

Obermaier and the Construction of the Spanish Paleolithic: A View from the 21st Century

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Abstract: *This paper analyses the work of Hugo Obermaier on the Spanish Paleolithic from epistemological and theoretical perspectives. As almost a century has elapsed since he began his work, this is a good moment to review his achievements. We highlight the way he was influenced by ideological issues and the role played by successive political events in the construction and deconstruction of his theories. We also examine the scientific and social context of Obermaier's work.*

From our perspective at the beginning of the 21st century we put forward our own ideas regarding some of the issues contained in Obermaier's writings. With the aid of three examples, we argue that some elements could again be valid today while others even though not sufficiently verified were substituted by others that succeeded thanks, basically, to political opportunism.

Keywords: *Spain, Paleolithic, theory, history of research*

Obermaier und der Aufbau des spanischen Paläolithikums: Eine Betrachtung aus dem 21. Jahrhundert

Zusammenfassung: In dem Beitrag werden die Arbeiten Hugo Obermaiers zum spanischen Paläolithikum aus epistemologischen sowie theoretischen Sichtweisen analysiert. Da nahezu ein Jahrhundert vergangen ist, seit er mit seinen Arbeiten begann, bietet sich an dieser Stelle eine gute Gelegenheit, auf seine Errungenschaften zurück zu blicken. Dabei wird auch die Rolle des Verhältnisses Obermaiers zu Henri Breuil, seinem französischen Kollegen sowohl als katholischer Geistlicher wie auch als in Spanien tätiger Urgeschichtsforscher, beleuchtet, welches wichtig für den Aufbau des Paläolithikums in Spanien war. Besonderes Gewicht liegt auf der Art und Weise, wie Obermaier durch ideologische Belange beeinflusst wurde sowie auf der Rolle, die aufeinander folgende politische Ereignisse in der Herausbildung und Verwerfung seiner Theorien gespielt haben. Dabei werden auch der wissenschaftliche und der gesellschaftliche Kontext von Obermaiers Arbeiten untersucht.

Aus der Perspektive zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts werden eigene Gedanken in Hinsicht auf die in Obermaiers Schriften enthaltenen Punkte geäußert. Mit Hilfe dreier Beispiele wird dargelegt, dass einige Gedanken heutzutage wieder Gültigkeit erlangen könnten, während weitere, obwohl nicht ausreichend überprüft, durch andere ersetzt wurden, die in erster Linie dank politischen Opportunismus erfolgreich waren. Diese drei Beispiele betreffen drei repräsentative Themen aus der Arbeit Obermaiers: die Menschwerdung, die Beziehungen zwischen Afrika und Spanien im Paläolithikum, und schließlich die Chronologie der Levantekunst.

Schlagwörter: Spanien, Paläolithikum, Theorie, Forschungsgeschichte

Historical Context

The Catholic priests Hugo Obermaier (German) and Henri Breuil (French) were, from the moment they arrived in Spain at the beginning of the 20th century, the key figures in the construction of the Spanish Paleolithic. This was due as much to the importance of their work as to the influence that their proposals and they themselves had on the Spanish archaeologists who were working on the subject at that time. They arrived at just the right moment because, even though Spanish authors were well-informed about the work that was taking place in other parts of Europe, the arrival of these two wise foreigners (of a clearly orthodox persuasion) added impetus to the systematization of the different activities that were being carried out at the time and to the organization of the evidence that was being discovered. Obermaier's methodical character contributed decisively to this task. Their work is still relevant today as the problems they identified and the questions they asked in Spain, despite the fact that many were treated sometimes ballasted with *a priori* statements, have subsequently been approached in an equally '*a priori*' manner. As a result, a number of these issues have yet to be resolved.

His general theoretical approach continues to be valid for many authors. For Obermaier, whose ideas were based on metaphysical idealism, a theoretical position which is opposed to functionalist materialism, materials are derived from the spirit: "*Bienes culturales que, en general, se derivan de una constitución espiritual semejante y debido a una actitud coincidente se parecen hasta en los detalles.*" (Cultural goods which, in general, are derived from a similar spiritual constitution and, due to a coincidental attitude, are alike even in their details) (Obermaier, quoted by López-Junquera 1985).

This theoretical posture is only mentioned obliquely or incidentally in his work, which endeavours to be positivist and empirical. But the idealist and metaphysical conception is absolutely clear: it is from the spirit that goods are derived. This is the alternative hypothesis to materialist adaptationism: it is not the identity of the function that stimulates a similar cultural response. Similar cultural responses come from mental organisation and not from functional identity.

The German school of *Kulturkreise* diffusionism has its beginnings in F. Rätzl with the notion of *Kulturzone* which combined historical and geographical criteria and denied the progressive character of diffusion. It was actually Graebner who came up with the notion of *Kulturkreise*, from which developed the so-called historical-cultural school and the concept of cultural cycles. Within this theoretical perspective was the group led by Father Wilhelm Schmidt, known as the Vienna School. These 'cycles' constitute cultural nuclei that act as mechanisms in constant expansion which succeed in transmitting and assimilating cultural elements from other cultural zones. In order to trace the history of humanity it was clearly necessary to identify the areas where these elements had been generated and to which they had been transmitted. Whenever two cultural cycles clashed a new one was generated or one of them absorbed the other, apart from the mere transfer of isolated elements.

