Anthropology without Informants
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It is a great pleasure for me to be invited to contribute an essay on this topic, since I have enjoyed the most cordial and fruitful relationships with Spanish colleagues, especially in Cantabria, in my own research during the past 37 years. The careers of researchers from other countries run like colored threads through the historical fabric of prehistoric investigations in Spain, against the broad background of their Spanish counterparts. Despite changes in her political climate, and differences in philosophy and orientation between her own professionals, Spanish prehistory has been from the first fully international, and refreshingly open to outsiders. My own studies were from the outset facilitated by Spanish colleagues, even though they themselves sometimes could not seem to agree with each other on anything other than the importance of fomenting the discipline of prehistory. In my first years of work in Spain, students who wanted access to the wonderful artifact collections in Spain’s many museums needed written recommendations from Spanish professionals who knew them, or at least knew their professors. In my experience, recommendations written by one specialist to another were always accepted and attended with grace, even when the two specialists would not be seen in the same room together. Now, I have studied in several other countries in Europe, North Africa, and Asia, and I must say that my experience shows Spain to be unique in this respect.
As I said, the history of Spanish prehistory is intertwined with the careers of foreigners. They include such stellar personalities as the Sirets, Émile Cartailhac, the Abbé Henri Breuil, Paul Wernert, André and Arlette Leroi-Gourhan, F. Clark Howell, and, especially, Hugo Obermaier. (See Straus’s overview [1992].) But to deal with all international collaboration in Spanish prehistory is not my goal: it is the easier one of discussing North American involvement in research on Cantabrian prehistory. And, it is fortunate that this topic has been summarily treated before, in a useful chapter published by Lawrence Straus (1979). Nor will I attempt to provide a full bibliography of publications that resulted from this international collaboration: my own alone, or that of Straus, would fill many pages.

The beginnings of North American interest in Cantabrian prehistory date to the early years of the twentieth century (if we exclude from consideration earlier but sporadic visits by North Americans to Altamira, to view its famous paintings). As Straus (1979) has noted, serious involvement of North American professionals with Cantabrian prehistory seems to have begun in 1912, with visits to the caves of Castillo and Altamira by Henry Fairfield Osborn and George Grant MacCurdy, mentioned in Osborn’s work Men of the Old Stone Age (1918: 162), and in MacCurdy’s Human Origins (1924: 22). The impression the visit made on them is readily apparent from the space their works on world prehistory devote to the Spanish Paleolithic. Osborn in particular was impressed by the exceptionally complete, 15-meter-deep stratigraphic sequence of Paleolithic deposits exposed by Obermaier and others in the site of Castillo.

But in the following year, a young American came to work in Cantabria and the result was to have a truly revolutionary impact on the prehistory of North America. Though the story is known to many Americanists, it is not known by most Old World prehistorians, so I will repeat it here, since it beautifully illustrates the mutual benefits that international collaboration in research can produce.

The scholar in question was Nels C. Nelson (Obermaier 1916: 173; 1924: 162). At the time, Nelson worked for the American Museum, where he had helped Osborn prepare Men of the Old Stone Age, with its description of Osborn’s visit to Castillo, for publication. Impressed, Nelson came to help excavate at Castillo in the summer of 1913. Previous to his work there, the principles of careful stratigraphic excavation were almost unknown to U.S. archeologists, and except for isolated instances, were simply not applied to the study of North American sites (Gamio in Mexico and Uhle in California had both conducted stratigraphic excavations earlier, but Uhle’s conclusions were largely discredited in the United States). One of Nelson’s teachers at the University of California, the influential A. L. Kroeber, was not convinced that there was any possible utility to stratigraphic excavation in North America. The time depth of the accumulation of sites in the U.S. was believed by most authorities to be very short, so that there seemed to be little likelihood that peoples whose cultures were significantly different would have settled on exactly the same spot, an opinion that is both incorrect and, strangely, still used by some as an excuse for ignoring obvious “cultural” stratification in open-air sites, even in the Old World, where most prehistorians know better. What is more, such marked differences as those between
Mousterian and Upper Paleolithic assemblages had not yet been found in U.S. sites, and Kroeber, who thought that only such major disjunctions in artifact assemblages could serve as indications of cultural change, was simply not prepared to appreciate the fine-scale changes that Max Uhle could demonstrate stratigraphically in his excavations at the Emeryville shell-mound (Willey and Sabloff 1993: 63–64). Kroeber’s negative opinion discouraged others, including Nelson himself, from attempts at stratigraphic excavation.

