

*Harald Meller and Kai Michel*

## **THE MYSTERY OF THE SHAMAN**

### **An Archaeological Journey to our Beginnings**

#### **English sample translation**

9,000 years ago, two people were buried in Germany with hundreds of ritual objects—who were they?

“The presumed shaman captivated everyone. She also kept us on our toes with ever new and most amazing insights. Just as if she finally wanted her riddle solved. After 9000 years, that's high time even for a cold case.” Harald Meller and Kai Michel

Why is this case so special and what does it have to do with us today?

1. It dates from the era in which our fate was decided.
2. The fact that the scripture-less prehistory lacks sources to understand people's thinking and to reconstruct their beliefs lends enormous relevance to the double tomb.
3. The case shows us why so many people today complain about the loss of resonance and transcendence and suffer from the absurdity of everyday life.
4. The tomb provides insights into the former relationship between the sexes. Patriarchy has not yet been invented.
5. The shaman confronts us with questions that arise with great vehemence today, given the increasingly obvious limits of a technocratic understanding of the world based on the exploitation of nature.

“The Nazis thought the burial belonged to a white man from the Neolithic,” says Harald Meller, director of the State Museum of Prehistory. A dangerous and wrong conclusion „that was part of a larger campaign to prove that the German “race” had been in northern Europe for thousands of years.“ Andrew Curry, Archeology

#### **Press quotes:**

"An exciting book: the reconstruction of a detective masterpiece that is unparalleled in recent German archaeology." *Der Spiegel*

"The exciting narrative style, the varied composition of the book and the impressive illustrations make the shaman come alive in the mind's eye while reading."  
*Forschungsmagazin der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft 2022*

"The book 'Das Rätsel der Schamanin' takes the reader on a brilliant search for clues that leads to the roots of spirituality and religion.“ *ZEIT für Literatur (Podcast DIE ZEIT)*

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## Introduction

### **BASED ON A TRUE STORY**

When do you ever make someone 9000 years younger? But we have no choice if we don't want everything to fail because of age. The computer of the patient admission at the University Hospital Halle does not accept the year of birth. No matter how many times we try, the system refuses, regardless of whether we enter 7000 or 6900 BC. We don't know that exactly. So we have to cheat on the age: "Your birthday is May 4, 1934." After all, that's the day our patient saw the light of day - albeit for the second time. It works. The computer asks for the first name. "Shaman," we answer as if from the same mouth. Last name? "von Bad Dürrenberg. Place of residence? "State Museum of Prehistory, RichardWagner-Strasse 9, 06114 Halle an der Saale." Health insurance number? We look at each other, perplexed. Fortunately, the director of the Department of Radiology, Professor of Medicine Walter Wohlgemuth, saves us: "In the case of such a prominent woman, we turn a blind eye. It is an honour for us to examine the shaman of Bad Dürrenberg. Even without a health insurance

number." Our patient irons out the initial difficulties with immense patience. Where others provide blurred images because they can't sit still for so long, she impresses with dead calm. Today, the jaw area is examined using DVT, or digital volume tomography. The radiology assistants do their best to place the skull correctly and make sure it doesn't fall down. Normally, patients here wear their heads firmly on their necks. As fascinated as the medical staff is by the state of preservation of the more than 9,000-year-old dentition - "Not all of our patients have such good teeth" - the assistants are equally moved when they register that the upper incisors on the inside are open all the way into the tooth sockets: "That must have hurt like hell." From the examinations at the university hospital, we hope to learn more about whether the shamaness of Bad Dürrenberg possessed gifts of a special kind. We would like to know if she had access to spheres that remained hidden from others.

