

MONREPOS – RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

July 12, 2014 Sonja B. Grimm Day of Archaeology 2014, Environmental Archaeology, Experimental Archaeology, Museum Archaeology, Osteology, Prehistory, Public Archaeology Anthropology, archaeozoology, evolution, experimental archaeology, Gönnersdorf, hominin behaviour, Ice age, Mesolithic, mobile art, museum, palaeolithic, Pleistocene, Research

Finally, I want to write a bit about our archaeological research which has to continue while the museum is prepared for the re-opening.

Of course, an apparent question is: Why don't the other researchers write their own posts about their work? Well, the answer is simple and, presumably, very common in science:

It's a matter of time!

Work schedules of cooperative projects and deadlines of submitting articles have to be kept. Since most institute members also try to help with the museum, time is getting short and even shorter... So we practice one of the amazing achievements of human behavioural evolution: division of labour! So while I'm blogging, others continue with their work.

For example, Dr. Martin Street just finishes writing an article about dogs... in space... and, more importantly, in the Upper Palaeolithic. This paper is his contribution for an exhibition catalogue of another institute. You see, we help where we can!

The previously mentioned [Dr. Radu Ioviță](#) has several research projects including field projects in Romania and Kazakhstan. Besides answering questions of actors, today he worked on one of his lab projects and made figures for an article he co-authors about bifacial symmetry.

A Master student he is working with, Nina Schlösser, made spear throwing and thrusting experiments the other week to understand microscopic breakage patterns of lithic tips. Some of us helped her back then throwing and thrusting spears, measuring the depth of the shaft in the animal, or simply switching cameras on and off. Today she was one of the many helpers in and outside the museum and for some unknown reason she was using a shaft again.



Radu's and Nina's work contributes to our previously mentioned research theme "Diet and Nutrition". Understanding hunting equipments and, thus, hunting strategies in the past contributes to the very old

problem how to get to the food.

This important motivator helps to fill the larger picture of our research concept which is “Becoming Human: the Evolution of Hominin Behaviour”. In our institute, we focus on ice age (Pleistocene) material as the longest part of human history to portray this process.

Many people instantly think of big glaciers, massive ice sheets, snow, and cold temperatures when they hear “Ice Age”. However, these phases of glacial growth were repetitively intersected by several millenia of warm phases so called interglacials such as the Eemian and, probably, the Holocene. Another of our research themes, “Human behavioural strategies in interglacial environments”, focuses on these warm periods. Important projects in this theme are, for example, the 300,000 years old site at Schöningen or the Eemian site of Neumark-Nord 2. Both sites represent specific lake shore environments which allowed a good preservation of organic material. The bone material needs detailed recording to distinguish natural processes from carnivore and human activity. Therefore, the pieces are not just determined to body part and animal species but they are also examined for breakages and potential cutmarks. Our Basque colleague, [Dr. Aritz Villaluenga Martinez](#), spend some of his working day with this detailed recording.



He is one of the researchers having his desk in our comparative collection on the top floor.



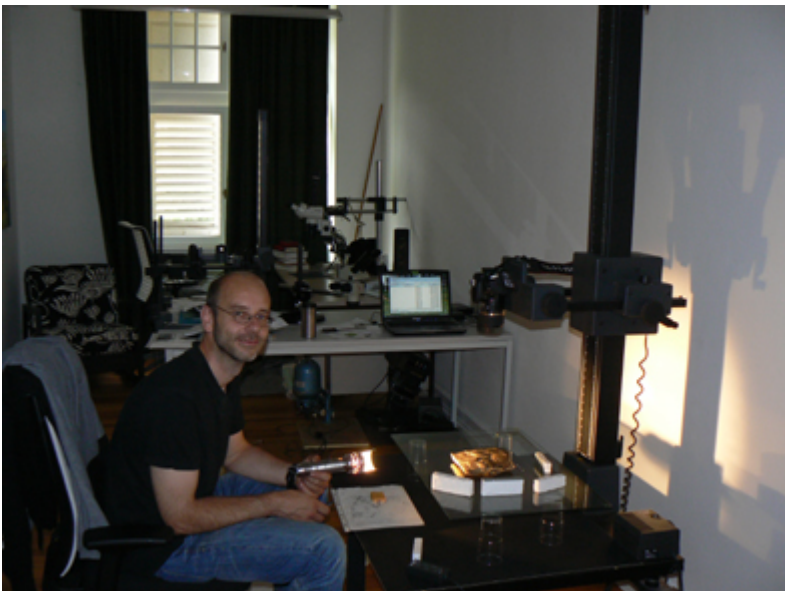
Such collections are needed for more reliable determinations but in some difficult cases, direct exchange with other experts is the best way to come to a reliable conclusion. Therefore, most of our archaeozoologists have desks on the top floor.



Likewise others, Aritza used the Friday afternoon to additionally work on corrections of two reviewed papers. Moreover, earlier today he helped together with our colleague Geoff Smith cleaning up outside the museum.



Another one working late on a Friday afternoon is Wolfgang Heuschen M.A. For his dissertation, he examines schist plates from the Magdalenian site Gönnersdorf. These plates were regularly engraved with Pleistocene mammals such as woolly rhino or mammoths as well as stylised female silhouettes. Continuous use and post-depositional damages make finding and documenting these engravings a difficult task, in particular, requiring a moveable light.



Wolfgang focuses on signs and symbols which are occasionally difficult to distinguish from unintentional scratches. Therefore, he systematically records the plates and establishes regulations in the composition of engravings. Thus, regulations of early societies, our third research theme, can be filtered from the archaeological material.

In a comparable manner, we all contribute to the three research themes that support the research concept – if we are back to our usual working mode. Then we fill large parts of the process of becoming

human as a team and explain more and more bits and pieces of the evolution of hominin behaviour – from Tuesday on, we also present what we already learned to the general public in our newly re-opened museum.

So if you are interested: Please, come and visit us!