



Press Release

Valuable new information about life in Europe's Stone Age from the Vogelherd Cave

Tübingen Early Prehistory and Quaternary Ecology Prize for Benjamin Schürch

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Tübingen, 02.02.2026



Benjamin Schürch
Photo supplied by Benjamin Schürch

The 28th Tübingen Prize for Early Prehistory and Quaternary Ecology goes to Dr. Benjamin Schürch of the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU). He will receive the award on 5 February 2026 at Hohentübingen Castle. The University of Tübingen Institute of Prehistory, Early History and Medieval Archaeology makes the 7,500-euro award annually to a researcher who has written an outstanding doctoral thesis. Schürch's theses revisits finds from the Vogelherd Cave in southwest Germany's Lone Valley, which was first excavated in 1931. The finds of up to 120,000 years old from the period of Neanderthals and the first modern humans had been analysed in

previous decades; working in recent years, Schürch was able to reexamine the material using a greater variety of innovative methods. This enabled him to uncover further details of human life during the Aurignacian cultural phase. This is the period from around 42,000 to 35,000 years ago, in which anatomically modern humans spread into central Europe after the extinction of the late Neanderthals. In this time, humans created figurative art and musical instruments for the first time.

The Vogelherd Cave is considered one of the most important Paleolithic sites in Europe. "With his use of various techniques, Benjamin Schürch has unlocked new secrets at the cave, almost a hundred years after the site was discovered," says Tübingen's Professor Harald Floss from the Institute of Prehistory, Early History and Medieval Archaeology, who will give the laudation for the award winner.

Schürch subjected finds such as stone tools to a technological and typological reassessment. With the aid of modern analytical methods, he demonstrated that the people of that time must have brought some materials considerable distances to the cave – unworked stone, for example, and mollusk shells used for jewelry. “Schürch also proved for the first time that there was human habitation at the Vogelherd Cave during the Gravettian cultural phase, which followed the Aurignacian, as well as during the later Mesolithic period. His award-winning work is an important contribution to our understanding of the Paleolithic settlement history of the Swabian Jura,” says Floss.

Benjamin Schürch studied Prehistory and Medieval Archaeology at the University of Tübingen and completed his doctorate here in 2024. “Due to his personal commitment, he made significant contributions to the Department of Ancient Prehistory and Quaternary Ecology,” says Floss. His career has included research stints in the US at the University of Connecticut and in Belgium at the University of Liège. As curator and research assistant, Schürch was responsible for various collections and exhibitions at the Vogelherd Archaeological Park in Niederstotzingen and in the Early Prehistory Collection at the University of Tübingen for most of 2025. Since October 2025, he has been a research assistant at the Institute for Prehistory and Early History at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg.

“This prize, aimed at early-career researchers worldwide, already has a long tradition. It highlights the importance of this successful field of research in Tübingen,” says University of Tübingen president, Professor Dr. Dr. h.c. (Dōshisha) Karla Pollmann.

The Tübingen Prize for Early Prehistory and Quaternary Ecology is sponsored by mineral water brand EiszeitQuell. The award is now in its 28th year.

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