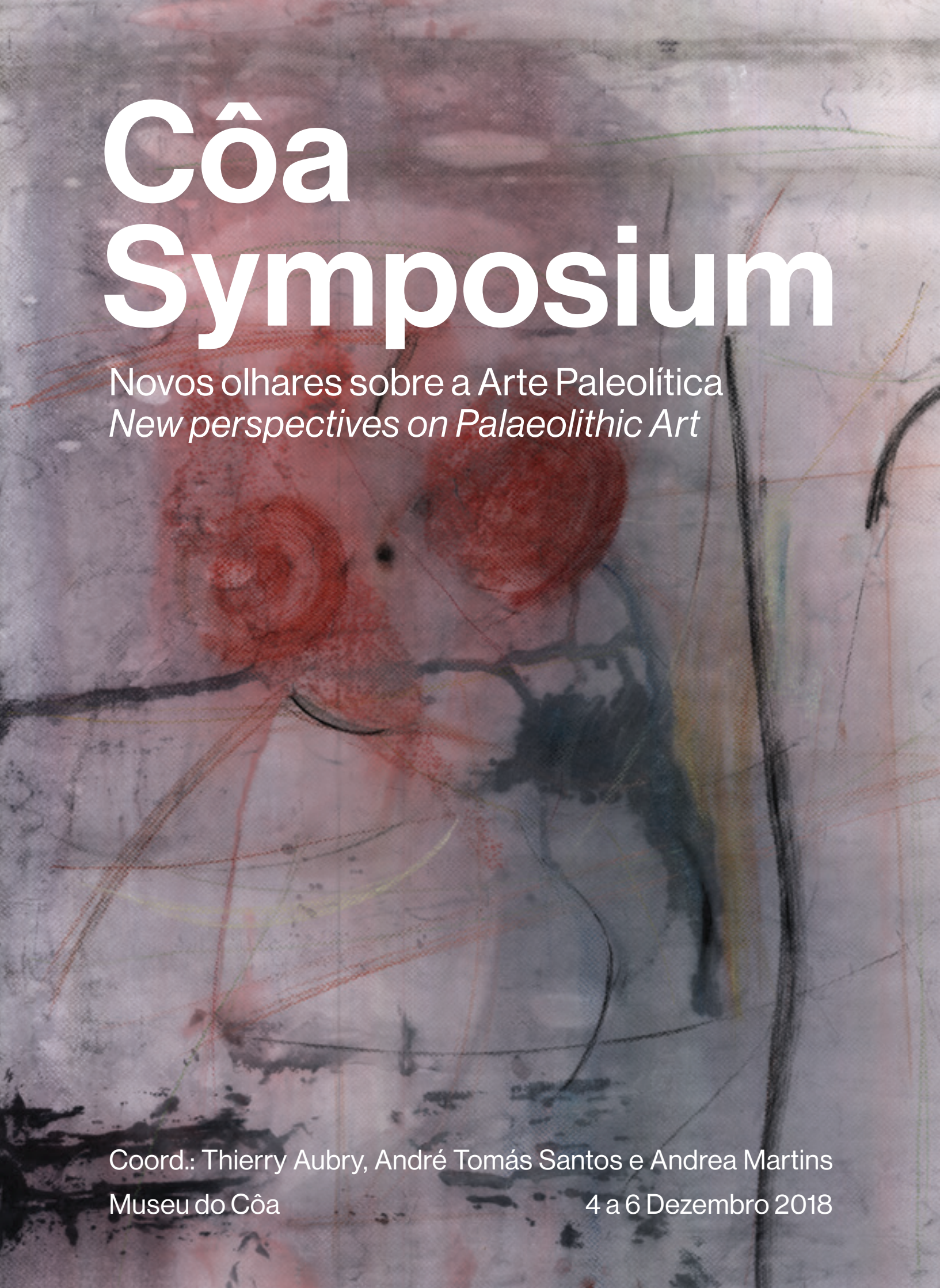

Côa Symposium

Novos olhares sobre a Arte Paleolítica
New perspectives on Palaeolithic Art

Coord.: Thierry Aubry, André Tomás Santos e Andrea Martins

Museu do Côa

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Índice

The Gondershausen petroglyphs in the Hunsrück (Germany) – 7 years after the press conference!

Wolfgang Welker

ARRATA – Verein für fachübergreifende und angewandte Archäologie e.V., Schönauer Mühle, Niederbachstr. 101, 55430 Oberwesel. E-mail: w.welker@t-online.de

Abstract: On 1 July 2019, it is seven years since a press conference was held by Doris Ahnen, the then Minister of Culture (Rhineland-Palatinate), presenting a "sensational discovery" to the public. With the publication of this unique cultural monument, the discussion about the existence and the methods of dating for the identification of Late Glacial rock art in Germany was revived. Attracting a large number of visitors, the historical monument was brought into acute danger, which was denied by the specialist authority. Increasing damage to the rock engravings has led to a successive and irreversible destruction of a cultural monument, which represents, apart from the subjective and ideological appreciation of the monument authority, a unique research object in Germany.
Keywords: Open-air art; Rock art; Palaeolithic; authenticity; Heritage preservation; Germany, Rhineland-palatinate.

Zusammenfassung: Am 01.Juli 2019 wird sich die Pressekonferenz, als die „Sensationsentdeckung" der Öffentlichkeit durch die damalige Kulturministerin Doris Ahnen (Rheinland-Pfalz) vorgestellt wurde, zum siebten Mal jähren. Mit dem Bekanntwerden dieses einzigartigen Kulturdenkmals wurde die Diskussion über die Existenz und die Methodik der Altersbestimmung zur Identifizierung späteiszeitlicher Felskunst in Deutschland neu belebt. Gleichzeitig wurde ein großes Besucheraufkommen ausgelöst und das Denkmal in eine akute Gefährdungslage gebracht, die durch die Fachbehörde geleugnet wird. Zunehmende Beschädigungen am Felsbild führen zu einer sukzessiven und nicht reversiblen Zerstörung eines Kulturdenkmals, dass unabhängig der subjektiven und ideologisch geprägten Wertschätzung der Denkmalbehörde, ein einzigartiges Forschungsobjekt in Deutschland darstellt.
Schlüsselwörter: Freilandkunst; Felskunst; Paläolithikum; Authentizität; Denkmalpflege; Deutschland, Rheinland-Pfalz.

