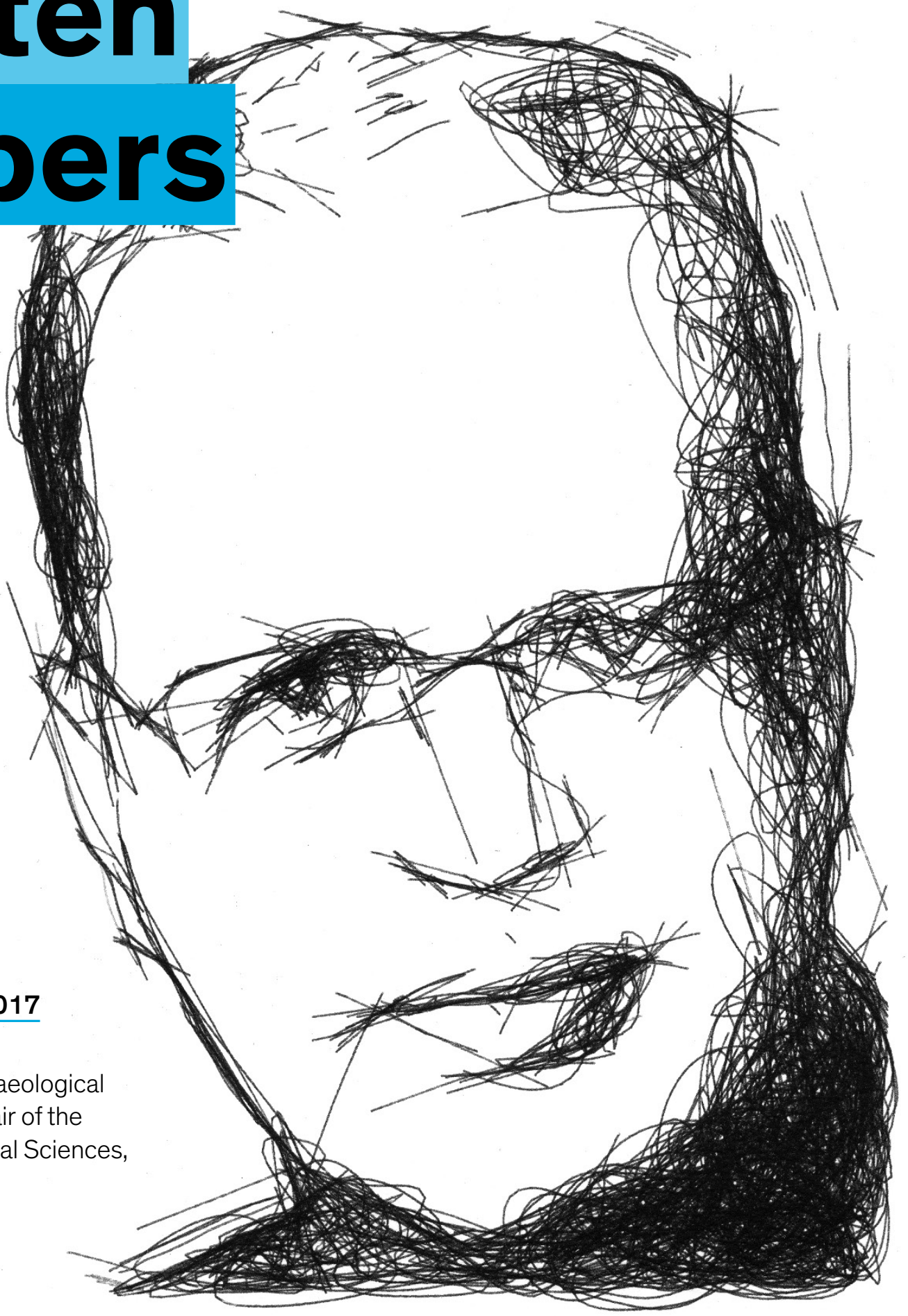
Zukunftskolleg

Universität Konstanz

Alumnus Karsten Lambers



Alumni Portrait Nr. 04—2017

Associate Professor of Archaeological Computer Sciences and Chair of the Department of Archaeological Sciences, Leiden University

Artwork by Patrick Tresset

Karsten Lambers

Zukunftskolleg

Karsten Lambers, Associate Professor of Archaeological Computer Sciences at the University of Leiden, thinks the interdisciplinary aspect of the Zukunftskolleg is simply intriguing: "When I applied for a position as a Research Fellow, Konstanz didn't even have a department for archaeology!"

Karsten Lambers is a man of many interests: He had even considered studying aerospace engineering before settling on American anthropology, prehistoric archaeology and Spanish. At that point, he did not think much about potential future employment, he simply wanted to do something that was both fascinating and challenging. In 1998 he finished his master's degree in Bonn and went to Zurich, where he earned his PhD in 2005. He was looking for a branch within the wide field of prehistoric archaeology that was not well-researched, because "that would be very thrilling!" His dissertation on the Nasca geoglyphs of Palpa, Peru, was what pointed him in the direction of archaeological computer sciences: "I simply couldn't use traditional methods for my fieldwork." Geoglyphs are man-made ground drawings, which in this case cover areas of some 100 km² and can be best mapped from the air. In close collaboration with geomatic engineers at ETH Zurich, he used remote sensing, which included analysing aerial images and modelling the whole landscape and the geoglyphs in 3D. His dissertation received the Best Thesis Award from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Zurich.

