

Eya

Martin Porr

Archaeology/Centre for Rock Art Research + Management School of Social Sciences
Faculty of Arts, Business, Law and Education
The University of Western Australia
Crawley WA 6009, Australia
martin.porr@uwa.edu.au

Introductory note

The text below illustrates aspects of an interpretation of the Aurignacian mobile art of the Swabian Jura Mountains in narrative form. The story is set during the end of autumn in the Lone Valley, near Vogelherd and Hohlenstein Caves. The main elements of the understanding of the art in this piece of informed fiction were developed in the context of my PhD research at the University of Southampton between 1998 and 2002 (Porr 2002). Key ideas were subsequently developed further in several publications between 2004 and 2015 (Porr 2004, 2010a, b, 2015; Porr and de Maria 2015). The art objects are seen as the products of the relational construction of identity, establishing metaphorical links between animal and human characteristics and behaviors within a structured framework of similarities and differences. The interpretation also integrates generalized insights from the ethnography of hunting and gathering societies and their complex understanding of animals and the environment.

This work has benefited from the insights and the generosity of many people over the years: Clive Gamble, Thomas A. Dowson, Nicholas J. Conard, Miriam N. Haidle, Linda R. Owen, Stefanie Kölbl, Kurt Wehrberger. The text has also immensely profited from the seminal and pioneering work of Joachim Hahn.

Throughout my undergraduate studies at the University of Tübingen and later as an exhibition manager at the State Museum for Prehistory (*Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte*) in Halle, I was fortunate to receive the support and encouragement from Prof. Hansjürgen Müller-Beck. He was a constant source of inspiration, always supporting innovative and creative ways for understanding humanity's deep past. He also was passionate about communicating the insights, theories, methods and the importance of archaeology to the wider public in informed and accessible ways.

This text is dedicated to the memory of Prof. em. Dr. Hansjürgen Müller-Beck (1928 – 2018).

Vorbemerkung

Die folgende kurze Geschichte stellt eine bestimmte Interpretation der aurignacienzeitlichen Kleinkunst der Schwäbischen Alb in erzählerischer Form dar. Sie spielt im Spätherbst im Lonetal, in der Nähe der Höhlen Vogelherd und Hohlenstein. Die wichtigsten Bestandteile des im Text verwendeten Ansatzes wurden im Rahmen einer Doktorarbeit an der Universität Southampton zwischen 1998 und 2002 entwickelt (Porr 2002).

Die zentralen Ideen wurden anschließend in einer Reihe von Publikationen weiterentwickelt (Porr 2004, 2010a, b, 2015; Porr and De Maria 2015). Die Kunstobjekte werden als Produkte einer relationalen Identitätsbildung gesehen, die metaphorische Beziehungen zwischen Merkmalen und Verhaltensmustern von Menschen und Tieren innerhalb eines strukturierten Rahmens herstellt. Die Interpretation integriert auch allgemeine Erkenntnisse aus ethnologischen Forschungen zu den Tier-Mensch-Umwelt-Beziehungen bei jägerisch-sammlerischen Gesellschaften.

Die Arbeiten haben über die Jahre immens von einer ganzen Reihe von Personen profitiert: Clive Gamble, Thomas A. Dowson, Nicholas J. Conard, Miriam N. Haidle, Linda R. Owen, Stefanie Kölbl, Kurt Wehrberger. Dies trifft auch auf die wegweisenden Beiträge von Joachim Hahn zu.

Während meines gesamten Grundstudiums an der Universität Tübingen und später, als wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter am Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte in Halle, hatte ich das große Glück, die Unterstützung und Begeisterung von Prof. Hansjürgen Müller-Beck erfahren und erleben zu dürfen. Er war eine ständige Inspiration und hat sich immer für innovative und kreative Ansätze in der Urgeschichtsforschung eingesetzt. Er war zudem immer daran interessiert, die Ergebnisse und die Bedeutung archäologischer Forschung einer breiten Öffentlichkeit anschaulich zu vermitteln.

Dieser Text ist dem Andenken an Prof. em. Dr. Hansjürgen Müller-Beck (1928 – 2018) gewidmet.

Eya

She felt warm. Comfortable. The wind played with her dark hair. The color of a young mammoth. Today it was dry. Cooler than yesterday. Soon the water would turn into ice. Soon the rain would turn to snow. Eya loved the winter. Then she could see all the tracks and the ground was hard. Then she could run as fast as a horse when she wanted to. Her father had carved a duck a few nights ago. It looked like an animal moving very fast. Almost like a spear, just before it hits its target. Her father had held it up against the light of the fire. "When they come down and dive nobody can catch them." Everyone knew the birds that were living along the streams and lakes. Her father had captured the movement of the bird perfectly.