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A case that is more than 9000 years old - that is probably called a cold case. Much colder cases are hardly conceivable. And in few have people been on the wrong track for so long. When the Nazis came across the grave in the spa gardens of Bad Dürrenberg on the aforementioned May 4, 1934, they were sure they had discovered an old white man. In the meantime we know: It was a woman, in her early, mid-thirties. And the new genetic tests reveal: she was not white. Her skin colour was so dark that if she were alive today, she would be classified as BIPoC, or Black, Indigenous, People of Colour. Indigenous she was in any case: she is one of the oldest people found so far in Saxony-Anhalt. Rarely have people been so mistaken about a person as they were about this woman. The Nazis believed to have found with the grave the proof that the Aryans did not come from India or Tibet, but from the heart of Germany. The fact that the dead woman held a child, who had not even turned one year old, on her lap, perhaps even in her arms, did not interest them in the slightest. Nor did they pay much attention to the richness of the grave goods, which could do credit to any Harry Potter novel, so peculiar are they. The Nazis were solely interested in making the tomb a central building block of their insane racial ideology. No wonder it was largely forgotten after 1945. Only in recent years has the suspicion circulated that this woman might have been a

shaman - a powerful woman who was in close contact with the forces of fate. Thanks to fortunate circumstances, today we can get to the bottom of this suspicion and set about solving the case, which is as spectacular as it is mysterious. We want to find out who this woman really was and what the child at her side is all about. To this end, an interdisciplinary team of investigators has begun work: Archaeologists digging through tons of rock; geneticists decoding ancient genetic material; anthropologists extracting the last secret from skeletons; medical experts using state-of-the-art diagnostics; and material specialists demonstrating their criminological skills. The effort is worth it: After all, it's not just about one of the most important archaeological finds in Europe. This cold case also opens up the possibility of an archaeology of ourselves.

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In fact, it is hard to find an archaeological case that concerns us more personally. The shaman of Bad Dürrenberg comes from the Mesolithic, the Middle Stone Age following the end of the Ice Age. This may sound brittle, but this phase represents a decisive crossroads in human history. It already heralded the Neolithic, the time when people began to lead a new kind of sedentary life with agriculture and animal husbandry. We can observe at close quarters the beginning of those complex changes to which we owe the modern world - with all its marvels, but also the innumerable problems that beset us today and whose scope we have not yet fully recognized. Perhaps the glacier mummy of Ötzi, who perished in the Alps 5300 years ago, may seem more spectacular. He has also provided science with immensely valuable insights. But Ötzi already dates from the time when people had abandoned their original way of life. Without wanting that to sound disrespectful: The world of a Neolithic Alpine farmer is of rather secondary importance for our everyday life today. The treasures of Tutankhamun are also light years grander than the finds from Bad Dürrenberg. The golden sarcophagus is one of the most magnificent pieces of archaeology. Nevertheless, as much knowledge as we may gain from the burial chamber in the Egyptian Valley of the Kings, its pomp tells us above all something about the life of the ruling elite in ancient Egypt 3300 years ago. This pharaoh, however wonderful, has nothing to do with our personal concerns. The situation is different with the double tomb, which lies high above the Saale River in the present-day spa park of

Bad Dürrenberg, not far from the city of Merseburg, which is famous for its magic spells. As the richest burial of its time in Central Europe, the tomb is not only archaeologically exceptional. It concerns us all. And for at least five reasons:

First, it dates from the era in which our fate was decided. Those two who spent 9,000 years there, bedded in red-coloured earth, as if they were lying in the womb of the earth, were among the last to live in the middle of Europe the way humans have done for the longest time in the history of evolution: hunting and gathering, highly mobile, in small egalitarian groups. The psychological adaptations resulting from this original way of life have become deeply inscribed in all of our beings. Without knowledge of this existence, we cannot understand ourselves.

Second, the fact that the scripture-less prehistory lacks sources to understand people's thinking and reconstruct their beliefs lends enormous relevance to the double tomb. The ensemble of grave goods alone, which testify to the deep veneration of the deceased, proves to be an inspiring puzzle. Deciphering it gives us insights into the beginnings of religion, spirituality and the roots of humanity that are otherwise difficult or impossible to gain.

