

The cave of lascaux essay



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During the prehistoric time, people would express their thought by drawing many pictures in the caves and usually drew on the walls and ceilings inside the caves. The most common pictures in cave paintings are big wild animals, such as horses, tigers, deer, and tracings of human hands. Many cave paintings were found all over Europe and usually, they were on the wall of abandoned cave with the blocked entrance for many years, so the paintings were well preserved inside the cave. Cave paintings started during the time called the Paleolithic Age.

According to archeologists, around 40, 000 B. C. , the earliest arts were created and cave paintings were started. Also the caves where paintings have been found are not likely to use as shelter, but they were used for ceremonial purposes (Tedesco, 2008). Although cave paintings are old and faded, because of today's technologies, scientists and archeologists can trace back when they were painted or how people lived back in prehistoric time by carbon dating methods, so these cave paintings can give valuable clues for everybody.

For many people, those caves can be interesting to explore because they can know the culture and beliefs of that past time. In fact, to know the culture and beliefs of that past time, people should visit the Lascaux cave because of its prehistoric and cultural value. The Lascaux cave was accidentally discovered on September 12th, 1940 and it has many amazing prehistoric mural paintings. The cave was discovered by the four school boys named Marcel Ravidat, Jacques Marsal, Simon Coencas and Georges Agnel from Montignac in the south central, western corner of France.

Those four boys were hunting in the woods with their dog. The dog suddenly fell into the cave and would not answer the owner's call. After they tried to drop some small rocks to the whole, it appeared that rocks fell endlessly. So, they decided to go inside the cave and explored more. Those boys thought that it was a dark cave full of dirt but as they got closer they found out that the cave that they entered was not just a cave, but it was full with cave paintings (Bataille, p. 137).

Word of the discovery spread quickly across the village of Montignac and it was quickly classified and preserved as pre-historic cave on December 27th, 1940 and opened to the public since 1948 ("The cave of Lascaux," 2008). In 1963, the French government had to close the cave because it suffered from fungus infections due to many visitors and they had to build same identical cave called Lascaux (ii) in order to allow visitors to explore the cave. Thus, many people visited this prehistoric cave since it was opened to the public.

Over the years, it became popular attraction to many tourists because of its prehistoric paintings. Lascaux cave is also considered to be the oldest regions of Ice Age era mural drawings in Europe (Grand, 1967). The drawings discovered in the caves portray various species such as bulls, bison, and horses. However, there are a few paintings that have humanlike shape and one of the popular paintings is called "the Shaft of the Dead Man." It is a group drawing and the face of the dead man appears to look like a bird's face on a human body.

The bull with lowered horns shows the bull's wild behavior and the bird with the long leg appears to be waiting for the dead man to eat. Those creatures

are also drawn in an even triangular shape (see Figure 1). According to BBC News article, " Ice Age star map discovered," " the eyes of the bull, birdman and bird represent the three prominent stars Vega, Deneb and Altair, known as the Summer Triangle. 17, 000 years ago, this region of sky would never have set below the horizon" (Whitehouse, 2000).

By looking at those pictures, scientists and archeologists can predict that prehistoric people may have used stars as a map to locate places. Although, it is hard to say what the purpose of the cave was, archeologists suggested that the cave may have served as sacred or ceremonial meeting place because most of the paintings are located far away inside the cave, and many of the chambers do not have easy entrances (Tedesco, 2008). Thus, those pictures definitely can tell that prehistoric people were also sophisticated because they used fine artistic skills and expressed their ideas by the drawings and the engravings.

Some people think these prehistoric sites are not of great importance because they are living in modern life. They also do not want to look back how it was in prehistoric time because they think the living style was not comparable to modern life. However, understanding history is important not only because they are cave sites, but also because they are the past culture of a group of people.

The web article, " The Value of Archaeology" states that " Archaeological sites have scientific significance to many disciplines s they help reconstruct who, what, when, where, how and why of culture process. Sites also have public value for education and a sense of our common human past" (Gilsen,

2008). By knowing the past, humans has an ability to change the environment with different aspects and cultures because the humans invent new ways of life and replace the old with the new environment directly through the culture to suit the daily requirements. For example, in the past, people would hunt animals using the bows and arrows and preserved their memories through drawings or engravings.

But, people in modern life use their guns for hunting and collect their memories with the modern technologies such as photos or videos. When there is no cultural value, the process of passing through the culture from one generation to another will be very tough and our way of life such as languages, beliefs and customs will vanish. By visiting the Lascaux cave, people can get more information of the past culture. Therefore, visiting the cave site can definitely tell important cultural value of the region, and it will preserve the past.

In conclusion, understanding the cultural value is important because our ways of life will fade away without knowing the culture. Lascaux's paintings are unique because scientists are able to determine the life of people and the artistic value by looking at those drawings and engravings. Thus, by visiting the cave, people can get more information about the prehistoric cultural values because prehistoric arts were also sophisticated as it is shown by their fine artistic skills.