

# 1

## ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND YEARS TOWARDS CIVILIZATION

Birth is a wonderfully random event. Like winning a lottery. We all descend from two cells - an egg and a sperm - that multiply to become the approximately 40 trillion cells that make up our body.

But why was it precisely that egg among the 500,000 maternal ones and that sperm among the 50 million that could have reached it?

Nothing is more random than birth.

In contrast, if birth is unpredictable, death is a certainty determined at the very moment of birth. Our existence begins under the sign of Chance and ends under the sign of Determinism.

Yet, those who disappear leave a trace in the memory of those who remain. Burials, increasingly solemn through ritual, are in some way a form of survival.

You are about to embark on a journey spanning 100,000 years—from the first burials by Neanderthals to 10,000 years ago, when the era of hunter-gatherers was coming to an end, and the last Ice Age gave way to agriculture.

In that stretch of time, the cult of the dead goes hand in hand with the dawn of civilization.

While the society of abundance has sought to remove the end of life from view, science and technology have transformed it from an instantaneous event into a slow process that can last months or years.

Today, between life and death lies an intermediate zone that demands to be treated with respect for the person, their values, and their freedom. This gives this exhibition a philosophical and civic message, building a bridge between Neanderthals and us, *Homo sapiens*.

# 2

## THE FIRST GUARDIANS OF MEMORY BURIALS IN THE PALEOLITHIC

Funerary practices offer us an opportunity to investigate the deeper elements of the thinking of Paleolithic humans, dating back to around 100,000 years ago, in a period that predates the emergence of artistic expressions. Death rituals, in fact, do not correspond to material needs but to concerns of a different nature, concerning the fate of an individual – or their body – after death. These rituals represent an important stage in the social history of humanity and can enrich our knowledge of the human group to which the deceased belonged.

Thanks to burials, which have protected human remains from destruction by external agents, we have almost complete skeletons of these populations.

Paleolithic burials are an exceptional event, probably reserved for people who had played an important role within their group.

# 3

## THE CASTS

This exhibition displays casts of prehistoric burials that accurately reproduce, with remarkable aesthetic detail, the situation uncovered during excavation. A cast made at the time of discovery is not a mere copy because it replicates a context that no longer exists, as it has been disrupted by the excavation process.

Since the 1980s, casts of this type have been made by creating a matrix (negative) in silicone elastomer and a positive in resin. In the case of burials discovered before these materials were available, the cast was made by repositioning the finds (skeleton, grave goods) in their original position, based on photographs and excavation diaries.

The technique used to create these casts (from making the negative and positive to coloring and patination) was developed by René David, at the time working at the Laboratoire du Lazaret in Nice, directed by Henry de Lumley.

The Turin collection of casts of prehistoric burials - partly made in Turin and partly obtained from other laboratories - is the richest of its kind internationally. This exhibition announces the creation of a Museum of Human Evolution, which will be housed in the Palazzo degli Istituti Anatomici of the University of Turin.

# 4.1

## THE PROTAGONISTS

Although some funerary practices (such as the accumulation of corpses and possibly ritual cannibalism) are documented in earlier periods, it is only during the Middle Paleolithic that intentional burials appear. The oldest ones have been discovered in the Middle East and date back to about 100,000 years ago. They are attributed to Neanderthals (*Homo neanderthalensis*) and to early representatives of *Homo sapiens* (Middle Paleolithic *Homo sapiens*). This practice was later spread to Europe by the Neanderthals. However, these are always very simple and rare burials.

Later, with the Upper Paleolithic *Homo sapiens*, burials became more frequent and complex, sometimes accompanied by rich grave goods.

The two species of the genus *Homo* who practiced the first burials, *neanderthalensis* and *sapiens*, represent very recent episodes in our evolutionary history. Both species derive from *Homo heidelbergensis*, a species present in Africa, Europe, and western Asia, from which *Homo neanderthalensis* evolved around 400,000 years ago. The lineage of *Homo sapiens*, on the other hand, appeared 300,000-200,000 years ago. In the diagram, the partial overlap between the areas of the two species suggests possible interbreeding, which accounts for the presence of 2-4% Neanderthal genes in our DNA.

# 4.2

## THE PROTAGONISTS

### **The Neanderthals**

The Neanderthals (*Homo neanderthalensis*), who populated Europe and Western Asia, evolved from an earlier human species, *Homo heidelbergensis*, around 400,000 years ago. Strong brow ridges, a receding forehead, and a jaw without a bony chin are characteristic of this hominin, who in the collective imagination represents the typical human fossil. He is associated with the Mousterian, a complex of Middle Paleolithic cultures characterized by lithic tools made from flakes, especially scrapers and points.