In order to oppose materialist evolutionism, the existence of a rudimentary monotheism (superior to the degeneration of earlier polytheism) was postulated among the most primitive societies. Catholic missionaries (like Martin Gusinde), working as ethnographers, set off to look for and study hunter-gatherer societies, which unilinear

evolutionism had situated at the origin of human societies. Broadly speaking, the aim was to show that the spiritual constitution was separate from physical and biological materiality. In this way, ethnographical information that was being compiled could, if necessary, illustrate the historical image that people with the same theoretical position would generate through archaeology.

However, in reality representations of societies were based on a set of non-explicit general laws, which were reinforced by falling back on 'common sense', which is no more than 'the way of seeing others in comparison with ourselves' and of a vague ideal of 'primitive man' inherited from the 19th century, all adorned, of course, with ideas extracted from 'modern primitives' and embellished with a few bits of archaeological 'data'.

To some extent 'prehistoric science' needed to fall back on ethnography in order to obtain an image of prehistoric society, as the archaeological record was considered to be too limited and static. Consequently, its study would not permit complete knowledge of the development of prehistoric societies. Thus, there was an *a priori* explicit rejection of explanation (since this already existed and fitted into an established metaphysical order or, in its coarsest and most radical form, in the association of specific characteristics and psychological abilities with certain races). Archaeology thus became a descriptive discipline for classifying material obtained from excavations, and its objective was to follow the progress of anonymous cultural circles chronologically, watch them intersect, follow the migrations of different peoples and observe the relationships between races (which could be defined from human fossil remains):

"During these phases of humanity's infancy, so remote and long-lasting, one must accept that it is not possible to know the names of peoples, definite dates or important events. However, we are able to see these anonymous cultural cycles very clearly. At times they can be charted chronologically by means of climatological changes, others are observed to evolve together and, on more than one occasion, combine, from which it is possible to deduce primitive migratory routes and groups of peoples, the races of which we may surmise from discoveries of skeletal remains." (Obermaier 1932, 32-36).

The fundamental objective of academic science was to establish a historical-cultural sequence, a stratigraphical succession of cultures. Aspects of social and economic organization and the explanation of changes in Paleolithic societies were progressively sidelined from academic discourse and were relegated to the sphere of popular fiction for the consumption of the general public. They faced up to the impossibility of overcoming historical particularism: ethnography was only useful for establishing anecdotal analogies as each people display unique peculiarities and there is no other that can be compared, for example, with the people who painted Altamira.

In 1925, Obermaier described the Paleolithic 'palethnologically' as:

"Men of the Chellean - wandering hunters locked in a titanic struggle, thanks to their stone tools, with a gigantic, dangerous fauna - must have attained a degree or level of civilisation which was superior to certain peoples (Pygmies, Andamanese, Wedda, Senoi, etc.) who today live in the greatest isolation and who are ignorant of stone tools.

Groups of Mousterian men brought together through necessity and mutual sympathy, living in camps with their families to which they are united by the sexual instinct and consanguinity were equivalent to the Tasmanians or Australian aborigines of today. They possessed an aesthetic appreciation that had already been proven by the beautiful symmetrical shape of the Acheulian handaxes and which were given visible expression through their fondness for trinkets and body decoration. They displayed a high degree of spirituality which was expressed through their affection towards children, worship of the dead, a belief in the after-life, worship of manes, talismans, hunting magic, altar offerings and cannibalism (which was practised for psychic reasons).

During the Upper Palaeolithic, new, superior peoples totally wiped out the Neanderthals. Their hafted-blade industries were like those of the Australian aborigines, Melanesians, Polynesians, Bushmen and Eskimos. But no people with such a high level of development exist today. From the paintings of the Levant it was possible to deduce that they wore clothes and the weapons, baskets and quivers they used. Bracelets, necklaces and hairnets have been found at burial sites.

They no longer hunted pachyderms with their bone and horn projectiles, their bows and traps, but preferred reindeer although they also hunted deer, horses, bulls, bison, goats and chamois.

Their spiritual life was intense: they painted, sculpted drawings, talismans, magical 'batons of commandment', they performed magical dances with masks, worshipped the dead and believed in an afterlife, as well as having totemic animals. Their fetishes and erotic idols tell us of the relations between the sexes, in which women were equally important as men. Their beliefs were sustained by secret societies, castes and the womenfolk". (Obermaier 1925).

In short, the story line and even the illustrations that accompany it are repeated over the years in the different works that he wrote (Obermaier 1916, 1925, 1932; Obermaier and García Bellido 1941). The 'social' story line never changes as the life of 'the prehistorics' could be imagined through preconceptions and a few general laws, all mixed up with a homogenisation of present-day 'primitive peoples'. He maintained this position despite the accumulation of archaeological data. In his time, Obermaier already had access in Spain to abundant archaeological evidence; we should not forget that the majority of caves had already been discovered in 1936 and the most significant, as far as the Paleolithic is concerned, is still El Castillo, which he himself excavated.

Obermaier and Breuil

The relationship between Obermaier and Breuil was very important for the construction of the Paleolithic in Spain. It is interesting to look into it in order to understand the different paths taken by Spanish authors in their research.