But virtually single-handedly, Nelson was shortly to change this attitude, showing North Americans the advantages of applying the techniques of careful stratigraphic excavation that they would soon adopt as standard practice. At the time of his visit to Castillo, Nelson had already begun his own research in the Galisteo Basin, in the U.S. Southwest. Though he must have known of Uhle’s work, he apparently thought that stratigraphic excavation would be of little use in his research. But, by his own account, he was so impressed by the stratigraphy he saw exposed on the walls of the deep excavation at Castillo, and by the culture-historical results that he saw could be obtained through careful attention to stratigraphy, that on his return to the southwestern U.S., he began to search for a site with an undisturbed long stratified sequence that would establish the foundation for a cultural chronology of the Galisteo Basin, and finally found it at Pueblo San Cristobal. In a personal letter written in 1960 to the U.S. archeologist Richard Woodbury, Nelson said: “my chief inspiration to search for chronological evidence came from reading about European cave finds, from visiting several of the caves, seeing the levels marked off on the walls, and in taking part in the Castillo Cave in Spain for several weeks” (Woodbury 1960: 98).

True, Nelson did not follow the example he had seen at Castillo exactly, for what he introduced was excavation by arbitrary spits, rather than natural levels of deposition. That may be partly excused on account of the fact that much of the stratigraphy in southwestern U.S. sites is anthropogenic—results from human activities such as the excavation of building foundations, or the dumping of garbage in abandoned houses—and his previous American experience had been with shell-middens, where it is notoriously difficult to distinguish natural strata. But in spite of this, his techniques were infinitely superior to the complete disregard for stratification that had characterized U.S. archeology before. Nelson’s evident success and the obvious validity and wide diffusion of his results led to the adoption of his technique of stratigraphic excavation by the majority of those working in the field. It is quite correct to say that the collaboration of Nelson in the excavations at Castillo was a principal factor in developments that produced a revolutionary change for the better in the methods and theories of North American archeology (Willey and Sabloff 1993: 99–103).

Nelson went on to do research in Central Asia and the caves of the Yangtze. He was not involved again in Cantabrian prehistory, except perhaps incidentally. The same cannot be said for Osborn or for MacCurdy, both of whom returned to review Cantabrian research on other occasions. Under the direction of MacCurdy, the American School of Prehistoric Research sent a team of American students to
Cantabria again in 1929, where they visited the Prehistoric Museum in Santander, and the excavations of R. P. Jesús Carballo, the Museum’s director, at the site of el Pendo (MacCurdy 1930: 5). That year, most of the “students” were themselves university professors and officials, including the then deans of Mt. Holyoke College and Clark University. Carballo invited the school to return and participate in his excavations the following year, and MacCurdy did so with another group, this time consisting of university and college students who were probably more willing to get their hands dirty. The roster of participants in the 1930 excavation at el Pendo reads like a *Who’s Who* of Anthropology. Those involved were Lloyd Cabot Briggs, Jeanne Ernst, John P. Gillin, Robert Greenlee, Theodore McCown, Robert Merrill, John Z. Miller, Pachanan Mitra, Cornelius Osgood, Froehlich Rainey, Lucille Serrem, Sol Tax, J. Townsend Russell, V. J. Fewkes, and Robert W. Ehrich (MacCurdy 1931). As far as I am able to determine, those of the students who were anthropologists (the majority) without exception continued to work abroad, obtained higher degrees, and established major international reputations in later life.

