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Neandertals in the forests : a palaeomagnetic study of the Eemian interglacial stage deposits from north-western and central Europe
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Acknowledgements

Scientific life starts with a PhD title is an often heard expression. Even though I do not agree with this statement, it is true that with this title you are able to apply for grants which in turn, if granted, are the lifeblood of your scientific life. My scientific life started late and it took me a while to realise that I wanted to pursue a scientific career. In retrospect this is strange because from an early age I was very much interested in science, especially geology and archaeology. I remember clearly asking my parents at an age of 4 what existed before us, humans, and being fascinated with the fossils I found during our summer holidays. If I was not looking for fossils I loved to visit the local archaeological excavations and when my sisters and mom had enough I went to visit the archaeological museums alone with my dad, while the “girls” spent the day at the beach. Some years later it turned out that one of my sisters, Maaïke, did enjoy all the visits to the archaeological sites as she decided to study archaeology in Leiden. She in turn saved me from going to study Economy in Rotterdam (the one subject that I disliked intensely in high school) by suggesting that geology in Utrecht might be a better choice for me. It was thanks to you Maaïke!

Most of you know that I did not start working in geology after finishing my studies in Utrecht. Instead I joined the ING bank in Amsterdam, a place where I enjoyed working. During my ING days I spent my overtime hours with Douwe van Hinsbergen in Greece, helping him sample the whole Greek country for his PhD. In total we spent 11 weeks together in the field spread over two years. It was a great time! And definitely, it also rekindled my interest in science. Thank you, Douwe.

Some years later I knew it was time for a change in my career but I could not see clear where I wanted to go. I hired a job-coach and we sat down to talk about my interests, dreams and ambitions. After a few hours the job-coach told me: I have never been able to advise anybody within the first session until today. You should do a PhD in geology or study archaeology or history. Do not mention this to anyone yet as they will try to talk you out of it. We will meet in three months and talk about it some more when you had time to think about it. My first reaction was WHAT??? I just spent a lot of money and this is the advice I get... That evening I called my parents to tell them about the meeting. After a while they said: when we hear you talking about it, it seems clear you are going to study archaeology... Parents know you better than anyone. Thank you, mom and dad. And thank you also for the love and support you have given me over the years, for providing me the

room to be myself and achieve my dreams. For being an example of loyalty and devotion, and for giving me my great three sisters Marieke, Maaïke and Maartje, accomplices and guardian angels.

Three months later, when I met my job-coach again I was already a part-time student in Archaeology (thank you ING) and had already passed my first exams. Thank you, job-coach.

From there on, it did not take long for me to realise that I wanted to pursue a scientific career in Palaeolithic archaeology. Fortunately, Wil Roebroeks was awarded the Spinoza premium (thank you NWO) and I was awarded one of the Spinoza funded PhD positions (Thank you, Wil) co-promoted by 2 world renowned scientists, one a rock-magnetist, and the other one a palaeo-magnetist, Mark Dekkers and Josep Parés. I believe that I have been very lucky with my promoters; not only they are experts in their field but they are also easy going and good advisors, albeit all three in their own personal way. The way you do your science is an inspiration for me. Wil, many thanks for the opportunity you gave me over these years to pursue my vocation. It is a pleasure to be part of the Human Origins Group and I hope to be part of it for many years to come. You have been always generous with me and you were the first one to definitely bet on the scientist I had inside. And something else! Before I started my PhD, unknowingly, Wil had a big influence on my life. Due to his contacts, Leiden students had the opportunity to go to Dmanisi, in Georgia. I was one of them, supposedly to do some palaeomag work. This did not happen but I did meet my wife! Endless thanks for this, Wil! Josep, your trust and your support have been crucial for me to be able to combine my personal and professional life. Also your Spanish and US background has given me new perspectives on the scientific world. Mark, you have been called the walking encyclopaedia in the past. This is true but for me you are mostly the man of detail, both in structure of the text as in structure of the research. I learned and learn a lot from you but most importantly, you know how to pick a good wine. Many thanks to the three of you I could not have done it without you.

Many other people deserve an acknowledgement; so many, that I decided to group them and avoid unintentional forgets.

To my friends, neighbours and the Amsterdam Crusaders! To Miolnir, a great group who gave me at least 15 weeks extra field experience, my jaarclub (including Astrid). To the people from the Fort with Cor Langereis at its head, who leads by example both in science as in life enjoyment. Tom you are missed! To all the staff from the faculty of Archaeology with its Human Origins group at its core. To the teams and support staff of Dikika, West

Turkana and Atapuerca research projects. To the Neumark, Caours and Rutten colleagues with special mention of Jan Peeters. To Claudia from the CENIEH paleomag lab. To the Kennis brothers for letting me use one of their beautiful drawings. To Woef and the old boys. To Joanne Porck for all her help with the illustrations over the last few years. To José María Bermúdez de Castro for all his support in the last few years and being a great person in all senses. I also appreciated that you and Eudald Carbonell cleared the TD1 section for me with sledgehammers. Finally, some people have made my life in Burgos warmer and funnier. Laura, Angel, Pili and Elena are part of that Spanish world.

For different reasons there are a few people I want to give a separate mention: Jose, Corrie, Kim and Adam.

The SNMAP for funding part of my Dikika research. This research is not published yet and in the end is not part of this thesis, but your financial contribution was an important stepping stone for the research that I will be doing the next few years. Many thanks! With this respect I want to give a special mention to Guillaume. I published my first paper with you and many more are on its way. Thank you for giving me that opportunity!

Also I would like to thank my family in the Netherlands and Spain and those family members who are not longer with us. Especially Apa en Aaldert would have loved my research. Oma Sier would have been so proud, maybe of me, but mostly because she has a great-grandchild named after her.

To my wife María I want to give the biggest thanks. She followed the path of the PhD before me and knows how it's done. We make a good team together. We have two great kids and she makes and continues to make me better a person and scientist. LOL!

Finally I want to thank my kids Mark and María. It is pure joy to have you around and to see you grow and learn. You are a guarantee of something good in my life, ever and forever. No words can come close to describe what the two of you mean for your father and mother. Life has gained a whole new meaning with your arrival. Love you!

Curriculum Vitae

Mark Jan Sier was born on the 27th of august 1972 in Amstelveen, the Netherlands. After graduating in Geology in the faculty of Earth Sciences at Utrecht University he pursued a career at ING bank in Amsterdam. In this period he spent his holidays helping Douwe van Hinsbergen with palaeomagnetic fieldwork in Greece, rekindling his interest for science. Some years later this resulted in, first part-time later full-time, studying Archaeology in the faculty of Archaeology of Leiden University (MA 2008). Coffee visits to the “Fort Hoofddijk” palaeomagnetic laboratory in Utrecht led to Mark being asked to join the African stratigraphic projects in hominin-bearing sites of Guillaume Dupont-Nivet. Subsequently, Mark started a palaeomagnetic stratigraphy project in the Neandertal Neumark Nord archaeological site, together with Mark Dekkers. This site forms an important part of the PhD research presented here which started in 2009 at the Human Origins Group led by Wil Roebroeks of the Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden. For this thesis also collaboration was started with Josep Parés of the CENIEH, Spain. Mark’s thesis allowed him to combine his interests in Geology and Archaeology. Other interests are skiing, american football, ice skating and reading.

Mark is married to the beautiful and brilliant scientist Maria Martín Torres, who has an excellent sense of humor and shares (or exceeds) Mark’s taste for beer. Together, they have two kids, Mark and Maria.

