

# BOOK REVIEWS

Robert Liris, *Chercheur de Mystères, Entretiens avec Claude Arz*. (Paris: Les Editions de l'Œil du Sphinx, 2018/2021); 166 pp; ISBN: 9782380140415.

More than a series of interviews, this book contains many brief essays and *aperçus* on a variety of topics that Robert Liris has been interested in throughout his life. As the title informs us, Liris has for a very long time been a researcher into mysteries—strange historical coincidences, unexplained archaeological sites, modern emergences of archaic and ancient images. In addition, he has been a teacher, a poet, an art critic and good friend to many. Where others have turned away from controversy, Liris has faced it square on and pursued it through its smallest details, using not only his powerful intuition but cameras and light filters. And other high-powered optical equipment. He calls himself a psychohistorian, someone who not only looks for what happened, or how it happened, but why it happened—the emotional and the psychic forces that run through history.

Liris' key places and themes have in the past centred on Glazel, its discoverer Emil Fradin, but also the so-called Shepherds' Table nearby in the Bourbon region: in each of these places, professional and official scientists and government agents have glanced and dismissed these places as not worth any further attention. Liris has looked, studied, visited and revisited and talked the ordinary people nearby, and finds them each portals into a world of energy and insight beyond textbooks and publicity brochures. That Vichy should have been chosen as the seat of Marshall Pétain's collaborationist government during the Nazi occupation he takes as no mere accident: a convenient spa town with lots of hotel space into which a phoney bureaucracy could be placed. Vichy is a place of historical energies flowing through it for millennia and when its propaganda symbols and posters are examined closely he finds the strange connections to archaic phenomena. Even in an apparently superficial similarity between Tarot cards and videos of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York City, Liris discovers something more than fact or fake news: uncanny affiliations which lead us to ponder in a new way the world we live in.

The most important part of the book for me are Liris' speculations on the nature of the objects found at Glazel and his insights into prehistoric art in general. Though not systematically presented—they come and go with the

flow of the conversation with Arz, they do come together in the reader's mind as a profound meditation on our earliest ancestors and their engagement with their own minds. In one sense, Liris is sceptical about the dates given for the various materials found at the site—bones, horn and clay—accepting, it seems, the conservative readings of C14 and Thermo-Luminescence that they are relatively late, sometime between 1500 BCE and 800 CE, rather than some pieces thousands of years earlier and were only collected and perhaps re-written on later. Yet he seems to accept the late Hans-Rudolf Hitz's view that the "alphabetical" marks constitute an early set of proto-Celtic languages found elsewhere in the Alpine regions of what is now France and Switzerland, the messages being interpreted as simple *ex voto* and ownership statements; rather than marks of a more hieroglyphic nature, later re-touched to conform to those proto-alphabetic ciphers. All of which still leaves us with the mystery of what the site, with its storage tunnels, and setting across the plains to the volcanos near modern-day Clarmont Ferrand is –burial grounds for sacred objects, museum or reliquary of people in the tragic sense of their own historical disappearance between Gaul and Rome, or Aladdin's Lamp Cave for early medieval thieves and forgers.

In another sense, Liris feels and sees with mystical insight some deeply spiritual meanings in the artefacts, their markings and contiguity, as though it were the phantoms of the deep and dark past speaking to us out of the ground, in the old-fashioned glass cabinets in Fradin's museum, and in the inexplicable controversies and even hostility generated by the uncovering of the field, the exposure of unheard-of objects by mere peasants, school teachers and amateur prehistorians.

Other than those complete deniers and sceptics who find it hard to grant any significance to the objects found in Glozel or to the site itself, now known to be associated with a Gallic settlement on the other side of the river, in whose banks the tunnels full of a mixed collection of materials have been found. Visitors to the miniature (one room) museum set up by Emil Fradin have marvelled at the startling variety on display: carved and etched bone and reindeer miniatures, clay models of faces and intersex beings, tablets full of some mysterious kind of proto-writing. The walls of the museum also have photographs of famous visitors, including men of the stature of Salomon Reinach, celebrities and royalty from around Europe, as well as newspaper clippings of the controversy that happened from the early 1920s to the end of that decade.

