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## Prehistory and archaeology in 19<sup>th</sup> century France on the pages of *L'Écho du Monde Savant*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The journal *L'Écho du Monde Savant* was published weekly in Paris from 1834 to 1846. Established and directed, for many years, by Nérée Boubée (1806–1862), *L'Écho* aimed to « present a summary of the most important news that happened within the savant world » to both the specialized and non-specialized public and constituted a relevant facet of Boubée's professional activities, namely as a science popularizer. *L'Écho* was subdivided inside into seven sections, namely: *Discussions de la semaine*; *Cours scientifiques*; *Nouvelles*; *Bulletin archéologique*; *Prix proposés*; and *Annonces*. From January 1836 onwards, the journal split into two different weekly issues, which embraced different science fields: on Thursdays, it informed about astronomy, meteorology, physics, chemistry, mechanics, industrial economy, archaeology, and history; on Sundays, it published matters relative to zoology, physiology, botany, paleontology, mineralogy, geology, and geography. The above-mentioned section *Bulletin archéologique* was expected to be a privileged space for disseminating archaeological news and contents mixed with those on prehistory. In addition, it published information received from learned associations, like the *Société Royale des Antiquaires de France*. From number 37 onwards (August 1, 1834), *L'Écho* became the official journal of archaeological societies. As an example of themes, one may mention the fossil bones found in caves in France, which received strong attention for a long-lasting period, on many occasions compared with the situation in other countries – Paul Tournal (1805-1872), Boucher de Perthes (1788–1868), as well as William Buckland (1784–1856) undoubtedly cited. The present paper focuses on the contents related to human prehistory and archaeology published in *L'Écho*, aiming to identify their main topics and place them within the broader context of those scientific fields.

**Keywords:** *L'Écho du Monde Savant* – Prehistory – Archaeology – Nérée Boubée – Paul Tournal – Marcel de Serres – Société géologique de France

*Comment! on ne vous a pas conté, à Perpignan, comment M. de Peyrehorade avait trouvé une idole en terre? [...] M. de Peyrehorade nous a dit que c'était une idole du temps des païens... du temps de Charlemagne, quoi! [...] Vous ne vous doutez pas de tout ce que nous allons vous montrer. Monuments phéniciens, celtiques, romains, arabes, byzantins, vous verrez tout, depuis le cèdre jusqu'à l'hysope. [...] Ah! il vous a parlé de l'idole, car c'est ainsi qu'ils appellent ma belle Vénus Tur... [...] Demain, au grand jour, vous la verrez, et vous me direz si j'ai raison de la croire un chef-d'œuvre. Parbleu! vous ne pouviez arriver plus à propos! Il y a des inscriptions que moi, pauvre ignorant, j'explique à ma manière... mais un savant de Paris!... Vous vous moquerez peut-être de mon interprétation... car j'ai fait un mémoire... moi qui vous parle... vieil antiquaire de province, je me suis lancé... Je veux faire gémir la presse..*

(Prosper Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille*, 1837)

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## Introduction

As already well established in the literature, the geological sciences in the nineteenth century experienced significant development, many advances, and conceptual and institutional developments, not only in its so-called « Golden Age » but throughout the century. The reasons for that were diverse, but the increased exploitation of mineral resources caused by the First Industrial Revolution and modern imperialism played an important role. The Geological Surveys – already identified as a « trademark » of the 19th century (Secord, 1986) –, in parallel with the construction of roads and expansion of communication systems, the implementation of urban lanes, supply or sewage networks, were responsible for excavations, cartography and inventory of natural resources (Secord, 1986; Guntau, 1988; Oldroyd, 1996). The impact of this surface and subsurface « sweeping » was felt in many ways, from the refinement of stratigraphy and the location of new mineral deposits to the discovery of traces of ancient civilizations and the ancestors of the human race, not only in European countries but also in colonial territories, like India, or former colonies, like Brazil:

*« In the nineteenth century, geologists, archaeologists, Orientalists, engineers, and urban planners began digging the earth like never before. [...] Yet geologists were not alone in this pursuit of terrestrial resources and antiquity, nor was geology a singular discipline. Sometimes digging to create underground sanitation systems revealed human remains, excavation of ancient cities unearthed prehistoric fossils, or cutting channels for canals uncovered buried cities. Besides the earth, geologists, ethnologists, archaeologists, and missionaries were also digging into ancient texts and genealogies and delving into the lives and bodies of indigenous populations, their myths, legends, and pasts. One pursuit was imbricated with another in this encounter with the earth and its inhabitants and between the past, present, and future. »* (Chakrabarti, 2020, p. 1).