"I am faster" Eya had said. Her father had looked at her. "I have already caught them many times" she had said. "With my bare hands." "I know" her father had replied. "But one day, my daughter, you won't be fast enough. One day, you'll jump after the bird and it will take off..." He had made a dramatic movement with his hand. "And, whoosh.... You'll jump straight into the lake. Then you'll become a fish!" He suddenly had thrown the little fish he had made a few days earlier to her. "Catch, Eya!" It wasn't an easy thing to do in the flickering light of the fire. She did it though. She had caught the fish out of the air, but in doing so had fallen over and had disappeared in the darkness. Everybody had laughed. Nobody wanted to be a fish. Never.

Eya looked at the cave. It was a fabulous spot. They came here every year. The cave had three entries that could easily be blocked or opened. To keep the warmth in or let fresh air inside. Her flute sounded beautiful inside the cave. She had made it from the

bone of a bird she had caught with her own hands (Fig. 1). The bird had given the flute to her. He kept singing when she played the flute. The bird was now a part of her.



Fig. 1: Hohle Fels. Ivory figurine of a water bird from the Aurignacian layer AH IV, ca. 39,000 years old. Length: 4.7 cm. Photo: Hildegard Jensen, © Universität Tübingen.

Abb. 1: Hohle Fels. Elfenbeinfigur eines Wasservogels aus der aurignacienzeitlichen Schicht AH IV, ca. 39.000 Jahre alt. Länge: 4,7 cm. Foto: Hildegard Jensen, © Universität Tübingen.

The cave was really like a big tent. It overlooked three valleys. Water was nearby. They would always find food here. It was the best place to stay over the winter. Right now, the women and children were close by. Her brother Aya and the other boys had gone into the forest, trying to find some useful wood, maybe some stones for their little spears. They might even try getting one of the smaller animals. They made a decent meal. But nothing more. A meal for boys. The men had left in the morning. They sent the boys in the opposite direction. Her father hated it when the children would get in his way during the day. They don't understand. They ruin everything. But he will have to take Aya out hunting soon more often. He needs to learn. Proper hunting. He needs to understand.

Eya looked down the valley. Her grandmother followed her gaze. "You cannot go there. The lion has moved into his cave. It is forbidden for you. Too dangerous. It is the wrong kind of power. Your brother will soon become a man. When he is ready. He will go to the Lion".

Yes, I know, thought Eya. And Aya is already scared. He is not as strong as me, she thought. She was never afraid of the lions. She knew how to handle them. She knew how to go around them. She knew how to keep the distance. She also could read the signs, their footprints. They always made a mess. She could smell them. They would never catch her. But for her brother it was different. He could not avoid the lions. Soon he had to become one (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Hohlenstein-Stadel. Therianthrope ivory figurine, so-called *Löwenmensch* (Lion man). Height: 31.1 cm. Photo: Dagmar Hollmann / Wikimedia Commons“, Lizenz: CC BY-SA 4.0.

Abb. 2: Hohlenstein-Stadel. Elfenbeinfigur des so genannten *Löwenmenschen*. Höhe: 31,1 cm. Foto: Dagmar Hollmann / Wikimedia Commons“, Lizenz: CC BY-SA 4.0.

Eya touched the little mammoth that was hanging from around her neck. She always liked the feeling of it. It was already round and smooth from her touch. She knew that the little mammoth was alive and that it was as strong as she was. Her mother had carved it for her, right here, two winters ago. She also had made a lion for Aya. “It will give you strength, my boy” she had said. The little lion was perfect. It was strong and would not back down. Her father had not been happy. “It is not right for women to play with the strength of lions”, he had said. Her mother had only laughed. “I brought this little lion into the world as well as this one,” first pointing at Aya and then at the little figurine (Fig. 3). “I know very well how to deal with the strength of lions.”



Fig. 3: Vogelherd. Ivory figurine depicting a lion. Length: 6.8 cm. Photo: Juraj Lipták, © Universität Tübingen.

Abb. 3: Vogelherd. Elfenbeinfigurine eines Löwen. Länge: 6,8 cm. Foto: Juraj Lipták, © Universität Tübingen.

Suddenly, her grandmother raised her hand. Without a sound she told her to be quiet. Anganung looked up and listened carefully. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She felt the wind and every movement travelling through the ground. Eya listened too. The moment grew longer and longer. Then Eya could feel it as well. Anganung looked her in the eyes and smiled. “They are here.”

