

Inconvenient Neandertaloids

Peter Line

This article examines some interesting and obscure fossil skulls that have Neandertaloid features. Some of these skulls are dated by evolutionary methods as being thousands of years younger than supposedly the last living Neandertal. Hence, these fossil skulls raise awkward questions for both the Out-of-Africa ‘pure’ replacement model of human origins, as well as for the Progressive Creationist model of human origins.

Out-of-Africa model

From an evolutionary perspective the Out-of-Africa theory has been the most popular and influential theory of modern human origins in the last couple of decades. Evolutionists were writing on the Out-of-Africa hypothesis as far back as the mid-1970s, with Stringer putting forth essentially the modern version of the model in 1984.¹ Interestingly, ‘progressive creationists’ Fazale Rana and Hugh Ross have developed a Reasons To Believe (RTB) human origins model very similar to the Out-of-Africa theory, stating that:

‘The chief features of the Out-of-Africa hypothesis bear striking similarity to the central tenets of RTB’s human origins model. In some respects the Out-of-Africa hypothesis could be thought of as the biblical model shoehorned into an evolutionary framework.’²

Rana and Ross claim to have ‘contemplated’ the question of human origins over the last decade or so, but only vigorously so in the last five years.³ Based on the chronology of events, and the biblical problems with progressive creationism,⁴ it would be more appropriate if part of the above statement was paraphrased as: ‘The RTB model could be thought of as the Out-of-Africa evolutionary model shoehorned into a quasi-biblical framework.’

The Out-of-Africa model proposes that modern humans emerged Out-of-Africa within the past 100,000 years, replacing all other earlier ‘archaic lineages’ (such as the Neandertals) they came across without interbreeding, although Stringer has acknowledged that there may ‘perhaps’ have been exceptions to the latter in Australasia.⁵ While a pure Out-of-Africa scheme allows no interbreeding between the emerging African modern humans and resident ‘archaic’ people, interbreeding is allowed to different extents in variants of the Out-of-Africa model.⁶

Viewed as the alternative to the Out-of-Africa model, the Multiregional model argues ‘that various human groups arose where they are found today.’⁷ In this view humans, as in *Homo erectus*, also migrated Out-of-Africa at least a million years ago to different regions of the world. But rather than being replaced by a subsequent recent migration, they evolved in parallel in these different geographic regions, but ‘gene flow between the groups through interbreeding was sufficient to maintain humans as a single species.’⁸ In this scenario the Neandertals were ancestors of modern humans.⁹

Rana and Ross appear to accept that Neandertals coexisted with modern humans,¹⁰ but they regard them as spiritless animals that in terms of emotion and intelligence possessed similar capacities to that of the great apes.¹¹ They also regard Neandertals as created about 150,000 years ago,¹² which was prior to Adam and Eve. The conventional creationist position regarding the Neandertals is that they were descendants of Adam and Eve, and that any differences in their morphology compared with present-day ‘modern’ humans is a reflection of post-Babel human variation, whether genetic or environmental or both.

According to Stringer and Andrews the ‘fossil evidence does not show an evolutionary transition occurring between the last Neanderthals and the first moderns, but it is disputed whether there is evidence of hybridization.’¹³ Concerning the Neandertals, most evolutionists believe that by 25,000 years ago they were ‘gone forever, leaving *Homo sapiens* as the sole surviving human species on Earth.’¹⁴ Hence, if there is evidence of Neandertals, or hybrids between them and modern humans, existing much later than 25,000 years ago (by evolutionary dating methods), then this would be strong evidence that the prevailing evolutionary view of Neandertals, as non-human hominids that went extinct, is wrong. It would also require reassessment of all current theories on the emergence of modern humans.