Those scientific findings also reverberated in the arts. In literature, an example of the French case is the short story *La Vénus d'Ille*, from which we extracted the epigraph, written by Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870) – himself Inspector of Historic Monuments. He traveled throughout France on a large mission already in 1834 and also became acquainted with Paul Tournal in Narbonne (Guilaine & Alibert, 2016). Published in 1837, the tale is classified as a “fantastic tale”, narrating the story of a Roman Venus that comes into life in the backyard of the provincial archaeologist’s house who found her. The text mobilizes various elements that were part of the contemporary context: amateur archaeologists scattered across French territory, as well as objects, relics, and monuments; disputes and distances (physical and metaphoric) between Paris and the countryside, between professionals and amateurs; the construction of a noteworthy past and the search for traces – Celtic, Roman, or whatever – that would serve as proof of it and object of pride. The short story is worth reading, and it is not up to us to dwell on its presentation. However, it was quoted here just because it translates into literary form much of what appears in the news and articles published in *L'Écho du Monde Savant*, resonating with the « spirit of the time ».

Hence, the present paper focuses on the content related to prehistory and archaeology published in the journal *L'Écho du Monde Savant*<sup>2</sup> (hereafter referred to as *L'Écho*), especially in its initial years. Rather than a systematic, comprehensive survey, it intends to highlight special topics that might be of interest to the discussions involving prehistory and earth sciences, which were the central topic of the 47<sup>th</sup> INHIGEO symposium (Les Eyzies, France, September 2022).

### Situating *L'Écho du Monde Savant*

*L'Écho* was published weekly in Paris from 1834 to 1846, established and directed, for many years, by the naturalist and geologist Nérée

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<sup>2</sup>The digital version of the collection available at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (BnF), with complementary information, can be read and downloaded at Gallica: <https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb327622829>. Therefore, for clarity reasons, throughout the text, we will indicate only the numbers, pages, and dates of the cited data and not every electronic address of each issue. They may be easily accessed via the link above. Only the years 1834, 1835, 1836, 1844, 1845, and 1846 are available at Gallica. The missing volumes at Gallica can be found at the Biodiversity Heritage Library (<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/search?stype=F&searchTerm=L%27Echo#/titles>).

Boubée (1806–1862). The journal aimed at a large-scale popularization of science and technology, intending to « *present a summary of the most important news that happened within the savant world* »<sup>4</sup> (*L'Écho* no. 1-2, April 10, 1834) (Fig. 1) to the public, both lay and specialist, and constituted a relevant facet of Boubée's professional activities, namely as a science popularizer, as he called himself. Simon-Suzanne-Nérée Boubée was born in Toulouse on May 12, 1806, and died on August 2, 1862, in Luchon (Fig. 2), both towns in the Meridional French region, also known as the Midi. Although he is currently little known, he experienced a certain prestige in his days. Boubée was one of the founders of the Société Géologique de France (SGF) in 1830 and a regular, active presence in the sessions, besides belonging to several other scientific associations (Figueirôa, 2018, 2021 and 2022).

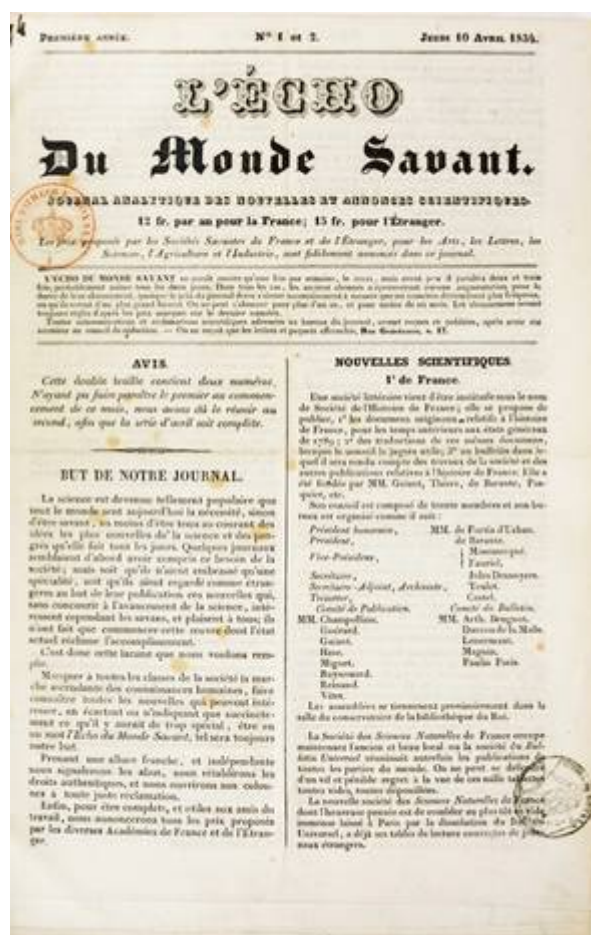


Fig. 1. Opening page of the first edition of *L'Écho du Monde Savant*



Fig. 2. Bust of Nérée Boubée in his tomb in the Graveyard at Luchon

([https://ressourcespatrimoine.laregion.fr/ark:/46855/inventaire\\_IA31012387.fr](https://ressourcespatrimoine.laregion.fr/ark:/46855/inventaire_IA31012387.fr), accessed June 22, 2023).