They were not equals; Breuil was always the dominant figure. The character of the person who had the key to the earliest sources of finance for excavations and who was the main decision-maker in the IPH projects as borne out in the documents published by E. Ripoll (letters and writings) may offer us an explanation. In them we can clearly see

the chauvinism and anti-German sentiments of the Frenchman, the only explicit exception to which was Obermaier. Moreover, the allied victory in World War I favoured the cultural pre-eminence of France in the first decisive thirty years of the 20th century and its continuing influence regarding the Paleolithic until the 1960s.

What happened between Cabré and Breuil is also illustrative in terms of the character of the abbé: it was Cabré who discovered the paintings of Calapatá and those at many other sites, paintings that Breuil published in articles financed by the Prince of Monaco. They ‘collaborated’ until 1914 when Cabré published ‘Cave Art in Spain’ (Cabré 1914). He is then anathematized by the abbé in ‘L’Anthropologie’ in 1916. According to Ripoll, the enmity had, however, existed beforehand, from a letter in which Cabré dared to suggest that work carried out by the Spaniards was as good as anybody else’s (Ripoll 1994).

Breuil, as several authors have pointed out (e.g., Utrilla 1996), kept the study of the cave paintings for himself. The materials which Obermaier had excavated at Castillo were removed to Paris, effectively denying the German access to them after 1914. We might even go further and ask ourselves why the materials from El Castillo were not published. Why, in contrast, did Breuil base the Magdalenian sequence on materials from deficient French excavations, and not on materials and stratigraphies from Cantabria, which had been more thoroughly studied? While the German author accepted the successive changes that Breuil made to his 1912 chronocultural scheme, the abbé, in contrast, used his power to reinforce the alternative systematizations of the more critical Spanish prehistorians and in this way put an end to Obermaier’s own systematization of the Cantabrian Magdalenian in favour of the French model.

Aside from personal anecdote and their apparent good relationship, the two authors subscribed to different concepts due to their different origins and which goes much further than the iconography reflected in the photographs of the period. Breuil was a product of the French school, while Obermaier came from a Germanic tradition that was less politically homogenised. For a Jacobin mentality inherited from the Bourbon period, it was better, more proper, to have a cultural model that was centred on France and of a centrifugal nature, a kind of ‘culturally pure’ centre-periphery model rather than Obermaier’s model, which reflected alternative influences originating from cultural circles with mutual acculturation and influences (‘loans’). A phrase from Pallary’s definition of the Iberomaurusien is highly illustrative of the French way of doing things, which was only partly shared by Obermaier: “*L’industrie de La Mouillai est donc nettement paléolithique, comme Siret l’avait déjà constaté dans le Sud de le Sud de l’Espagne. C’est un niveau bien défini mais encore non distingué en Algérie et que je ne peux rapporter à aucune des industries de la classification française. Je propose pour nommer cette époque, le nom d’Ibéromaurusien qui aura l’avantage de montrer de montrer son extension dans les deux pays...*”. (The industry of La Mouillai is considered to be exclusively Paleolithic, as Siret has already verified in the south of Spain. It is a level that is well defined but as yet not identified in Algeria and which I am unable to link with any of the industries of the French classification. I therefore propose to call this epoch the Iberomaurusien. This has the advantage of showing that it covers both countries...) (Pallary 1909, quoted in Camps 1974, 57)

Breuil’s model would also be more acceptable to the imperial-Francoist unitary mentality that prevailed in Spain after the Civil War and which linked up with Fascist ideology on the one hand and Bourbonic (centralist) ideology of French origin on the other.

Obermaier, the Natives, and the Criterion of Authority

Obermaier, due to the circumstances of his arrival and the social context in which the caves of Santander were located, first associated with aristocrats, priests and middle-class people who were interested in archaeology. It was not until later that he established links with the Spanish university community, which was centred on Madrid and Barcelona. In these relations there were somewhat contradictory feelings of admiration, inferiority and subordination on the Spanish part (Vega del Sella 1917); feelings deeply rooted in history and which at times manifest themselves in bitterness (Carballo 1924).

German influence in Spain was highly significant owing to the admiration that Germany evoked as a scientific power. This was further borne out by the fact that the vast majority of scholars chose it or were encouraged (with funds) to choose it as a country in which to further their studies.

The search for cultural sequences that Breuil and Obermaier identified as a priority for prehistoric research was also adopted as a primary objective by the Spanish. They justified their activity, however, by adding a patriotic and altruistic motivation: 'to give the country a soul'. Hernández Pacheco (1915), for instance, defended the 'patriotic work' of the Commission for Prehistoric and Palaeontological Research in 1915.

The cultural sequence proposed by Obermaier with his framework of multiple influences and particularities was welcomed, especially on the periphery of the Iberian peninsula (e.g., by Bosch Gimpera, professor at the University of Barcelona) which was undergoing a resurgence of nationalist political feelings and a renewed defence of the peculiarities of the historical nations which had been suppressed by the Spanish Bourbon monarchy since the 18th century. This sequence was maintained due to the academic authority of the professors in Madrid and Barcelona until Obermaier left Spain in 1936 and P. Bosch Gimpera departed into exile (e.g., Pericot 1942, 17). Much later, it was admitted that: "*Ningún arqueólogo responsable en el occidente de Europa se atrevió a discutir lo que maestros tan eminentes como Breuil, Obermaier y Bosch Gimpera daban como hecho adquirido para la Ciencia.*" (No sensible archaeologist in western Europe dared to question that which such eminent scholars as Breuil, Obermaier and Bosch Gimpera had ruled was an immutable fact of science.) (Pericot 1964, 455).

