



21st May, 2014

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To: Dr. Mariagrazia Galimberti  
Heritage Officer: Archaeology  
South African Heritage Resources Agency

Dear Dr Galimberti,

**Re: Additional motivation in relation to the application requesting the export of faunal material from Blombos Cave – CaseID 5245**

The SAHRA Guidelines to archaeological permitting state that a temporary export permit will be granted on condition that the material cannot be studied or analyzed in South Africa due to the necessary technical equipment, comparative collection or expertise not being readily available in the Wits Satellite Laboratory in Buitenkant Street, Cape Town or at another research venue in South Africa.

*Background to the Tracsymbols Research Project and the analysis of materials from excavations carried out at the southern Cape Middle Stone Age sites, Blombos Cave and Klipdrift Shelter*

It is relevant to this application to note that Prof. Christopher Henshilwood holds a position as Professor and SARChI Chair at the Evolutionary Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, and that he is the full-time Professor of African Prehistory, University of Bergen, Norway. He is also the Principal Investigator on a 5 year European Research Council FP7 grant, Tracsymbols ([www.tracsymbols.eu](http://www.tracsymbols.eu)) granted to him at the University of Bergen. The terms of his appointments require him to spend 6 months per annum in Norway and 6 months in South Africa.

The postdoctoral appointment of Dr. Emmanuel Discamps, to carry out the macrofaunal analysis of bone recovered from Blombos and Klipdrift, was made through University of Bergen funding and under the auspices of Prof. Henshilwood's projects in South Africa and Norway. This 3 year appointment requires that Dr. Discamps is resident in Norway and spends the majority of his research time at the University of Bergen.

As requested in your letter dated 15/05/2014, herewith, additional motivation to clarify the following points:

### 1. Technical equipment and comparative collection

- *whether the technical equipment is available in South Africa*
- *whether a comparative collection is available in South Africa*

The required technical equipment (e.g. microscopes) and some comparative mammalian collections are available in South Africa. Please note however that the mammalian comparative collection is not open at Iziko SA Museum and it is not known when this will become available. From November 2013 to March 2014, Dr. Emmanuel Discamps undertook research at the Wits Satellite laboratory in Cape Town and at the Ditsong National Museum of Natural History, Pretoria. The latter was because a comparative faunal collection was not available in Cape Town. At these facilities, technical equipment (eg. microscopes) were available but comparative faunal collections were available only at the latter.

### 2. Additional space

- *whether additional space can be sought in South Africa to allow for the analyses to be undertaken within the country (e.g. Iziko South African Museum; Archaeology Department, University of Cape Town; Wits University Satellite laboratory, Cape Town; Evolutionary Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand)*

The question about whether there is additional space to carry out the proposed research on the faunal remains from Blombos is only partly relevant to this re-application for an export permit. While he is in South Africa, Dr. Discamps will have access to the facilities at the Wits Satellite laboratory (although space here is limited) and also limited space in Prof. Henshilwood's shared laboratory at Wits University in Johannesburg. Despite numerous requests by Prof. Henshilwood to various staff members at Iziko, including the CEO, Dr. Rooksana Omar and Dr. Hamish Robertson, it has been made clear that bench space and access to the comparative collections is unlikely to be available in 2014. No date has yet been set for the reopening of the Iziko facilities.

A central reason for the request of an export permit is related instead to two of the planned analyses that will be carried out by Dr. Discamps within Prof. Henshilwood's Tracsymbols project:

- the first is a systematic search for bones that can be refitted that will aid in identification to species or genus. During these analyses, all the fragments are placed on tables and fracture edges are matched by systematically comparing each bone fragment with all the other ones, one by one. This is extremely time-consuming; bone fragments must be left in place, untouched; space must be specifically attributed to the researcher(s) for several months.
- second is a detailed analysis of the burnt bone fraction. This analysis requires thorough sorting of bones in several categories (burnt stage, anatomy, dimensions), following a complex and time-consuming protocol.

Facilities will be made available in the laboratory at the University of Bergen, Norway including access to the required technical equipment (microscopes, cameras etc.)

### 3. Dr Discamps' relocation to South Africa

- *whether Dr Discamps' research grant may not allow for his temporary relocation to South Africa*

As a postdoctoral research fellow within Prof. Henshilwood's research group at the University of Bergen, Dr. Discamps is required to spend a minimum of 6 months per annum

based at the Bergen laboratory. A letter to this effect can be provided by the head of the AHKR Department in Bergen, Prof. Jan Heiret (<http://www.uib.no/personer/Jan.Heiret>).

Prof. Henshilwood also has two field seasons per annum, each of 6 weeks duration, excavating at sites in the southern Cape (Blombos, Klipdrift). It is a requirement of Dr. Discamps' appointment that he is present at these excavations. This effectively means that Dr. Discamps has about 14 weeks available per annum to work in a South African laboratory. As noted above it is not possible to carry out the planned research on these MSA faunal collections within the time available. Hence the request for a temporary export permit that will permit some of the small sized and unidentifiable bones (about 40 small packets or one medium sized box) to be transported to Norway for analysis. The maximum period for each loan will be of 6 months duration.

Our analyses in Norway are non-destructive, all the research in Norway will be carried out under the supervision of Prof. Henshilwood and he will ensure that the bones are returned to South Africa in their original condition and within the stipulated time limits. The faunal material for which a permit is required will be personally couriered to Norway in July 2014 by Prof. Henshilwood. Full precautionary measures will have been undertaken with the packaging of all the material to ensure careful protection during transport.

Furthermore, with reference to the following: « *We are also aware of scientists belonging to foreign institutions who have previously undertaken the same type of analyses in South Africa in collaboration with local institutions* », we would like to state that the proposed refitting and analysis of the burnt fraction have not been carried out before on the Blombos faunal material. Dr. Discamps was specifically recruited for Prof. Henshilwood's multi-disciplinary and multi-national research programme as he is one of few researchers with this recognized expertise.

Please take note of the points that have been raised above with regard to the reasons why we are requesting that this box of faunal material be temporarily exported to Norway. The results of the proposed research will contribute to a better understanding of the behavioural origins, subsistence patterns and technical abilities of early *Homo sapiens* in South Africa. The loan of this box of bones for temporary export to Norway is low risk and we request that a permit is granted to Prof. Henshilwood for the period 15th July – 15th November, 2014.

Yours sincerely



Prof. Christopher Henshilwood