As already discussed in a previous paper (Figueirôa, 2021), the French intellectual context at the time, in what it specifically concerned science and technology subjects, was then a driving force for science popularization. Within that context, « *science occupied a central place in French society and culture. [...] The overriding pattern was one of science's growing prominence, both in governmental policy and in public perceptions of its importance in the life of the nation* ». (Fox, 2012, pp.1-2) A product of its time, *L'Écho du Monde Savant* appeared on April 10, 1834, and lasted until 1846, printing more than 6.000 pages over 13 years. The first issue announced the intention of publication twice a week, which happened only from January 1836 onwards (in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year). Then, the journal split into two different sections: on Thursdays, it reported on astronomy, meteorology, physics, chemistry, mechanics, indust

<sup>4</sup> Hereafter, all translations from the original French texts into English are the responsibility of the author of the paper.

rial economy, archaeology, and history; on Sundays, it circulated matters relative to botany, zoology, physiology, mineralogy, geology, paleontology, and geography. Inside, *L'Écho* was subdivided into seven sections, namely: Discussions of the week; Scientific Courses; News; Archeologic Bulletin; Proposed Premiums; and Advertisements. That general structure subsisted, almost unaffected, until the end of the journal's life. In 1839, *L'Écho* went to the hands of Adrien (the viscount of) Lavalette (1813(?)–1886). By 1844, the journal had proved itself to be a great success: the subtitle became the all-embracing *Encyclopaedic Review of the Works of Scientists of all Countries in all Sciences*; it displayed more than ten different thematic sections, and collaborators included quite a lot of influential scientists, such as Auguste Bravais, Henri Becquerel, Alphonse De Candolle, Auguste Daubrée, Bory de Saint-Vincent, Johan Christian Poggendorf, among others (Figueirôa, 2021). However, it is unclear why *L'Écho* was discontinued after the last issue of 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1846. Absolutely nothing different is said on the pages that could indicate the newspaper was reaching its final days. A possible hypothesis is that the legal process in 1844, which involved the Viscount of Lavalette against Bruno Fraysse, a former employee at *L'Écho* who scammed the newspaper's accounts by a few thousand francs, had been the reason for a possible insolvency that might have brought the business to an end.

The pages of *L'Écho* allow the readers to perceive its wish to connect the « deep France » – meaning everywhere that was not Paris – with the capital, the perpetual heart. News about scientific developments, meetings, museums, learned societies, publications, and naturalists from the provinces was constant. As put by Robert Fox, « *provincial savants were an indispensable element, [...] in the gathering vogue for the collecting and study of specimens* ». (Fox, 2021, pp.62-63) A sense of native pride, particularly under Boubée's rule, may also be detected here and there. These aspects are present in and relevant to the articles on archaeology and prehistory in *L'Écho*, sometimes intermingled with academic disputes, such as those that opposed Boubée and Paul Tournal (1805–1872), mentioned further in this paper.

## News and articles on prehistory and archaeology

As referred to above, *L'Écho* published the section Bulletin Archéologique, which was thought to be a privileged space for disseminating archaeological news and contents mixed with those on prehistory. Why did the journal include these topics? The reason seemed clear because, for Boubée, the chief editor, geology and prehistory were both parts of natural history:

« *All our readers have understood the philosophy that makes us mix the scientific news of L'Écho with the archaeological news. All the natural sciences are summed up in geology, which is the history of the earth, the history of its rocks, and the history of the animals and plants that populated the globe in ancient times. In a word, the world's ancient history until the appearance of men. Archaeology, that science of the first times of humanity, often throws light on geology, and it often borrows, in its turn, from the geologist the fruit of his observations; so that these two sciences, which lead to the same point in the past, the appearance of man, will serve each other as a counterproof when we try to determine the age of the human race. In the important question of the fossils of the diluvian terrain or the human remains of contemporary man and mammals, archeology and geology present an intimate connection.* » (*L'Écho*, no. 36, 05/12/1834)