After this date, this cultural order for the Paleolithic would be challenged even by Obermaier's own pupils and assistants who, thanks to their alignment with the politics of the victorious pro-Franco faction, took over power in academia, the universities and the museums.

The Spanish Context

Obermaier, like Breuil, was a product of the Church's interest to pursue, and win, the struggle against materialist Darwinism which was gaining ground at the time (an interest that was clearly expressed in 1893 in the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* of Pope Leo XIII). In Spain, this struggle between Darwinism (synonymous with evolution) and orthodoxy (synonymous with fixism) was especially violent during the 1870s and 1880s.

In the end, the Church developed an important strategy (whose main characteristics are contained, for example, in the summary of the proceedings of the Council of Seville by Fita [1893]) which would permit it to take over the Spanish Academy. To achieve this they were obviously able to count on the unconditional help of the ruling classes, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. The same classes that took an interest in collaborated with and financed the work of Obermaier, Breuil, and other Spanish priests who, encouraged and assisted by this interest, devoted themselves to Paleolithic archaeology. As these posts were being occupied, the debate gradually moved to the political sphere and society in general. Progressive political organisations and the (mainly anarchist) workers' movement played a decisive role in the defence and dissemination of these evolutionist ideas. As a result, the works of Darwin, Haeckel, Spencer, Reclus, etc. were published and sold at popular prices. They also included a criticism of cultural history and the underlying racism of the approaches of Rätzkel, Kossinna and the Vienna School in general (e.g., Reclus 1906).

Regarding this strategy of the Church, the so-called 'Council of Altamira' (held in August 1925) is an important piece of evidence (Bégouën 1945). At that time there was a need for arguments to justify the 'failure' of evolutionary materialism which should give way to 'spiritual evolutionism'. The Catholic prehistorians had to come up with some solutions. It was essential to find an alternative to block the ultrafixists, who were influential in Rome, as it seemed that the Holy Office intended to condemn the Theory of Evolution and, faced with this potentially radical official position of the Church, there would be no possible solution or serious arguments to stop the materialist scientific perspective. They needed a reform that was both satisfactory from a scientific point of view and which at the same time coincided with dogma in order for it to be acceptable to the Catholic hierarchy.

Taking advantage of Obermaier's excavations in Altamira, a decisive meeting was held at this place, which was attended, in the words of Comte Bégouën (1945), by "wise men from France and other countries, priests and laymen". During the meeting there was "discussion of all the aspects of the transformist idea" and in conclusion a document was drawn up that would be "respectfully submitted to the Pope" (Estévez and Vila 1999, 52). The aim was nothing less than to modernise the 'chain of being', a concept established by Saints Augustine and Gregory. In Breuil's words: "The theory of evolution is concerned with no more than the surface of that which God's permanent act of creation makes reality successively in time and space. (...) Everything unfolds in accordance with the fixed, logical rules, which were pre-established by God" who had intervened at three crucial moments: at the origin of matter, at the origin of life and at the origin of intelligence or the soul.

As both Comte Bégouën (1945) and M. Almagro Basch (1960) pointed out, this idea of evolution as a master plan directed by God, with three divine interventions at the most significant moments, allowed the Church to make evolution compatible with Catholic orthodoxy and recover Cuvier. It should not be forgotten either that there was another political objective which, according to what Comte Bégouën himself tells us, accompanied this proposal: to put a stop to Marxism and Communism which, at the time when the meeting was held, had consolidated the Russian Revolution (and which, at the time when Bégouën published his report, had already advanced as far as Berlin).

The papal nuncio in Paris forwarded the document produced in Altamira to the Pope and in the end the dreaded ultra-orthodox condemnation from Rome did not materialize, although the proposal was not made official and teleological evolutionism was only accepted in small doses, first by the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943) of Pius XII and then, more than eighty years later, when it was definitively recognized at the end of the 20th century.

On this occasion the dominant voice was also that of Breuil, but Obermaier adopted this idealistic evolutionary alternative unreservedly. Years later (Obermaier and García Bellido 1941), he would go even further than Breuil in his reluctance to accept without question the discoveries which continued to mark out the proof of a human evolution from the primates. Thus, there is a clear difference between the text of Obermaier's manual in its 1932 version and that of 1941. On page 40 of the latter he introduces a long new paragraph on his contrary position to the evolutionary theory of small changes and in favour of that of large 'mutations'.

The academic staff (M. Almagro Basch, L. Pericot, J. Maluquer, etc.) of Spanish universities in Franco's time passed this creationist perspective of evolution to the Spanish Academy and to Spanish society itself by means of popular publications (Estévez and Vila 1999).

