

**L'ABRI DU PAPE
(ROCHERS DE FREYR, FALMIGNOUL,
DINANT, NAMUR PROVINCE):
LOCATION, BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION**

Lawrence Guy Straus, Jean-Marc Léotard and Marcel Otte

PREAMBLE

As accidents of archeological history and of geomorphology, the Neolithic and Mesolithic of Belgium are best known from open-air sites in Middle and Lower Belgium. Although many cave and rockshelter loci of these periods have been dug over the past century and a third on the fringes of the Ardennes in Upper Belgium, many were either unsystematically looted or (due to inadequate excavation techniques and/or actual considerable mixture within the surficial deposits) poorly distinguished from underlying Upper Paleolithic materials. Among Belgian cave sites with a significant, usable Mesolithic record, really only Coléoptère and Remouchamps in the eastern part of Liège Province stand out (Gob 1984), whereas the Neolithic is best known as a source for "contamination" of Magdalenian collections with human burial remains, ceramics and domesticated fauna (notably in the caves of the Lesse and Upper Belgian Meuse basins) (e.g., Charles 1996; Bahn and Otte 1985). The question of Mesolithic-Neolithic "relationships" on the territory that is today Belgium c.6500-6000 bp, has largely been addressed with archeological materials from the loess-covered Hesbaye Plateau and alluvium of the Lower Belgian Meuse Valley (e.g., Keeley 1992; Gob 1990; Keeley and Cahen 1989; Gustin *et al.* 1994). And the richest Mesolithic lithic artifact inventories are from sites in the sandy substrates of Lower Belgium--bereft of organic remains (including fauna), and poor in stratified sequences and in radiometric dates (e.g., Vermeersch 1984). Open-air Mesolithic sites not far from Pape in the Upper Belgian Meuse basin (Sarts-à-Soile) and adjacent Lower French Meuse area (Roma, Roc-la-Tour II, Roche-à-Fépin) are not radiometrically dated and lack faunal evidence (Rozoy 1978, 1990). Yet some (the French sites) at least may have been part of the same settlement-subsistence system as at least some of the occupations of Pape (?).

On the other hand, recent years have produced a series of discoveries of Neolithic *and* Mesolithic burials (individual and collective) in several small caves along the Upper Meuse, Lesse and Sambre valleys. The Mesolithic burials---accompanied by little or no cultural material---are all radiocarbon dated between c. 9000-9500 bp (uncal.)(save one case at 7500 bp), while the Neolithic ones---associated with Michelsberg and Seine-Oise-Marne (i.e., Middle-Late Neolithic) artifacts---are dated between c. 5300-3600 bp (Toussaint *et al.* 1996a,b). Two of the best, most recently excavated funerary caves are located just upstream of the Lesse-Meuse confluence, in the Rochers de Freyr: La Grotte Margaux and l'Abri des Autours---very near l'Abri du Pape (Cauwe 1988, 1993, 1998).

All three of these caves, plus several others (e.g., La Grotte Bibiche also in the Freyr Cliffs and La Grotte du Bois Laiterie further downstream along the Meuse) were discovered by one indefatigable and perspicacious speleo-archeological prospector, Philippe Lacroix, a.k.a. "Bibiche". It should not be surprising that this long-time, well-known rockclimber should have found so many sites on the Rochers de Freyr, a most favorite practice venue of the Alpine Club of Belgium, since Lacroix has been personally responsible for laying out many of its awesome, vertical "routes".

Although spectacular in its setting (Photo 1), at the base of the sheer, 100 m. Freyr Cliff near the rock formation known as the Gueule de Lion ("Lion's Jaw") on the bank of the Meuse almost directly opposite the fabled Chateau de Freyr, the Pape rockshelter appears to be minuscule and insignificant. However, though indeed small in area, it has proven to be very deep in stratigraphy and rich in information about the human settlement of the Upper Belgian Meuse Basin during much of the lower and mid Holocene, from early Mesolithic until Roman times. It has provided several radiocarbon dates, faunal and floral information, artifact assemblages in stratified context, abundant burials of various periods (especially within the later Neolithic)---all of which enrich the relatively depauperate late prehistoric and protohistoric archeological records of the western Ardennes region. Although small in surface area, l'Abri du Pape deserves not only excavation---initiated by Léotard following the successful results of Lacroix's risky initial testing---but complete, interdisciplinary analyses. Such is the goal of the present volume on Pape: a small site, but one that is valuable and not to be ignored simply on quantitative grounds.