Thirdly, the case of the shaman shows us why so many people today complain about the loss of resonance and transcendence and suffer from the absurdity of everyday life. As the philosopher Albert Camus wrote in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "The absurdity of modern life arises from "the juxtaposition of man who asks and the world that is irrationally silent." We enter a time when the world still had much to say to man and no one was desperate for the meaning of life.

Fourth, the tomb provides insights into the former relationship between the sexes. The burial shows: The most important burial of this age in Central Europe known so far belongs to a woman. And this is not an isolated case. Patriarchy has not yet been invented. But we will also identify some of the causes that upset the age-old balance between men and women. Finally, fifth, the shaman allows us to travel into a world that is of a completely different nature than ours. She confronts us with questions that arise with great vehemence today, given the increasingly obvious limits of a technocratic understanding of the world based on the exploitation of nature. We will follow paths that seem tempting when it comes to finding a

way out of the predicament into which we have put ourselves and the other living beings on this planet.

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But beware, we are entering delicate terrain. Already more than 100 years ago, the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep rumbled that among all the vague terms with which religious studies would have to grapple, "shamanism" was probably the most dangerous. Even today there is anything but unanimity as to what it is supposed to be. Some may speak of it at most in terms of certain cultures of Siberia, in the case of those where shamans put themselves into a trance by the steady beat of the drum in order to send their souls into the spheres of the spirits, where they seek help and healing for the community. For others, shamanism represents a universal phenomenon found around the globe. They consider it the oldest religion of mankind, possibly even a buried source of global spirituality. Therefore we would like to emphasize that for us the question whether we are really dealing with a shaman 9000 years ago in the heart of Germany is by no means decided in advance. This may sound paradoxical, since this mysterious woman from the depths of our prehistory has been presented for some years in the museum in Halle as the "Shaman of Bad Dürrenberg". A label fraud? No, there are good reasons for that. But so far, as it is so often the case in archaeology, it was only a justified hypothesis. However, since we are dealing with such a spectacular and significant case, and since science now has completely new possibilities at its disposal, we will do everything we can to substantiate - or refute - the suspicion of shamanism. Above all, the general awareness has grown in recent years that we should not really trust our traditional ideas in many areas. Especially when it comes to foreign cultures, we are dealing with mostly outdated terms and concepts, which are often colonially contaminated. Our own past is also affected by this. For the Mesolithic in the heart of Germany, which lasted from about 9600 to 5500 BC, is much stranger to us than today's tribal cultures in New Guinea or the jungles of South America may be. In fact, in matters of shamanism, there is much to suggest that it is, to a not inconsiderable degree, a Western phantasm. This is fatal. For if we want to understand where we come from - masters of the trance: shamans are considered mediators between the realm of humans and the realm of spirits. They take on all dangers to help their community. Shaman of the Nanaj from

the Amur region in eastern Siberia on the border with China (1896). If we want to understand where we come from and how these origins have shaped our feelings, longings, and intuitions, we must not chase possible fantasy products, no matter how dazzling they may be. This is what makes this Mesolithic double burial so important: it comes from a time before all that is called "civilization." All later traditions are culturally distorted. Our cold case promises authenticity. By investigating suspicions of shamanism, we explore the roots of human existence. This is the promise that the woman and child of Bad Dürrenberg have to offer: based on a true story.

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Now we have to struggle with a problem typical for scriptless cultures: we do not know any names. Since we do not want to resort to the database number BDB001, as the archaeogeneticists do, we see for the time being no other choice than to stay with Shamanin in the sense of a proper name. And Schamanin has already been swallowed by the computer of the patient admission in the University Hospital Halle. Whether she was one - we will spare no effort to find out. We are dealing with anything but a niche topic. It is about the future of all of us in a post-religious world. The fact that shamanism is booming today can be seen as a revealing contemporary phenomenon. We know the pictures of Siberian or Mongolian shamans in magnificent robes. We have heard of the jaguar shamans of the Amazon. Quite a few people assure themselves of the assistance of power animals or have had experiences with mind-expanding substances such as ayahuasca or magic mushrooms containing psilocybin. In Europe, people are turning their backs on traditional religions. Many are looking for new ways to experience resonance of the extra-ordinary kind. Some find happiness in soul journeys, in contacting the ancestors or sweat lodge rituals; others develop spiritually thanks to meditation, healing stones or lunar rituals. Some drift away completely. For most, however, the occasional opportunity to escape the all-too-rational everyday world is enough, be it with a fantasy novel on the sofa, series à la Game of Thrones or costume planning for the next Comic Con. For a long time now, you don't have to travel to distant spheres to do all this. Shamanism has also left the esoteric circles in this country and is on the best way to get a firm