Obermaier and the Paleolithic

Having summarized the 'general context', we can now proceed to analyse a number of relevant examples of the specific scientific domain/context, which will illustrate how all this worked out in practice. We have chosen three of the most representative issues: hominidization, Africa-Spain, and the chronology of Levantine art.

Hominidization

Obermaier shared Cuvier's principle of the direct relationship between intelligence and cranial capacity. Consequently, he became increasingly convinced of the authenticity of the Piltdown remains.

The ease with which he accepted the suspicious remains from Piltdown was not the result of the state of knowledge of the period, but a question of opportunity, to use it as a way of fighting against acceptance of the theory of evolution. There was no shortage of evidence to suggest that it was a hoax, as Obermaier himself pointed out: "Given the surprising difference between the skull and the jaw, a number of scholars have deduced that they must be the remains of two totally distinct individuals (...) *Eoanthropus dawsoni*, and the other (...) the fossil of a chimpanzee." (Obermaier and García Bellido 1941).

Likewise, one can understand his reluctance to accept the 'humanity' of the other fossils. In his efforts to relate the race, defined bio-anthropologically, and the cultures (a key issue for the *Kulturkreise*), he accepted two parallel evolutionary lines for the Lower Paleolithic. *Eoanthropus dawsoni* (with a larger skull and therefore superior) would have been responsible for the cultural circle of the hand-axe while the Neandertal had produced the flake industry. The latter was described as a "*ser humano de aspecto vedadamente salvaje. Las características no se limitan a determinadas partes del cuerpo, sino*

a su constitución total" (human being with a truly savage appearance. These characteristics are not limited to particular parts of the body, but to the whole physical constitution [Obermaier 1934, 59, 60]), in keeping with the descriptions of M. Boule, his 'trusted' paleoanthropologist, who had accompanied the team to Castillo and had played a key role in 'primitivizing' the Neandertal form.

The acceptance of Piltdown man made it possible to eliminate fossils with small brains (*Australopithecus* or *Pithecanthropus*) from the human line. Due to its small cranial capacity, the latter was associated with a large gibbon, a fossil monkey from the island of Java (Obermaier 1934, 133).

Faced with the need to interpret the remains of *Sinanthropus*, which he excluded from the human line, he was forced to postulate the existence of a contemporaneous human race, despite the lack of any fossil remains of it. To this undocumented race he attributed cannibalistic activities against *Sinanthropus*: "*Se ha objetado que un ser dotado de un cráneo de todos los seres humanos conocidos, carecería de inteligencia, y puesto que se encuentran pruebas acción de utensilios, es natural deducir que con Sinanthropus existió un verdadero hombre paleolítico, perseguidor de aquél.*" (Objections have been raised to the fact that a being equipped with a skull smaller to that of all other known human beings should have lacked intelligence, and given that there are proofs of the use of tools, it is natural to deduce that with *Sinanthropus* there existed a truly Paleolithic man, who hunted him) (Obermaier 1934, 133). He later added: "*Nos parece inconcebible que un homínido primitivo haya podido elaborar una industria tan perfecta. Esta hay que atribuirle a hombres auténticos, los cuales han debido cazar ocasionalmente también a los homínidos desde entonces extinguidos, que, por su construcción somática debieron ser chimpanzoides*" (It seems impossible that a primitive hominid could have created such a perfect industry. This can only be attributed to **authentic** men, who must occasionally have hunted hominids that subsequently died out and which, due to their somatic make-up, must have been chimpanzoid) (Obermaier and García Bellido 1941, 133).

It should come as no surprise that at the beginning of the 20th century authors (including non-specialists) who were committed to evolutionary ideas accepted and described these remains and organized the human phyletic tree more accurately than Breuil and Obermaier, and were more sceptical of remains of questionable contextualization like those from South America. Eliseo Reclus (1906), for example, accepted the recently discovered *Pithecanthropus* as the missing link between the Neandertals and the modern form. He indicated correctly that the remains from Spy and Neandertal were halfway between *Pithecanthropus* and the modern form, and that "on the genealogical tree of the superior species this race occupies a special branch." (Reclus 1906, 31).

The Spanish Academy, in contrast, once again agreed with Obermaier, accepting the Piltdown remains and maintaining until the end of the 1950s that *Australopithecus* was a monkey. However, after the 1940s they preferred to follow Breuil's opinion regarding *Sinanthropus* and agreed to place it in the human line.

Africa – Spain

Obermaier, "like most prehistorians of his day essentially equated culture with race and 'explained' particular archaeological phenomena in any given region with reference

to supposed ‘invasions’ or ‘migrations’ from somewhere else.” (Straus 1996, 196). Obermaier (1916) declared that the Spanish Paleolithic was the result of two influences. This allowed other authors, such as Bosch Gimpera (1917), professor at the University of Barcelona, to distinguish between the Franco-Cantabrian and the Mediterranean-Capsian. Both areas possessed their own art and ethnic psychology.

This duality of the Spanish substratum was opposed by those who defended the racial unity of Spain and those who believed in the inferiority of the African cultural circle rejected any African influence, too. Paradoxically, these authors had been disciples of Obermaier, had received grants to study in German universities and had been heavily influenced by German national-socialist ideology.