Indeed, as explained by Claudine Cohen (1999, p.31), « *in the middle of the 19th century, [...] the sciences of the prehistory of man – paleontology and prehistoric archaeology — were founded as disciplines aimed at reconstructing, from anatomical and cultural remains, the very ancient history of humanity.* ». Nevertheless, the scientific community, in France and outside, was not entirely enthusiastic about accepting the notion of fossil humans. Therefore, at a time when absolute geochronologic dating was not available, stratigraphy and geology were then the required scientific fields for the discussions, as well as history, which brought ancient traditions, testimonies, and even mythologies of different cultures in support of fossil, or antediluvian human beings, as they were called. Several journals and magazines, whether

academic or not, published articles on those topics, which interested both Christians, religious and non-religious people. *L'Écho*, for instance, reproduced the text « Note de M. le docteur Holmbaumsur des traces d'animaux fossiles, proche à la ville d'Hessberg » from the *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* (*L'Écho*, no. 79, October 2, 1835). Boubée himself, a catholic who sponsored George Cuvier's and William Buckland's ideas, believed that it was possible to bring together the earth's history as supported by geology and as told by the Bible. The articles in which he argues about the concordance between geological facts and the Genesis narrative are noteworthy.<sup>5</sup>

However, Boubée was critical of the strict « mosaic geology », adopting an intermediate view where science was paramount. In his manual of geology (Boubée, 1842 (1833), p.165-166), he differentiates the Flood of the Bible from the other « geological deluges », affirming that « *since the appearance of men there have positively occurred [...] deluges of which the history of peoples preserves the tradition* ». Boubée was in accordance with other relevant French scientists, for instance, Marcel de Serres (1780–1862), who already in 1829, affirmed that the historical reality of the Flood is not only indicated by physical facts but also established by the most constant and universal traditions, the memory of which has been preserved in all peoples (Stoczkowski, 1993). However, de Serres will be on the opposite side as regards human prehistory.

That was then a relevant point of debate: were there distinctions between the geological deluges and the biblical Flood? If positive, how could one demarcate the lines? It is well-known that a non-negligible group of naturalists saw no conflict between a long-lasting history of the earth and the creation stories in Genesis. Rudwick alerts that « *the 'diluvial theory' deserves to be taken seriously as an attempted explanation of some extremely puzzling physical features [...]. The 'geological deluge' was eventually recognized as having been far earlier in Earth's history than any event recorded by literate human societies. Among geologists [...], this gradual dissociation [...] was generally amicable, not acrimonious* ». Such discussions were to have a profound impact on the constitution of human paleontology and prehistory

because « *the notion of the antediluvian period is found in the first half of the 19th century at the very center of the debate which will give rise to prehistory; the notions of prehistoric and antediluvian times were then often interchangeable* ». (Stoczkowski, 1993, p.14) *L'Écho* plunged into these debates early in its history. Let us now look closely at the variety of the contents.

### News about the associations

The *Bulletin archéologique* section published information received from several learned associations, like the Société Royale des Antiquaires de France or the Société de l'Histoire de France, covering the membership and the discoveries of all kinds of material historical-archeological evidence. First, in a more « bureaucratic » style, the journal registered the foundation of historical and archeological associations, praising local experts and amateurs. One reads, for example, that « *an Archaeological Society was recently founded in Montpellier; Mr. Bégé, Prefect of Hérault, has put the greatest zeal into assisting this useful association* ». (*L'Écho* nos. 1-2, April 10, 1834, p. 2) Or that « *a Literary and Archaeological Society has just been founded in Narbonne. It specifically proposes to bring together and make known the large number of monuments that are widespread in the district of Narbonne. Mr. Tournal Fils [Son] is the secretary-general. The ministry has already favored this association via the concession of superb premises, some funds, and delivery of precious books* ». (*L'Écho* nos. 1-2, April 10, 1834, p. 2) Also, we read that « *under the name of Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest, a society has just been formed in Poitiers, for the research, conservation, and description of monuments and historical documents in the provinces between the Loire and the Dordogne* ». (*L'Écho* no. 23, September 5, 1834, p. 90) From number 37 onwards (dated August 1, 1834), *L'Écho* proudly announced it became the official journal of various archaeological societies:

« *Moreover, it is to the opinion of archaeologists that we will be indebted for the hereafter regular communications of the Société Royale des Antiquaires de France, of the Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest à Poitiers, of the Société*

<sup>5</sup> For instance, see *L'Écho du Monde Savant*, 9 (May 29, 1834) and *L'Echo du Monde Savant*, 37 (December 12, 1834).

*Archéologique du Midi de la France, etc. After a special deliberation, the Société Royale des Antiquaires de France instructed its secretary to write henceforth, following each session, an analysis of the work of the Society and to send it immediately to the director of L'Écho du Monde Savant. L'Écho du Monde Savant will thus, from now, be the Official Journal of the Archaeological Societies and, consequently, the special journal of antiquarians, as it is already that of naturalists, geologists, and all friends of the physical and natural sciences. » (L'Écho no. 37, December 12, 1834, pp. 147-48)*

However, the catholic Boubée did not miss opportunities to disclose his agenda. Commenting upon an article published by Adolphe Napoléon Didron (1806-1867), a specialist on Christian archaeology and iconography, in the then recently founded Revue du Progrès Social, Boubée regretted that the Société Royale des Antiquaires de France relucted to give priority to the study of France's Christian past, which he considered « *so eminently useful, so truly national* » and that « *would give us back what we essentially lack, an art, an artistic nationality.* » (L'Écho no. 29, October 17, 1834, p. 116)

