



CHATEAU FLINTSTONE

Homo sapiens staggers in as Homo dull throb between the ears

The discovery that wine is *20 centuries older than previously labelled* rewrites social history. The Neolithic Château Khomeini from the 5,400-5,000 BC vintage is evidently not a premier cru, more of a dernier cri. Not only is it retsina, but it has been laced with terebinth for medicinal purposes. And for a learned joke, the archaeologists have identified it in that part of the modern world which most strictly discourages wine-drinking: the Zagros mountains of Iran. We must be grateful for small sheries. At least chromatography has found no trace of fossilised plastic mugs or cubes of cheese and pineapple on toothpicks. The world is not yet ready for such an antedating of the perils and pleasures of the publishers' book-launch.

But these Flintstone funsters have beaten previous wine experts into a Stone Age pottery jar. For they were cultivating man's first hangover millennia before Noah first planted his vineyard. Noah then drank so much from it that he felt sparkling, though his family found him unusually talkative, and the author of *Genesis* called him drunk. The first wine-drinkers knew that when young Homer called the sea wine-dark, he was merely commenting on the taste as well as the colour of Greek red wine. Their presumptuous but amusing little vintage from Oldbins makes even their Persian descendant Omar Khayyám sound immature in his passion for the daughter of the vine.

So wine emerges as one of the first not the middle rungs on the ladder of man's long ascent. This Neolithic vintage, which is not merely prephylloxera but antediluvian, comes from the dawn of civilisation. It was fermented and bottled at a time when man was learning to cultivate grains, packing in the hunter-gathering and building his first settlements – with village bistro. Because wine has played so important a part in man's religious, medical, economic and plastered development, this Neolithic special offer will have a big scholarly kick.

But it also helps to redefine *Homo sapiens* as little lower than the angels. Scientists have previously tried to characterise man as a tool-making animal, the animal that laughs, a social animal and a two-legged featherless animal. But chimpanzees make tools. Cats have a sense of humour. And ants are social. It is true that some dogs and horses have been trained – by man – to drink beer, though less often wine. If wine is man's third oldest activity, perhaps he should be redefined as the creature who makes wine.

Homo Vinibibens? Wine maketh glad the heart of man. Wine gives strength to weary men. It makes man wiser and wittier, at any rate in his own eyes. It comforts the pains, frustrations and irritations of the wicked world, Post-modernist or, it now turns out, Neolithic. Of course, drunk without discretion, it can give man a hangover. But that is a price man has been happy to pay since opening time in the first chance bar.