After Franco’s victory and Obermaier’s alienation, Martínez Santa-Olalla (1946) expounded his arguments on the absolutely unitary character of the people of the Iberian peninsula which, he said, had been exposed to European influences only, Spain’s superiority (European circle) and its influence on Africa (the inferior African circle). This discourse was of an exclusively theoretical and political nature.

It was Almagro Basch who, using the (typological, taxonomic and descriptive) work of Vaufrey in Africa and Pericot in the cave of Parpalló as references, rejected the role of the Capsian in the formation of the Paleolithic in the Peninsula.

Thanks to his **political** influence he slowly wore down academic misgivings regarding the change and gradually shifted the influences away from Africa until he succeeded in making them derive exclusively from France. Naturally, Breuil’s position in favour of the pivotal role of France in history was of crucial importance in achieving this.

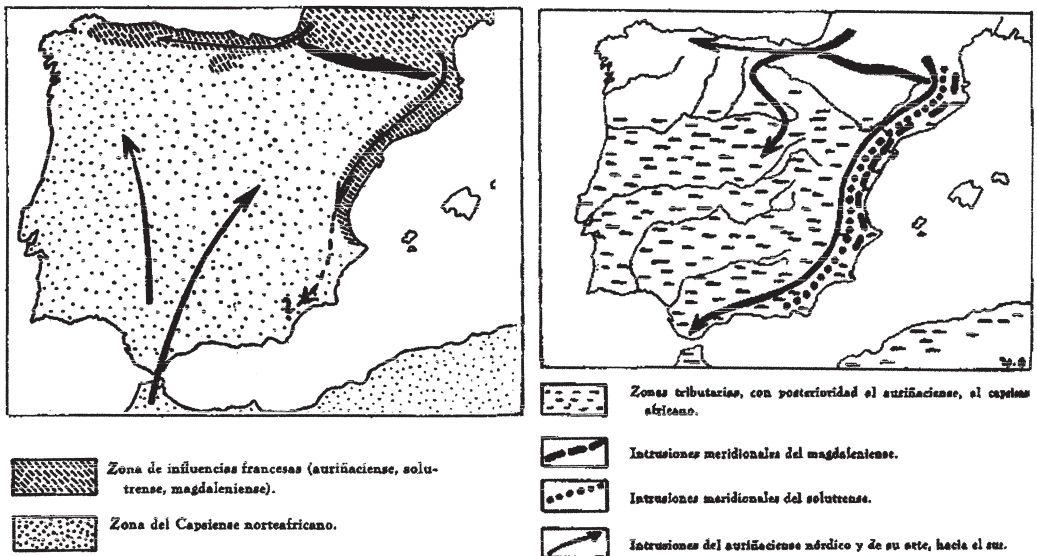


Fig. 1: Maps of the influences in spanish Upper Paleolithic by Obermaier in 1925 (left) and in 1941 (right), showing his changing point of view.

After these criticisms, and taking into consideration the results of the excavations at Parpalló and the revisions of the African industries, Obermaier changed his opinions somewhat and moderated and redefined the African influences (see Fig. 1). Pericot and other authors slowly followed his lead and reduced the importance of the African influences. Up until the 1950s they were still open to the possibility of some kind of mutual influence between Africa (the Aterian) and the Iberian Solutrean in the south and east of the Peninsula (e.g., Pericot 1954). But at the beginning of the 1960s the Spanish Paleolithic had been almost completely europeanized, apart from the hand-axe people of the Acheulean, who continued to be linked with the north of Africa.

However, the arguments used to reject any crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar are only subjective opinions relating to the danger resulting from the crossing itself. For example: "*l'Homme de Cro-Magnon était-il capable de franchir le détroit de Gibraltar? Meme en tenant compte de la régression, le bras de mer subsistant entre les es deux continents était encore un obstacle dont le franchissement **paraît difficilement concevable***". (Was Cro-Magnon man capable of crossing the Strait of Gibraltar? Even if we take into account marine regression, the stretch of water separating the two continents **would still appear** to have been **too difficult** an obstacle to cross) (Camps 1974), made by people who sometimes had not even seen the area themselves.

The Capsian crisis was also more theoretical than real. There were no absolute datings, and even today there is very little information available about what had happened in the north of Africa (e.g., Aumassip 2001). In 1932, when Vaufreyc postulated the modernity of the Capsian, he defined the Aterian as a period of the Upper Paleolithic with a Mousterian tradition. Why didn't Obermaier re-adapt his framework and insist on the influence of the Capsian? Why did he completely ignore the Iberomaurusian? Or, why didn't he take the Aterian, which had been known about since the 1920s, as the origin of the southern Solutrean in the Peninsula (as even several Spaniards did after Parpalló)? Today it is possible to approach this issue again (Otte and Noiret 2002), but with solid arguments. "This already mentioned lowering of the sea level in regression phase would facilitate the crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar, across smaller distances than the current ones. This way the 'relationships', in the framework of organized movements, of hunter-gatherer groups would be possible, with a direct connection with the communities on both sides of the Mediterranean in keeping with models of 'restricted nomadism'" (Ramos et al. 1999).