It is worth mentioning the news about the advent of the above-mentioned Société Littéraire et Archéologique at Narbonne, founded by Paul Tournal son (1805–1872), a key figure in the establishment of the field of prehistory, which he called « *anté-histoire* ». This society in Narbonne, and Tournal, were to become very relevant in the field. Paul Tournal, from the same generation as Boubée and his countryman from the Midi region, was a pharmacist and prehistorian born and dead in Narbonne. He is frequently mentioned in L'Écho and occasionally collaborated with it, authoring some texts. However, several times Tournal was strongly criticized by Boubée, whether on geological or archeological interpretations, an attitude that reveals the latter's ambition to be « *the* » authoritative voice to speak from and about the French Midi.

Tournal undertook excavations in the caves of Bize in 1827, being one of the first to propose the contemporaneity between prehistoric humans and certain extinct animal species. He published several texts on this subject, the best known being *Considérations théoriques sur les cavernes à ossemens*, which appeared in the *Annales de*

*Chimie et de Physique* in 1833. Before that, however, he presented to the SGF his *Observations sur les ossemens humains et les objets de fabrication humaine confondus avec des ossemens de mammifères appartenant à des espèces perdues*, in the session of May 16, 1831 (Bulletin SGF 1830-31, pp. 195-202). The ensuing discussion was enlivened by the voices of Roulland (former navy officer and member of the SGF, with a strong interest in paleontology), Henri Paul Reboul (1763-1839), Léonce Élie de Beaumont (1798-1874), and Boubée himself, all adding complementary information and positive comments. Furthermore, Tournal was the first to put forward that only the period of recorded human history should be referred to by the term « *historical* » to be distinguished from the strict geological period, named *anté-historique* by him, which encompassed both human and geological history lacking decipherable records (Guilaine & Alibert, 2016).

Other researchers, namely Jules de Christol (1802–1861) and Marcel de Serres, would make similar discoveries. Together with the Belgian Philippe Schmerling (1791–1836), all of them present in the pages of L'Écho, they would be part of a group who believed they had unearthed human bones from before the Flood. Finally, in the report on the progress of geology in the year 1830, presented to the SGF on February 21, 1831, its secretary Ami Boué (1794-1881) offered a rich picture of the ongoing research on prehistory and human paleontology around Europe, in which he referred to many other scholars interested in that topic – by the way, not an infrequent one in the meetings of this French association for several years, as it is possible to read in the Proceedings of SGF meetings:

« *Did the human race precede the formation of the alluvial terrains, or is it even contemporary with the tertiary and secondary periods? Such is the question on which geologists differ greatly and which was treated last year by several scholars. [...] Messrs. Marcel de Serres, Christol, Tournal, Farine, and others believe they have found human bones and works of art in the bone caves, and they conclude from this that man existed at least during the alluvial period. On the other hand, Donati and Mr. Germar claim that there are human bones in the bone breccias of Dalmatia. Mr. Keferstein keeps a piece of glass from this same rock. MM. of Schlotheim, Count Sternberg, Schottin, and*

Count Razoumovsky described human bones in alluvial marl or ossiferous clay detritus and concluded that man suffered the same catastrophes as the lost animals with which his remains are found associated in rock cavities. Finally, one of our secretaries [probably Ami Boué] announced that he had, on two separate occasions, found human bones on the banks of the Rhine [...]. Let us, therefore, wait some time for the solution to this interesting problem. It is the wisest course. » (Bulletin SGF 1830-31, pp. 105-107)

Such ideas also attracted strong criticism from various voices from many institutions, a famous one being Jules Desnoyers at precisely the Société Géologique de France, seconded by Boubée on many occasions and others (Guilaine & Alibert, 2016; Stoczkowski, 1993). In the session of January 30, 1832, he delivered a long talk based on a catastrophist and historical approach, envisioned « to prove that these bones, and the objects of human manufacture that have been found with them, were left there after the last great cataclysms, and are not contemporaneous with the destroyed species of mammals with which they are found united. I rely first on a passage from Florus, a historian of the beginning of the second century. » (Bulletin SGF 1831-32, pp. 126-133) It is worth remarking that Desnoyers, Boubée, de Serres, Tournal, and de Christol all belonged to the SGF since its very beginning (1830), a situation that could account for the fact that the debates were held in its meetings, seen as reliable spaces for scientific discussions.