The main archeological work at Pape was carried out by the Service de Préhistoire de l'Université de Liège and S.O.S. Fouilles de la Communauté Française in 1989-90, under the direction of Otte and Léotard (Léotard 1989, 1993) (Photos 2 and 3). They excavated Medieval, Roman, Iron Age and Neolithic levels and uncovered the top of the Mesolithic sequence that had first been revealed in Lacroix's 1988 test pit at the rear of the rockshelter. Limited further excavation of the artifact-poor uppermost (protohistoric and late prehistoric) levels was conducted by the Université de Liège under the field direction of I. López Bayón in 1994. Remnant Neolithic deposits and the Mesolithic levels (20-23 + sterile underlying layers) were excavated by the Universities of New Mexico and Liège in 1993-94 under the direction of Straus and with financial support from the National Geographic Society and L.S.B. Leakey Foundation (USA), as well as from the Ministère de la Région Wallonne and Services Fédéraux des Affaires Scientifiques, Techniques et Culturelles.

Permission to excavate at Pape was graciously granted by the landowner, Baron F. de Bonaert, and by the tenant of the Rochers de Freyr, the Club Alpin de Belgique.

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

L'Abri du Pape is located at 4 deg. 53' 30" E x 50 deg. 13' 10" N on the right (East) bank of the Meuse River in Namur Province. The site is at an elevation of c. 100 m a.s.l., at

the base of the Rochers (or "Roches") de Freyr, the summit of which is at c. 200 m a.s.l. The Carboniferous limestone cliffs are essentially vertical in this sector, a few meters upstream of the Gueule de Lion point. Pape is 7 km downstream along the Meuse from the French border at Givet and 5 km upstream of the Belgian city of Dinant. It is 3 km upstream of the confluence of the Lesse River with the Meuse and lies on the western edge of the high, narrow interfluvial promontory between these two major rivers of the western edge of the Ardennes. The rockshelter faces southwest and, given this ideal solar exposure, can become quite warm in the afternoon. The Gueule de Lion shields the site from north winds. Fairly easy access to the interfluvial plateau above Pape is provided via the Ravin des Cuves (or "Colébi"), 500 m upstream of the site. This talweg is lined with caves including Grotte Margaux. Administratively, Pape lies between the villages of Falmignoul and Anseremme in the Township (Commune) of Dinant.

The main covered area of the rockshelter now measures c. 8 m wide by c. 5 m deep. The entire talus terrace in the alcove at the foot of the cliff covers a larger area: c. 115 sq. m. The excavation trench was sited in the axis of the deepest part of the rockshelter, perpendicular to the cliff base and extends from it to the talus break-in-slope. The surface of the terrace is c. 8.5 m above the present (artificially lock-and-dam maintained high) level of the Meuse. The talus descends very steeply to the bank of the river, which is no more than c. 8-10 m away from the break-in-slope. Obviously, the river may have been slightly farther from the site during some of the pre- or protohistoric human occupations. The topmost Mesolithic stratum (20) lies only c. 4.5 m above the present Meuse level. This was a real riverside site.

The post-Mesolithic levels total nearly 4 m in thickness, testifying to an extremely rapid rate of deposition (especially if one considers the existence of a considerable hiatus between Middle Mesolithic Stratum 20 and Middle Neolithic Stratum 18). Given the site's position at the base of a 100 m cliff composed of highly friable limestone, the rapidity of *éboulis* and fine sediment deposition is not surprising. Indeed, it is very likely that the shelter overhang was considerably greater (extending much further SW) during Mesolithic times than at present. That extensive overhang is now reduced to a mass of blocks and gravels on the talus, which is essentially an angular scree.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Specific excavation techniques of the Otte-Léotard and Straus excavations of the different Pape components (protohistoric, Neolithic and Mesolithic) will be described in the relevant sections of this work. In general, most deposits and all culture-bearing ones were hand-excavated using small tools (trowels, brushes, dustpans, etc.) and the sediments screened (mainly in water in the Meuse). Certain areas were systematically sampled for micro- and malacofauna, as well as for pollen. All measurements (including piece-plots of artifacts and faunal remains) were made relative to a grid system laid out by Léotard, with a site zero datum

inscribed on the cliff-face slightly above the surface of the terrace. All depths were therefore recorded as "below datum".

The trench opened by Léotard extended outward from the rear of the shelter (taking advantage of Lacroix's 1988 test pit at the base of the cliff in the deepest part of the shelter) 6.5 m to the talus break-in-slope. It is 2 m wide, except inside the very rear of the shelter, where it is c. 2.5 m wide. An adjacent strip of 2 m was later dug along the NW edge of the trench to broaden the exposure in the uppermost levels (proto-history and late Neolithic) and to relieve the danger of general collapse of the deep, standing stratigraphic section of the main trench. However the main sample of Neolithic levels totaled no more than c. 17 sq. m and the sole area of sampling of Mesolithic levels totaled no more than c. 14 sq. m---both including Lacroix's 1988 and 1992 test pits (c. 3.25 sq. m combined).

