

Fellows

Matthäus Rest

IFK_Research Fellow

Duration of fellowship

01. March 2021 bis 30. June 2021

Matthäus Rest

PROJECT TITLE

Curdled Milk: Ancient DNA, Milk Microbes, and the Archive of Life Itself

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Curdled Milk will attempt an anthropology of milk across Eurasia and the ages. Uniting humans, dairy animals, and microbes in a common frame of analysis, the project investigates milk as a medium for relation-making between species—and between distinct temporal horizons. The research is informed by my ongoing fieldwork with biomolecular archaeologists who are studying the prehistoric spread of dairying. It is their work that sustains my methodological claim: that the ability to read ancient DNA has transformed the archaeological record into an archive of life itself. This has enabled an anthropological investigation of the biology of history: how human interventions have altered genetic code. But in order to make genetic claims about the past, my colleagues need contemporary dairy samples, which I collect from peasants in Mongolia, Jordan, and the Alps. My fieldwork with them aims to contribute to the continuity of their multispecies fermentation collectives.

CV

Matthäus Rest is an anthropologist and peasant. He is interested in the relations between the environment, the economy, science and time and looks at them predominantly through the prism of peasant life forms. His PhD project dealt with a hydropower dam in Nepal that has remained unbuilt for over 30 years. He is currently working on a book which aims to describe what it means to wait for such a long time for a large-scale infrastructure project to be completed and how water and land produce contradictory claims to sovereignty in the Himalayas. Since 2017, he has been working at the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History in Jena with an interdisciplinary group of archaeologists interested in the deep history of the relationships between humans, ruminants and dairy microbes. Otherwise, he likes to think about the Krampus and the Yeti.

Publications

with Salla Sariola and Charlotte Brives (eds.), *With Microbes: Ethnographies*, London 2021, “Dreaming of Pipes. Kathmandu’s Long-Delayed Melamchi Water Supply Project, Environment and Planning C,” in: *Politics and Space* 37.7 (2019): p. 1198–1216; with Alessandro Rippa, “Road Animism: Reflections on the Life of Infrastructures,” in: *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 9.2 (2019): p. 373–389; with Gertraud Seiser (eds.), *Wild und Schön. Der Krampus im Salzburger Land*, Vienna 2016.