

Preface

Since humans became self-aware, they have asked fundamental questions: who are we and where do we come from? Time and again, the search for answers to these questions has led to fields of religion or philosophy, and these experiences and theories certainly play an important role for many people to this day when we ask, “what makes humans so special”. Since the first fossil human finds were discovered in the middle of the 19th century, e.g., in the Neander Valley, and Charles Darwin and Russell Wallace developed the theory of evolution, these questions were also asked of natural sciences. Year after year, prehistoric archeologists and paleoanthropologists, together with colleagues from other disciplines, unearth new empirical data on the origins of humans and what makes us human. The exhibition *Being Human — The Beginnings of Our Culture* presents the most cutting-edge research on these questions and will therefore be of widespread interest.

The exhibition curators Dr. Liane Giemsch and PD Dr. Miriam Haidle are experts on these topics. Dr. Giemsch received her doctorate from the University of Tübingen with a thesis on the Paleolithic finds at Lake Manyara in northern Tanzania; her research focus is on the development of stone processing technologies. Dr. Haidle completed her habilitation at the University of Tübingen as a prehistoric scholar and paleoanthropologist with comparative studies on human and animal tool behavior and possible conclusions on the respective cognitive abilities. Both are closely linked to the long-term research project “The Role of Culture in Early Expansion of Humans” (ROCEEH) at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities based in Frankfurt and Tübingen. Dr. Giemsch was a member of the ROCEEH junior research group and is now curator for prehistoric archeology at the Archaeological Museum in Frankfurt. Dr. Haidle has coordinated the project from the Frankfurt ROCEEH office at the Senckenberg Research Institute since 2008, where she researches the development of cultural capacities. This exhibition, which is dedicated to being human and the beginnings of our culture, summarizes the results of the long-term work of the two curators and the ROCEEH team on the earliest phase of human development between 3.3 and 1 million years ago. It is the first of a series of syntheses, already planned, to present the last three million years of human history to a broad audience.

The first of these compilations, *Being Human*, starts at the beginning of human cultural history with the 3.3 million-year-old stone tools from Lomekwi in the Turkana region in Kenya. It illuminates the earliest phase of the Paleolithic and questions the origins of humans and their culture. The exhibition shows how culture shaped different areas of life from its inception: the skills and knowledge required for different technologies, the cooperation within a group, the interaction with the environment, the use of resources. It emphasizes the role of learned behavior and the transmission of knowledge as main features of human development with roots that reach back to the oldest members of the genus *Homo* around three million years ago. *Being Human* discusses the importance of social learning and the gradual expansion of available actions based on the cumulative knowledge of many thousands of generations.

At this point, in addition to Dr. Giemsch and Dr. Haidle, I would also like to thank my colleagues in the ROCEEH team, apl. Prof. Dr. Michael Bolus, PD Dr. Angela Bruch, Dr. Christine Hertler, Julia Hess, Dr. Andrew Kandel, Prof. Dr. Friedemann Schrenk, and Dr. Christian Sommer, our ROCEEH guest PD Dr. Oliver Schlaudt, the director of the Archaeological Museum Frankfurt, Dr. Wolfgang David and his staff, the many students at the Goethe University in Frankfurt and numerous fellow scientists for their support and contribution to this exhibition and the supplementary volume about our origins, our identity, and our future.

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