

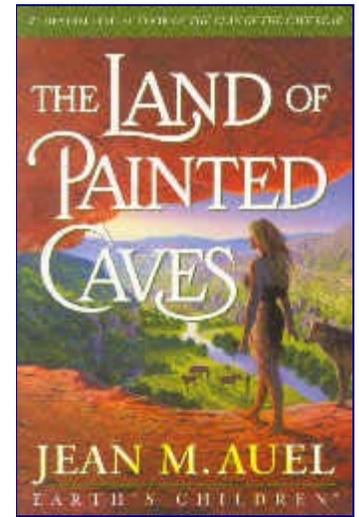
Site Map: [MAIN](#) / [A Reader's Journal, Vol. 2 Webpage](#) [Printer Ready](#)



A READER'S JOURNAL

The Land of Painted Caves Sixth Novel in Earth's Children Series by Jean Auel

ARJ2 Chapter: Reading for Enjoyment
Published by Crown Publishers/NY in 2011
A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2011



Six years after reading the fifth book in the Earth's Children Series, I had given up on hearing about Jondalar and Ayla again. So,

when I learned of a sixth novel, I quickly ordered the book before it was released and began reading as soon as it arrived. Our two heroes were older now with a daughter, Jonayla, who was just barely old enough to ride the smallest of their horses. The book opens with a group approaching a friendly cave hanging above the plain, only to find their way blocked by a group of Cave Lions. Ayla had the greatest respect for her totem animal whose claw marks on her leg were like a badge of honor and an indelible reminder of the ferocious lion's attack on her as a child. What worried Joharran, Jondalar's brother, most was that the lions were not worried by the approach of a group of humans. The huge lions probably saw the humans as an afternoon snack. Which told Ayla that they had not been around humans much or they would be concerned. She urged an attack to prevent the lions from staying around, which might happen if they simply bypassed the lions. She prepared her spear thrower.

[page 13] The cave lions became still and seemed tense as they watched the approach of the strange herd that didn't behave like prey animals.

Then, suddenly, everything happened at once.

The big male lion roared, a staggering, deafening sound, especially from such close range. He started toward them at a run. As he closed in, poised to spring, Jondalar hurled his spear at him.

Ayla had been watching the female on his right. About the time that Jondalar made his cast, the lioness bounded forward running, then vaulted to pounce.

Ayla pulled back and took aim. She felt the back of the spear-thrower with the spear mounted on it rise up almost without her knowing it as she hurled her spear. It was so natural for her, it didn't feel like a deliberate move. She and Jondalar had used the weapon during their entire year-long Journey back to the Zelandonii and she was so skilled, it was second nature.

The lioness soared into her leap, but Ayla's spear met her more than halfway. It found its mark from beneath the big cat, and lodged firmly in her throat in a sudden fatal slash. Blood spurted out as the lioness collapsed to the ground.

Soon the remaining Cave Lions were crawling away through the bush, some of them wounded. This hunting adventure started off the long saga of Ayla and Jondalar on their visit to the region filled with caves decorated by artists who lived long before them. Caves filled with images of rhinoceroses, mammoths, cave bears, hyena, aurochs, and various creatures who roamed the region. These caves can be

visited today, as the author Jean Auel did in preparation for this book. One can expect that the caves described in this book were actual caves visited by the author.

Someone told me recently that some author she was reading wrote about the daily things that women did around the house. I was reading this book at the time, and thought, yes, that's what Jean Auel is doing, only it's around a cave instead of a house. Riding on horses instead of cars, pulling a travois instead of a trailer. She describes to the reader how Ayla cooks supper, makes tea, carries around her provisions for making tea in a pouch she always has with her. Without metal containers, Ayla and her contemporaries used water-tight leather bowls filled with water to cook in and make tea, etc. These bowls had hot rocks placed into them to heat up the water, soup, or stew. The rocks were placed in the campfire and were taken from the fire with wooden tongs and dropped into the liquid.

