

## Re: Neanderthal man has been badly misunderstood

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*Source:* <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.anthropology.paleo/2005-10/msg00548.html>

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- *From:* [lsj@xxxxxxxxxx](mailto:lsj@xxxxxxxxxx)
  - *Date:* 20 Oct 2005 00:42:04 -0700
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Roger Bagula wrote:

- > And it appears from this article ; still is?
- >
- > <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,542-1153762,00.html>
- > Cave in
- > Neanderthal man has been badly misunderstood
- >
- > When in doubt, trust William Golding. The author was a campaigner
- > against hogwash. When he came across an old novel about a group of
- > supertalented British boys who got stranded on an island – and,
- > amazingly, managed to create on it their own, perfectly organised
- > mini-England – he was the first to cry nonsense. Taking a slightly more
- > realistic approach to the subject, he wrote Lord of the Flies. Another
- > of his books, The Inheritors, is similarly straightforward in telling
- > how the peaceloving Neanderthals were defeated by an emerging human
- > race.

The Inheritors was baseless speculation when it was written.  
In any case, was it really WG's intent to say anything realistic  
about Neanderthals, or did he simply use them as a foil in his  
arguments about the nature of Homo sapiens?

- > As it turns out, Mr and Mrs Neanderthal were not the grunting
- > thugs you may have imagined.

Jury remains out on this one.

- > For all we know, they sat around of an evening, tucking into a little
- > sirloin and discussing the subtler subcontextual points of the latest
- > West Cave play. Golding suspected as much; now researchers in Spain have
- > proved it.

At best, the researchers have shown evidence that the Neanderthals  
did have vocal communication. What they did with such an ability  
remains baseless speculation.

- > Based on the fossil remains of five Middle Pleistocene

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- > hominids (who were related to Neanderthals), collected from a Spanish
- > site, scientists have determined that prehistoric human ancestors
- > acquired hearing abilities similar to those of modern humans at least
- > 350,000 years ago. This supports a recent hypothesis that hominids
- > became capable of speech about 500,000 years ago.

The first paragraph in this article that is actually accurate.

Cf. my book 'Origins of language' (2005, Benjamins,  
[http://www.benjamins.com/cgi-bin/t\\_bookview.cgi?bookid=CELCR%205](http://www.benjamins.com/cgi-bin/t_bookview.cgi?bookid=CELCR%205))  
where this hypothesis is presented.

- > Neanderthals, it
- > seems, have been badly misunderstood.
- >
- > We Homo sapiens appear intent on underestimating them. Twenty years ago,
- > scientists found a Neanderthal hyoid bone – essential to the vocal
- > mechanism – in an Israeli cave. It was almost identical to modern
- > humans', suggesting that the Neanderthal throat was designed for speech.
- > Yet still, we have continued to picture them as underdeveloped hoodlums
- > with hairy backs, tiny brains and a big fat club in every big fat fist.
- > Perhaps it makes us feel better about our football "fans".
- >
- > It is time the record was corrected. First, Neanderthals were no hairier
- > than your average modern woman just before her leg wax.

We have no data on their hair cover. Hair or no hair are equally speculative.

- > Secondly, they
- > did not make or use brutishly heavy wooden clubs. They preferred sharp
- > spears and knives, just as we do when we dine out.

Wooden clubs are not usually preserved, so we don't know whether Neanderthals had them. As for spears, there is no consensus on whether Neanderthals knew how to fasten a stone tip to a wooden shaft.

- > Thirdly, their brains
- > were as big, or bigger, than ours.

This is hardly news.

- > And finally, as noted previously,
- > they were perfectly capable of civilised conversation, or some version
- > of it.

Some version of speech, very likely. 'Civilized conversation' is yet more speculation.

- > So say what you like about Neanderthal dress sense – and it was
- > slightly suspect. Animal prints went out in the Early Pleistocene, at

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> least, and haven't really come back since. Their hairstyles were not as  
> sophisticated as they might have been, either. The hairbrush really is  
> the wheel of coiffure. But what Neanderthals lacked in style, they made  
> up for in words. They'd hold their own at the pub, at least. Ugh.

More bullshit.

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Best regards, HLK, Physics  
Sverker Johansson U of Jonkoping

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Science: Truth without certainty  
Creationism: Certainty without truth

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• *Follow-Ups:*

- ◆ *Re: Neanderthal man has been badly misunderstood*  
◇ *From:* spiznet

• *References:*

- ◆ *Neanderthal man has been badly misunderstood*  
◇ *From:* Roger Bagula

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