place in the repertoire of a modern spirituality, from which many hope for the knowledge of themselves and the access to new energies. Shamanism is considered a means of self-empowerment. Shamans belong to the longing figures of our days. For quite a few, however, they belong to the horrors. There are spinners and charlatans who give dubious, if not worse advice. Suspiciously often we find them among the high priests of rampant conspiracy cults. We all remember that "QAnon" shaman who went through the world press with coyote fur and bison horns as a horribly obscure icon of the violent storming of the American Capitol in Washington in 2021. These, too, are phenomena resulting from the disappearance of those ecclesiastical institutions that had a firm grip on the West for many centuries. Thanks to an ever better understanding of our evolutionary history, we know: These are not simply unenlightened aberrations or foolish superstitions. What is rumbling here are age-old, evolutionarily acquired structures of human psychology that sometimes more, sometimes less, demand satisfaction. It is all the more important to understand what this is all about. After all, even the most rational among us carry this evolutionary heritage within them. Only then can we deal with it sensibly and in a contemporary way, or at least prevent dangerous excesses. No, we are not preaching a new spirituality here, we are pleading for archaeology as a medium of self-knowledge. It has long been common knowledge that our bodies suffer from the fact that their evolution took place under completely different conditions than those that determine our modern world. We don't exercise enough, and our prehistorically rooted appetite for salty and fatty foods makes life difficult for us in the truest sense of the word. The fast food industry has built its mega-empire on this. The fact that something similar applies to our psychology, on the other hand, is only slowly becoming established. That's why we are far too easily fobbed off with mental fast food, willingly hand ourselves over to digital megacorporations or fall prey to threatening hyperconsumption. It is time to finally identify our psychological legacies and develop an adequate way of dealing with them. There is no way back to the old world of hunter-gatherers. But we must know their living conditions, because they have shaped our psyche. And we need to understand the massive changes in the conditions of existence that we as Homo sapiens have undergone since then. The archaeological journey to our beginnings thus becomes a means of emancipation.

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Sciences such as primatology and evolutionary anthropology have painted an increasingly compelling picture of human nature in recent years. However, when it comes to the deep human prehistory in which it has formed, they depend on archaeology. For only archaeology can provide evidence of how things really were. This places a great responsibility on archaeology. It must do everything in its power to reconstruct the human roots as accurately as possible and not fall prey to fantasy products. This has happened far too often so far - and anything but unintentionally. The history of shamanism in general as well as the shaman of Bad Dürrenberg in particular are prime examples of how the human past has been falsified and instrumentalized for ideological reasons. Prehistory research, like ethnology, has all too often been at the forefront of cementing the injustices of the world. It is this double dimension that makes our case unique: not only are we dealing with a spectacular archaeological find, but it is also a blatant case of abuse. This runs like a second thread through our book: time and again, science has served to legitimize oppression, exploitation, and extermination. That is why we do a double archaeology. More than once, we have to clear away questionable debris of civilization in order to begin the actual archaeological work. Fortunately, this debris is as exciting as it is topical. For the first time, we will be able to reconstruct how the grave at Bad Dürrenberg was used as a building block in the pseudo-scientific underpinnings of the Nazis' racist extermination policy. At the same time, we will observe how colonialism poisoned Western thinking and what suffering Russian imperialism caused in the past. Last but not least, we will explore why the West is intoxicated by trance and shamans. So, in addition to prehistoric archaeology, we are doing an archaeology of the modern world. \* All the more we have to be careful that - despite best intentions - we do not invent a new prehistory ourselves. Therefore, we will disclose as transparently as possible the course of research and show how archaeological work is based on hypotheses that are confirmed or questioned and modified by new findings. Science is a process of discovery, not the proclamation of ultimate truths. In doing so, we have been able to rely on a network of equally great and critical scholars from a wide range of disciplines. We are deeply indebted to them for allowing us to report on their new research here for the first time. Therefore, we are once again following the advice of