1. Introduction

In 1992, Jürgen Weinheimer discovered a series of rock engravings on a slate rock face in a V-shaped valley in the Hunsrück Mountains of Germany (**Fig. 1**). Their subject matter includes three horses and one other complete animal shown in profile. These animals are carved in a kind of bas-relief. After an initial appraisal by Gerhard Bosinski in the summer of 2010, the site was visited by Antonio Martinho Baptista and Dominique Sacchi in 2011, and Paul Bahn in 2013, all of whom attributed the decorated panel to the Palaeolithic period (Bahn, 2015, p. 84; Baptista, 2012; Sacchi, 2011). Between 2010 and 2014, a study group from the ARRATA e.V. society worked in conjunction with the Koblenz branch of the General Dirctorate for Cultural Heritage in Rhineland Palatinate (GDKE, Rheinland-Pfalz). On July 1, 2014, the rock engraving was introduced to the public during a visit to the site by D. Ahnen.

The research results established proof of the authenticity of the rock engraving. The iconographic analysis indicated a close cultural affinity with the Palaeolithic cave art of France, giving reason to believe that it dates back to the Late Glacial period (Welker, 2014, 2016, 2018). The interdisciplinary investigations (i.a. 3-D scan, geology and lichenology) planned within the scope of cooperation with the specialist authority, the GDKE Rheinland-Pfalz (General Directorate for Cultural Heritage Rhineland-Palatinate), could no longer be implemented. The cooperation ended in August 2014, due to a change in the management of the competent authority. The following contribution deals with a critical review of the Gondershausen project on the one hand, and the disastrous monument preservation procedure on the other.

Figure 1: Palaeolithic rock art in the Hunsrück, Germany (photo: M. Schaffranski).

2. A brief outline of the 2014 research results

The engraved rock can be found near the village of Gondershausen in the northern Hunsrück in the German federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate (**Fig. 2**). The Hunsrück is a low mountainous region that is bordered by three rivers. To the west is the Moselle, with the Rhine to the east and the Nahe to the south. The engraving was found in one of the V-shaped valleys typical of this region. The small, intermediate plateau of the mountain spur, characterised by single, upturned boulders, lies exposed in the valley (**Fig. 3**). The Hunsrück is part of the Rhenish Slate Massif. The engraved Hunsrück slate can be geologically allocated to the Early Devonian period and is distinguished by its layered deposits.

Figure 2: The Hunsrück (Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany) and its geographical position in relation to Gönnersdorf and Vogelherd (map: ARRATA e.V.).

Several periods of work can be defined, each marked by various techniques, motifs and degrees of weathering (**Fig. 4**). The pictorial ensemble with its depictions of animals derives from a first creative phase, during which the rock surface was intensively prepared by pecking, hammering and scratching. The main motif of the deep engravings constitutes two horses in profile (**Fig. 5**, N.º I and II), both facing left and staggered in their array and each around 0.5 meters long. They form an oblique axis along which the other engraved animals, also facing to the left, are evenly distributed. Unlike Horse II, Horse I is shown moving, this supported by the inclusion of anatomical details that are lacking on the other animal figures, such as the bent foreleg and the hooves. This seems to polarise the two horses. Horses I and II also feature a second hind leg in the *perspective tordue* first described by Henri Breuil, where cer-