The Out-of-Africa model has modern humans arriving in Europe around 40,000 years ago,¹⁵ with the extinction of the Neandertals believed to have occurred no later than 25,000 years ago. According to Churchill and Smith, ‘Neandertals and modern humans coexisted in Europe for at least 2,000–4,000 years, and perhaps for 8,000–10,000 years or longer.’¹⁶ Any evidence of interbreeding between ‘moderns’ and Neandertals, during the coexistence phase that evolutionists believe occurred, undermines the ‘pure’ Out-of-Africa model, but not the assimilation version of that model.

Evidence of interbreeding (e.g. hybrids) between Neandertals and modern humans would be fatal to the current Progressive Creationist model. This model sees Neandertals as having survived to about 30,000 years ago.¹² Even if there was coexistence between the Neandertals and modern humans, this model regards the former as spiritless animals, which by definition would be a different Genesis kind (let alone a different species) from humans created in the image of God. Interbreeding between the two populations would therefore not be feasible.

Alternatively, any evidence that indicates interbreeding between Neandertals and modern humans indicates they were the same species, and hence supports the conventional (young-earth) creationist position that both groups of people were descendants of Adam and Eve. With this in mind, some interesting and obscure fossil skulls will be looked at.

Podkumok skull

The Podkumok skull (figure 1) was found by workmen excavating sewers in Piatigorsk, European Russia, in 1918, beneath a pottery vessel and a polished stone implement that they came across at a depth of 4–6 m.¹⁷ Further investigation of the site was stopped by civil war conditions a few days later, making dating of the find difficult. Based on general geological conditions the deposit containing the Podkumok skull was dated to the Würm glaciation, to ‘a short period between the beginning of the retreat of the glacier and the land raising’.¹⁷ In evolutionary terms the Würm glaciation lasted about 90,000 years, with the start of the last retreating of the great ice sheets occurring about 15,000 years ago.¹⁸

Although not discussed often, the Podkumok skull is these days referred to as Upper Paleolithic,¹⁹ a period broadly dated by evolutionists to between 40,000 and 10,000 years ago.²⁰ As the Podkumok find was associated with pottery, it should be noted that according to the evolutionists’ scheme pottery first appeared in Japan 14,000 years ago and in other regions later.²¹ Hence, and from an evolutionary view, the Podkumok skull is at the very earliest from the end of the Upper Paleolithic, but possibly from the Holocene epoch, a post-Würm interglacial geological period beginning slightly more than 10,000 years ago and lasting to the present day.²²

Why is the evolutionary age of the Podkumok skull important? The reason is that the incomplete Podkumok cranium shows ‘morphological affinity with the Neanderthal group’.²³

As demonstrated above, evolutionists believe the Neandertals were ‘gone forever’ 25,000 years ago at the latest, and so the appearance of the Podkumok Neanderthaloid²⁴ skull, at the very minimum 11,000 years after the last Neanderthal supposedly died, must question their theory on the origins of modern humans. Whether



Figure 1. The Podkumok skull (top: frontal view; bottom: side view) has morphological affinities with the Neandertals, including a prominent continuous browridge and a receding forehead. (From Golomshtok,¹⁷ Plate VII).

the Podkumok skull was that of a Neanderthal proper or a hybrid between Neandertals and modern humans makes little difference, as the ‘pure’ Out-of-Africa model proposes replacement of the Neandertals by modern humans without interbreeding. Hence, hybrids are not expected to exist at all, let alone 11,000 years after the last Neanderthal died out.

The main Podkumok skull bones found included an almost whole frontal bone, fragments of both temporal bones, a small part of the nasal bone and fragments from both right and left sides of the lower jaw, as well as some teeth.¹⁷ Its morphological affinity with the Neandertals includes the prominent true undivided browridge (supraorbital torus), described as: ‘The presence of uninterrupted *torus supra-orbitalis* passing to *processus zygomaticus*, similar in its development to the corresponding formation of Spy II and the Krapina fragments.’²³ One needs only to compare the side view of the Podkumok skull with that of the Neanderthal Spy II skull to see that it also fits the Neanderthal profile of a receding frontal bone (forehead),²⁵ as opposed to, for example, the steeply rising frontal bone of an anatomically modern human from European Russia (Kostenki XIV) dated to 25,000 years ago.²⁶ Interestingly, according to Bayanov and Bourtsev:

‘... at least some of the Neanderthaloid skeletons found in more recent strata and looked upon as “pseudo-Neanderthal” may be real Neanderthals, among them the Neanderthaloid Podkumok (Caucasus) skullcap, which is of as recent origin as the Bronze Age.’²⁷

The Podkumok skull, found at least 11,000 years after Neandertals were believed to have died out (by evolutionary dating methods), and being associated with pottery, considered a modern human invention,²¹ and hence requiring human intelligence, would clearly destroy current theories of modern human origins if it belonged to a real Neanderthal. If the skull was from the Bronze Age, a period evolutionists believe started around 3500 BC,²⁸ then the skull is indeed very recent by evolutionary chronology. Hence, in order to save their theory, it seems evolutionists have little choice but to consider the Neanderthaloid morphological features of the Podkumok skull as being encompassed within the range of modern humans. However, by doing so they would essentially be expanding the variation in modern human morphology to include much of the Neanderthal morphology, and so their human origins model is still in serious trouble, as it removes much of the basis for considering the Neandertals as a separate species.

Interestingly, a recent morphometric study concluded that some Russian Upper Paleolithic Neanderthaloid skulls (Skhodnya and Khvalynsk) were different from both Neandertals and modern humans, although the outcome of their Podkumok skull analysis was not reported in the abstract.¹⁹ Hence, a third strategy to get around the above problem would be to ‘invent’ another recent hominid species, but one somehow doubts that evolutionists would want to open up a ‘can of worms’ like that.

Undora skulls

Other specimens of interest in Golomshtok's 1938 survey of the Paleolithic Period in European Russia are the Undora I (figure 2) and Undora II (figure 3) crania, found lying side by side on the island of Undora in 1913.²⁹ Although considerable parts of the two crania were not preserved, enough was found to indicate that the Undora II crania differed markedly from Undora I, with the former having a more sloping forehead and more pronounced supraorbital ridges (both Neandertal-like features), as well as appearing to have been longer.³⁰ Both skulls were reported to be dolichocephalic,³¹ which is a feature observed in Neandertals.³²

While Golomshtok does not refer to these specimens as Neandertaloids, although Undora II contains features suggestive of this, what they at the very least indicate is that there was considerable variation in skull features in members of the same population. This suggests caution in assigning fossils with differences in morphology, such as that between Neandertals and modern humans, to different species. While no specific evolutionary age is given, the article points out that Undora I and Undora II belong to a series of crania 'appearing in Europe soon after the last glaciation.'³³ Hence, one presumes that at the time they were believed to be of Holocene age.

Nowosiolka skull

The 'Neandertal in chain mail armour' is a specimen that has generated quite a bit of controversy.³⁴ Formally known as the Nowosiolka skull (figure 4), the specimen was found in Poland about a century ago, and was judged as containing 'numerous characteristics which are only associated with *H. primigenius*', including a large non-interrupted browridge.³⁵ At the time *Homo primigenius* was a popular name for Neandertals in Germany.³⁶ According to the author Stolyhwo:

'... out of 47 characteristics studied, the Nowosiolka skull possesses 23 which are identical to that of *H. primigenius*, 11 that are close to that of *H. primigenius* and only 13 that differ from *H. primigenius*. These results prove that the Nowosiolka skull possesses in some aspects a structure as primitive as the *H. primigenius* type and permits us to establish a morphological link between this skull and those of Spy-Neandertal-Krapina.'³⁵

Stolyhwo does report that a suit of armour and other items were found near the Nowosiolka skeleton, suggesting it was from the Middle Ages. Although the armour part is not disputed, evolutionists have predictably played down the Nowosiolka skull's Neandertal features. For example, Colin Groves has dismissed the Nowosiolka skull as basically 'a very robust (i.e. be-browridged) European man.'³⁷ According to evolutionist Jim Foley the problem with claims such as the 'chain mail Neandertal' is that:

'... they were made at a time when Neandertals were not nearly as well known as they are today, and

by authors who probably had no personal familiarity with Neandertal fossils. There was a tendency in the early 1900's to classify any skull with a browridge or receding forehead as a Neandertal.'³⁸

One could reply, however, that in the late 1900s and early 2000s the tendency is for evolutionists to deny the existence of any 'recent' Neandertal, no matter what the skull looks like. One may well ask when a skull with Neandertaloid features is a Neandertal, or at the very least, when can it be considered a hybrid between a modern human and Neandertal. Even evolutionists acknowledge that Stolyhwo was a legitimate scientist,³⁷ and so his opinion that the skull showed affinity with Neandertals should be taken seriously. While the Nowosiolka skull may not have been a Neandertal proper, it appears to show enough Neandertaloid features to either classify as a hybrid or to illustrate that many Neandertal characteristics are within the range of modern humans.

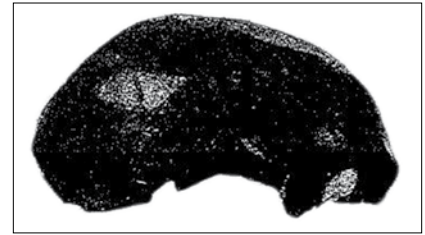


Figure 2. The Undora I skull (side view). (From Golomshtok¹⁷).



Figure 3. The Undora II skull (side view). Neandertaloid features of this skull include a sloping forehead and a dolichocephalic (longheaded) shape. (From Golomshtok¹⁷).



Figure 4. The Nowosiolka skull (side view) was reported to contain numerous characteristics only associated with Neandertals, including a large browridge. (From Stolyhwo³⁵).

Hahnöfersand Man

I have previously discussed the re-dating of the Hahnöfersand man frontal bone (figure 5), from about 36,300 years old to 7,500 years old.³⁹ Evolutionist Bräuer, who did extensive analysis on the Hahnöfersand specimen, summed up his findings by stating that 'Hahnöfersand has modern

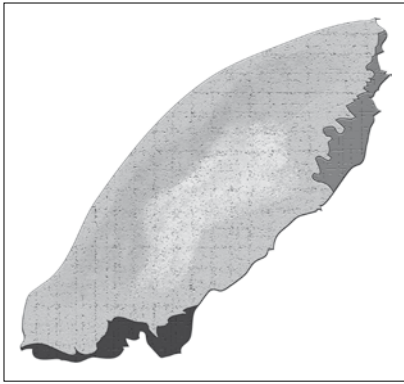


Figure 5. The Hahnöfersand frontal bone (side view) has some Neandertal features, including a receding forehead, and was considered to be from a hybrid between Neandertals and ‘modern’ humans by some evolutionists. (After Bräuer⁵⁰)

and Neanderthaloid affinities’ and that it ‘is certainly difficult to state which affinities are dominant in this frontal’.⁴⁰ Bräuer suggested that Hahnöfersand and Neandertals may have gone through a ‘hybridization phase’ in Western Europe.⁴¹

Because of the new date of 7,500 years for the Hahnöfersand specimen, it is of course no longer even in the realm of plausibility for most evolutionists to consider hybridization between Hahnöfersand and Neandertals, as this would infer that Neandertals survived well into the Holocene. As illustration of this bias in interpretation, a recent publication dealing with German Paleolithic ‘hominids’ referred to the Hahnöfersand specimen as an anatomically modern human.⁴² Yet the fact is that the Hahnöfersand frontal bone has the same morphology now, with the much younger date, as it did before, with the older date. Removing Hahnöfersand status as a plausible hybrid and re-classifying it as an anatomically modern human, without any influence of Neandertal genes in its genome, can only be because of its new date. In fact, the authors of the German Paleolithic hominid review admit as much, when they state:

‘Regarding anthropological evidence for hybridization, given the loss of the Hahnöfersand specimen as a potential hybrid due to revision of its chronology, we suspect that there are at present no convincing European candidates demonstrating an admixture of modern and archaic *Homo*.’⁴³

The above example seemingly illustrates how a fossil’s ‘perceived’ skull morphology can depend on its assigned geological age, changing from potential hybrid to anatomically modern as a ‘new’ younger date is obtained for the same skull. This demonstrates unequivocally how ‘rubbery’ the definitions of modern humans and Neandertals really are, as well as the bias involved in ‘hominid’ interpretations. By the above reasoning any ‘recent’ Neandertal-like fossil, if found, will simply be defined out of existence, that is, it becomes anatomically modern by default. A similar argument is used by the authors to dismiss the Portuguese Lagar Velho skeleton as a hybrid, when they state that:

‘The dating of the find horizon to circa 24,500 BP also suggests a younger context than should be relevant for a phase of hybridization of Neandertals and early modern humans in Europe.’⁴³

More hybrids

While the Out-of-Africa pure replacement model has been the dominant theory of modern human origins in recent times, an increasing minority of evolutionists now believe in an assimilation scenario. In the assimilation model ‘modern humans originated in equatorial Africa and subsequently expanded into Eurasia and the remainder of Africa, variably absorbing regional late archaic human populations in the process.’⁴⁴ According to evolutionist Erik Trinkaus:

‘Versions of the assimilation model have remained contenders for the interpretation of modern human phylogenetic emergence, if frequently overshadowed by the more polarized regional continuity (with gene flow) and (Out-of-Africa with) replacement scenarios. The last two interpretations are finally intellectually dead. Both are contradicted by available evidence, and it is time for the discussion to move on.’⁴⁴

As support for their position of admixture or hybridization between Neandertals and moderns the assimilation group cites evidence of Neandertal features in early modern humans, including the Oase (Romania), Mladeč (Czech Republic) and Lagar Velho (Portugal) finds.⁴⁵ The Muierii fossils from Romania, exhibiting a ‘mosaic of modern human and archaic/Neandertal features’, is the latest evidence put forth to suggest interbreeding between Neandertals and humans.⁴⁶ Proponents of the Out-of-Africa pure replacement model, just when their position seems on the verge of collapse, get revitalized by yet another Neandertal DNA study, as seen recently.⁴⁷ However, it should be pointed out that these ‘ancient’ DNA molecular clock studies are based on unproven and problematic assumptions,⁴⁸ which even some evolutionary paleoanthropologists acknowledge.⁴⁹ And back and forth the arguments go.

Conclusion

The possible existence of very late-living Neandertals and/or evidence of recent interbreeding between Neandertals and modern humans (i.e. hybrids), is strong support for a creation model that considers both Neandertals and modern humans as descendants of Adam and Eve. Evolutionists who hold to the Out-of-Africa pure replacement model cannot accept such evidence as it would mean the collapse of their model of human origins, and so Neandertal skull features in recent anatomically modern humans have to be explained away.

The finding of Neanderthaloid hybrids is particularly damaging to the RTB Progressive Creationist model, as it means that Neandertals (spirit-less animals) interbred with the descendants of Adam and Eve (modern humans), which is not possible in their scenario. And/or that some modern humans looked like Neandertals, but then, what is the difference? Even if, for example, the Podkumok skull is brushed off as a very late Neandertal (and not a hybrid), its association with pottery infers human (not animal) intelligence to the specimen, and so would cause all sorts of

awkward theological questions if it was not a descendant of Adam and Eve.

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Peter Line’s undergraduate major was in biophysics. After that, he completed a Masters Degree and a Ph.D., both in the area of neuroscience. He has had a keen interest in the creation/evolution issue ever since becoming a Christian, as evolution had been a stumbling block to him believing God’s Word was true.