There certainly must have been further visits to Cantabria by North American archeologists between 1930 and 1961, but apparently none remained to do extensive fieldwork until I (and later Henry Irwin) arrived in Santander in winter 1962. That summer (and the next), as a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Chicago, I had assisted F. Clark Howell in his excavations at the Acheulean butchering sites of Torralba and Ambrona on the Spanish Meseta. At that time Francisco Jordá Cerdá, then of the University of Oviedo, was the delegated Spanish co-director of Howell’s excavations in Spain. Jordá, Spain’s foremost authority on the Mousterian, invited me to stay in Spain to do my doctoral research on the Mousterian and the nature of the transition to the Upper Paleolithic. After a preliminary period of typological training in Talence, France, under the tutelage of my late friend and mentor, Prof. François Bordes, I returned in early winter to begin work. Cantabria is still a major international center for the study of the Middle and Upper Paleolithic, while the abundance of spectacular decorated caves there and the preeminence of Altamira in the study of Paleolithic wall art have given the name “Franco-Cantabrian” to this manifestation of creativity in Western Europe. At the time, the largest well-provenienced Mousterian collections in Spain were housed in the Museo Arqueológico Provincial de Santander, internationally famous as the home of one of the world’s finest collections of Paleolithic materials. Jordá of course presented me to its new director, Dr. Miguel Ángel García Guinea, and its vice-director, R. P. Joaquín González Echegaray. Although I was generally well treated by all my museum hosts in Spain, and particularly so by Prof. Jordá himself, I was never received more warmly elsewhere than I was by the directors of the Santander Museum. They gave me a place to work, opened the Museum’s warehouse to me, and spent hours giving me valuable advice, and discussing with me the peculiar characteristics of Cantabrian Mousterian collections and their feelings about their significance. The director and vice-director of the Santander Museum were internationally known, highly respected scholars, and there was a ferment of interest in archeology and history that I believe was unparalleled anywhere else in Europe at the time. At the heart
of its operations was the Seminario Sautuola, involving interested people from all 
sorts of backgrounds—doctoral students, high school students, businessmen, school 
teachers, laborers—who were eager to volunteer for the tasks that needed doing. 
The Museo was host to scores of world-renowned scholars from other countries 
whom it was an honor to meet, and their induction into the Seminario is still one 
of the most prized of their memories. Collaborating scholars from other disciplines 
gave freely of their time to help solve special problems beyond usual archeologi-
cal expertise—I think particularly of Dr. Benito Madariaga de la Campa, historian, 
veterinarian, member of the Oceanographic Laboratory, and expert identifier of 
mammal bone and mollusks, and Sr. José María García Cáraves, banker, outstand-
ing photographer and editor, and then director of the Centro de Investigaciones 
Submarinas—while the directors were more than generous in sharing credit for 
work accomplished and authorship of reports with all their collaborators regardless 
of status. There was also an unparalleled openness to new and innovative ideas and 
a tolerance for different methods that I have not met elsewhere. At any time, one 
might find speleologists there checking their equipment prior to an expedition, or ta-
bles full of tools being studied by archeologists, or a small group painting little slabs 
of limestone to try various media for the suspension of pigments, in an attempt to 
replicate Paleolithic techniques, or perhaps a team transferring the original tracing 
of a recently discovered engraving to a background in publishable form. There were 
lectures both planned and spontaneous. All the while, questions were being asked, 
opinions solicited, critiques offered, information exchanged. Despite the relatively 
free rein given to all sorts of activities, they produced organized results, rather than 
confusion, as is attested by the many scholarly publications that were their result. 
In the early 1960s, the Museo Arqueológico Provincial was a veritable paradise for 
the student of prehistory, no matter what his specialty or country of origin. While 
such scientific excitement has existed elsewhere, particularly at focused international 
symposia, which last a few days and then dissolve as participants return to their 
homes, the Museo managed to maintain that high pitch of productive work and 
excitement for several years before it finally changed.

Later that winter, the Harvard student Henry Irwin, whom I had met in 
Talence, came to Santander, looking for an opportunity to do field research on the 
Upper Paleolithic. Knowing my interest in Mousterian developments, the Santander 
Museum permitted me to clean the deep stratigraphic section at Castillo and take 
carbon-14 samples for analysis, and I was joined by Irwin in that operation. Later, 
with González Echegaray, I was permitted to dig a small test pit down into the pre-
Mousterian levels at the same site. During that same period, I put a small test pit in 
a promising corner of Cueva Morín, in collaboration with Museum volunteers, and 
discovered that there were still intact sediments in the cave that would repay excava-
tion. The provincial civil engineer, Dr. Alfredo García Lorenzo, also made it possible 
for me to study collections of Mousterian implements from the Cueva de la Flecha. 
When I returned to Chicago after the summer 1963 excavations at Torralba and 
Ambrona, I had more than ample information to complete my study of the northern 
Spanish Mousterian, whose central aspects were the Cantabrian collections. During
the summer of 1966, after my doctoral thesis had been completed, I was able to examine all the remaining Mousterian artifact collections from Spain. While I have undertaken several seasons of research elsewhere, both in Spain and abroad, always in collaboration with specialists from my host country, and usually under pleasant conditions, I have never found that research to be as congenial to me as has been my work in Cantabria.