Another fascinating aspect of this book is the description of certain symbols having mystical properties. It is likely, as Liris and Arz his interlocutor suggest, that many of the large cliff-face walls across the whole of Europe which are marked by often vast numbers of wordless signs, left by and for passage by shepherds during transhumance. Their record symbolically changes in the lives of rural people over many centuries, and may give advice to their fellow shepherds in how to avoid catastrophes—being caught in blizzards, falling into crevasses, warnings to hide from hostile robber bands and so on—as well as the unknown dreams of countless generations who feel inspired by and feel the need to respond in kind to the carvings found there since time out of mind. Crosses, circles, hatched lines and gouged holes along with hundreds of other signs attest to these places as *lieux de memoire*, where powerful memories of traumatic experiences accumulate.

These energies, Liris postulates, may be actual (natural) magnetic fields, geological forces vibrating underground from unseen rivers deep in the earth, rumblings of volcanic eruptions, tremors of low-level earthquakes that sporadically are felt in certain configurations of boulders and echoes of explosive contacts with celestial bodies that disintegrate on impact. Human events, for groups, large and small, even individual families, repressed memories be triggered by visualization of these signs, the release of long dormant traumatic shocks, and thus, when rediscovered during transhumance, produce responses in dance, song and mythical narratives: or silent catatonic absorption into the shared collective memory.

As Arz and Liris continue their conversation—reconstructed and organized for this book—many other topics are covered, ranging from the phenomena associated with UFOs and the special relationship Robert finds with his wife Pierrette, Black Madonnas and black icons of Christ, alchemy and the Philosopher's Stone, and historical coincidences that place national leaders, scientists, charlatans, and celebrities into strange seemingly mutually-illuminating patterns.

As a psychohistorian, Liris knows that such things are matters of hallucination, returns of repressed images and sounds, and collective anxieties manifest in all sorts of ancient and modern social media. However, he also entertains other explanations, such as spiritual forces and a Jungian kind of archetypes virtually written into the DNA of modern humans. His meeting with Lloyd deMause in New York at a meeting of the Psychohistorical Association proved to be almost as much of a life-changing

event as his introduction to Emile Fradin and Glozel. Nothing is simple and a cigar is never just a cigar. As Freud shows, whether in dreams, jokes or clips of the tongue, there are always hidden motivations, secret connections and sudden eruptions of mental energy in close encounters with seemingly trivial or meaningless people, places, things and ideas.

A conversation with Robert Liris is never just an exchange of pleasantries: it is an exciting entry into a many-branched Palaeolithic grotto, a descent into the abyss of darkness, out of which there sparkles rare crystals, sparkling jewels and explosive fireworks from somewhere deep inside the earth. When he meets a painter like Sloba Jevitic, their personalities click, they understand one another, and they spark each other into new thoughts and understandings of art and the universe. But that's not all. When he sees photographs of the Twin Towers collapsing in New York City of 9/11, he also sees the towers painted on Tarot cards, out of each of these catastrophes there are figures of people falling from the heights into the earth; and when he watches the latest pictures of Notre Dame de Paris burning and its steeple collapsing, the mystery is expanded, not a mystery of what is unknowable and rationally improbable, but the enigmatic and bizarre connections between different happenings in different times and places, connections that cannot be confined to formal historical protocols or sensationalized in popular manuals of dream interpretation.

It is a privilege and an honour to read Robert Liris' latest book as a way of renewing and reinvigorating our friendship: we often meet in places of difference and disagreement, but our meetings—whether in person, in books or in imagination—are always exciting moments in time.

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Harald Jähner, *Aftermath: Life in the Fallout of the Third Reich, 1945-1955*, trans. Shaun Whiteside. (London: W.H Allen, 2021); xvii + 382 pp; ISBN-10: 0593319737; ISBN-13: 978-0593319734.