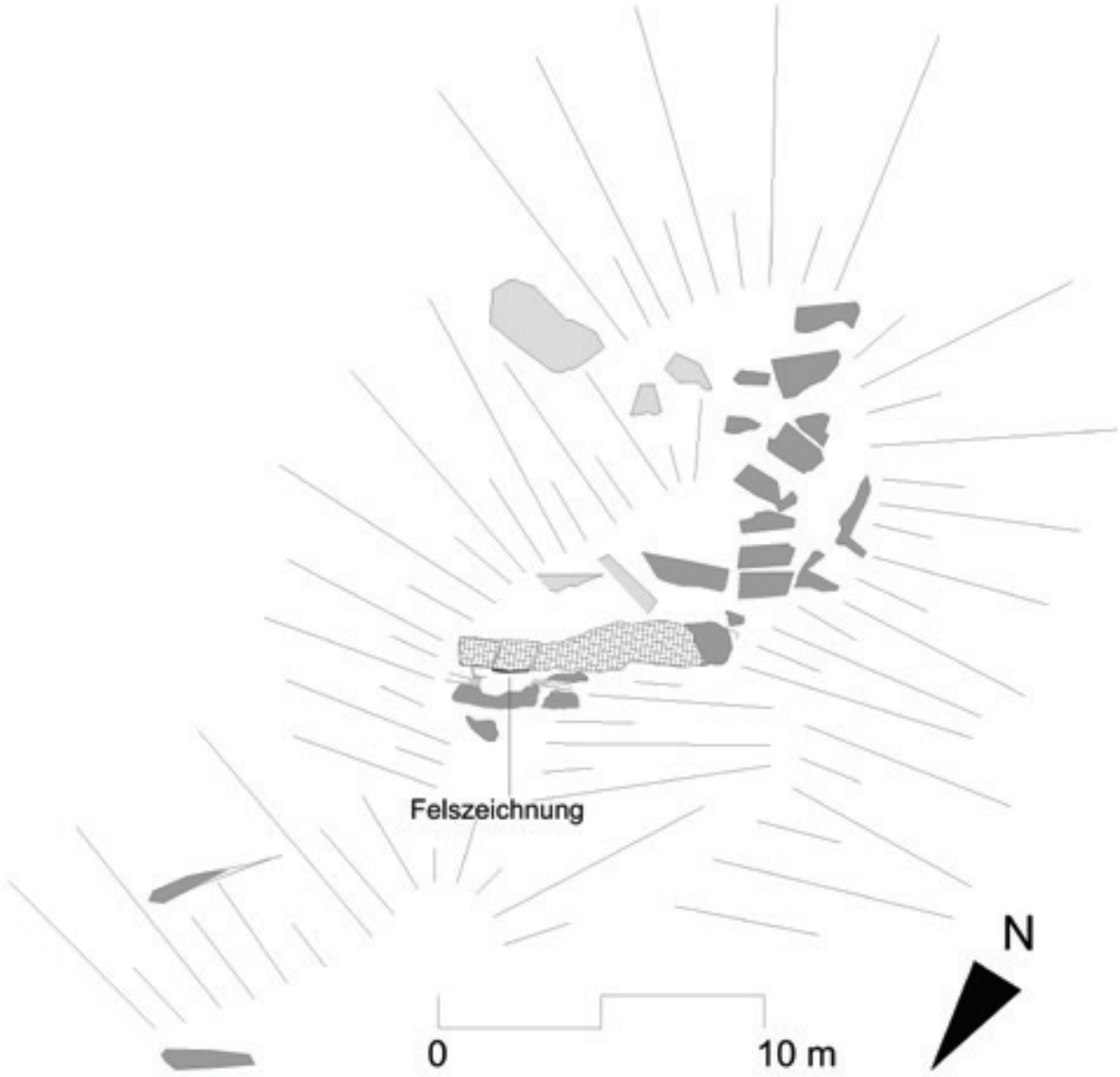

Figure 3: Site plan of the engraved rock in the Hunsrück (not orientated north). Light grey: upturned boulders. Dark grey: bedrock (plan: A. Schmidt, GDKE).

tain elements of an animal shown in profile are turned through an angle of up to 90° (Leroi-Gourhan, 1981, p. 32). On the upper right of the image area, the composition is embellished by a small horse (III) measuring approximately 0.25 metres in length, which is framed by the back line of an indeterminate animal (IV). On the lower edge of the axis, there is a complete, indeterminate animal that is ca. 0.4 metres long (V). Despite erosion traces of the engraving, a horn (or antler?) can be identified. The clearly formed withers and angular rump would suggest a bovid or cervid-type animal.

What is remarkable is the close array of the individual beasts, with the gaps between them less than a centimetre. However, they do not overlap. Regarding the use of space, the Hunsrück animals are distributed in an ordered and even manner that can be referred to as a symmetry of mass in the sense of André Leroi-Gourhan

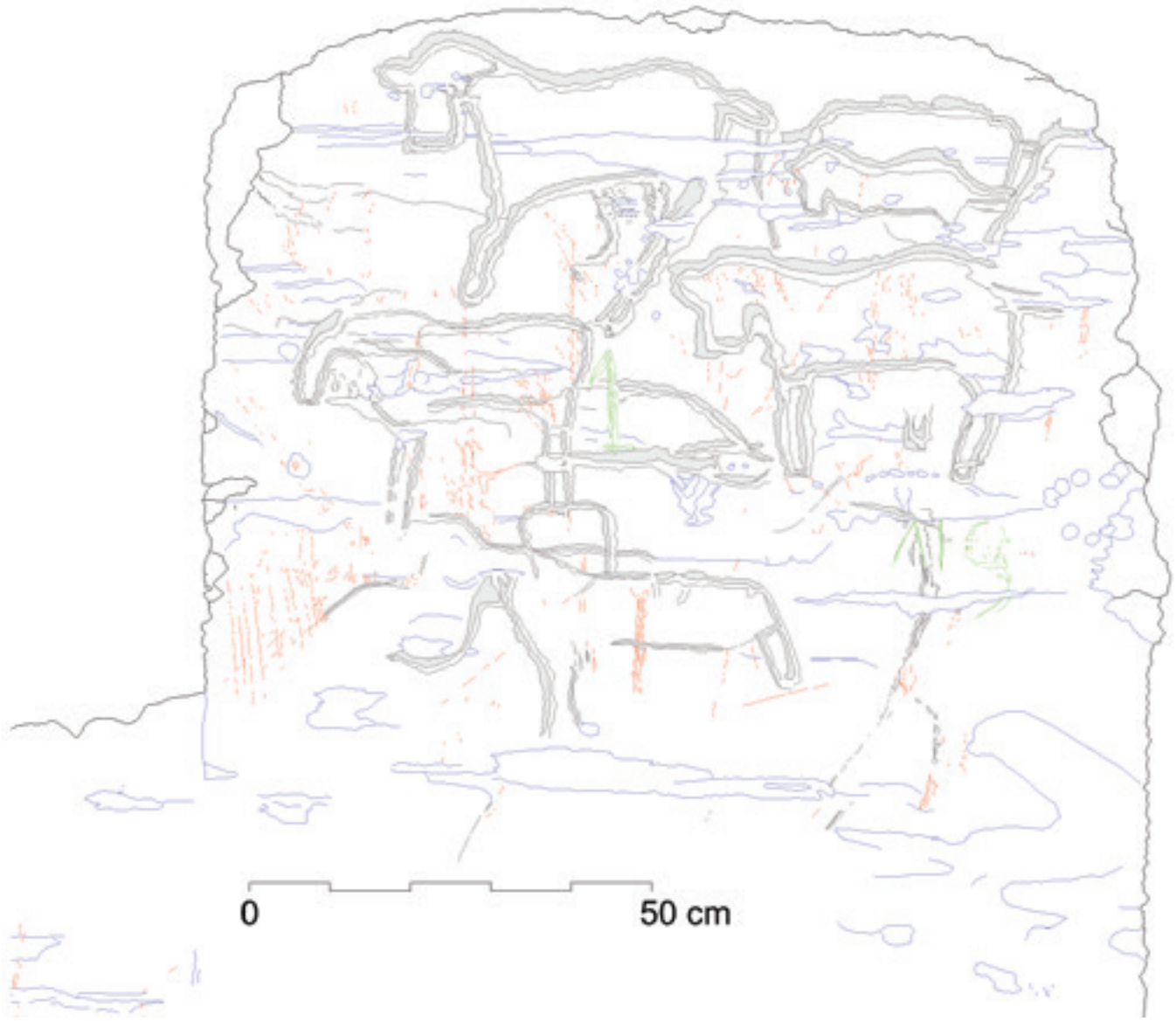

Figure 4: The Hunsrück rock with its deep engravings (black), fine incision (red), other historical markings (green) and areas of natural disturbance (blue). Sketch: R. Hecker/W. Welker. Digital representation: W. Welker/A. Schmidt.