I have been almost totally dedicated to Cantabrian research, and to a continuing collaboration with Dr. Joaquín González Echegaray, since our joint excavations at Cueva Morín in Villanueva de Villaescusa (1968–1969). When our test indicated that there was still much to be learned at that site, I made application to the National Science Foundation for a full-scale excavation to be conducted in collaboration with Echegaray. In the meantime, in 1966, he and Dr. García Guinea had undertaken a first and limited campaign of excavations there, in which Henry Irwin, by then teaching at Washington State University, and Antonio Gilman, now professor at California State University, Northridge, participated. With NSF funding, I returned to co-direct excavations at Morín with González Echegaray in the summers of 1968–1969. Participating scientists included the American geo-archeologist, Dr. Karl Butzer, the radiologist/dating specialist Dr. R. Stuckenrath from the United States, the palynologist Mme A. Leroi-Gourhan from France, the archeologists Dr. Paul Janssens from Belgium, Dr. B. Bender from England, Dr. Jesús Altuna (who studied our mammalian fauna), Dr. José María Apellániz, and Dr. B. Madariaga the malacologist, while several members of our field crew, then students, have since gone on to become professional archeologists. They include G. A. Clark, M. Conkey, K. Flataker Müller-Wille, John Fritz, and Major McCullough from the United States; S. Frankenstein from England; A. Moure-Romanillo, M. S. Corchón, and M. de los Angeles Querol from Spain. The fieldwork was most productive: it helped clarify the nature of Cantabria’s peculiar cleaver flake–rich Mousterian, to eliminate supposedly transitional “Aurignaco-Mousterian” industries, clarified the nature of the causes of difference between the different kinds of Mousterian known as “facies” (Freeman 1994), discovered the first intact Chatelperronian level known from Spain, yielded evidence of structural complexes in both Mousterian and Archaic Aurignacian levels, and to our astonishment provided a series of Archaic Aurignacian burials, one of which contained a human body in an unusual state of preservation, its flesh represented in a fragile three-dimensional pseudomorph called a “soil-shadow.” The discovery of this unique find, its transportation to the United States for conservation, and its eventual return in 1970 to the Altamira Museum, where it is currently located, involved collaboration between a surprising number of institutions: the Museo Provincial and the University of Chicago, who were responsible for the excavation; the Spanish Ministerio de Cultura, which issued the excavation permit and had to give permission for its temporary exportation; Sres Angel Bedía and Javier Echevarri’s Santander boat-building establishment, that built the fiberglass and plastic container around the earth containing the burial; the Diputación Provincial de Santander, which provided the equipment and labor to remove the burial en bloc from the cave; the Museo Etnográfico de Muriedas (Casa de Velarde), where the encased burial was stored
awaiting transport; the Spanish and U.S. Health Departments, which had to issue and accept death certificates for this 30,000 (+) year-old individual; the U.S. Air Force, that flew the burial between Santander and Washington; the U.S. National Museum (Smithsonian Institution), where the underside of the pseudomorph was excavated by Freeman and González Echegaray, where it was studied by L. Angel and T. Dale Stewart, physical anthropologists of the Department of Anthropology, and where the whole was then embedded in plastic by John Widener of its Model Shop; and the Altamira Museum, where the embedded pseudomorph is now displayed. Excluding the various universities from which our student assistants have come, this is the largest number of institutions that have ever been involved in any of the research projects in which I have been engaged, to date. If there were any doubt about the efficacy of collaboration between institutions, regions, and nations across all borders, this case by itself should provide enough evidence to be convincing.

Research on Cueva Morín continued each year through 1970; our work is published in two large monographs and a compact book (González Echegaray and Freeman 1971, 1973, 1978), as well as several briefer articles, but some aspects of the analysis have continued periodically until today.

