

Neanderthal/human relationship questioned

September 12 2005

The debate over the relationship between Neanderthals and modern humans is taking on new virulence amid a collection of new evidence.

For years, paleontologists have argued about whether anatomically modern humans either wiped out the Neanderthals or whether Neanderthals and the invaders simply interbred to create today's Homo sapiens, the Washington Post reported.

While DNA analysis to date suggests Neanderthals and modern humans are probably unrelated, researchers say new analysis of materials from old excavations in France shows Neanderthals and modern humans coexisted in western Europe during the Neanderthals' waning days, and thus had "potential demographic and cultural interactions."

Co-author Paul Mellars -- a University of Cambridge archaeologist and leading proponent of the view that modern humans pushed aside and then replaced Neanderthals -- told the newspaper he knew "there would be screaming" after publication of the research in the journal Nature this month.

"It's hogwash," said Erik Trinkaus, an anthropologist at Washington University in St. Louis who is an advocate both of Neanderthal-modern human interbreeding and Neanderthals' ability to adapt and "modernize."

Trinkaus said Mellars "is grasping at straws."

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Citation: Neanderthal/human relationship questioned (2005, September 12) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-09-neanderthalhuman-relationship.html>

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