Abstract: Neandertals are the best-studied of all extinct hominins, with a rich fossil record sampling hundreds of individuals, roughly dating from between 350,000 and 40,000 years ago. Their distinct fossil remains have been retrieved from Portugal in the west to the Altai area in central Asia in the east and from below the waters of the North Sea in the north to a series of caves in Israel in the south. Having thrived in Eurasia for more than 300,000 years, Neandertals vanished from the record around 40,000 years ago, when modern humans entered Europe. Modern humans are usually seen as superior in a wide range of domains, including weaponry and subsistence strategies, which would have led to the demise of Neandertals. This systematic review of the archaeological records of Neandertals and their modern human contemporaries finds no support for such interpretations, as the Neandertal archaeological record is not different enough to explain the demise in terms of inferiority in archaeologically visible domains. Instead, current genetic data suggest that complex processes of interbreeding and assimilation may have been responsible for the disappearance of the specific Neandertal morphology from the fossil record.
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