Neanderthals became extinct around 40,000 years ago when the first anatomically modern human populations (*Homo sapiens*) arrived in Europe.

### **The Middle Paleolithic *Homo sapiens***

The first anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) appeared in Africa between 300,000 and 200,000 years ago and spread to Eurasia just over 100,000 years ago. In the Middle East, they coexisted with Neanderthals, sharing the same Middle Paleolithic culture (Mousterian). In their skulls, the strong brow ridges disappeared, the forehead became vertical, and the jaw presented a bony chin. From these early modern humans, populations of Upper Paleolithic *Homo sapiens* will eventually emerge and spread across the European territory, arriving around 40,000 years ago.

### **The Upper Paleolithic *Homo sapiens***

The classic Upper Paleolithic European humans are represented by Cro-Magnon Man, who shows some regional variability. The typical form is characterized by a tall stature (average of 175 cm). Throughout the Upper Paleolithic, various cultures succeeded each other, marked by the production of lithic blades and tools made from hard animal tissues (bone, antler, ivory). In Italy, after the initial phase (Aurignacian, from about 40,000 to 30,000 years ago), the Gravettian (around 29,000-20,000 years ago) and the Epigravettian (around 19,000-10,000 years ago) followed, marking the end of the Paleolithic. In other parts of Europe, the Gravettian was followed by the Solutrean and the Magdalenian.

# 5

## THE DISCOVERY OF PALEOLITHIC BURIALS

In the last decades of the 19th Century, the scientific community, influenced primarily by the authoritative figure of Gabriel de Mortillet, was resistant to the idea that Paleolithic humans had practiced funerary rituals. Nevertheless, Paleolithic human remains that had been intentionally buried had already been discovered, such as the Red Lady of Paviland (Wales) in 1823 and the Cro-Magnon Shelter remains (Dordogne) in 1868. However, these finds consisted of incomplete and disassembled skeletons.

In 1872, Émile Rivière discovered a complete skeleton (a cast of which is displayed here) in the Caviglione Cave (Balzi Rossi, between Ventimiglia and Menton) along with grave goods. This find became famous as the "Homme de Menton." Rivière interpreted the remains as those of a man who had died "in his sleep".

In the following years, additional burials were uncovered in the Balzi Rossi caves. In these cases, the evidence for funerary rituals was undeniable, yet de Mortillet argued that these were not Paleolithic burials but rather more recent Neolithic interments.

In 1901, Prince Albert I of Monaco organized meticulous excavations in some Balzi Rossi caves. At the Grotte des Enfants, three burials were uncovered, and their Paleolithic age was beyond doubt due to the accuracy of the archeological documentation. This largely resolved the debate, although skepticism persisted regarding older burials.

When the Neanderthal skeleton of La Chapelle-aux-Saints (Corrèze, France) was discovered in 1908 (a cast of which is also displayed here), the possibility of burial practices was reluctantly considered.

# 6

## TRACING NEANDERTHALS

To date, around forty Neanderthal burials are known in Europe and Southwestern Asia, many of which have yielded complete or nearly complete skeletons, allowing for a good knowledge of their skeletal anatomy.

In the early decades of the Twentieth Century, the most significant discoveries occurred in French locations: La Chapelle-aux-Saints, La Quina, Le Moustier, and La Ferrassie. Their excavation was carried out with methods that were less precise than those used today, and the documentation in many cases is not accurate. For this reason, the presence of grave goods, which has occasionally been reported, is not always certain.

# 7

## NEANDERTHALS THE MOST FAMOUS BURIAL

On August 3, 1908, abbés Amédée and Jean Bouyssonie, along with their brother Paul, discovered what would become the most famous burial of a Neanderthal in the Bouffia Bonneval, a small cave near the village of La Chapelle-aux-Saints (Corrèze, France). The skeleton was hastily extracted, without photographic documentation being made, and we have only a description and some schematic drawings of the burial.

The skeleton, identified as belonging to a male around fifty years old, was found in a pit. It was the first almost complete Neanderthal skeleton ever discovered. It was sent to Paris to Marcellin Boule, who described it in a monograph that became the foundation of our understanding of the anatomy of classic Neanderthals, dating to around 50,000 years ago.