When the Nazi Regime surrendered and collapsed in 1945, Germany was a land of destruction and desolation. The monstrous dream of a Thousand Year Reich ended, and the people of Germany were left in the skeleton of a country. Forty million people were left homeless, confused and disillusioned, searching for a way home or a bite to eat. This was not only Wehrmacht prisoners of war and demobilised troops, but displaced persons of many kinds. It included the forced slave labour Hitler brought in to run his war machine, the incarcerated prisoners in concentration camps, and the Jews who had survived extermination camps. Entire neighbourhoods were flattened and burnt out by Allied bombing raids. Millions of Germans were dead or injured, or had been driven to insanity by the war. If the author of this book, Harald Jähner, did not keep reminding us of what the Hitlerite Stormtroopers and Nazi gangs did at home and abroad in the name of the *Volk*, one might almost fall into the trap of feeling sorry for the remaining soldiers.

So desperate were people to find somewhere to shelter and something to eat, that they spoke of themselves as living in the *Wolfzeit*, the time of the wolves. Mothers sent their children out to scavenge and steal what they could, while they themselves ventured out into the streets to bargain, trade or steal what they could, while their confused, disorientated husbands sat at home and stared at the walls, if they had made it back from the front at all. It was a period of *homo hiomini lupus*, each one a ravaging wolf to the other. Without law, without order, without a functioning economy, for at least a decade, Germans did not recognize who or what they were. They virtually never mentioned the Jews or the Holocaust or any of their enormous crimes against humanity and civilization. The worst of the worst criminals were put on trial by the four Occupying Powers—America, France, Britain and the Americas or the Middle East; and yet most members of the National Socialist Party made appropriate noises to pass through the weak process of “de-nazification” and returned to their old jobs in government, commerce or education. Mostly they stayed *shtumm*.

Drawing on contemporary personal diaries, newspaper essays, magazine articles and a few films, Jähner describes the state of mind in the post-war Germany. It was as though the whole of the dreams and illusions

for the previous twelve years evaporated and the world had slipped into a state of mindless prehistory. Jähner's approach is one of a *histoire de mentalités* (though he calls it "an anthropology of culture") and thereby enfolds within it a history of emotions and the small matters that make up everyday existence—food, shelter, hygiene, fashion and social relationships. This way of working from the bottom up, from the needs of the individual and family up to the re-creation of civil society, comes about by default. The normal concerns of formal history, such as it used to be called, with a focus on great men doing great deeds in the homeland and abroad, virtually ceased to exist after the Allies won the war and occupied the territory of the Greater Reich. Virtually all the institutions and their concrete places of operation and the ruling elites disappeared either literally—through death, arrest or escape; but also in emotional, aesthetic and intellectual ways. Jähner is concerned with showing how the mental healing of the German people came about, that rather than the usual subjects of political history or even cultural history. *Aftermath* is therefore about what Lloyd deMause called "the emotional life of nations": how they brought up their children, learned to make friends and lovers, and experienced life as individuals and members of a family: how they saw the world as a place of imaginings and dreams.

Significantly, Jähner considers the short-term aftermath of the Second World War in Germany, taking note of the days and weeks following rather than just the years. Before the miracles could be made, there had to be a shaking up of the pieces, a twisting of the kaleidoscope, a descent into craziness. Unwanted immigrants from one part of Germany or Europe wandered aimlessly to another, children thus growing into adolescence without control and rebelling against their parents, young adults moving away from the family homes and villages into new communities and houses in unknown regions wanted new styles and developed trendy tastes in the televised versions of the West—old customs, traditional ties and tastes broke down and were replaced with something, though often superficial, was strong enough to generate the so-called German Miracle. Popular songs and light theatrical shows arose with roots neither in the Weimar Republic's satirical skits or the older literature of classical times

Despite a few pockets of resistance and hide-aways of the Old Guard (e.g., SS men and women and party hacks of all ages), what emerges—and Jähner is very persuasive—a kind of society unlikely to slide into the deep cesspool of Nazism ever again:

Within a few years the national identity of the Germans had been profoundly transformed. What had been warmly celebrated under National Socialism as a racially unified *Volksgemeinschaft* was transformed in the post war years into an enforced association of unloved ethnic groups. This in turn, during the boom years, turned into an unsentimental compromise-based society in which everyone felt only tolerably well treated.