After his PhD and a first postdoc position in the Nasca project, he wanted to stay in academia and got busy sending out applications. It was a hard time, because "there weren't many jobs around". It was then that he saw the advertisement by the Zukunftskolleg. Even though Konstanz had no department of archaeology, he received the support of Professor Saupe of the Department of Computer and Information Science and Professor Gotter of the Department of History.

Karsten Lambers became a Zukunftskolleg Fellow in 2008. After two years, he was appointed assistant professor at the University of Bamberg, but was still able to continue his Fellowship until 2013 as planned. He still had his desk in Konstanz and tried to be there as much as possible. "I'm very happy that the Zukunftskolleg was flexible and adjusted to my situation." At the Zukunftskolleg, he worked on a project to detect archaeological objects via satellite images in alpine terrain above the tree line. "The idea is to automate image analysis. Let the computer look for interesting archaeological records!"

Karsten Lambers took advantage of the opportunity to invite a ***Senior Fellow***, Professor Bernard Frischer, founder of the Virtual World Heritage Laboratory at the University of Virginia. This lab applies 3D digital technologies to model cultural heritage objects, such as artefacts and sites, thus enabling 3D scientific simulation. Even today, they are still in touch with one another. Thinking back to his time at the Zukunftskolleg, Karsten Lambers remembers the ***Jour Fixe*** as "very inspiring." Listening to talks from other researchers from totally different fields was sometimes difficult, but experiencing up-to-date research at the very moment it was being done was great. "I do miss it, but today I just wouldn't have time for meetings of that kind." Although collaborating with other Fellows was not easy – every Fellow had to prioritise his or her own network – he did enjoy discussions with other researchers.

Today Karsten Lambers is still connected with the Zukunftskolleg and planning an interdisciplinary project with Associated Fellow Sasha Kosanic from the Department of Biology, with funding from the Zukunftskolleg. Building on previous research in the Alps initiated during Karsten's Fellowship, their project aims to study natural and anthropogenic impacts on landscape change in the Lower Engadine (Switzerland) in order to develop appropriate strategies for the sustainable use of historical agricultural terraces that are currently threatened. Preservation of these terraces is crucial for maintaining the ecosystem services in the region. Therefore, their project will combine different approaches from archaeology, ecology, geography and anthropology, in order to support an integrated study of past, present and future landscape change and its social and cultural implications.

Karsten Lambers is careful about giving advice to young researchers, as no two careers are ever the same, but says that in his career, two things were extremely important: Having his own ideas and teaching skills. "There is a risk of your own research becoming a narrow field, but in a way universities need all-rounders to do the teaching! Teaching experience got me my current job." Since 2015, he has an appointment at the University of Leiden.

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Distinctions, Awards and Honorary Posts

2013 – 2017 Chairman of Computeranwendungen und Quantitative Methoden in der Archäologie e.V. [Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology (CAA) – German Chapter] and member of the Steering Committee of CAA International

2014 – 2016 Member of the General Management Board of Archaeolandscapes Europe (ArcLand)

2008 – 2013 Fellow of the Zukunftskolleg, University of Konstanz

2005 Best Thesis Award, Faculty of Arts, University of Zurich, Switzerland

Curriculum Vitae

Education

2005 PhD, Department of Prehistory and Protohistory, University of Zurich, Switzerland
"The geoglyphs of Palpa, Peru: documentation, analysis, and interpretation"

1999 – 2004 PhD student under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Philippe Della Casa, University of Zurich, Switzerland

1998 Master's thesis, Department of American Anthropology, University of Bonn
"Späte Besiedlung in Xkipché, Yucatán, Mexiko" ["Late Maya settlement at Xkipché, Yucatán, Mexico"]

1992 – 1998 Studies in American Anthropology, Prehistoric Archaeology and Spanish, University of Bonn

Scientific Career

Since 2017 Associate Professor of Archaeological Computer Sciences and Chair of the Department of Archaeological Sciences, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, Netherlands

2015 – 2016 Assistant Professor of Archaeological Computer Science, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, Netherlands

Since 2015 Privatdozent [Private Lecturer] in Computational Archaeology and Digital Geoarchaeology, Institute of Archaeology, Heritage Sciences and Art History, University of Bamberg

2010 – 2015 Assistant Professor of Digital Geoarchaeology, Institute of Archaeology, Heritage Sciences and Art History, University of Bamberg

2008 – 2010 Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Computer and Information Sciences, University of Konstanz

2005 – 2007 Postdoctoral Researcher, Commission for Archaeology of Non-European Cultures, German Archaeological Institute, Bonn

2004 PhD Research Assistant, Department of Prehistory and Protohistory, University of Zurich, Switzerland

1999 – 2004 PhD Research Assistant, Institute of Geodesy and Photogrammetry, ETH Zurich, Switzerland