

The Emerging Fate Of The Neandertals

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The Oase 2 (Upper) and Muierii 1 (Lower) crania in norma lateralis left. In an article appearing in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Erik Trinkaus, Ph.D., professor of anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis, has brought together data showing that early modern humans did exhibit evidence of Neandertal traits. Credit: Romanian Academy/Muzeul Olteni/Erik Trinkaus

For nearly a century, anthropologists have been debating the relationship of Neandertals to modern humans. Central to the debate is whether Neandertals contributed directly or indirectly to the ancestry of the early modern humans that succeeded them.

As this discussion has intensified in the past decades, it has become the central research focus of Erik Trinkaus, Ph.D., professor of anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis. Trinkaus has examined the earliest modern humans in Europe, including specimens in Romania, Czech Republic and France. Those specimens, in Trinkaus' opinion, have shown obvious Neandertal ancestry.

In an article appearing in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Trinkaus has brought together the available data, which shows that early modern humans did exhibit evidence of Neandertal traits.

"When you look at all of the well dated and diagnostic early modern European fossils, there is a persistent presence of anatomical features that were present among the Neandertals but absent from the earlier African modern humans," Trinkaus said. "Early modern Europeans reflect both their predominant African early modern human ancestry and a substantial degree of admixture between those early modern humans and the indigenous Neandertals."

This analysis, along with a number of considerations of human genetics, argues that the fate of the Neandertals was to be absorbed into modern human groups. Just as importantly, it also says that the behavioral difference between the groups were small. They saw each other as social equals.

Source: Washington University in St. Louis

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