

Neanderthal Man Was An Innovator, Study Says

June 19 2007

Neanderthal man was not as stupid as has been made out says a new study published by a University of Leicester archaeologist.

In fact Neanderthals were far removed from their stereotypical image and were innovators, says Dr Terry Hopkinson of the School of Archaeology and Ancient History in a paper published in *Antiquity*.

Neanderthals were the sister species of *Homo sapiens*, our own species, and inhabited Europe in the Middle Palaeolithic period which began some 300,000 years ago. This period has widely been thought to have been unremarkable and undramatic in cultural or evolutionary terms.

Now Dr Hopkinson has challenged this notion and shown that it does not fit the archaeological evidence. He says early Neanderthals were devising new stone tool technologies and also coming to terms with ecological challenges that defeated their immediate ancestors, *Homo heidelbergensis*.

Conventional theories focus on tool innovation much later on leading up to the period when modern humans replaced Neanderthals some 40,000 years ago.

Dr Hopkinson said: "There has been a consensus that the modern human mind turned on like a light switch about 50,000 years ago, only in Africa. But many 'modern' traits like the use of grind stones or big game hunting began to accumulate in Africa 300,000 years ago.

"It was the same in Europe with Neanderthals, there was a gradual accumulation of technology."

Not only did the Neanderthals combine old stone tool technologies in innovative ways to create new ways of working stone, says Dr Hopkinson. They also spread from western Europe into areas of central and eastern Europe their forbears had been unable to settle.

"The eastern expansion shows that the Neanderthals became capable of managing their lives and their landscapes in strongly seasonal environments," said Dr Hopkinson.

Dr Hopkinson concludes:" Neanderthals have typically been thought of as incapable of innovation, as it was assumed to be something unique to Homo sapiens. With this evidence of innovation it becomes difficult to exclude Neanderthals from the concept of humanity."

Source: University of Leicester

Citation: Neanderthal Man Was An Innovator, Study Says (2007, June 19) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2007-06-neanderthal.html>

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