In this new uncomfortable Germany hovering over the fetid abyss—even with the Eastern Democratic Republic being imposed wherein the crazy mix of peoples brought together under a socialist banner and looking enviously on at events in the other part of itself—almost everything can be seen as fake: fake people denying and masking their past, phony reasons for doing things that never came to grips with the real motives that were suppressed, false domestic and community harmony on the street, yet slowly mellowing out; again, except for the disgruntled and the hateful who still lurked in dark corners—or carried on their own civil service or institutional jobs, albeit with a slightly muted jargon.

For a decade or more, Harald Jähner write, there was as much inner as outer devastation, as well as secret alliances between those who worked to build the new Germany and those who gazed through a mist of incomprehension. Streets and minds formed “a jumble of contradictory feelings” and “a tangled mass of myths and imaginings.” This “spiritual demobilization of the Germans” seems to have been a necessary process of catharsis to drain away as much of the lies, indifference and greed that had been the soul of the Third Reich.

But hardly ever, in the private letters Harald Jähner has combed through, the women’s magazines (copied from American models) he has read from cover to cover (for the covers and the advertisements often tell us more than the editorials and opinion pieces), is there anything about the Jews who disappeared, where the food and furniture came from that replaced bombed out apartments, and who were the strange workers in the factories that replaced the millions of husbands and sons who went to war. The Law of the Jungle, the Theatre of the Absurd, the Time of the Wolf—and the average woman or man in *Deutschland* could not understand why the rest of the world had so little sympathy for them. “The degree to which they had repudiated themselves as a nation was apparent only to those Germans had emigrated. Within the country, it was not clear even to opponents of the Nazis, those had been ashamed of the regime, just how far they had fallen in the eyes of the world.” If people “had apparently once more become wolves

towards their fellows,” as the historian Malte Zierenberg writes, they did not know why, and they wanted to blame it on someone else. At best, they thought and felt, they would have “to start over from the beginning.” But this was not to slip back into real innocence or to purge themselves of past guilt. “Hardly anyone could escape the magic of this carefully stage-managed beginning.”

Children who emerged from the fog of war into the rubble of peacetime often did not know their own names and grew up in a kind of perpetual anomie, with parents denying their own past, and having only one goal: to find food, shelter and sympathy. The occupying powers imposed new sets of rules, different in the various zones and then in the different pseudo-nations that emerged. Those intellectuals and politicians who had fled or been expelled came back and wanted to tell their former fellow-citizens how to live. However, the Germans, so-called good and so-called bad, didn’t want to hear those voices. Nor did they want to watch the films produced out of documentary footage of the death camps when they were first opened. When they were forced to attend the showings: “Many viewers simply looked away, or else spent the whole film staring at the floor. Some who had seen the mountains of corpses on the screen vomited or collapsed in tears as they left.” In other words, it was not only the shock of waking up one day to find the whole structure of German power relations and the institutions of repression were gone, crushed beneath years of bombings and cannon fire, but to feel a great emptiness inside, having fallen into or been pushed down an abyss, “the historically unprecedented maelstrom” of history.

After being compressed and concentrated since 1870 into an incomplete Second Reich, an amalgam of peoples, when the Third Reich imploded, one commentator cited by Jähner sums it up in a bizarre and outrageous *cri du coeur* of a people utterly blind to their own crimes against humanity and against the Jewish people:

The lurching unconsciousness into which the German people were plunged by the mendacious lunacy of the sub humanity that had risen to power was followed by the inevitable collapse, the most shocking physical and mental hardship that any people has been forced by fate to endure. The soul of no other people has ever been deeper and more often and thus better prepared for the seed of the new spirit than that of the Germans.

Jähner keeps his sights clear on the hardship of the Germans after the war, their time of hunger and confusion, their economic recovery—never really

the miracle it was presented as, since the Western nations helped in no small way, for their own strategic reasons, The author does not pull any punches as to the awakening of a moral conscience and the sense of responsibility, in the Federal Republic at least. Neo-Nazis politic actions and occasional criminal attacks against Guest-Workers, other immigrants from the Middle East and always the Jews, remain a worry, though so far they have been more a painful annoyance than a danger. It remains to be seen whether the wolf-packs will come back.

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