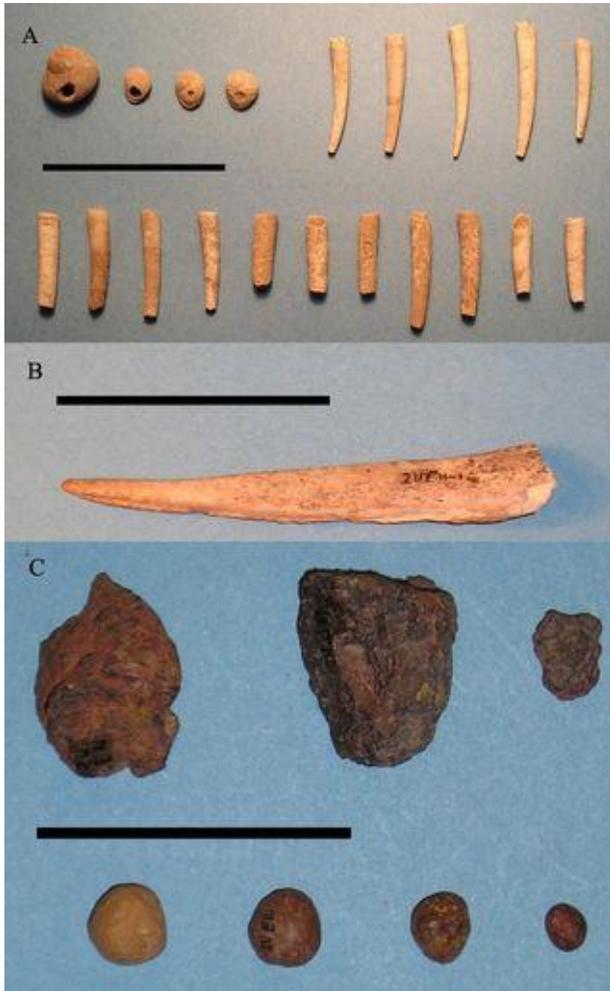


Neanderthals more intelligent than thought

Study suggests at least one group learned how to adapt and make different, better tools independently

Copyright 1985 Mark Hallett, "Awakening of Hunger"



Riel-Salvatore

Discovered tools represent a change in Neanderthal behavior: these hominids were adapting to climate change by learning to hunt more than just large game — they were going after smaller land animals and even fishing.

[DiscoveryNews](#)

updated 30 minutes ago

For the last fifty years, any discovery of modern tools associated with a Neanderthal community was thought to be a byproduct of Neanderthal-human interactions. The scientific thinking was that there was no way these other hominids could have developed such technology on their own.

Or could they? Now a new study suggests that at least one group of Neanderthals learned how to adapt and make different, better tools independently.

Anthropologist Julien Riel-Salvatore of the University of Colorado, Denver has studied Italian Neanderthal communities for the last seven years. His work sheds new light on the way we look at Neanderthals and their history.

"Basically, I am rehabilitating Neanderthals. They were far more resourceful than we have given them credit for," Salvatore said in a press release.

Around 140,000 years ago, Neanderthals lived all over Europe. One community in central Italy developed the Mousterian culture.

Then, around 42,000 years ago, modern humans entered the scene. They created the Aurignacian culture in the north. At the same time, a new culture called Uluzzian developed in southern Italy. Riel-Salvatore believes this new culture was Neanderthal.

An article published in August online in the Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory explains that the Uluzzian were different from the Mousterian because they created different tools, similar to those used by modern humans. Riel-Salvatore discovered projectile points, ochre, and bone tools, among many other objects at different Uluzzian sites.

The tools represent a change in Neanderthal behavior: these hominids were adapting to climate change by learning to hunt more than just large game -- they were going after smaller land animals and even fishing.

Riel-Salvatore is convinced that the Italian Neanderthals came up with these tools independently because of their geographical isolation, stuck at the southern tip of Italy.

Studying the Uluzzian got him thinking about the way Neanderthals are categorized: they are considered a separate species from modern humans and are often referred to as our "cousins."

"The fact that Neanderthals could adapt to new conditions and innovate shows that they are culturally similar to us," Riel-Salvatore said. "Biologically they are also similar. I believe they were a subspecies of human but not a different species."

Taking things one step farther, Riel-Salvatore theorizes that modern humans did not kill off Neanderthals, as researchers previously thought. Instead, humans adopted them into our culture.

A study released earlier this year further supports this idea. In May, researchers found that people in Asia and Europe get between one and four percent of their genetic material from Neanderthals.

I guess our ancestors also believed in the saying, "Make love, not war."

Copyright © 2010 Discovery Communications, LLC. The leading global real world media and entertainment company.