Tournal also founded the Narbonne Museum, a fact reported by *L'Écho* with vivid colors, in the founder's own words: « The creation of the museum of Narbonne will contribute powerfully to propagate, in the South, the taste of the archaeological studies, and to fix the attention of the scholars on the rich monuments which have the department of Aude and the neighboring departments. When all the archaeological wealth that Languedoc contains is known, scholars who come to study history in its most brilliant and poetic aspect will see that the materials are spread in great numbers in our valleys and our mountains. It will be enough for me, to justify what I have just said, to cite only the monuments which are within a radius of a few leagues [...] », and a long list follows. (*L'Écho* no. 54, April 10, 1835, p. 248) The Narbonne Museum became indeed a highlight of the

rich historical heritage of the town and surroundings, where also « anté-historiques » fossils and objects were carefully displayed, as those Tournal collected from Bize (Guilaine & Alibert, 2016).

### **Debating the cave fossil bones**

*L'Écho* also published originals – or reproduced articles from other journals, a common practice by then (Csiszar, 2018). In *L'Écho*, the fossil bones found in caves in France received strong attention for a long-lasting period, on many occasions compared with the situation in other countries. The Christian geologist and naturalist Marcel de Serres, a professor at the University of Montpellier with whom Tournal worked (not without quandaries and difficulties), contributed to writing several texts. As an example, it is worth reproducing part of his article, published in *L'Écho* no. 29 (October 17, 1834, p. 114):

« There is, however, a point which, in the eyes of certain geologists, still needs to be cleared up; it is the coincidence of the time of the filling of the caves with that of the appearance of man. In this respect, the new caves of Lozère are of some importance, for they show that the human bones are at least of the same date as the other organic remains associated with them, if not older. What is certain is that the remains of our species are found there, not only confused with them but, moreover, buried below the layer in which we see the bones of bears of lost species. [...] The cave of Nabrigas, whose extent is about 300 meters, is the most considerable of the four. [...] As for the organic debris that we observe there, here is what results from the still somewhat superficial examination that we have made of it. First of all, the bones of bears are singularly in excess, and among the hyena remains, we have only collected a single tooth and two balls of album gæcum. But fortunately, this tooth is sufficient to characterize the species to which it belonged. »

Here, Marcel de Serres uses clear stratigraphic/geological reasoning to make his point, emphasizing that « the remains of our species are found [...] buried below the layer in which we see the bones of bears of lost species », which is a crucial issue for the debate, as it is a confirmation of the antiquity of those humans. Another example of similar stratigraphical reasoning based on the relation between animal and rock debris is



the text by the Belgian catastrophist naturalist Philippe Schmerling, published in *L'Écho* no. 75 (September 4, 1835, p. 367), reproducing his article from the *Bulletin de l'Académie des Sciences de Bruxelles*:

« *This cavern, he says, is located a quarter of a league from Villers-Sainte-Gertrude [in the province of Luxembourg] on the edge of the limestone hill on the left bank of the Aisne. [...] Many existing animal bones, such as wolf, fox, pig, horse, ox, and sheep, are scattered among the stones. All these remains have been introduced there at a recent period and do not deserve our attention. What is most interesting is the very abundant silt in this cave. [...] By breaking this layer, one notices an unpleasant odor emanating from the silt **containing fossil bones, rolled pebbles of different kinds, and angular stones. Much of these bones are engaged in the underside of the stalagmite layer; others are found without order in the silt, at different heights, arranged in the same manner as I have had occasion to observe in many localities. The first search provided me with the remains of the bear misnamed by Blumembach Ursus speloeus; teeth, jaws, vertebrae, and extremity bones of this species appear most abundant there. I also found there some remains of a wolf and a metacarpal bone of the lion's little finger, smaller than that of the Felis speloea (Goldfuss) that I collected at Goffontaine.** » (emphasis added)*

Schmerling, too, is using geological reasoning, based on the stratigraphical position of the material, together with his prior experience, to demonstrate the relevance of geology in helping solve issues about the origins of humans and their possible coexistence with ancient, extinct animals.

Concerning these inquiries, sometimes *L'Écho* was even awarded samples, an indication of its involvement in those debates and its relative standing in the contemporary French scientific scene:

« *We received from Mr. Mauduyt, curator of the Poitiers Museum, a box of bones from the Lhormaizé cave. They are remains of hyenas, ox, horses, and a large species of deer. They are generally in a good state of preservation. Their ensemble announces a prehistoric era and must thus rule out the opinion expressed of an old road network. We know that the research of the most knowledgeable archaeologists has not been able*

*to find traces of the hyena as a contemporary of the human race in our region. These bones must therefore be considered fossils because, on the one hand, they lie buried in the ground, which is enough to deserve this title and, in addition, they date from a prehistoric period, which, for others, is a necessary condition in the sense of this word. »* (*L'Écho* no. 40, January 2, 1835, p. 166)

The publication of scientific information was intrinsic to *L'Écho*, but Boubée, as the owner and chief editor, would almost always take the opportunity to contradict visions contrary to his own, adjoining (sometimes long) comments to the published texts. In issue no. 19 (August 8, 1834, p. 75), there is a reference to a notice from the newspaper *Le Breton*, which states:

« *There are few shell beds which deserve more careful examination by geologists than the hill entirely composed of layers of oyster shells found at Saint-Michel-en-l'Herm [Vendée]. Two perfectly preserved skeletons have just been discovered there, the bones of which are of an unusual proportion and to whose skulls the hair still adheres. Their feet are pointing towards the sea. [...] Finally, here are human skeletons found pell-mell with marine fossils in regularly stratified layers. [...] What a severe ordeal, say some, for certain geological theories, especially for those whose defenders have so clearly refused to admit fossil man into the bone caves of the South of France, which, despite the most positive assertions of MM. Tourmal, Christol, Marcel-de-Serres, etc. have always evaded the fact so simple, so obvious! Thus, declaim already all the partisans around them of the fossil man; the skeletons of Saint-Michel-en-l'Herm are a good fortune for them. »*

Nonetheless, Boubée immediately adds his criticism: « *But let them beware; before supporting themselves so strongly on this new base, that they make sure of its solidity. To what formation belong the shell beds that contain these human remains? Are they anterior to the deposits which usually contain the remains of man, or are they precisely of the same age? That is the whole point. However, according to the studies of MM. Fleuriau de Bellevue, Chaudruc de Crazannes, Desnoyers, Jouannet, these shell beds [...] are part of the land called quaternary. »* Then he concludes, leaving no room for doubts and reinforcing the side to

which he was aligned: « *The discovery of the skeletons of Saint Michel-en-Lherm will therefore not be able to modify in any way the geological theory based henceforth on so many facts, on so many precise observations. On the contrary, they will be a new proof of the need to distinguish between the flood of geologists, the mosaic flood, and other less important cataclysms, a distinction that we see with joy accepted today by scholars of the highest merit. In summary, the shellfish grounds of Saint-Michel-en-Lherm, whose most characteristic fossil is the *Ostrea edulis*, which, thank God, still populates all our coasts, are post-diluvian and of the same age as those which usually contain human remains: it is therefore not surprising that similar remains have also been found there.* »

### **Courses and reliquia**

As said previously, a special section of *L'Écho* was dedicated to reproducing courses taught at prestigious institutions in Paris by no less prestigious scholars – an extensive collection encompassing different branches of science, whether applied or not (Figueirôa, 2021). At the end of each course, all the lessons published in the journal were collected and published in a single volume, already revised by the teachers, and sold by *L'Écho*. The list of courses is long, and among them, there was one entitled « Archaeology ». Along the years 1835 and 1836, the lessons of a specific course on archaeology taught by the respected archaeologist Désiré Raoul-Rochette (1790-1854), a reputed specialist and superintendent of antiquities at the Bibliothèque Royale, were carefully transcribed, the complete record published by *L'Écho*. A specialist in Ancient Greece and Rome, Raoul-Rochette taught indeed about it, but also about Asia, to which he attached even more importance, as follows: « *Now the learned professor of the Royal Library switches the subject of his lecture again. He noticed that all eyes have been turning, for some time now, to Asia, that noble cradle of the human race, where once appeared the white man, the eldest son of the 'homo sapiens', the man of the Caucasus. [...] He, therefore, chose, as the subject of his current course, this primitive homeland of our ancestors.* » (*L'Écho* no. 62, June 5, 1835, p. 291; emphasis added)

Finally, the pages of *L'Écho* are an authentic catalog that inventories archeological findings,

paying special attention to Roman, Celtic, and Medieval times. Tombs and the objects found inside, such as skeletons of soldiers in armor, as well as potteries, coins, inscriptions, and so forth, all were detailed reported, as in the following excerpts, both on *L'Écho* no. 17 (July 24, 1834, pp. 67-68): « *During the first days of this month, workmen, digging foundations at Lons-le-Saulnier, in the courtyard of the barracks, found, at a depth of 8 or 10 feet, a large number of rimmed tiles, piled up on a layer of Roman cement; and, among the debris, fragments of pottery; one also found in the same excavations a medal in medium bronze of the emperor Adrian, presenting on the reverse the standing emperor, raising a prostrate woman; in the middle, a vase and this legend: Restitutori Achaïae (S.C.). This medal is in excellent condition.* » Also: « *We have just recently discovered at Danville-aux-Forges (Meuse) [...] several stone tombs, 8 feet in length, which contained fairly well-preserved bones. In one of them was a saber worn by oxidation, and an earthen urn, of a very elegant firmness, ornamented with several moldings in relief of perfect execution.* »

