

# An Enigmatic Cancel

Old World Archaeologist - Summer 1987

by George Rohrer

The post office at Nice, France, issued an attractive cancellation to commemorate the first meeting of the International Congress of Human Palaeontology, October 16-21, 1982. A brief account of the symposium directed by the distinguished couple Henry and Marie Antoinette de Lumley was a part of "The First Settlers in France" presented in the Winter 1983 OWA Journal [Vol. VII, No. 1, (25)]. Not appearing in the article was a separate hand cancel honoring the same event. The significance of the design has puzzled many interested people who have observed it.

Help in interpretation comes from Monsieur Pierre Cadenat whose comprehensive "Prehistory and Philately" appeared in translation in the November, 1984 OWA Journal [Vol. VIII, No. 2, (30)]. As baffled as anyone, he secured a briefing from Monsieur de Lumley himself.

The artist, Eric Guerrier is evoking the culture of Homo erectus at the Terra Amata site located a short distance from the present beach at Nice.

The upper outline of the design represents the profile of one of the huts made of branches arranged in wigwam style. This reference is most significant, for the shelters at Terra Amata are the earliest known to have been constructed by man.

It is not known when fire was first domesticated, but its use was a part of the Homo erectus culture. The two residents nurturing a blaze are easily distinguished. The organization required to establish the encampment is evidence of a society, however loosely constructed.

A section of the coastline of the early period is represented near the top of the design. The hand cancel complements the machine cancellation whose message is more direct.

Many of the artifacts from this encampment of 400,000 years ago have been retained in the Musée de Terra Amata established on the site. Comment on the subject is abbreviated here to avoid repeating points covered in the article mentioned in the first paragraph.

The oval shape of the huts is established by noting the positions of the holes in the soil made by the insertion of the upright branches.

The sketch on the cover of the catalog was made from a painting in the museum. Thus the inspiration for the creation of the machine cancellation is quite evident. The museum collection, already impressive, keeps being enriched as new material comes to light.

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