C.W. Ceram, who in the most successful archaeology book of all time, *Gods, Tombs and Scholars*, issued the slogan that nothing is more exciting than to let the readers take the same path as the science. One of us, as the state archaeologist of Saxony-Anhalt, is also the director of the State Museum of Prehistory in Halle, where the shamaness of Bad Dürrenberg enchants visitors, and is thus responsible for the new excavations and the extensive follow-up investigations. Nevertheless, in this book we will always be like investigators or reporters on the road, discussing the latest research findings with all those involved. We will let you participate in it up close and personal. In the two colour plate sections of our book, we will present our heroine, the tomb, the finds and the world from which she comes. For spatial and temporal orientation, you will find an overview map in the front cover of the book and two time beams in the back to inform you about our deep past.

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**[excerpts pp. 323-330]**

There can hardly be a better starting point than our shaman: For this one is a thoroughly Janus-faced figure. One of her two faces looks deeply back into the past. She is, if you like, the ideal personification of the animistic worldview: the master of all the relationships between humans and all persons of non-human form. Her second face, however, points towards the future. For with shamans begins in the Mesolithic the history of specialists, of experts, and that means also of dependencies, of unequally distributed resources and of power over others. Access to those powers that are considered to determine life becomes limited. No longer can everyone communicate with the spirits - and later gods. Especially in areas of life that seem existentially important, people no longer have their fate in their own hands. In the world of arable farmers that followed the Mesolithic, the Neolithic, the old group

relationships dissolved. Once, because people are now tied to land and the new food production explodes the population, which leads to competition for resources, to conflict in new dimensions and war. Once also because property in the form of stocks and land now secures existence - and must be protected and defended if necessary. For this purpose, the sons are kept locally, the women have to marry into foreign families and lose their old networks. For men, it becomes central to pass on property to sons. Here, the one-way street toward patriarchy is taken, the age-old balance of the sexes destroyed. To legitimize the new claims to land and property, the cult of ancestors is forced. We observed this in the context of first settlements. Ancestors now watch over the new rules and donate power. And as people become more unequal, so do ancestors. People need to know powerful people, only then can they imagine powerful deities. We recall the basic study of Peoples and Co: ancestor worship as well as gods are quite late inventions of mankind. Where agriculture is intensively practiced and property is accumulated, the social gap widens. New forms of government emerge, and soon the first states are formed. Their rulers establish their power as favourites of the gods. Something emerges that can only be described as a religion of rule. Throne and altar forge their fateful alliance. The religion of domination relies on overwhelming power and monumentality, on legions of priests and bombastic temples. In this polytheistic world of many gods, however, the old spiritual spheres still persist, the world of spirits, magic, spells and a multitude of shamanic techniques. This is colourful, suitable for everyday life, not dogmatic, it is experimented with everything that helps and heals. We are dealing with a religion from above and a religion from below. Only the religion from above, the religion of rule, prescribes to people what they have to believe, how they should live and what is good and evil. The one from below, the everyday religion, is simply there and intuitively understands itself. In the Judeo-Christian world, what can be described as the religious and spiritual dispossession of people occurs. The former state god Yahweh, a representative of religion from above, becomes the only existing god. For this new monotheism, all other gods are by definition non-existent and their worship detestable idolatry. Thus, the sphere of everyday religion with its spirits, ancestors, but also many powerful female deities is also fought as superstition and heresy. The Bible considers the representatives of religion from below Deserted by all good spirits worthy of death. All competition must be eradicated,

