

Study suggests why Neanderthals vanished

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A multi-university study argues the disappearance of Neanderthals was not due to competition from modern humans, as is widely believed.

The disappearance of Neanderthals is frequently attributed to modern humans' greater intelligence, making them more efficient as hunters.

But anthropologists from Harvard University, the University of Connecticut, the University of Haifa and Hebrew University argue the hunting practices of Neanderthals and early modern humans were largely indistinguishable.

That conclusion leads to a different hypothesis, also based on archaeological data, to explain the disappearance of the Neanderthals.

"Each population was equally and independently capable of acquiring and exploiting critical information pertaining to animal availability and behavior," write the anthropologists.

The researchers used archaeological data from a Middle- and Upper-Paleolithic rock shelter in the Georgian Republic dated to 60,000-20,000 years ago to contest some prior models of the perceived behavioral and cognitive differences between Neanderthals and modern humans.

The researchers suggest social developments that led to more routine use of distant resources, and a more extensive division of labor, might better explain the disappearance of Neanderthals than simply their hunting practices.

The research appears in the February issue of *Current Anthropology*.

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