(Leroi-Gourhan, 1981, p. 24 f.). Principles of design that represent the third dimension have also been applied here. For instance, surrounding the small horse with the contours of Animal IV suggests that the artist employed the device of 'overlapping' to create a sense of depth.

The picture area is completed by a number of other deep engravings which can be interpreted as animals shown in an abridged form.

A number of other abstract geometrical signs on the rock belong to a later creative period and are technically striking in that they consist primarily of fine incisions (**Fig. 4**). Finally, more recent history has left its mark on the engraved wall of slate in the form of a chiselled "1" and the carved abbreviation "AIG" (**Fig. 4**). In some areas, the decorated rock is also covered by lichens.

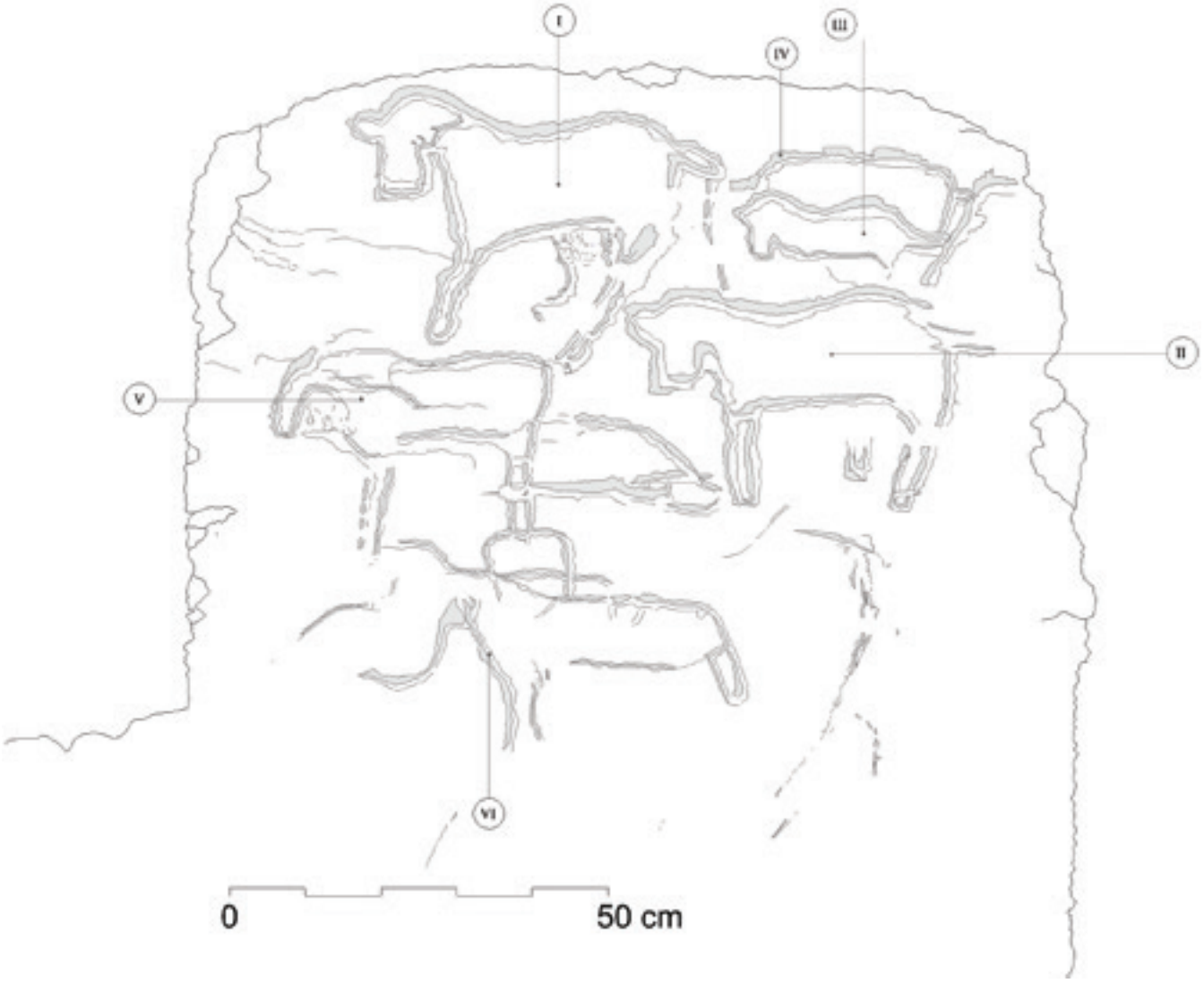

Figure 5: Plan of the deep engravings (digital representation: W. Welker/A. Schmidt).

The pictorial ensemble, with its depictions of animals, displays an intensive preparation of the rock, with the animal figures produced by pecking, hammering, scratching and scraping the rock face. The lines of the carvings achieve widths of up to 40mm and depths of around 10mm.

The relative depth between the outline and inner area of the animal bodies is over 20mm in places. It is also assumed that the rock in areas I–III, on which the horse was engraved, was worked flat beyond the outlines, at least in part. The neck and back lines of the animals, especially of the horses, are particularly strong. The V-, or more often, U-shaped groove of the engravings is asymmetrical here (**Fig. 6**), giving the animal body a three-dimensional design. The wide line carvings thus do not emphasise the relief-like properties of the animal bodies (**Fig. 7**). In both natural (**Fig. 1**) and artificial light (**Fig. 8**) the illusion that this is a three-dimensional design is enhanced by the contrast between light and shade.