But even if one adopts a radical traditional diffusionist perspective, it would be necessary to consider this possibility very seriously. The Hungarian origin for the Solutrean proposed by Breuil has no consistency, nor is it based on any chronological or geographical evidence. It is even worse to look for the origin of the Solutrean in a Mousterian culture of Acheulean tradition which had taken refuge in the area of Provence in France and had theoretically been created by extinct Neandertals. On the other hand, the *Homo sapiens* population and barbed and tangled arrowheads of the Mediterranean Solutrean are more closely linked with the Aterian in the north of Africa which, according to some authors, could have survived for a very long time. There is even a possible cause for this expansion: the pressure exerted by the advance of the desert at the very moment when marine regression was at its maximum and the Strait was easier to cross.

Moreover, from an adaptationist perspective, the south of the Peninsula is ecologically closer to the north of Africa than the steppe inhabited by the mammoth. The fauna in the south of the Peninsula includes African species. Even from the standpoint of evolutionary archaeology, if one postulates an analogy between technology-type and gene, the conclusion for the industrial filiation must be the same as that for the anthropological filiation: the 'black Eve'. Why not accept an 'Out of Maghreb', which modern man could have reached at least at the same time as the Near East, for the Upper Paleolithic?

So, the issue regarding the path taken by Paleolithic cultures, which Obermaier initiated in 1916, is still unresolved, after almost a century of full-time academic research.

Levantine Art and its Chronology

Another issue which was hastily closed is that of the chronology of Levantine art. Obermaier's assumption (and Breuil's too, in the beginning) of a Paleolithic chronology and a parallel development for Levantine and Franco-Cantabrian art was consistent with his proposal regarding the duality of Paleolithic cultures in the Peninsula.

Even though the early objections to this proposal raised by Hernández Pacheco and Cabré prior to 1936 did not have this explicit motivation, the objections which finally turned out to be definitive were not based on a series of datings but on an ideological premise: the unity of the population of Spain since the Upper Paleolithic. And this unity could not be expressed in contemporary terms through stylistic forms and composition that revealed an 'ethnic psychology' and ideologies which were as disparate as the Franco-Cantabrian and the Mediterranean-Capsian. It was firstly Martínez Santa-Olalla and, finally and above all, Almagro Basch, who formulated this criticism. They were later joined by the other Spaniards.

Martín Almagro Basch wrote: "*A ciertos prehistoriadores les ha sido más grato hablar de los pueblos de España, en plural, y estudiar más las diferencias que las afinidades, ver los procesos de roce y dispersión (...) en vez de ver la unidad (de) todos los hombres de España. A la escuela de prehistoriadores de Barcelona y a la escuela de prehistoriadores y etnólogos vascos les ha parecido más científico, por serles tal vez mas grato, aludir a los pueblos de España...*" (Some prehistorians have preferred to talk about the peoples of Spain, in plural, and study their differences more than their affinities, see processes of friction and dispersion (...) rather than the unity of all the men of Spain. The school of prehistorians of Barcelona and the school of Basque prehistorians and ethnographers have considered it more scientific, due to the fact that it is perhaps more agreeable to them, to refer to the peoples of Spain...) (Almagro Basch 1950).

In the Wartenstein Symposium (Pericot and Ripoll 1964), the opinions of the Spaniards were yet fixed: Levantine cave art must be more recent than Franco-Cantabrian Quaternary art, which must have been created by a homogeneous Paleolithic population from the Peninsula. At the Symposium this position was pitted against the critics and the defence of Breuil's position, which was made by Blanc. But the modernizing chronology proposed by Almagro was also contested by Jordá, who considered that the paintings were even more modern and linked them with Anatolia and the Aegean. This argument has continued to this day, with the same arguments.

However, even Obermaier changed his opinion. At first he postulated influences from African people. In 1932 Levantine art was, in Obermaier's opinion, Capsian. The discovery of engraved and painted stone plaques at El Parpalló found at the end of the 1930s induced him to think of them as signs of an autochthonous local development. In 1941 Obermaier was already writing that there were no African influences in Levantine art, although he continued to associate it with the Quaternary.

Faced with this dispute we might ask ourselves from an epistemological standpoint (regardless of the fact that today it may seem to be an issue which has largely been resolved) whether the arguments and proofs for either position were sound or, preferably, if the criticisms levelled at Obermaier's and Breuil's interpretations were founded on better arguments or only on vague political abstractions and intuitions.

Obermaier's and Breuil's arguments were of a stylistic and contextual nature. The objections, above all from Almagro Basch, also were. The problem with basing chronology on something as subjective and elusive as style is an issue which still today, even for the Franco-Cantabrian paintings for which direct independent datings exist, continues to provoke strong debate (we have the example of the fascinating discovery of the Chauvet cave). Moreover, the absolute datings for the so-called Franco-Cantabrian paintings have failed to confirm the stylistically-based chronology, which have been attributed to them.

Any disinterested observer can detect a stylistic palimpsest that is as evident in the Franco-Cantabrian paintings as it is in the Mediterranean rock art (whether it is accepted as Paleolithic or not) or in the Parpalló plaques themselves, which were one of the cornerstones of the argument in favour of a post-Paleolithic date for the Levantine paintings. As Villaverde's compilation (1994) shows, the population continuity attested both by the use of the cavity and by the Parpalló art itself does not correspond with a unidirectional linear evolution neither in regard to the motives nor with what could objectively be called 'style'.

