort the unpredictable individual, and we ought probably to treat all archaeological evidence as exceptional and unpredictable until shown not to be so. It is this that we first observe in any period: a stone circle in Brittany, a great tumulus in Burgundy, fortress walls in Languedoc; these were the work of individuals, but they are surrounded by wastes of uneventful conservatism, a protracted 'Neolithic', post-Hallstatt provincialism. These passive periods no less than the other are the concern of the archaeologist, and their unexceptional course is to some extent predictable.

The time has hardly come for a general prehistory of France. Too small a part of the things necessary and convenient, let alone those of human pleasure, are yet known. I have attempted in this study something more partial, less ambitious, and I hope, at this stage in our knowledge, more fruitful. Population was sparse enough in the centuries that pass for a 'Bronze Age' in central and western Europe, particularly in the earlier phase, for movements of people and ideas to work to a large extent independently of one another, only attracting and repelling each other at certain points, causing eddies within the main current. Towards the end of this period increased population and freer movement led to growing interdependence and a much greater complexity. For these reasons it is possible to focus attention on certain aspects of the period in France and to follow

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selected groups of people, particularly those which stemmed from the great foci of Tumulus and Urnfield culture in central Europe; which also means concentration on eastern and north-eastern France, as it was there that the new cultures first rooted, and thence new ideas were diffused. Later the south took on its dynamic role in a diffusion of ideas, if not of peoples.

This then is the study of a particular aspect of the French Bronze Age, and of certain cultures—identifiable groups of people—more than others; it does not attempt to treat all in equal detail. This emphasis on the north-eastern regions must not obscure the importance of influences from other directions such as north Italy and Spain at the beginning of the Bronze Age, and from the Atlantic shores towards its end. These I have referred to but not followed closely. In this way an attempt is made to widen a little our quantitative knowledge of a great region in a vital period; the deepening of qualitative knowledge must be left to those in near and constant touch with the land itself.

I have drawn as much as possible on new research and on those publications which had appeared up till the winter of 1954. In this I have been greatly helped by the revival of interest in Bronze Age questions within France and the rapidly augmenting catalogue of new discoveries, particularly of the last few years, which this has brought about. The first part of a most valuable general study of the 'Iron Age' in the Midi has appeared too recently to discuss or make use of. This is *Le Premier Age du Fer languedocien*, Part I, *Les Habitats*, by M. Louis and O. and J. Taffanel. Owing to the kindness of the authors I was able to see much of the material which they publish here; that which is new does not, I think, alter the general scheme I have adopted when discussing the Midi, although I am not entirely in agreement with some of their conclusions, as will be seen.

On my various visits to France I have worked in a number of provincial museums and private collections. This was for the most part soon after the war when museum authorities in France, as in the rest of Europe, were working under particular difficulties so that important material was not always available for study. Help and interest were, however, constant from curators of museums, owners of private collections, and directors of Circonscriptions des antiquités préhistoriques. A further journey to museums and sites in the Midi was made possible by a grant from the Craven Committee, Oxford University, for which I am most grateful.

It is a great pleasure to acknowledge my debt to all those friends in France without whose constant and unflinching help this book could not have been written. Their help has included information about sites before publication, and permission to use drawings and photographs of new material. In addition to acknowledgements hereafter in the text, I want to thank for particular kindness on many occasions M. L. Armand-Calliat,



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Dr J. Arnal, MM. A. Brisson, G. Gaudron (Inspecteur principal des Musées de Province), J.-J. Hatt, R. Louis, A. Niederlander, P. Parruzot, P. Ponsich and Mlle Odette and M. J. Taffanel. Mlle Taffanel has kept me in touch with the important work in Languedoc and with much else of interest from the Midi. Amongst many conservateurs, excavators and other experts in France I owe special thanks to MM. M. Clouet, S. Gagnière, P. Giot, P. Hélène, P. Huchard, Prof. Jannoray, MM. R. Jeanjean, R. Joffroy, Col. M. Louis, MM. P. Poulain, A. Sicard, Mlle. C. Sauer. Outside France I have had valuable help from Prof. W. Kimmig, also from Prof. W. Dehn, Dr H. Hencken, Dr O. Uenze, Prof. M.-R. Sauter and Prof. W. Werner.

In addition to those already referred to I have to thank the following authors, editors of periodicals, reviews and societies for permission to copy drawings and photographs: *l'Anthropologie*, *Bulletino di paleontologia italiano*, J. Déchelette (Editions Picard), *Gallia*, *Germania*, J. Hawkes, M. Lapiere, *Revue archéologique de l'est et du centre-est*, H. Rolland, C. F. A. Schaeffer, *Revue archéologique* (Presses Universitaires de France); the following societies; Historiques et Archéologiques de Périgord, Normande d'études préhistoriques, Préhistoriques Françaises, des Sciences historiques et naturelles de l'Yonne, the Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Urgeschichte; also the following museums: the British Museum; the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Musées Nationaux, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; Schweizerische Landesmuseum, Zürich; and provincial museums of Angoulême, Auxerre, Avallon, Beaune, Besançon, Châlons-sur-Marne, Chalon-sur-Saône, Dôle, Epernay, les Eyzies, Haguenau, Ecole Saint-Jacques, Joigny, Lons-le-Saunier, Lyon (Musée Guimet), Moulin, Nancy (Musée Lorrain), Narbonne, Nîmes, Perpignan, Poitiers (Ecole de Paléontologie), Semur-en-Auxois, Sens, Strasbourg (Château des Rohan), Toulouse (Musée d'Histoire Naturelle), Troyes, Saint-Père-sous-Vézelay.

I owe a particular debt to Prof. C. F. C. Hawkes for his unfailing help, criticism and encouragement in many discussions, also to Prof. V. G. Childe who first guided me through the perplexities of French prehistory and was always ready to remind me of the wider European issues. I have benefited much from helpful and stimulating discussions with Prof. Stuart Piggott and have been much helped by Dr Glyn Daniel and in discussions with Mr J. J. Butler, Mr J. D. Cowen, Mr T. Dunbabin, Dr P. Jacobsthal, Mr T. G. E. Powell and Dr Savory. Many more have helped at various stages in the collecting of material and writing, all of whom I cannot name, but in conclusion I owe most of all to the criticism and practical help of my sister whose suggestions have made easier both my task and that of the reader.

N. K. S.

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