

b6 Extinct Stone Age animals < mammoths, woolly rhino, giant elk >

This

is what we have come to: ash and shivered glass. Memorialized dead-centres without focus. Atrocious glamour / grime plastered corrosive, corroded; road salts, metals.

—Geoffrey Hill *Speech! Speech!* ¹

Common folk have long been intrigued by the remains frozen in the tundra of animals that are no more. For millennia before the invention of elephant gun, mammoth tusks were a source of entrepreneurial ivory. Naturalists have attempted to explain the Nordic mythology of frost giants in terms of the bones of extinct mammoths and beached whales that the cold of northern lands has preserved. Unicorn horns (purported to detect and eliminate poison in food, and so valued by kings and tyrants) were brought to Medieval Europe by Vikings who kept secret for 300 years the source—the ‘mythical beast’ is the Narwhal (*Monodon monoceros*).⁶ These rarest of whales live in the frigid Arctic seas north of 70° latitude and favor Baffin Bay between Canada and Greenland.⁷ The spectacular spiraling tooth (length to 10 feet and weight to 22 pounds) grows on the left-hand side of the upper jaw of males (some grow a double tusk and sometimes females grow a single thin horn).⁸

Giant deer *Megaloceros giganteus*, “Irish elk” (*sic*: moose with broad palmate antlers. Elk have thin, many branched, pointy antlers), now extinct, left their horns, which deer (family Cervidae) males characteristically grow anew each spring, strewn in Ireland and elsewhere across Eurasia.⁹

Neolithic people did not write (or did so on perishables) but some did leave cave paintings and rock etchings of animals.² The antiquity of these is evident from the animals shown, some far outside their present geographic zones and some extinct and not known to have lived in historical times. In Europe, Neolithic people left in cave niches ceremoniously arranged bones of extinct giant cave bears.³ Also, ~17,000 year old cave paintings of woolly elephants (mammoths) and woolly rhinos are found at Lascaux, France, and at Altamira, Spain.⁴ In 1995, an enormous underground (and, we can be sure, undisturbed by amateur archeologists) art gallery of 20,000 year old cave paintings was found in the Ardèche River canyon near Vallon-Pont-d’Arc, France. On the cave walls are more than 300 colorful paintings of bears, goats, hyenas, owls, oxen, panthers, and woolly rhinos. Some of the animals are shown in groups, standing or galloping; a crash of rhinos are fighting. The skull of a cave bear sits in the middle of one gallery, as if part of some ceremony. Mysteriously, no fish or day-flying birds are depicted; nor are humans but for outlines of hands painted on the cave walls with soot mixed with spit.⁵ Older paintings are at Cosquer and at Chauvet, France.

In North America, mammoths, woolly rhino, and immigrants from South America via the isthmus of Panama, as giant ground sloths and tanklike armored glyptodonts, were in prehistoric existence. The entrapped and pickled remains of 59 mammal, some 130 bird, and many insect and plant species,¹⁰ some, as saber-toothed cats, now extinct, made famous the La Brea Tar Pits, California, discovered by Gaspar de Portola’s expedition in 1769. The location is in what came to be *El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles de Porcinuncula* or “The town of our Lady Queen of the Angels of Porcinuncula” (this last is the Spanish spelling of the Italian *Porziuncola*, which means “little portion” and is the name of a church in Assisi often visited by St. Francis) or in short, in the mercury-vapor streetlamp, unflattering, blue-white lighted present, Los Angeles.¹¹

Georges Cuvier was the first naturalist to realize that, not owing to human causes, organisms have become extinct (*see* Topic e9). He studied skeletons of fossil animals in the sediments of the Paris Basin, France. Comparative anatomical studies of *mammoths* (a name he coined) and elephants convinced him that mammoths were indeed past inhabitants of Earth and that they had become extinct. Mammoths were too big to be now in hiding. On the same criterion he could argue that other prehistoric exotic forms are extinct. Cuvier believed that the Noachian Flood was real and had been of universal extent. The Flood had prepared Earth for its present inhabitants. Antediluvian creatures demonstrably different from living creatures are mammoths, woolly rhino, sabertooth cats (incorrectly called *sabertooth* “*tigers*”), giant cave bears, and giant deer. In the catastrophe of the Flood, they had perished worldwide.¹² But not all, John Fleming (1785-1857) later found, as their unworked fossils also occur in Alluvial (Post-diluvial) sediments.¹³ *See* Topic b31 for a modern account. □