The thematic and stylistic differences within Levantine art itself as well as within that which is accepted as Quaternary in the Mediterranean Levant and Andalusia, and the differences with that of Cantabria are consistent with Obermaier's argument in relation to different Paleolithic groups which were, however, in contact with each other in the Mediterranean and the Cantabrian. If we compared the motives and shapes reproduced on the Parpalló plaques, we might also see similarities, for example, between the figures of bulls and goats, both in the Levantine rock art and in that of the Franco-Cantabrian area and the Pyrenees. If, furthermore, one considers the possible lack of temporal homogeneity within Paleolithic art itself, it is easy to understand that the stylistic argument was not a critical element against the Obermaier/Breuil position.

Almagro's palethnological comments have no chronological value whatsoever, they were a tautology. If for Almagro the population was homogeneous but the paintings were not, they could obviously not have been contemporaneous. The same thing could be said for Obermaier's counter-argument: if the populations were different, even if they were in contact with each other, the paintings should reveal these differences in ethnic psychology. The presence of bowmen in the Levantine paintings and not in the Franco-Cantabrian ones was no chronological argument either. In the opposite sense, the presence of

arrowheads in the Upper Paleolithic of Parpalló should not be automatically correlated with the Levantine bowmen scenes.

Another argument that was used by both sides was the supposed biostratigraphical value of the species of fauna painted. Obermaier forced the interpretation in an attempt to show the presence of cold climate fauna from the Pleistocene. The other side used this element to reinforce their position, using the argument of the absence of cold climate fauna. Thanks to archaeozoological studies (Estévez 1979; Davidson 1980) we now know that these cold climate species were not present on the Mediterranean coast south of the Ebro, and that their presence even in Catalonia (in the north-east of the Peninsula, south of the Pyrenees) was extremely sporadic and possibly came from farther north. The remains of mammoth, for example, both on the Cantabrian coast (Santander and Asturias), where they appear in art too, and in Catalonia, is restricted mainly to dental plates and fragments of ivory which could have been obtained from far away or even from older skeletal remains. In short, the faunal species from sites of the Upper Paleolithic in the Levant are the same as those we find depicted on walls and throughout Levantine art. The only species which is emphasized painted in the deep caves in the Mediterranean area and which is under-represented in faunal groups (both Paleolithic and Mesolithic) is the horse.

Some interpretations regarding the presence of domestic fauna in the shelters of the Levant which have been used as an argument in favor of the Neolithic age of the cave paintings should be considered as merely anecdotal, as with the same premises we could consider tied up, and therefore domesticated, the Paleolithic horses depicted, for example, in the Isturitz cave in the Basque Country.

Finally, the argument regarding the archaeological context should be the most convincing. The paintings in Cantabria and France have been found in caves that were sealed from before the end of the Paleolithic or blocked by late glacial sediments. But in the case of the Levantine paintings this relationship between context and paintings has not been univocal either: in caves on the Mediterranean coast of the Peninsula which contain paintings that are unanimously considered to be Paleolithic there have always been, until now, Neolithic and Chalcolithic archaeological levels. For this reason, the existence of this type of level in the Levantine shelters should not be used as a chronological criterion for the paintings.

The Cova Fosca (in Castelló province) is the site that could give us the best information about a, at the very least, Mesolithic correlation of the paintings, as they contain these levels and plaques with the stains of colouring matter. But this is not conclusive either and precisely for this reason it has not avoided its share of controversy.

Our opinion is therefore that the issue of chronology, from a purely logical point of view, is still open, despite the fact that all the force of the Academy continues to support, now automatically, the contrary position to Obermaier.

Final Discussion

Apart from his excavation work and field surveys, Obermaier's main scientific contribution was to order the materials unearthed in the Peninsula and adapt the retouch to Mortillet's square that Breuil had presented in 1912. With the publication of 'The Fossil Man' (Obermaier 1916 and 1925; see also Gómez Tabanera 1985) Paleolithic research in Spain to all intents and purposes became fossilized too. Consequently, very few changes were introduced in the 1940s (Obermaier and García Bellido 1941). In spite of the fact that his conclusions regarding detail were criticized for political reasons, these same critics had also been his own pupils and had studied at and received the influence of the German universities. They therefore shared Obermaier's essential theoretical-methodological position and even took it to more radical extremes. In some cases we might think that they were right in the criticisms they levelled at Obermaier. But, if they were indeed right, this was not the consequence of more precise scientific arguments or of better interpretation of data.

In the 21st century, after more than two centuries of Rationalism, we should not still be questioning the existence of an objective reality. We should, however, be able to accept that there is a gap between this objective reality and our knowledge. This gap is not only the result of a lack of technical resources but of the interference of our own social, political, ideological, and even personal, conditioning. But the problem does not reside in the existence of these limitations but in our own inability to recognize them, in order to try to attenuate and overcome them. If not, we may not realize that we are working under a number of ideological, religious or political premises that, like the case of the Spanish Paleolithic during most of the 20th century, had been established at the end of the 19th century and which unconsciously conditioned the, apparently contradictory, conclusions that were being drawn. The success or failure of any given set of theories will then be subjected to the social and political reality of the moment, rather than to true objectivity.

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