Because of the loose, open-work nature of most of the sediments, the excavation had to be thoroughly shored up with sheets of plywood and cross-beams of wood and iron running from wall to wall of the trench. Even so, constantly shifting scree made excavation precarious and led to collapses both during and between excavation seasons. Shoring had to be extended downward as the excavation progressed and made it impossible to draw all stratigraphic sections. In places, by the time the excavation was terminated, it had reached nearly 7 m below the surface of the terrace.

As noted above, the Medieval, Roman, Iron Age and Neolithic levels combined made up nearly 4 m, whereas the Mesolithic strata totaled c. 70 cm. in thickness. These in turn overlay a 2 m-thick series of culturally sterile (or almost sterile) clay, gravel and block deposits. Although there is no clear, culturally diagnostic sign of Magdalenian or other pre-Mesolithic human occupation, some faunal and geological indications suggest that the basal deposits may have been laid down during the terminal Last Glacial (Dryas III?). The cultural sequence, however, corresponds to the late Preboreal, Boreal, late Atlantic and subsequent phases of the Holocene. The human use of l'Abri du Pape was a Post-Pleistocene affair, but essentially post-dated the 9-9.5 kya Mesolithic burials of nearby Margaux and Autours. Bedrock was attained only at the rear of the rockshelter, where it directly underlay Stratum 23. In that area the first Mesolithic occupation established itself atop bare rock, while on the terrace in front those first bivouacs were atop talus scree probably in a hollow between two lateral cones of éboulis descending from the sides of the shelter alcove.

In what follows, the different excavators of the site and analysts of the materials---cultural and natural---describe the results of their respective work, the result of an unusual collaborative "relay" in the study of this small but interesting site.

LEOTARD, Jean-Marc. Université de Liège, Service de Préhistoire, 7, place du XX août, bât. A1, 4000 Liège BELGIQUE or Région Wallonne, Service de Fouilles de Liège, 62 avenue des Tilleuls, 4000 Liège BELGIQUE.

OTTE, Marcel. Université de Liège, Service de Préhistoire, 7, place du XX août, bât. A1, 4000 Liège BELGIQUE.

STRAUS, Lawrence G. University of New Mexico, Department of Anthropology, Albuquerque, NM 87131 USA.

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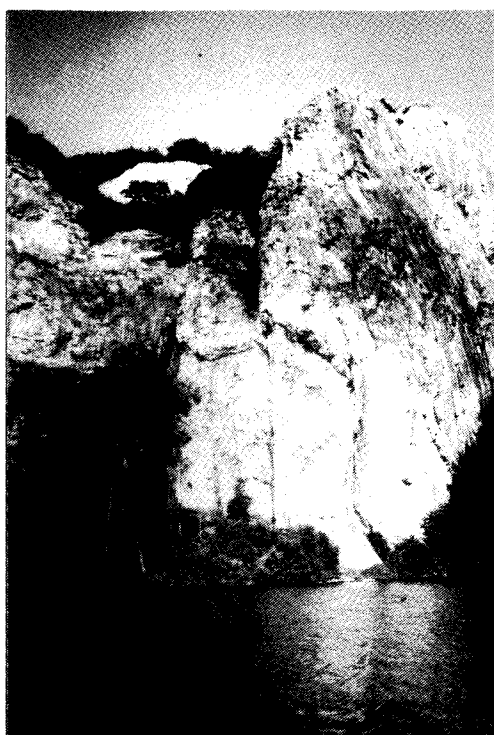


Photo 1. L'Abri du Pape at the base of the Rochers de Freyr. (Photo: L.G. Straus)



Photo 2. Excavations at l'Abri du Pape. (Photo: L.G. Straus)

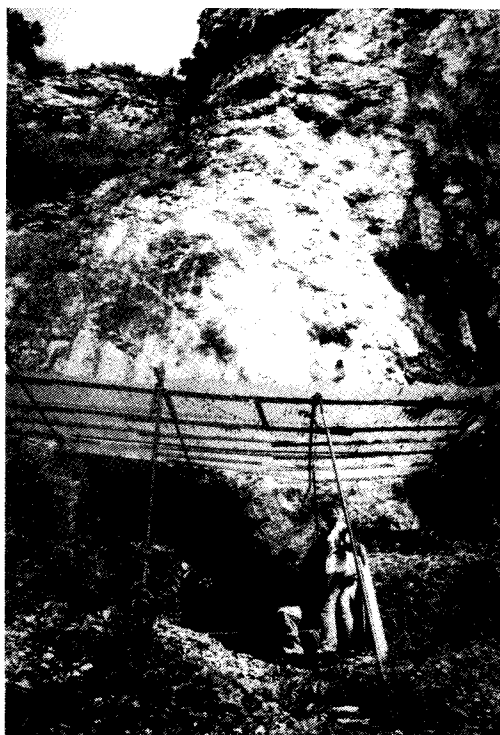


Photo 3. Excavations at l'Abri du Pape. (Photo: L.G. Straus)