The Hunsrück animal carvings are representative of a cautious naturalism which is marked by a schematic style. The contours of the virtually square heads with their V-shaped ears, the S-shaped line of the neck, back and tail follow a fixed, repetitive pattern on all of the horses. The schematisation is so pronounced that the lines could

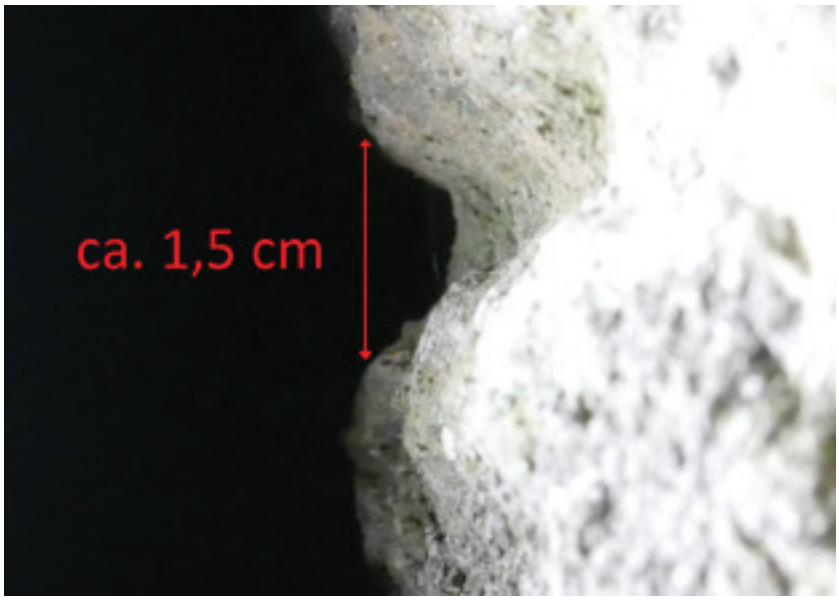

Figure 6: Profile of the stomach line of horse II (photo: M. Schaffranski).

Figure 7: Angled view of Horse II (photo: M. Schaffranski).

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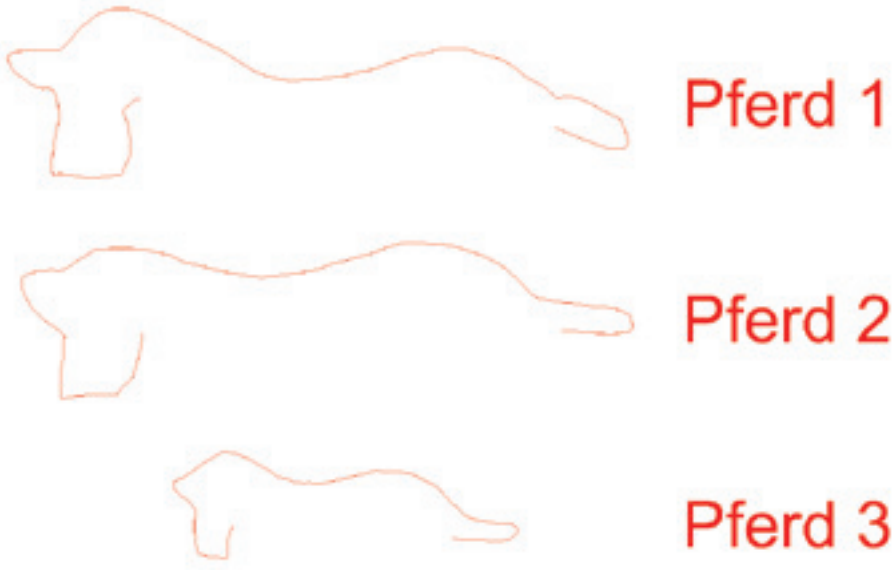
Figure 8: The Hunsrück animal engravings in artificial light (photo: M. Schaffranski).



←
Figure 9: The head, neck and back lines of the horses follow a fixed pattern (W. Welker/ A. Schmidt).

be placed on top of one another and used as a template (**Fig. 9**). Only the leg and stomach lines are treated differently on the horses, therefore making a clear distinction between them. On horse I details such as the hooves are especially prominent (**Fig. 10**), while the legs on small horse III are not fully formed. The line of the leg and stomach of Horse II, on the other hand, has a clear geometrical style and gives the

Figure 10: Front leg of Horse I (photo: M. Schaffranski).

impression of a static leg hanging in the air. The line defining the legs and stomach on indeterminate animal V follows the same pattern. The heavy overemphasis of the heads in both shape and size is particularly notable.

Both the general schematisation of the Hunsrück animal engravings and the particular accentuation of various body parts and the neck and back lines are reminiscent of the early phases of Palaeolithic art.

The strongest parallels in style, subject matter and technique with the Hunsrück engravings are found in the Palaeolithic period and, in particular, in the drawings on Panel 1 at Pair-non-Pair, which dating to the Aurignacian Period (Martínez & Loizeau, 2013 [2006], p. 100). The heavily pecked animal carvings at Pair-non-Pair use the nat-