Some findings were considered to date back to the invasion of the Kingdom of the Franks, as one made by Boucher de Perthes: « *It was recently discovered in the peat bog of Estrebeuf, near Saint-Valery (Somme) [...] a canoe [...]: this boat seems to date back to the first times of navigation, or at least to the invasion of the Normans. [...] This singular monument, acquired by Mr. Boucher de Perthes, is now deposited in the meeting place of the Société d' Emulation of Amiens, which he presides.* » (*L'Écho* no. 19, August 8, 1834, p. 76). It is worth noticing that this record preceded in more than a decade the publication of Perthes' *Antiquités celtiques et antédiluviennes*, issued in three volumes in 1849, 1857, and 1864. Another one reported findings that reinforced the Roman past: « *A farmer from Vassy (Haute-Marne) has just found in a field a large number of Roman medals, small and medium bronze, bearing the effigies of the emperors Aurelian, Tacitus, Probus, Carus, Carin, Numerian, Diocletian, Maximian, Constantine, and Constance; the most recent are therefore 1.500 years old.* » (*L'Écho* no. 23, September 5, 1834, p. 91)

Boubée himself was an enthusiast of that narrative about the Midi's historical past and of the Pyrenean mythology, frequently taking the

opportunity to praise it: « *The Pyrenean mythology alone would, at another time, have fixed the attention of every learned world; and this mythology so gracious, so poetic, the author [Mr. du Mège] has found it on our old Pyrenean marbles, popular songs, ballads, etc.* » (*L'Écho* no. 19, August 8, 1834, p. 76) Boubée even included, in one of his guides for geological traveling, entitled *Bains et courses de Luchon* (published in 1843), a note referring to ancient rock inscriptions on the outside of the town's church. Indeed, the intermingling of « natural objects », mythology, and historical artifacts was at the heart of prehistory and archaeology practices in different countries and cultural sets, as was the case, for instance, in colonial India:

« *The terrestrial excavations [of the Yamuna Canal] were complemented with the study of local myths, historical texts, and ethnological accounts. The historical antiquarianism around the medieval canal system and other archaeological remains in the Doab region were infused with geological antiquity. Consequently, the Indo-Gangetic Plain appeared as the bedrock of Indian civilization and antiquity.* » (Chakrabarti, 2020, p. 2)

More than just a collecting phenomenon, the digging into ancient monuments and times responded to efforts of building up a past, a tradition rooted in the classical times – which was not difficult due to the actual Roman solid presence in the territory now turned into France. According to Sackett (2014, p. 3), « *antiquarians insisted upon peopling the few millennia that separated the Roman occupation of France and England from the Biblical beginning of humankind, with tribes and nations mentioned in historical records. For a while, Noah's descendants or even refugees from Troy held the field. But ultimately, antiquarians settled on the Celtic-speaking Gauls and Britons who had confronted the Romans. The notion of a rich Celtic past appealed to national sentiment, especially when flavored with a bit of romantic Druidomania.* »

As expected, that enthusiasm, together with the long-lasting market involving the circulation of antiques and significant amounts of money, allowed the occurrence of all kinds of fraud. *L'Écho*, thus, worried about its reputation, also provided

transcriptions of legal processes against falsifiers, a significant challenge that, as pointed out by Cohen (1999, p. 31), « *sheds light on the historical conditions for mustering evidence as proof in these disciplines* ». As an example, some issues of *L'Écho* (no. 72, August 14, 1835, and no. 79, October 2, 1835) detailed the lengthy trial of a crook who tried to sell false antiques of a Roman villa to the towns of Nérac and Toulouse – known as the « *Affaire Nérac* ».

### Final remarks

To conclude, it must be said that *L'Écho* proved a fantastic historical source, where both heated, updated scientific debates and institutional information can be found alongside detailed reports of historical and archaeological discoveries. On the one hand, the news and articles make it possible to track, within the time frame in which it was published, a series of discoveries of archaeological and historical remains, both in France and other European countries, that could even help current museological work on collections. At the same time, its pages allow us to follow the fossil finds and the constitutive debates of prehistory, too. The set of news and articles published by *L'Écho* undoubtedly contributes to mapping the movement that constructed this field in time and space, particularly in its beginnings, in the transition to the 1830s, when geology played a key role – and it still does, as shown by the current subdiscipline « *geoarchaeology* ». Since then, « *this duality of the real and metaphorical digging of the earth naturalized the past, indelibly inscribing the nineteenth-century study and imagination of antiquity in the deep history of nature, landscape, and people* ». (Chakrabarti, 2020, p. 1) On the other hand, key personalities from the discipline of prehistory are present on the pages of the journal, helping us to reconstitute the network of researchers involved in the process and revealing a hinterland that pulsed and resonated far beyond the limits of Paris. Some, however, got due recognition late, perhaps precisely because they came from the provinces. As Armand de Quatrefages clearly said in 1867 (apud Guilaine & Alibert, 2016, p. 235), « *Christol and Tournal were modest provincial scholars [...]. The geologists of the Midi were barely listened to and declared convicted of errors* ». Alas!

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