We are told how Ayla field-dresses large game such as aurochs and dries strips over a smoking fire which she notes, not only preserves the meat, but makes it take on the taste of the smoke and wood. Also, Auel describes something that is rarely mentioned in literature, certainly not in Jane Austen's novels: how and when a woman goes to urinate or replaces her menstrual padding. How their daughter was taught to pee as a baby when she was taken outside and held up away from the cave entrance. Auel describes all the daily activities of a woman and the materials she for cooking, cleaning, padding, clothing, riding, or hunting, using only materials that would have been available in the region of the land of the painted caves — what today we call France — during the early Stone Age times of Ayla and Jondalar. This book is like a written travelogue into the earliest human times of the Ice Ages.

In addition, Auel describes how annual meetings were held and who attended. How vacations would be taken. How visits to old friends would happen, sometimes on a long trip. How baby-sitters were engaged, e.g., when Jondalar and Ayla went on a trip to a nearby museum — such as to one of the magnificent painted caves.

The summer lodges were described with scrupulous detail, including how the inside walls of the lodges were kept dry from overnight moisture.

[page 76] The ground cloth only went a short distance up the inside wall, but it was enough to keep out drafts. Any moisture that condensed in the cool of the evenings would form on the inside of the outer wall, leaving the inside of the inner wall dry.

What constituted sex education for the young female virgins? A special ceremony called the Rites of First Pleasures.

[page 85, 86] Ayla and Jondalar said their farewells and headed toward the camps to which they had been directed. When they neared the camp of the Third Cave, Ayla recognized the large zelandonia lodge with its ancillary lodges close by. Right now, she thought, recalling the Summer Meeting of the year before, the young women who were being prepared for their Rites of First Pleasures were cloistered in one of the special dwellings, while appropriate men were being selected for them. In the other lodge were the women who had decided to wear the red fringe, to be donii-women this season. They had chosen to make themselves available to the young men who were wearing puberty belts, to teach them how to understand a woman's needs.

Pleasures were a Gift from the Mother, and the zelandonia considered it a sacred duty to make sure the first experience of young adults was appropriate and educational.

By her liberal and consistent use of the word "pleasures" to refer to sexual activities, Auel is able to avoid using modern words for activities which certainly happened during Stone Age time. She does so in a very delicate way so that even modern prepubescent youngsters might learn something about sex, but no librarian would pull Auel's books from even her most Puritanical collections.

Have you ever met someone who was so shallow that you thought their brains were useless? After reading

this next passage, you might have to alter that opinion. Their brains would be useful for tanning hides.

[page 208] Many of the internal organs of herbivorous animals like bison or aurochs or any of the various deer, or mammoth or rhinoceros, were edible and quite tasty — the liver, the heart, the kidneys — and some parts were usable. The brains were almost always used for tanning the hides.

Auel states that the people of that region didn't have a concept of private property. That they didn't consider that land could be owned. Yet, rightly understood, land cannot be owned, only the right to use the land can be owned. In the definition of property as "all non-procreative derivatives of one's life" land cannot be included because the land was there before the person acquired the rights to use it and will be there after the person is gone or the rights have been sold. This is the most robust and useful definition of property and I recommend to everyone(1). In her creative imagination of the Cave people, Jean Auel formulated a version of such a definition of property.

[page 20, 21] "It is in the territory of the Fourth Cave of South Land Zelandonii, and they consider it theirs to use and show," the First said. "They are also the ones who would add any new paintings, usually. If Jonokol felt moved to paint on the walls, they would probably welcome it, but it would be best if he made his wishes known to them first. One of their own might have been feeling the need to paint something in the same place. It's unlikely, but if that were true, it might mean that the spirit world is reaching out to the zelandonia for some reason."

She went on to explain that it was always fitting to recognize the territory that any Cave thought of as theirs. They didn't have a concept of private property; the notion that land could be owned did not occur to anyone. The earth was the embodiment of the Great Mother, given to Her children for all to use, but the inhabitants of a region thought of their territory as their home. Other people were free to travel anywhere, through any region, even distant ones, as long as they used consideration and generally accepted courtesies.