ural rock surface to create a bas-relief-type impression in some areas (Delluc & Delluc, 2013 [2006], p. 28 and p. 32). Stylistic parallels exist in the reduced, schematic legs, among other aspects, which create a hanging, immobile impression (such as on Horse No. 7). On Panel 1 at Pair-non-Pair one of the motifs also shows a striking polarity between two horses. Horses 6 and 7 face in the same direction and have been engraved one behind the other in different stances and close proximity (Delluc & Delluc, 2013 [2006], p. 29 with fig. 20). The artist has also arranged all of the other animals very closely together and attached great importance to the use of space by not overlapping the various animal figures, integrating natural niches and cracks in the rock into his or her work of art. Besides the animals shown in full on Panel 1 there are others depicted in an abridged form. This striking accumulation of similar characteristics in motif, technique and style points to a close cultural relationship between the rock art in the Hunsrück and the engravings in the small cave of Pair-non-Pair. Remarkable parallels in the Gravettian can be found in Pech-Merle, for instance. The style of Pech-Merle's Black Frieze is dominated by schematic animal figures and animals also shown in abridged form which ironically betray an attention to anatomical detail (Lorblanchet, 2010, p. 431 f.). The existence of a stylistic relationship is corroborated by a direct comparison of Horse I from the Hunsrück with Horse I on the Black Frieze. The execution of the neck and back line with the square head and V-shaped ears and the otherwise rather schematic depiction of the leg and stomach line, with a precise rendering of the front hooves (Lorblanchet, 2010, p. 61 f. with fig. no. 1), are notable parallels. There are also further stylistic parallels with Paleolithic cave and mobile art (Welker, 2014; 2016). It can be said that there is much conformity in technique, style and subject matter with dated works of art from the older phase of the Upper Palaeolithic, thus probably indicating a dating before the last glacial maximum.

3. Discussion

The investigation of a bovid depiction engraved in a sandstone in the Allerberg abri near Göttingen (Lower Saxony) recently gave a working group *"the impetus to develop an interdisciplinary protocol for evaluating the authenticity of possible Late Glacial or early Holocene rock art"* (Grote *& alii*, 2018, p. 77). In their opinion, no reliable protocol guaranteeing transparent results has existed so far. They hold the view that the opinion of experts could not be used as the sole criterion for this issue[1] (cf. Grote *& alii*, 2018, p. 76), using the examples of the Maeander cave (Blumenröther *& alii*, 2018) and Gondershausen without any verification. From a critical perspective, however, their model project of the Allerberg abri can only partly be applied to other rock art sites. In the Allerberg project, direct dating (Beryllium-10 method) as well as geoscientific, bioscientific and visual methods were used in an unprecedented way. The catalogue of criteria reveals the well-known issues of *"theme* (*content of drawing*), *style* (*specifics of execution*), *ageing* (*alteration of drawing*), *technology* (*manner of execution*), *dating* (*direct and/or indirect age estimation*) *and context* (*historical/cultural inclusion*)*"* (Grote *& alii*, 2018, p. 83).

The investigations of the Allerberg abri were part of a probably unprecedented archaeological landscape survey carried out by Klaus Grote, who was in charge of the district archaeology in Göttingen for more than 20 years and accordingly researched petroglyphs and 1600 rock overhangs (110 of them with archaeological relevance)

1. Original source: „Hierzu reicht die Meinung von Experten als einziges Kriterium nicht aus."

(Grote *& alii* 2018, p. 95). These conditions are not met in the hinterland of the heritage preservation authorities. Moreover, it will be an exception in the future that no financial limits will be set for the investigation of a singular bovid depiction and that a dating method (Beryllium-10) which has hardly been tested on the object of research (rock engraving) will be used. In fact, there is still a lack of acceptance and support for rock art research in Germany. This is owed to the fact that it has been considered dubious and exotic since the Second World War; thus, rock art represents an unrecognised type of source material (Züchen, 2000). The Beryllium-10 dating used in the Allerberg abri cannot be applied in the Rhenish Slate Mountains due to the lack of suitable carrier materials (quartz). Furthermore, there is currently no specific dating method for slate. With the Gondershausen project, research in Germany broke new ground for rock art in the open landscape. Hence, the methodological challenges were manifested by the lack of a scientific basis. For this reason, countless site inspections had to be carried out before the investigation began in order to a) develop explanatory models for geological questions (differentiation between anthropogenic and geological rock traces), b) determine rock inscriptions with datable ageing traces, and c) determine the local archaeological context. The most urgent objective, however, was to establish a dating approach by proving the authenticity of the engraved animal depictions.

On the grounds of comparisons with datable traces of ageing procedures, a deliberate act of imitation can certainly be ruled out in Gondershausen. This issue is based on the thesis that with the first discovery (Altamira in 1879) at the earliest and the end of the scholarly dispute about the existence of Late Pleistocene cave art in 1901 (cf. Cartailhac, 1902), it has proved possible to produce conscious imitations of Ice Age cave art. Four engraved pictures including dates (1917, 1926, 1929 and 1935), which are situated less than 500 m away from the research object and have been subject to the climatic factors of sun and rain, serve as chronological parameters (**Fig. 11**). Protohistoric petroglyphs in the Rhenish Slate Mountains such as the Roman "Justinus Rock" in the Taunus (Bender, 2005), which was first published in 1870, also confirm the results. The question of authenticity focused in this paper is therefore cru-

Figure 11: The modern inscription "1935" (total length: 21,7 cm) only shows very few ageing traces (photo: W. Welker).

cial because the iconographic analysis decoded complex pictorial elements showing parallels solely in Palaeolithic art (cf. W. Welker, 2014). It is important to note that all motifs from subsequent farming cultures to modern times possess a completely different imagery. This line of argument goes beyond the simple chronological criteria of the subject (content of drawing), i.e. the depicted motif and the animal species or style (specifics of execution), with the classification of the engravings according to the four styles of Leroi-Gourhan (1965) (cf. Grote *& alii*, 2018, p. 83). Bednarik also criticises: *"Apart from the geological and forensic evidence that these motifs can only be of recent, historical antiquity, the stylistic argument is also flawed"* (Bednarik, 2015, p. 20). Unfortunately, he does not go into iconographic analysis and erroneously reduces his stylistic criticism to the simple statement *"that 'naturalistic' animal depictions were made in all historical periods of the continent"* (Bednarik, 2015, p. 9).