The important cave of el Pendo, in Escobedo (Camargo), was the site of renewed investigations during the years 1953–1957. These investigations were undertaken by the Seminario de Historia Primitiva of the University of Madrid, under the direction of its chief, Dr. Julio Martínez Santa-Olalla. The research was truly a large-scale, international collaboration, involving participants, many of them already accomplished professionals, from France, Holland, Belgium, and England, as well as Spain (in the latter group were some from Cantabria, including the Inginiero de Caminos of the Diputación Provincial, Dr. Alfredo García Lorenzo, the young J. González Echegaray, and others). However, it was not until after Dr. Santa-Olalla’s death that it became possible to study and publish their results. A team under the direction of González Echegaray was charged with that work in 1972. Dr. K. W. Butzer, then at the University of Chicago, was delegated for the geological study, and I was entrusted with the task of studying the artifactual materials from its important Mousterian levels. Other participants included the now-familiar names of González Echegaray, I. Barandiarán, M. Apellániz, C. Fuentes Vidarte, B. Madariaga, J. A. González Morales, and Arl. Leroi-Gourhan. Another of the original participants, the late A. Cheynier, made his field notes and observations freely available to us. This research was finally published in 1980 (González Echegaray et al. 1980). There is no doubt that had these fully modern investigations, whose methods were far in advance of their time, been published in timely fashion, their worldwide impact on the study of European prehistory would have been revolutionary as well as precocious.

I have continued to engage in field research in Spain, almost without a break, every year since the Morín excavations began. That project established the pattern for the continued, extensive, and productive collaboration between the two excavation directors that has continued unbroken since that time. One of the most significant research projects that we have undertaken is the 1980 re-excavation of Magdalenian deposits at the cave of Altamira (González Echegaray and Freeman 1996), and the
detailed restudy of its magnificent decorations: our results are soon to be published by the Maison des Roches in France. (In many countries, no non-citizen would have been permitted to collaborate in the excavation of such a significant national monument.) The reanalysis of the cave’s superb figures led to the rectification of some previously erroneous species identifications, and to the discovery of unsuspected principles of symbolic organization and aspects of meaning of the decorations (Freeman et al. 1987). Certainly from the standpoint of its duration and the abundance and quality of the information it provides, our most important project is our research at the Cantabrian Earlier Magdalenian cave site of el Juyo (1978–1997), of which major aspects are already published and others in preparation. Scientists who collaborated in the research included I. Barandiarán Maestu, of the Universidad de País Vasco in Vitoria; J. Altuna, of the Museo de San Telmo, in San Sebastián; M. Hoyos, of the Instituto Lucas Mallada, Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, Madrid; J. Fernández Tresguerres, of Oviedo; J. L. Casado Soto, of the Museo Marítimo, Santander; Mme. Arl. Leroi-Gourhan and A. Boyer-Klein of the Musée de l’Homme, Paris; S. Porter of the University of Washington; Richard Klein, then of the University of Chicago; Wm. Crowe, then of Chicago’s Field Museum of Natural History; F. Santamatilde from Santander, who served as our staff photographer; and J. Ogden, of Walnut Creek, California, our staff artist. Visiting professionals, including B. Bronson from the Field Museum, L. Keeley from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and F. Harrold from the University of Texas at Arlington, also took part in the excavation. Our research at el Juyo contributed in at least some small way to the formation of too many who became professional prehistorians or anthropologists for me to list them all, but among them are the Spanish scholars F. Bernaldo de Quirós, C. González Sainz, V. Cabrera, M. González Morales, M. del Carmen Márquez Uría, E. Baquedano, M. Dolores Herrera, M. de la Rasilla, Sergio Ripoll, Silvia Ripoll, M. del Carmen Gutierrez, R. Doce, and Monica Ibáñez, and the North Americans F. Gleach, M. Rosenthal, H. Stettler, J. Pokines, and K. Cruz-Uribe. From 1987 on, the el Juyo excavation also served as a field school, and over the course of its eleven-year duration, it provided a basic training in modern methods, theory, and results of Paleolithic research to some 150 students, many of whom have gone on to obtain advanced degrees in the professions. In the year before the field school began work at Juyo, its North American students participated, with Wm. Crowe and M. Ibáñez, in Dr. Victoria Cabrera’s excavations at the cave of Castillo.