### **Burial Goods**

In their description, the discoverers mentioned the bones of a large herbivore leg (probably a bison) and some reindeer vertebrae, placed near the right humerus. Additionally, some flint tools were associated with the skeleton, but they were later lost.

### **Interpretation of the Burial**

The discoverers were convinced that the individual had been subject to an intentional burial. The debate over recognizing burial practices in the Upper Paleolithic had almost subsided by this time. However, the situation was different for the Neanderthals, who were considered much older and more "ape-like" according to the views of the time. Boule himself did not accept the burial hypothesis for La Chapelle-aux-Saints. Only thanks to important discoveries made at other French sites in the following years did the scientific community gradually come to accept this reality.

# 8

## THE LATEST DISCOVERY

The Kebara cave is located in Israel, on the western slope of Mount Carmel. In 1983, a Neanderthal burial was discovered there, the only one attributed to this species found in recent times. The excavation was conducted using modern methods, ensuring careful observation accompanied by soil and laboratory analyses.

The skeleton, which lay in a shallow pit, is attributed to an adult male (about 30 years old). The skull was missing, but the mandible and hyoid bone were present. The right lower limb was absent, while only part of the left femur remained, showing significant alterations caused by sediment.

### **Ritual Elements**

No grave goods were identified. The flint tools and a boar molar visible near the skeleton likely belonged to the filling soil. The absence of the skull has been interpreted as the result of its removal by Neanderthals some time after the burial, once the ligaments connecting it to the vertebral column had decomposed.

# 9

## "GRAVES" OF THE EARLY SAPIENS

In Israel, the sites of Qafzeh and Skhul have yielded numerous remains of *Homo sapiens* dating back to the Middle Paleolithic, some of which were intentionally buried and are dated between 120,000 and 90,000 years ago.

The burials in Skhul Cave were discovered between 1929 and 1935, while those in Qafzeh were excavated between 1965 and 1979. The Qafzeh burials, found in relatively recent times, are well-documented thanks to modern excavation techniques, detailed surveys, and accompanying laboratory analyses.

# 10

## A BURIAL CAVE

The Qafzeh Cave is located in the Wadi el Hajj, near the city of Nazareth (Israel). In its Middle Paleolithic (Mousterian) layers, several *Homo sapiens* burials were discovered. Two of these, whose casts are displayed here, are particularly noteworthy. One (Qafzeh 9+10) because it is the only known double Mousterian burial; the other (Qafzeh 11) because it is the only Mousterian burial indisputably associated with a ritual offering.

### **Double Burial Qafzeh 9+10**

This burial contains the skeletons of a young adult female (Qafzeh 9) and an infant (Qafzeh 10), placed together in a pit. The infant's skeleton was positioned at the feet of the adult. No grave goods were identified.

### **Burial Qafzeh 11**

The skeleton belongs to a 12-13-year-old individual, placed in a pit with hands positioned near the head. The lower half of the skeleton was severely damaged by sediment. The skull has a fracture on the right side of the frontal bone, which was not the direct cause of death as signs of bone healing are evident.

One grave good, interpreted as a ritual offering, was found: a fallow deer antler placed on the hands and upper chest.

# 11

## THE SUNSET OF THE PALEOLITHIC

In Italy, approximately fifty Upper Paleolithic burials have been discovered, representing more than half of those found across Europe. These date to the Gravettian period, around 24,000 years ago, and to the Epigravettian, between 14,000 and 10,000 years ago, marking the end of the Paleolithic.

Gravettian burials often include elaborate and personalized grave goods with high aesthetic and emotional value. The funerary rites appear to emphasize the deceased's identity through the uniqueness of their grave goods and ornamental objects.

In contrast, during the Epigravettian period, burials are often simpler. Grave goods are, in some cases, minimal or entirely absent.

# 12

## THE "DAME DU CAVILLON"

This burial, discovered in 1872 by Emile Rivière in the Caviglione Cave (Balzi Ross, Ventimiglia, Imperia), represents an example of art associated with funerary practices. Initially thought to belong to a male ("Homme de Menton"), the skeleton was later identified as female and is now known as the "Dame du Cavillon". The individual, approximately 35 years old and about 170 cm tall, was removed in a block and later exhibited at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris.

### **Grave Goods**

- A funerary cap made of perforated shells (*Cyclope neritaea*) and atrophic deer canines.
- A bone awl fashioned from a horse metatarsus.
- Two blades made of flint from the Alpes de Haute Provence, positioned near the occipital bone.
- A leg bracelet made of perforated *Cyclope* shells.

