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Spanish scientists point at climate changes as the cause of the Neanderthal extinction in the Iberian Peninsula

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Climate – and not modern humans – was the cause of the Neanderthal extinction in the Iberian Peninsula. Such is the conclusion of the University of Granada (Universidad de Granada) research group "RNM 179 - Mineralogy and Geochemistry of sedimentary and metamorphic environments", headed by professor Miguel Ortega Huertas and whose members Francisco José Jiménez Espejo, Francisca Martínez Ruiz and David Gallego Torres work jointly at the department of Mineralogy and Petrology of the UGR [http://www.ugr.es] and the Andalusian Regional Institute of Earth Sciences (CSIC-UGR).

Together with other scientists from the Gibraltar Museum, Stanford University and the Japan Marine Science & Technology Center (JAMSTEC), the Spanish scientists published in the scientific journal Quaternary Science Reviews an innovative work representing a considerable step forward in the knowledge of human ancestral history.

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The results of this multidisciplinary research are an important contribution to the understanding of the Neanderthal extinction and the colonisation of the European continent by Homo Sapiens.

During the last Ice Age, the Iberian Peninsula was a refuge for Neanderthals, who had survived in local pockets during previous Ice Ages, bouncing back to Europe when weather conditions improved.

Climate reconstructions

The study is based upon climate reconstructions elaborated from marine records and using the experience of Spanish and international research groups on Western Mediterranean paleoceanography. The conclusions point out that Neanderthal populations did suffer fluctuations related to climate changes before the first Homo Sapiens arrived in the Iberian Peninsula. Cold, arid and highly variable climate was the least favourable weather for Neanderthals and 24,000 years ago they had to face the worst weather conditions in the last 250,000 years.

The most important about these data is that they differ from the current scientific paradigm which makes Homo Sapiens responsible for the Neanderthal extinction. This work is a contribution to a new scientific current – led by Dr. Clive Finlayson, from the Gibraltar Museum – according to which Neanderthal isolation and, possibly, extinction were due to environmental factors.

These studies on climate variability are part of the work of the group RNM 179, funded by the excellence project RNM 0432 of the Andalusian Regional Government's Department for Innovation, Science and Business and by the MARCAL project of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, both linked to the Andalusian Environment Centre (CEAMA - Centro Andaluz de Medio Ambiente).

Antonio Marín Ruiz | Quelle: alphagalileo
Weitere Informationen: www.ugr.es/prensa.ugr.es/prensa/research/index.php

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