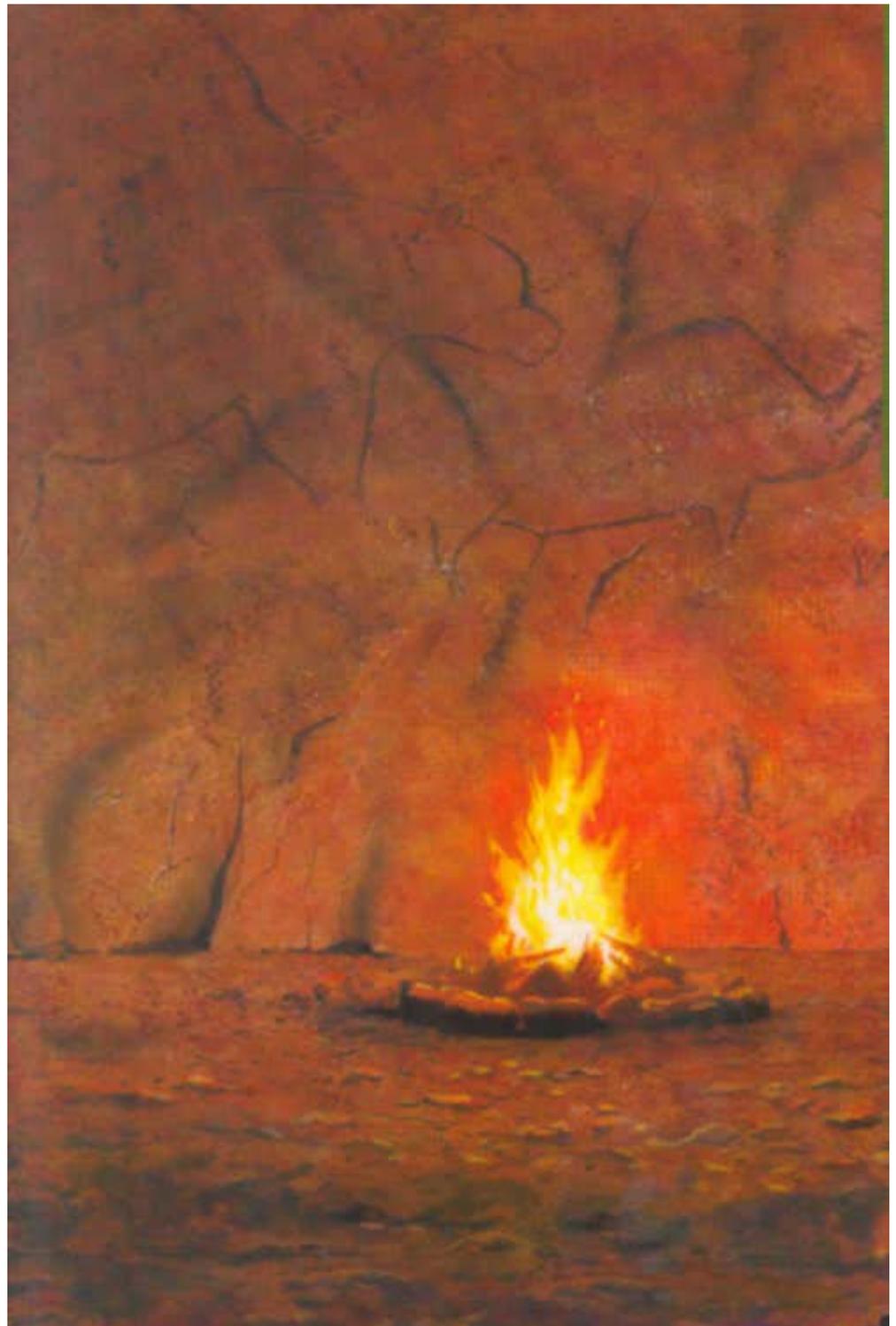
Jean Auel does a great job describing the walls of the painted caves, undoubtedly recorded during her visits to them. One can have the feeling of walking through these caves without having to bend down in low spaces, walk over slippery paths, re-light tallow candles to see in the dark, and without having crane one's neck over to inspect the ceilings. Ayla didn't know how to sing in the caves, but she could whistle and it worked as well to ken the size of each dark space they entered.