I would be remiss were I not also to mention the fruitful collaboration between Cantabrian and North American investigators in the absolute dating of the earliest Upper Paleolithic complexes in the region: complexes that unexpectedly have proven to be as early as any early Upper Paleolithic levels elsewhere in Europe (Cabrera and Bischoff 1989).

In 1983, stimulated in part by the intellectual ferment I had witnessed as a member of the Grupo de Trabajo de la Prehistória Cántabra (a highly productive informal association of investigators that originated in the 1970s, but disappeared soon thereafter), together with W. Crowe and the lawyer Ralph E. Brown I helped found the Institute for Prehistoric Investigations in Chicago, and at the same time González...
Echegaray formed the Instituto para Investigaciones Prehistóricas in Santander. It was always our intention that these two organisms, one Spanish, the other North American, should work in close collaboration, and although both have grown larger than they were originally, that has been the case ever since. The two institutions have shared personnel, facilities, and resources in ways that have been highly productive, and their research has resulted in many scholarly publications. In addition, the two institutes have financed the publication of the work of other scholars, sometimes in fields other than prehistory, and the Instituto in Santander maintains an extensive research library for the use of its collaborators.

In addition to its own investigations of Cantabrian prehistory on land, the Instituto’s Laboratorio para Investigaciones Arqueológicas Subacuáticas, directed by Dr. J. L. Casado Soto of the Cantabrian Maritime Museum, is engaged in ongoing research into the maritime history of Cantabria and of Spain in general: it has discovered and excavated parts of the Roman port installation in Santander, and explored important wrecks in the bay and off Castro Urdiales. In 1986–87, Dr. Casado Soto, Dr. Manuel Martín Bueno of the University of Zaragoza, and I undertook a research program in the Ría de San Vicente, funded by the Comité Conjunto Hispano-Norteamericano, excavating a stratified offshore anchorage whose deposits bracket the later Middle Ages and the early modern period, including the time of Columbus’s discoveries. These materials are especially interesting due to the role of *chalupas de San Vicente* in Columbus’s voyages (Casado 1992; Casado and González Echegaray 1995).

IPI has more recently been engaged in the study of Cantabria’s history, particularly concentrating on textual and artistic documents of the Middle Ages. My colleagues J. González Echegaray, A. del Campo Hernández (of the University of Cantabria), and I have translated into Spanish and English and commented on the text of the entire corpus of works of the celebrated Cantabrian eighth-century churchman, St. Beatus of Liébana; the first Spanish volume resulting from that collaboration was published by the Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos in 1995 (González Echegaray, del Campo, and Freeman 1995); IPI participated as well in the earlier publication of del Campo’s translation of Apringius of Beja’s commentary on the Apocalypse (del Campo 1991). We have also studied religious symbolism as manifested in the art of the miniatures illustrating Beatus’s *In Apocalypsin*, and in the sculptures of Cantabria’s Romanesque and Gothic churches.

Among my North American students I am proud to count several archeologists who have gone on to do further research in Cantabria as professionals. In 1971, G. A. Clark completed his study of the Asturian complex in Cantabria (Clark 1976). Together with another graduate student at Chicago, Lawrence Straus, he conducted an intensive survey of the Upper Ebro and Arlanzón valleys in northern Burgos on the edge of Cantabria in 1972. Straus, whose 1975 doctoral thesis is a study of the Solutrean in Cantabria and the Basque country (Straus 1983), has been the most constant in his involvement with Cantabrian prehistory, having taken part during 1973–1974 in the excavations of Cueva Chufín (Riclones), directed by F. Bernaldo de Quirós and V. Cabrera, and in those at Rascaño undertaken by González Echegaray
Margaret Conkey studied design elements on Magdalenian engraved bones for her doctoral thesis at Chicago, presented in 1978. Her research permitted the tentative identification of Altamira as a site for periodic aggregation by people who lived apart in other caves during other seasons, and her ideas have had considerable impact on the thinking of other investigators (see Conkey 1980). Another student, F. Harrold, though he did not take part in the Morín excavations, incorporated some of their results in his 1978 doctoral thesis on the Chatelperronian.

