



The Centre for Early Human Behaviour (EHB) at the University of Bergen: A transdisciplinary exploration into the evolution of homo sapiens behaviour

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Homo sapiens was anatomically modern by 200 000 years ago in Africa, but there is no archaeological evidence to demonstrate that behaviour was modern at the time. Attributes of modern behaviour, perhaps inspired by changes in the human brain, are only recognizable after 100 000 years ago. Before we can study the process, we must critically define the criteria for the term 'modern behaviour' and then find a means to recognize such behavior in the record. This seemingly simple research statement involves complex exploration by a team of specialists. In this highly competitive research field our centre will, for the first time, be able to rise to the challenge by combining the skills of cutting-edge scientists in archaeology, climate reconstruction and modelling, and the cognitive and social sciences. Over the next decade we will integrate knowledge and methods from different disciplines to synthesize approaches and contribute to a sophisticated understanding of early human behaviour. Our highly ambitious research program will focus explicitly on rare, well preserved archaeological sites occupied in the period between 100-50 000 years ago because these contain the 'keys' for unlocking the past. A major competitive edge is the EHB Director's 25 years of archaeological experience and his long-term exclusive access, with permits, to a number of the best-preserved sites in the southern Cape, South Africa - a region regarded as a major locus for vital evidence that could inform on the behaviour of early humans. Our planned excavations at existing and new sites and our ground-breaking and innovative interdisciplinary approaches, including climate (The Bjerknes Centre for Climate Research) and cognitive research, to understanding the processes that shaped human cultures. Primarily, EHB will directly address unanswered, first order questions about Homo sapiens: a) what defines the switch to 'modern behaviour', exactly how should this term be defined and then, when, why and how did the 'switch' occur; b) were there changes in the human brain at that time that accelerated behavioural variability and how can these be measured now? Secondary linked tasks address the social organization of these early humans: was social cohesion enhanced by symbolic material culture or vice-versa and did it lead to innovation; what cognitive skills had to be in place in order for other skills to develop; how adaptable were humans to environmental change and did climate act as a driver for technological innovation, social change and subsistence adaptations? This presentation will introduce the recently awarded center, its key objectives and ambitions, and serve as an open invitation to collaboration and intellectual engagement on this exciting topic.