[page 30] "Why don't you use your bird whistles to speak to the Mother, Ayla," the First said.

Ayla had heard the woman humming, not loudly but very melodically, and hadn't expected to be asked. "If you would like me to," she said, and began a series of bird calls, the ones she thought

of as softer evening sounds.

About four hundred feet from the entrance, halfway in, the cave narrowed and the sounds resonated differently. That was where the drawings started. From this point on, the walls were covered with drawings of every kind. The two walls of the winding subterranean passage were marked with almost uncountable, often undecipherably superimposed and intermingled engravings. Some were isolated and many that could be



interpreted were very well made. Adult women frequented the cave most often and, consequently, the more accomplished, refined engravings were usually made by them.

Horses predominated, shown at rest and with lively movement, even galloping. Bison were also very prevalent, but there were many other animals: reindeer, mammoths, ibex, bears, cats, wild asses, deer, woolly rhinoceroses, wolves, foxes, and at least one saiga antelope, hundreds of engravings in all. Some were very unusual, like the mammoth with its trunk curled back; the head of a lion that utilized a naturally embedded stone for the eye was strikingly rendered; and a reindeer bending down to drink was outstanding for its beauty and realism, as were the two reindeer facing each other. The walls were fragile and didn't lend themselves well to painting, but were easy to mark and engrave, even with fingers.

There were also many parts of human figures, including masks, hands, and various silhouettes, but always distorted, never as clearly and beautifully drawn as the animals, such as the disproportionately large limbs on the seated figure, shown in profile. Many engravings were incomplete and buried in a network of lines, various geometric symbols, tectiform signs, and undefined marks and scribbles that could be interpreted many ways, sometimes depending on how the light was held. The caves were originally formed by underground rivers, and at the end of the gallery there was still a karstic area of active cave formation.

When Ayla gets attacked, she and Jondalar subdue the four men led by Balderan, and take them to the nearest cave shelter with them. Everyone recognized them as the perpetrators of multiple sexual assaults, murders, and thefts in their own caves. The four were placed under arrest and the cave dwellers met to discuss the fate of the four murderous thieves. A decision was made to kill them by poison and Ayla reluctantly prepared the hemlock potion required, which could be disguised as part of the water parsnip soup of the evening, but the four led another attack on Ayla and this time, the cave dwellers took their own revenge on the four, leaving only one alive.

The last 200 pages of the 700 page novel were filled with excitement enough to keep pages flipping until late into the night. Ayla remained behind from the Summer Meeting until after the Summer Solstice (Summer Long Day) which marked the end of her year-long recording of the positions of the Sun and the Moon on her chart, a necessary study for her as an acolyte of the First Zelandonii. When she finally reaches the Summer Meeting already in progress, she stumbles upon Jondalar in a sexual liaison with his former girl and in the place in the river which was special to Jondalar and Ayla. She was heart-broken and for the first time since they first met in The Plains of Passage, she and Jondalar were separated and their beautiful daughter Joyayla was confused as why her parents were not sleeping together.

Enjoy the long trips through the Painted Caves and get ready for the long passage through the deepest psyches of Jondalar and Ayla which will end only the Mother knows where.

~^~

----- *Reader Comments* -----

From Anise, commenting on Bobby's blurb of this review on amazon.com titled "Field-dressing aurochs with Ayla for fun and profit" on April 25, 2014:

Well, at least this reviewer clearly read the book. I have literally not read more than 5-10 positive reviews that fit this description. Anise

~~~~~

----- *Footnotes* -----

**Footnote 1.** Details on this definition created by Andrew J. Galambos can be found in [Sic Itur Ad Astra](#).

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

~~~~~

