



## Seewiesen Colloquia

Speaker invited by: W. Schiefenhövel

**Thursday, January 29, 2015, 13:00 h, in House 4, Lecture Room**

### **Beads & Beauty Research on body decoration from 100.000 BP to present day New Guinea**

Marian Vanhaeren

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Personal ornaments have come to play an important role in the debate on the origin of behavioural modernity and the evolution of our ancestors' cognitive abilities. All authors agree in categorising beads as one of the hallmarks of cultural modernity, i.e. the cultural traits that underlie societies similar to ours. Divergent opinions exist, however, as to the dating of the first evidence of bead use and the taxonomic status of the first bead makers. Recent data seem to suggest that the most ancient personal ornaments were not put on in Europe but rather in Africa or in the Near East, and they can therefore no longer be seen as tied to the Aurignacian. It seems equally established in Europe that not only anatomically modern humans but also late Neanderthals produced and used such objects. Undoubtedly these discoveries have important implications for the question regarding the unique or multiple emergence(s) of symbolic thought and its association with one or more human types. But beads may offer more. In traditional societies they play at least fourteen different and often multiple roles (e.g. they may be used to beautify the body, function as 'love letters' in courtship, or as amulets, exchange media, expressions of individual and group identity, markers of age, class, gender, wealth or social status) which offer varied and rich information on the individuals, social groups, and societies that used them. Here we will present the earliest evidence of beadwork, the variety of functions that personal ornaments have in human societies and the methods we may use to understand the role beadwork played in the earliest symbolic cultures.

#### Who is Marian Vanhaeren?

- 2002 PhD University of Bordeaux, F
- 2003 French CNRS postdoctoral fellowship, UMR 7041 Ethnologie préhistorique, Nanterre, F
- 2005 Fyssen Foundation postdoctoral fellowship, Centre for the Evol. of Cultural Diversity, Univ. College London, UK
- 2006 CNRS Researcher (CR 2), UMR 7041 Ethnologie préhistorique, Nanterre, F
- 2011 CNRS Researcher (CR 1), UMR 5199 PACEA, Bordeaux, F

#### Selected publications:

- Vanhaeren, M., 2014. The Beauty of Beads: from prehistory to present day. In Sütterlin C., Schiefenhövel W., Lehmann C., Forster J., Apfelauer G. (Eds.), **Art as Behaviour. An Ethological Approach to Visual and Verbal Art, Music and Architecture**. Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg Institute for Advanced Study: Bielefeld-Verlag der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, pp. 273–288.
- Vanhaeren M., d'Errico F., Van Niekerk K., Henshilwood C., Erasmus R., 2013. Thinking strings: additional evidence for personal ornament use in the Middle Stone Age of Blombos Cave, South Africa. **Journal of Human Evolution** 64, 500-517.
- Vanhaeren M., d'Errico F., Stringer C., James S.L., Todd J., Mienis H.K., 2006. Middle Palaeolithic Shell Beads in Israel and Algeria. **Science** 312, 1785-1788.
- Vanhaeren M., d'Errico F., 2006. Clinal distribution of personal ornaments reveals the ethno-linguistic geography of Early Upper Palaeolithic Europe. **Journal of Archaeological Science** 33(8), 1105-1128.
- Vanhaeren M., 2005. The Evolutionary significance of beadmaking and use. In: d'Errico F., Backwell L. (Eds.), *From Tools to Symbols, From Early Hominids to Modern Humans*. Johannesburg: Wits University press, pp. 525-553.
- Vanhaeren M., d'Errico F., 2005. Grave goods from the Saint-Germain-la-Rivière burial: evidence for social inequality in the Upper Palaeolithic. **Journal of Anthropological Archaeology** 24, 117-124.