people must believe only what is prescribed for them from above. The God of the Christian church, with the support of Greek philosophers and Roman emperors, becomes all-powerful, above all dogmatic. All alternative religious and spiritual practices are demonized. Whether pagans, witches, overly soulful mystics: The church persecutes them with the utmost brutality. European colonialism carries this into all the world. In the name of the Christian God, war is declared against animistic thinking everywhere. But this is a fight against human nature. Because it relies on many actors also in supernatural things. That is why already Christianity had to improve with angels and devils, with demons and legions of saints. Our nature demands its right at all times. That is why this repressed and suppressed side breaks out again today, hardly have the churches lost their power. With the scientific progress the spiritual need of humans by no means disappears completely. How also, our old animistic nature announces itself here. There has long been such a multitude of esoteric, spiritual, alternative religious currents that religious scholars speak of "popular religion. They all try to make the world speak again.

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This is, in brief, the historical panorama that stretches between the time of the shaman and the time of today. Only against this background it becomes understandable what is currently happening - and this has less to do with religion than one would like to think. Even if the most obvious consequences of the described religious and spiritual dispossession can be observed in this context. Religion from above, the institutionalized religion of domination, namely Christianity, has prevented religion from below, i.e. the animistic substrate, from developing contemporary cultural forms of expression in the last almost 2000 years, which would have provided a framework for living out contacts with actors of any nature. Such a thing happened only in secret. That is why today we see this colourful proliferation of spirituality and alternative religiosity. Because since the control of the church has fallen away, this vacuum finally wants to be filled. Everywhere people are trying to revive old, buried traditions: Witches dance again, nature is experienced as a sacred space, trees speak to many, spirits and ancestors are invoked. That's why religious-spiritual concepts are imported from all over the

world; if people don't go in search of them themselves right away. In the remotest corners they sometimes believe to find what is missing in the formerly Christian Occident: lived animism, which manifests itself in rituals and sacred ceremonies that are as venerable as they are self-evident, time-honored practices and ancient traditions. Hence the enthusiasm for shamans: they go to great lengths to travel to the Amazon jungle, Siberia or Mongolia. To the seekers it seems as if they experience there encounters with a dream figure. Something deep in their soul is addressed, finally experiences resonance. Shamans bring the many-souled world, which speaks in an infinite number of voices, back to life for them. It is a recognition: The spiritual charismatics provide many with what they missed for so long: the much longed-for counterpart.

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Now this is true only for a certain segment of people. Many do not want to or cannot believe in spirits or spiritual powers again (like the authors of this book). Nevertheless, all humans are affected by this loss of good spirits, and to a much more fundamental degree than it might at first seem. Indeed, our ancient evolutionarily developed nature chalks up the loss as a social deficit and thus a lack of security. Having taken leave of one's senses. This becomes delicate because it is accompanied by a second complementary but much more essential process: We are also deep in the red as far as real human networks are concerned. Parallel to the described events of the last millennia, our social relationships with people have eroded. First the groups of hunter-gatherers dissolved; then a world took their place that was increasingly determined by competition and hierarchies and alienated people from one another. Individualization is the sign of our times. We are not cultivating cultural pessimism here, and nothing would be further from our minds than to conjure up conservative communal fantasies. However, it is existentially important to understand what fundamental phenomena we are facing here. Our biological heritage is causing massive problems in today's world. Only when we are aware of this can we develop contemporary solutions. There is no way back to the world of hunter-gatherers. Jared Diamond has summed up the basic dilemma: Once upon a time, people were materially poor, but socially unimaginably rich. Today it is the other way around: we are materially rich, but socially impoverished. Back then, social relationships guaranteed our