Referring to a microphotography (cf. Bednarik, 2015, Fig. 11), Bednarik regards the stripes as evidence of the use of an iron chisel (Bednarik, 2015, p. 20), but he fails to provide a scientific justification. Obviously, this is a natural slaty cleavage. In this context, it is vital to consider comparable grinding marks in the area of the engraved bovid in the Allerberg abri, suggesting the use of a crystalline stone tool (cf. Grote *& alii*, 2018, p. 88 with Fig. N.º 14). Digital microscopy was also used in Allerberg. Without further explanation, however, such statements first of all contradict each other.

Bednarik argues for a date below 1000 years (Bednarik, 2017, p. 2), stating that "the inscriptions on the Gondershausen petroglyph panel are no less weathered than

Figure 12: The "1" from modern times seems to have been engraved only recently. On the left, the line of the back leg belonging to animal V clearly shows ageing traces (photo: M. Schaffranski).

the petroglyphs" (Bednarik, 2015, p. 19). This statement, which refers to the inscription of the figure "1", can be refuted (**Fig. 12**; cf. Welker, 2018, p. 67 with Fig. N.º 8). In addition, Bednarik also regards the mining of roofing slate in the slope area of the rock engraving as evidence of a recent dating (Bednarik, 2017, p. 2). The most recent trace was already revealed by ^{14}C-dated charcoal, which was excavated by Monrepos (archaeological research centre of the RGZM) in autumn 2014. It was discovered in a small cleft in a rock, in front of the engraving area, and dated into the year 1972 +-15 years (communication with O. Jöris on 4 February 2016). These aspects are just as inconclusive as two fragments of flint blades discovered by M. Schaffranski on a field 700 metres away in 2014. Due to a striking surface characteristic ("en eperon"), one of the artefacts dates back to the Palaeolithic. Finally, this brings up the much-discussed question as to why the rock engraving should have survived the climatic conditions of the Ice Age. A plausible explanation was provided by Stefan Veil during a visit in 2016, considering the temporary covering of the rock with sediment. In fact, rudimentary deposits of displaced loess can be observed on the neighbouring plateau as well as in the side valleys of the Moselle, which support such a thesis.

4. Chronology of a heritage preservation debacle

As early as 2012, the specialist authority was informed about the necessity of a protective fence before the publication of the rock engraving. On 01 July 2014, the discovery was announced to the public at a press conference. In the press release of the GDKE Rheinland-Pfalz, D. Ahnen admits that this discovery is, without exaggeration, a sensation. She also promises that they will now think about the conservation and the protection of this archaeological monument.[2]

A. von Berg, the archaeologist in charge of the federal state, informed the media that they would try to develop a concept in the following one or two weeks in order to find out how they could protect the finds in the long run. He also addressed the people living in the local area, who would certainly be able to undertake this task[3] (SWR 4 of 13.10.14). On 18 July 2014, representatives of the municipal administration, the author of this paper, and external parties were invited by A. von Berg to discuss the protective measures. Interestingly, the invitation already mentioned 'the irreparable damage to the find' (cf. **Fig. 13**). In August 2014, P. Henrich became the new head of the competent specialist authority. Under his direction, there was a radical paradigm shift and, as a consequence, a temporary co-operation agreement with Monrepos and the Institute I3 (University of Mainz) to verify the age on a scientific basis. Much to his surprise, the author of this paper was recommended to withdraw his planned publication in Antiquity in order to avoid a "shitstorm". A subsequent small excavation of a cleft in the rock in front of the engraving area, however, did not yield any noteworthy findings (see above). On 16 September 2014, the director of the specialist authority informed the ministry and the project participants that the planned fence would not be built. The reasons he gave included the arguments that the fence might not deter potential destroyers, it would provoke visitors, and if the fence was destroyed, road safety would no longer be guaranteed. Moreover, it was

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2. Original source: „Diese Entdeckung ist – ohne Übertreibung- eine Sensation...wir werden uns jetzt intensiv Gedanken über die Konservierung und den Schutz diesen archäologischen Denkmals machen."

3. Original source: „Wir versuchen jetzt in den nächsten 1 bis 2 Wochen ein Konzept zu entwickeln, wie wir die Sachen dauerhaft schützen können – hier sind auch die regionalen Leute vor Ort gefragt, die das auch mit Sicherheit in den Griff kriegen können..."