Parts of the skeleton were impregnated with red ochre, particularly concentrated on the skull. In front of the face, a trench filled with sparkling hematite powder was found.

### **Relationship with Artistic Representations**

The burial was located against the right wall of the cave. On the opposite left wall, facing the burial, there is an engraved profile of a horse. A possible link between the engraving and the horse bone awl has been suggested, indicating a symbolic or ritualistic connection.

# 13

## A CRO-MAGNON AT BALZI ROSSI

Several skeletons discovered in the Balzi Rossi caves (Ventimiglia, Imperia) showed affinities with the classic Cro-Magnon Man. The find where these similarities are most evident - due to cranial features and particularly the tall stature (around 180 cm) - was discovered during the excavations organized in 1901 by Prince Albert I of Monaco and directed by Léonce de Villeneuve in the Grotte des Enfants (Grotta dei Fanciulli). Three burials were uncovered there (in addition to the previously discovered double burial), one from the Epigravettian period and two from the Gravettian. One of the latter, from the so-called "Foyer H," contained the skeleton of an adult male (Grotte des Enfants 4, GE 4). The body had been placed in a pit in a supine, extended position, with the hands placed against the neck.

### **Grave Goods:**

- Near the skull, some perforated shells (*Cyclope neritaea*) and deer canine teeth, interpreted as a "crown."
- A sandstone plaque with traces of red ochre behind the skull.
- At the chest level, some perforated *Cyclope* shells (possibly a pectoral or collar?).
- Some "high-quality" flint tools.

# 14.1

## THE YOUNG PRINCE

This burial is the richest known in Italy and one of the richest in Europe. It was discovered by Luigi Cardini and Luigi Bernabò Brea in 1942 in the Arene Candide Cave (Finale Ligure, Savona). The skeleton belongs to a male individual, approximately 15-16 years old, and about 170 cm tall. The body had been placed in the pit on a bed of red ochre, which also covered the body and, as the corpse decomposed, impregnated the skeleton. Between the jaw and the left shoulder, near a severe lesion with bone destruction, there was an accumulation of yellow ochre.

### **Grave Goods and Ornaments**

The grave goods and personal ornaments include prestigious items, suggesting that the deceased belonged to a privileged social group, which led to the nickname "Young Prince". These include:

- A funerary cap made of perforated shells (*Cyclope neritaea*), with a mammoth ivory pendant; the cap had broken up due to the decomposition of the body.
- Some perforated atrophic deer canines.
- A necklace made of perforated *Cyclope* shells and a cowrie (*Zonaria pyrum*).
- A bracelet made of *Cyclope* shells on the left forearm, with a large ivory pendant.
- A bracelet made of *Cyclope* shells on the left hand.
- Four "batons percés" made from elk antlers, three of which were decorated with engravings.
- A 25 cm long flint blade held in the right hand.
- Two ivory pendants near the knees.

# 14.2

## THE YOUNG PRINCE

### **The Prestige Objects**

The prestige objects placed in the burial include the long flint blade, four mammoth ivory pendants, and four “bâtons percés” in elk antler.

The blade is made of “zoned” flint from the Alpes de Haute Provence, more than 200 km away from Finale Ligure in a straight line.

The mammoth, the source of the ivory, was practically extinct in Italy at the time, except in Liguria, although it was very rare. It was more common in the Rhône Valley, and it is likely that the raw material or the finished artifacts were imported from that area.

The “bâtons percés”, common elsewhere, are the only such artifacts from the Italian Paleolithic. The elk was a rare animal in that area and at that time. Its antlers likely had symbolic meaning (two of them are associated with Epigravettian burials in the same cave).

### **The Causes of Death**

It is likely that the death occurred due to a severe wound that damaged the area between the jaw and the left shoulder. In fact, while the rest of the skeleton is perfectly preserved, the mandible is highly fragmented, and part of it is missing. Part of the left clavicle is also missing. It is hypothesized that the wound was caused by a large carnivore (both the panther and the bear were present in the area). Additionally, a mass of yellow ochre has been deposited in the area of the injury, a fact that seems to be related to the presence of the wound.

# 15

## DECORATIVE ART AT VILLABRUNA

An Epigravettian burial was uncovered in 1988 at a site (Villabruna A Rockshelter) discovered the year before during roadwork in the Cison Valley, in the Venetian Dolomites (Sovramonte, Belluno). The skeleton of a 25-30-year-old male, about 160 cm tall, was placed in a pit. Only parts of both femurs were preserved from the lower limbs (the rest was removed by the bulldozer during the excavation).