security; today, this depends on material prosperity. And here's the problem: Our security sensorium only checks our social networks, not our bank account. Since property is a very recent invention in evolutionary history (not to mention pension, health and other insurances), it simply does not provide a sense of security. As the saying goes, money does not make people happy. The result is a self-reinforcing vicious circle that is gaining momentum. Because material prosperity does not provide a real sense of security, we strive for even more prosperity. We have no sensorium in material things that signals to us: Enough is enough. Since the resulting competition makes stable social relationships even more difficult, the feeling of insecurity continues to grow, which in turn leads to more accumulation of material things. In a typical case of cultural blindness, ideologies have long sold this to us as normality, as the basic human condition: They declare us to be representatives of homo economicus, who are only eager for their own advantage, i.e. for the optimization of wealth, and who practice a cult of eternal growth. Anthropology has long since shown how wrong this is. We are dealing with the engine that drives the prosperity spiral of ever more. It devours the resources of the world, reduces the life chances of a large part of mankind, degrades the other living beings of the planet to exploitable material or exterminates them completely. We are all familiar with the reports of how the wealth of the world is becoming more and more concentrated in the hands of a few super-rich people. Considering that Homo sapiens is actually a deeply egalitarian primate species, it becomes clear what a wrong path humanity has taken.

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We should be aware that we all try to fill these social deficits in different ways. We have already touched on two compensatory strategies: Because we live in a world in which once sustainable human networks have dwindled to a minimum, quite a few try to compensate spiritually for the loss of those contacts that give people a sense of security and safety by securing the support of higher powers of whatever kind. The second compensation strategy is to invest in more and more material wealth. It is abstruse what we in affluent societies accumulate around us today. Advertising has long since recognized that we have a soft spot

there. Why do you think we are sold "things with soul", are advised to live with furniture that "tells stories"? Why do we surround ourselves with gadgets that speak to us? Why do we let Siri or Alexa wish us a "nice day" and even tell us jokes? We can make a killing with our social deficits. This also applies to the third strategy: compensating digitally for the loss of analogue contacts. This is what today's megacorporations are building their empires on. They feed us with "social media". As important as these may be as a means of democratization, they owe their success to their function as surrogates. Only a few digital relationships make people happy in the long term. That's why overcompensation can be observed here as well: Friends, followers number in the thousands and thousands. There is no such thing as enough. Whether Instagram or TikTok: It is precisely those platforms that succeed best in making us believe in a world of friendships and spontaneous togetherness that are booming. Something in us, however, remains hungry. In fact, we just stare lonely at our supposedly "smart" gadgets. The nightmare of living in a single computer simulation, which the movie Matrix set the scene for many years ago, seems to be becoming more and more real. Red pill time, Neo.

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We don't want to demonize any of this (except the increasing injustice of the world with its disastrous consequences). We want to raise awareness alone that these mechanisms are driving us further and further into isolation - and that our psyche is having immense difficulty with this because it is still stuck in prehistory. Without this awareness, we run the risk of being exploited, of falling for modern pied pipers, or of panting ourselves to death in that hamster wheel of overcompensation and material overkill, and incidentally driving the world to its demise. This is why we see prehistoric archaeology not only as a means of self-knowledge, but also as an instrument of emancipation. If we know this discrepancy between our inherited nature and today's world, and understand why this causes problems, we can try our hand at modern, contemporary solutions. After all, we are a highly culturally gifted species. We should take our destiny into our own hands. It is time.



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At times, during all the research for this book, we had the feeling that the shaman of Bad Dürrenberg is a sphinx who poses a riddle to us: Who are we really? Deeply social beings, our answer would be, for whose well-being real relationships are vital. Does the shaman also hold a lesson? We believe so: If we have lost our good spirits and are falling into social deficits, we see only one contemporary way out: we should invest in stable relationships with real people. In relationships based on the principle of reciprocity. We must finally take responsibility for ourselves and others again. And recognize that in the long run we can only survive in an all-connected world - to which the other living beings of this planet also belong. To our old animistic soul, at least, this immediately makes sense.