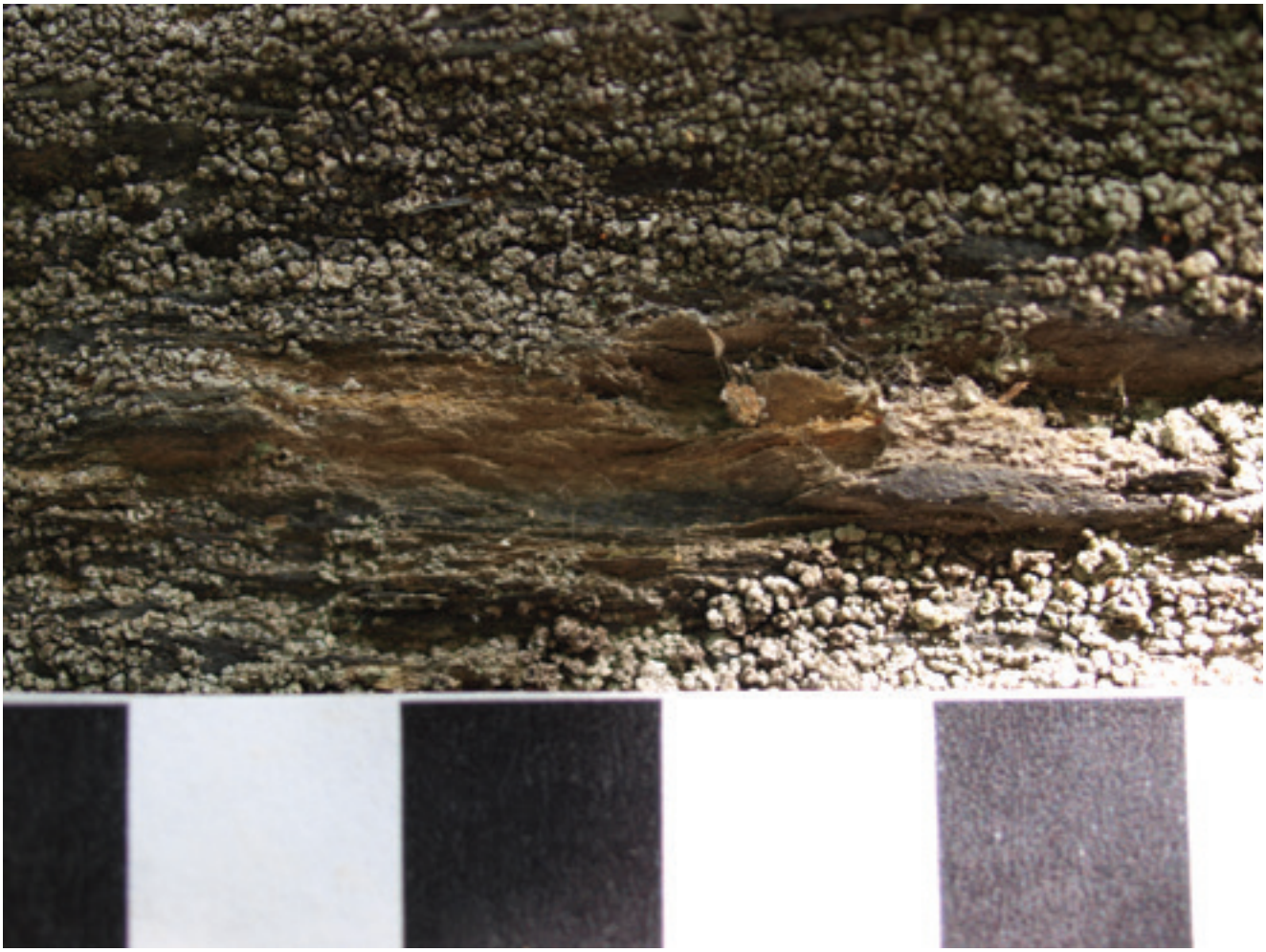

Figure 13: Typical destruction in the picture area. Such damages can be observed since 2014 (photo: W. Welker).

argued that it would cause additional costs[4]. Further promises were made on television, pointing out that the local community would not be left in the lurch with this sensational find, especially with regard to a touristic valorisation and the use of the find as a whole[5] (SWR, Landesschau, 2014). In September 2015, further damage to the rock formations (spalling) and in the immediate vicinity (e.g. scratchings) was reported to the competent authority. Once again the author was irritated when he was told that the rock engraving would date back to the 19th or 20th century. Furthermore, it was argued that the scientific value would depend on scientifically reliable facts and not on emotions based on a stylistic analysis. In February 2016, the municipality of Emmelshausen (including Gondershausen) therefore attempted, in consideration of the commitments made in July 2014, to launch a comprehensive preservation concept (fence, touristic attractions and educational actions) that would be financed by EU funds. However, the project did not receive the necessary approval from the

4. Original source: Als Gründe gab er unter anderem an, dass der Zaun „potentielle Zerstörer" nicht abhält, die „Besucher provozieren" würde und „bei Zerstörungen des Zauns…die Verkehrssicherheit nicht mehr gewährleistet" wäre und außerdem „neue Kosten" entstünden.

5. Original source: „Es ist ein einzigartiges Denkmal…natürlich wird die Ortsgemeinde nicht im Regen stehen gelassen…mit seinem Superfund…auch im Hinblick auf eine touristische Inwertsetzung und Nutzung des Ganzen…"

authorities, not least because a fence would hinder scientific activities. On site, it was made clear that the sawing-off of the rock engraving would be considered in order to protect it from possible damage. Monty Python's comedy troupe could not have staged it better! There is no question that sawing it off would hinder future research. This may lead to the assumption that such a measure is taken with the intention to get rid of an annoying problem. Taking the view of a heritage conservationist, the sawing-off of the rock engraving, which forms an inseparable unit with the cultural landscape, would lead to the destruction of the monument (Bednarik, 2007, p. 2). In the final protocol, the director of the specialist authority in Koblenz notes that the modifications of the rocks in the vicinity of the rock engraving, however, do not concern the monument discussed here! (cf. figure 13!) At the same time, the GDKE-LA-K considered three variants of protection, i.e. the removal and erection of a replica, the enclosure and securing of the rock, or the erection of a protective fence. The choice of an appropriate method depended on the result of the research, which was expected in 2016. Moreover, a full protection against vandalism could only be achieved by transport[6].

In response to the latest enquiry by ARRATA e.V. on 26 March 2019, the specialist authority announced that it would be in close contact with the communities and the Untere Denkmalschutzbehörden (lower monument protection authorities) in order to guarantee the best possible protection for the monument, taking into account the interests of all parties concerned[7]. Unfortunately, this could not be confirmed by the people involved. The rock engraving is still unprotected (status on 19 May 2021). Paradoxically, in 2019, a lightweight wooden fence was built around the rock face, which is used to protect against wildlife. Visitors can easily enter the rock face.

6. Original source: „...die Modifikationen der Felsen im Umfeld des Felskunst-Felsen jedoch nicht das hier besprochene Denkmal betreffen!... Die GDKE-LA-K diskutiert zur Zeit drei Varianten des Schutzes: Abtransport und Aufstellen einer 1:1 Kopie; Einhausen und Sichern des Felsens...; Errichten eines Schutzzaunes. Das zu wählende Verfahren hängt von dem in 2016 erwarteten Ergebnis der Forschungen ab. Eine 100%ige Sicherung gegen Vandalismus ist nur durch den Abtransport zu erzielen."

7. Original source: Auf die jüngste Anfrage durch ARRATA e.V. teilte die Fachbehörde am 26. März 2019 mit, dass man mit den Gemeinden und Unteren Denkmalschutzbehörde „in engem Kontakt steht, um hier den bestmöglichen Schutz für das Denkmal unter Berücksichtigung der Belange aller Beteiligten zu gewährleisten".

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