Her grandmother was not the fastest walker anymore. But she knew all the tracks. They slowly climbed through the forest. From time to time, Eya had to help the old matriarch over some difficult patches. Anganung never missed pointing out everything that seemed important to her. Eya tried to remember every little detail. But she knew that she will have to do it herself to really understand. The bark, the branches, the stones, the moss, the grass. Everything was useful. Everything was her friend. She just needed to learn. “You need to listen to the stones and the plants” her grandmother said. “You need to listen to what they have to say. Don’t be hasty. You are not a badger. You are not a fox. They only know a little bit. You have to know everything. You have to speak all the languages. So, you can understand everyone. Talk to everyone. Properly. They all have something to say and they all have something to give. You just need to learn to understand. And, of course, don’t be greedy.” “Yes, I know,” Eya said. Anganung always said that. Eya even had the suspicion that this was the first thing that she had ever heard. Don’t be greedy. She should tell that to Aya. He is always greedy.

They had almost reached the ridge and began slowing down. Then they stood still. And waited. They could hear them. Smell them. Anganung pointed ahead. She was smiling.

The mammoths were moving slowly. They were not in a hurry. Eya could not remember a single time she had seen a mammoth running. They were so strong and confident. Eya always became excited when she saw the mammoths. She could spend all day watching them. Learning their language. Learning all their names. “Look how they eat, how they gather,” her grandmother said. “They have become strong from gathering food and eating properly.” “Like you,” Eya said. “Like all of us,” Anganung said and smiled. Both

now lay flat on the ground, hidden under the trees and watched. The mammoths looked calm. Eya knew that this was not the case. Maybe they already knew they were here. Watching them. It didn't make a difference. They were safe. "They cannot see you, but they know when you are here," Anganung said. "They can feel you, smell you. Just like we do." "Just like we do," repeated Eya. Just like me (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Vogelherd. Ivory figurine of a mammoth. Length: 3.7 cm. Photo: Hildegard Jensen, © Universität Tübingen.

Abb. 4: Vogelherd. Elfenbeinfigur eines Mammuts. Länge: 3,7 cm. Foto: Hildegard Jensen, © Universität Tübingen.

Suddenly one large mammoth stopped grazing. It slowly turned in their direction. "That's her," Anganung said. "Old Ghala." The mammoth made a few steps towards them. It was still a good distance away. Eya had heard stories about the old matriarch but she had never seen her. She felt that the mammoth was searching for her. She felt how the old mammoth was searching for her with her whole being. It was not a threat. It was a warning. I know who you are. You are still young. You still have much to learn. I will share this world with you. But you must follow the rules. Then the matriarch turned away.

"You don't want to mess with Old Ghala. Nobody will. Not even your father," whispered Anganung. Eya nodded slowly. Even though she could feel the weight of Old Ghala's gaze on her, she was not afraid. She knew what she had to do. Old Ghala had told her.

The mammoths were followed by a small herd of bison. Anganung pointed at them. "She is even protecting them. Those cheeky animals. Very clever. They also trust Old Ghala. Even they know. She has been leading her herd safely for more than thirty winters."

For a moment, Anganung was silent. Then she looked at her grandchild. "And you, my child, I want you to be like her."

References

- Porr, M. 2002: Reflections of Human Beings. The Aurignacian Art of Central Europe. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Southampton.
- Porr, M. 2004: Individual reflections: Gender and the Aurignacian art of Southwest Germany. *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift* 45, 257–269.
- Porr, M. 2010a: The Hohle Fels ‘Venus’: Some remarks on animals, humans and metaphorical relationships in Early Upper Palaeolithic art. *Rock Art Research* 27, 147–159.
- Porr, M. 2010b: Palaeolithic Art as Cultural Memory: a Case Study of the Aurignacian Art of Southwest Germany. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 20, 87–108.
- Porr, M. 2015: Beyond animality and humanity. Landscape, metaphor and identity in the Early Upper Palaeolithic of Central Europe. In: F. Coward, R. Hosfield, M. Pope, and F. Wenban-Smith (eds.), *Settlement, Sociality and Cognition in Human Evolution. Landscapes in Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 54–74.
- Porr, M. and de Maria, K. 2015: Perceiving animals, perceiving humans: ‘animism’ and the Aurignacian mobile art of southwestern Germany. In: S. Sázelová, M. Novák, and A. Mizerová (eds.), *Forgotten Times and Spaces. New perspectives in paleoanthropological, paleoetnological and archeological studies*. Brno: Institute of Archaeology, Czech Academy of Sciences/Masaryk University, 293–302.