The doctoral research of James Pokines was fundamentally based on Cantabrian materials: the small fauna from the Magdalenian levels at el Juyo, compared to modern collections he made in Cantabria. His thesis was accepted in 1997, and is the basis for his 1998 monograph, published by British Archaeological Reports. His findings have advanced the reconstruction of paleoclimates and environmental change between 14,000 and 15,000 years ago. In 1998, Heather Stettler was also awarded a Doctorate in Anthropology. Her thesis (1998) involved a study of decorative motifs on bone artifacts, their distributions, and their changes through time, in Cantabrian Paleolithic sites. Her master’s thesis was based on the study of the distributions of seeds and other macrobotanical remains in the el Juyo levels, and Pokines’s master’s research on bone weapons and implements from the same site. Both spent extended research periods in Cantabria, aside from the time involved in assisting in our excavations and those of Cantabrian investigators, and both benefited from working in close collaboration with other scholars from Cantabria and elsewhere. Since both these professionals also have extensive experience elsewhere, it is still too early to tell whether they will continue to devote themselves to research in Cantabria, as I would hope.

In close collaboration with a colleague from the University of Santander, Dr. M. González Morales, Dr. Lawrence Straus, now professor of anthropology at the University of New Mexico, is currently engaged in excavations at the exceptionally important Upper Paleolithic site of the Cueva del Mirón, near Ramales: their work, involving flotation and the most advanced electronic techniques for data recording and analysis, is expected to set a new high standard for Paleolithic research worldwide. Those excavations are training a new generation of investigators, many of whom will become professors in Spanish and North American universities.

The work of my university, and later, that of the Institute for Prehistoric Investigations, has always been undertaken in strict collaboration with other research institutions: the Santander Provincial Museum, the Casa de Velarde, the University of Cantabria, the Museum and Research Center of Altamira, and the Instituto para Investigaciones Prehistóricas have been among the most important of these during my Cantabrian career. It has always involved other scholars with expertise in fields different from my own competences. In today’s complicated world, no one can hope to master all fields. The funding for our research has always been international as well: the U.S. National Science Foundation, the Diputación Provincial de Santander, the Comité Conjunto, the Excelentísimo Ayuntamiento de Camargo, the University of Chicago, and private donations through the U.S. Institute for Prehistoric Investigations have been our largest sources of support, and in most
cases our research has required funding from multiple sources, not just a single one. Without such cooperation on an international scale by granting agencies, there is no way that sufficient funds for a large and extended prehistoric or historic research project could ever be accumulated.

The benefits of collaborative research across international boundaries accrue to all parties involved. Obviously, without access to sites and collections in Cantabria, my own research could never have been carried out. Without the facilities and infrastructure that have always been provided for that research by Cantabrian institutions, it would either have been impossible or impracticably costly. Without a continuing infusion of information from my Cantabrian colleagues about such subjects as stratigraphic interpretation, site formation processes, excavation methodology, raw material sourcing, faunas, artifact typology, the names of local suppliers and reconditioners of equipment, and the “politics” of science on the local, regional, and national scale, there is always a possibility of misperceiving or ignoring essential connections between data and theory, having an irremediable equipment loss or failure, or having difficulties with other people, that may range from misunderstandings with local communities to insurmountable obstacles stemming from the resentment of other professionals, government officials, or the press. I frankly might never have discovered the added dimensions made available to our understanding of past systems of belief and behavior by the imagery that ancient peoples employed, and by the organization of that imagery, had González Echegaray not insisted that Paleolithic wall art could not responsibly be ignored. Had I not heeded his urging, I would never have learned how rich, complex, and informative is the field of symbolic information available in Paleolithic art, or in the religious texts and art of Medieval Spain.

