



Press Release

ERC Consolidator Grant for Katerina Harvati

Paleoanthropologist conducts research into early humans in South-East Europe – funding of EUR 2 million provided by the European Research Council

Tübingen, 16 December 2016

Professor Katerina Harvati from the Senckenberg Centre for Human Evolution and Palaeoenvironment at the University of Tübingen (HEP) has successfully applied for a consolidator grant from the European Research Council (ERC). Her “Human Evolution at the Crossroads” (CROSSROADS) project will be supported to the tune of nearly EUR 2 million during the next five years. The aim of the project is to gain new findings about early human migration and behaviour patterns in the Balkans.

Current evidence suggests that early humans migrated from Africa to Europe about 1.2 million years ago. The Balkans are generally viewed as the gateway to Europe because of their geographical location between the continents. The Balkan peninsula would have also acted as a refuge for plant, animal and human populations during glacial times. Because of these characteristics, this region should yield evidence of both a very old and a continuous human presence through time. However, paleoanthropological research has tended to focus on Western Europe in the past. Harvati believes that she will find new answers to many questions in South-East Europe: Did early humans possibly arrive in South East Europe as early or even earlier than the findings in Western Europe have suggested so far? In which climatic and environmental conditions did they live there and in what sense did these possibly affect their behaviour and human evolution? Is there a greater variety of human species of the genus *Homo* in this region and were different evolutionary processes associated with this at work? The project will be conducted in collaboration with several partners in Greek Institutions, including the Greek Ministry of Culture, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

In 2011 Harvati received a “starting grant” from the ERC amounting to EUR 1.3 million for her previous project entitled “Paleoanthropology at the Gates of Europe” (PaGE). The field expeditions of PaGE led to the discovery of

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almost 40 new archaeological sites in Greece, including the Marathousa 1 Lower Paleolithic elephant butchering site near the Greek town of Megalopolis, excavated in collaboration with the Greek Ministry of Culture. The site, which is nearly 500,000 years old, is currently viewed as the oldest radiometrically dated archaeological testimony to early human presence in South-East Europe.

Professor Katerina Harvati was born in 1970 in Athens, Greece. She studied anthropology at Columbia University in New York as an undergraduate and gained her doctorate at the City University of New York in the field of Anthropology. Harvati previously conducted research as Assistant Professor for Anthropology at New York University and as Senior Researcher at the Max-Planck-Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig. She has been Professor for Palaeoanthropology at the University of Tübingen and Deputy Director of the Senckenberg Centre for Human Evolution and Palaeoenvironment since 2009. In 2014 she received the Landesforschungspreis of the state of Baden-Württemberg for basic research.

The European Research Council uses its consolidator grants to support scientists, who have been conducting research for many years, as they establish their independent careers and their own research team. The aim is to encourage the creativity of young, promising scientists and introduce new ideas into fields of research. The bidding procedure is open to all subject areas and all fields of science. Each project is financed with up to EUR 2 million for a maximum period of five years.



Professor Katerina Harvati. Photos: Friedhelm Albrecht/University of Tübingen

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