### **Burial Goods**

Near the left forearm, there were six objects (probably originally placed in a container made of perishable material): a bone point with decorated edges featuring a series of notches; a backed knife, an unretouched blade, a flint core; a retoucher of siltstone, and a lump of resinous substance. The bone point lacked an intermediate section, but in the burial, the point and the base appeared to be in continuity, as if they had been reassembled. The missing piece, about one centimeter long, was found in the filling of the pit, suggesting a ritual practice.

### **Artistic Expressions**

The pit was covered by a series of large cobbles, five of which were adorned with red ochre designs, featuring geometric patterns and a hyper-anthropomorphic representation. On the wall of the shelter, corresponding to the pit, there were traces of red ochre (a sequence of six vertical bands), interpreted as a marker of the burial.

# 16

## TOGETHER FOREVER

The Romito Rockshelter and the adjacent Cave, located in Papisidero (Cosenza), have yielded two double and five single epigravettian burials (a total of nine skeletons) from the period between 10,800 and 14,000 years ago.

The Romito 1+2 burial, dating to the Final Epigravettian, is one of the few known double burials from the Upper Paleolithic. The skeleton of Romito 1 belongs to an adult female of modest height (about 150 cm), while Romito 2 corresponds to a young individual, likely male, aged between 15 and 20 years, with a height of 120 cm, suffering from dwarfism (acromesomelic dysplasia) - the only known case of this condition in the Paleolithic.

The skeletons are positioned supine and extended, lying next to each other. The young individual's head rests on the woman's shoulder, and she embraces him with her left arm.

The burial of the dwarf subadult indicates care and assistance from the group to which he belonged, as someone in that condition would have had difficulty surviving in a hunter-gatherer society. It is possible that the group had a particular perception of this individual, and connections to magical-religious beliefs have been hypothesized.

### **Grave Goods:**

The burial is quite simple, as is often the case with late Paleolithic burials. The assemblage consists of two aurochs horncores, one placed near the lower limbs and the other on the right shoulder of Romito 1. Additionally, a rectangular bone fragment was found against the right tibia of Romito 2. The presence of aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) horncores, the large wild bovine ancestor of domesticated cattle, in the burial is linked to the images of aurochs profiles engraved on a nearby boulder.

### **Relationship with Artistic Manifestations:**

The burial was located in front of a large boulder with engraved aurochs profiles. This positioning, along with the presence of aurochs horncores in the burial goods, suggests a totemic significance of the aurochs.

# 17

## THE LION OF THE TAGLIENTE ROCKSHELTER

A single Epigravettian burial was discovered in 1973 during excavations led by Alberto Broglio at the Tagliente Rockshelter in Valpantena (Stallavena, Verona). The burial had been partially destroyed during the medieval period by work to enlarge the shelter. Only the lower part of the skeleton, from the pelvis to the feet, has been preserved. The individual, identified as an adult male, was laid in a supine position in a deep pit covered with large stones.

### **Grave Goods**

It is likely that the most important grave goods were in the section of the burial that was destroyed. What remains are part of the horncore of a large bovid, probably a bison, and a pebble with traces of red ochre placed between the feet.

The pit was covered with stones. One of these, weighing about 30 kg, bears an engraved profile of a lion, above which is the horn of a bovid. Another stone shows traces of ochre.

Other engraved stones were found at the site, though not in the burial context.

# 18

## ART AT TAGLIENTE ROCKSHELTER

Numerous Epigravettian artworks have been found at Tagliente Rockshelter, not associated with the burial. Many of these are simple geometric figures, but some feature naturalistic representations.

**1 - Stone with engraving of a bison.** This was engraved on a large limestone pebble. The head is depicted fairly completely: both horns are visible, the eye is represented by a horizontal line, the nose and mouth are stylized, the ear is quadrangular in shape, and the beard is a line extending toward the left front leg. The line of the back features the characteristic hump.

**2 - Stone with engraving of an ibex.** This was engraved on a limestone pebble and is considered one of the best representations of Italian Paleolithic art, known for the liveliness and confidence of the incision.

**3 - Stone with engraving of an ungulate.** The image represents a head, probably that of a female moose.

**4 - Flint nodule with engraving of a feline head.** This was engraved on the limestone cortex of a small flint nodule, with little attention to anatomical detail.

**5 - Flint nodule representing a rabbit or hare.** Sculpture in the round, utilizing the natural form of the nodule, modified with short incisions and a series of scrapes.