On the other hand, I believe that contact with North American prehistorians and others concerned with reconstructing vanished lifeways in all their aspects and relationships has benefitted our Cantabrian colleagues. This interchange of ideas has naturally been facilitated by the fact that we have all made a concerted effort to publish our results in Spanish as well as in English, an obligation we all take very seriously. Familiarity with the ideas of scholars interested in reconstructing the ways people behaved and felt in the past through the study of the distribution of finds within levels, familiar with the benefits and limitations of formal and quantitative analysis, and wary of the pitfalls of uncritical reliance on microstratigraphy, has saved the discipline of prehistory as practiced in Cantabria (and Spain in general) from the sterility of the purely “geological” approach to analysis. That approach has been typical of much of Old World prehistory as practiced elsewhere. It has also saved it from the statistical naïveté of those who assumed that visual examination of percentage lists, “the statistical method” to some, could be adequate to distinguish statistically significant differences between assemblages of artifacts or contextual materials. Despite the fact that it has repeatedly been shown to be false, the idea is still widespread elsewhere in Europe that the deposits in a prehistoric site were almost always laid down in regular and uniform fashion, from oldest on the bottom to youngest on the top, and that any stratigraphic exposure through a site’s deposits should be equivalent or identical to any other. Those who subscribe to this misguided
idea believe that the study of prehistory can only progress by making finer and finer subdivisions of stratigraphy that will result in an ever more precisely resolved and reliable view of the sequence of paleoenvironmental and climatic changes that took place in the region through time. To such excavators, sinking a narrow shaft—anywhere—throughout the depth of a deposit seems the logical way to proceed. I do not of course deny the undoubted importance of careful stratigraphic and temporal control. But at every site I have excavated, in Cantabria or elsewhere, there are gaps in deposition (often, as at Morín and Juyo, these are due to the complete removal of strata during periods of Paleolithic building and “housecleaning”), or there are other kinds of accommodation of the site by its ancient occupants, including even the complete inversion of temporal sequences of deposition (as often happens when earth dug from a pit or hut foundation is thrown out on the adjacent site surface: this can result in the redeposition of strata in reverse order). Natural processes also result in closely adjacent stratigraphic sequences that are incomparable. Temporal control must be maintained, but to understand how prehistoric people lived and how they were using a site, large horizontal exposures of materials in a single natural level are absolutely essential. Just as an example, there are hut foundations inside many Paleolithic caves: to understand how they were constructed and used it is not enough to excavate a small corner of one of them; one needs to see all or most of their floor plans. North American excavators long ago learned this lesson, and their Cantabrian colleagues have been among the first to appreciate it. Cantabrian prehistorians have understood that where the remains they excavate are intact, they record past cultural behavior, and cannot simply be understood as so many geological strata. They have seen that to reconstruct a more truthful picture of the past, its human inhabitants, their uses of space, and their effects on their habitat must be included. At the same time, they have also understood that conclusions about such matters must be based on evidence recovered from the ground, not on a priori schemes, and that no amount of model-building or philosophical speculation can provide reliable answers. That places Spain, and particularly Cantabria, at the forefront of research in the Old World.

When I began Paleolithic research in Spain in the 1960s, the field was dominated by a few strong personalities. Fortunately for the future of the field, those in charge of “official” prehistory in Spain, though some may have considered them rigidly unreasonable in other respects, always heard me out with tolerance (as they also did other North Americans, both experts and tyros). They showed themselves to be admirably open-minded and receptive to approaches to the past and new ideas about methodology and interpretation, provided only that they could be shown to be worthwhile. Their students (many of whom, I am proud to say, have also worked with me) are now themselves the leading figures in the field, and having been trained in that atmosphere, are proving themselves to be as innovative and productive as any investigators in the world.

Any respectable modern program of prehistoric investigations and analyses always requires extensive interdisciplinary collaboration, and that almost inevitably means that scholars from more than one country will be involved. There can be
exceptions, where investigations are conducted by a national research laboratory whose staff includes all the kinds of specialists the laboratory deems essential, but such institutional structures can be quite restrictive: to eliminate competition between staff members with similar interests, they may assign different researchers to specific delimited regions; they sometimes impose their own nationalistic or philosophical viewpoint on investigations; they can also be intolerant of what the relevant hierarchy sees as inessential innovations. Spain has not historically been so restrictive, though some of her autonomous regions today are jealous of “intrusion by outsiders” whether domestic or foreign. Cantabria, fortunately, is not one of them.

The story of the human career knows no national boundaries. Xenophobia and nationalistic chauvinism have no place in science: there can no more be a nationalistic prehistory than there can be a nationalistic mathematics, astronomy, or theoretical physics. The subject matter we study is the story of all mankind, and we are all equally the inheritors of the evidence on which its study is based. It is greatly to the credit of Cantabrian scholars that they have not only understood that principle, but put it into action. Our discipline has made substantial advances in Cantabria on that account, and my students and I look forward with great pleasure to long-continued collaboration with our Spanish colleagues in research there.

REFERENCES


