

Who We Are #2 — Proto-Europeans



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*Nature's Evolutionary Goal: Higher Consciousness
Neanderthal Man: Mongrel or Adaptation?*

LAST MONTH WE traced our race's lineage through some 15 billion years of evolutionary development, from the time of the undifferentiated Cosmos, just after the Beginning, to the early Pleistocene. The Pleistocene, that epoch of drastic and repeated climatic change which greatly accelerated the pace of evolution in the earth's temperate zones, began about 3.5 million years ago and saw two of the important evolutionary developments we will consider in this series: the transition of the proto-European root stock from *Homo erectus* to *Homo sapiens* and the diversification of the European race into the subraces which exist today.

For one other important development, however — the beginning of the divergence of the various prehuman evolutionary lines leading to today's major races — we must push back a bit further, into the dimly remote Pliocene epoch. (In general, in this series we will not confuse matters by introducing the specialized jargon of the paleontologists and geologists — Pliocene, Miocene, Oligocene, etc. except where it is especially helpful. In particular we will try to keep the chronology simple, using absolute dates whenever possible, rather than the names of the various eras,

periods, and epochs, which are defined in terms of the geologic deposits characterizing them. Much of the older writing on this subject uses dates differing substantially from those in the newer writing, because of earlier errors and uncertainties in assigning absolute dates to the various geologic deposits. The beginning of the Pleistocene epoch — whose Greek roots simply mean “most recent” — for example, was formerly dated at about one million years ago, and has only recently been extended another 2.5 million years. The Pliocene — meaning, “more recent” — was the epoch extending from the beginning of the Pleistocene back to about 12 million years ago.)

The Antiquity of the Races

The present state of our knowledge does not allow us to fix with any degree of certainty the earliest time at which there were no racial differences among the ancestors of the various living subspecies of man. We do know, however, that human racial differences precede *Homo sapiens*; i.e., that the divergence into the various living races began at the prehuman level.

Even the oldest *H. erectus* fossils which have been found can be assigned to various racial categories, e.g., pre-European, pre-Mongoloid, etc. And even among the Australopithecines, from which *H. erectus* evolved, there are clearly discernible racial differences foreshadowing today's living races.

The racial trail becomes very difficult to follow back beyond about three million years, and the best guess that can be made at this time is that to find a common ancestor for all of the living subspecies of *H. sapiens* we would have to go back into the late Pliocene epoch, somewhere around four or five million years ago.

Separate Development

Thus, evolution has proceeded separately along several different lines from subman to man, with each line crossing that evolutionary threshold separately — and at a different time. The profound physical and psychical differences which can be observed today among the various races of man — between Whites and Blacks, for example — have been accumulating for a period of several million years (several hundred thousand generations) and were also present, to a lesser degree, among the prehuman ancestors of those races.

The separate development of the races throughout the Pleistocene is now a well-established fact, but for a long time egalitarian prejudices blinded many people, who preferred to believe that racial differences were only a few thousand years old. There are still a number of charlatans, in fact, promoting the “hat rack” theory of human evolution, which would have all the modern races sprouting from the top of a single line of human development in recent times. They believe that they can minimize racial differences by minimizing their antiquity.

It is worthwhile, therefore, taking a brief look at the evidence establishing the great antiquity of racial differences, before we focus our attention almost exclusively on our own line of development.

The Physical Evidence

The first *Homo erectus* fossil discovered was a skull on the island of Java, in 1891. It was subsequently determined that the creature to whom the skull had belonged had lived about 700,000 years ago. He came to be known as Java Man.

In 1929 another fossil *H. erectus* skull was discovered, this time at Choukoutien, in northern China, near Peking. Its owner, Peking Man, also lived about 700,000 years ago.

In the 1960's paleontologists began excavating a prehistoric site at Vertesszoelloes, a Hungarian village about 30 miles from Budapest. Two fairly complete fossil skulls have been found there and have been dated at about 700,000 years old.

Although the skulls of Java Man, Peking Man, and Vertesszoelloes Man are all approximately the same age, they differ markedly from one another in a number of respects. The cranial capacity (brain size) of Java Man, for example, was 850 cubic centimeters, while Peking Man had a cranial capacity of 1150 cubic centimeters — more than one-third larger. And Vertesszoelloes Man had a cranial capacity of 1475 cubic centimeters — practically as large as that of a modern European, and larger than that of living Negroes and Australian aborigines.

Java Man, Peking Man, and Vertesszoelloes Man also differed from one another in their teeth, facial structures, and shapes of their cranial vaults. The individual peculiarities displayed by the fossils can be linked to peculiarities which distinguish certain modern races.

As just one example, Peking Man's fossils exhibit a dental peculiarity known as shoveling, a characteristic deformation of the incisors. The same dental peculiarity is found in most living Mongoloids, but it is extremely rare in other living races.

Pattern Confirmed

Thus, paleontologists have been able to identify Java Man as a predecessor of the living Australoids (Australian aborigines); Peking Man as an early, prehuman ancestor of the modern Chinese and related Mongoloid peoples; and Vertesszoelloes Man as a predecessor of the modern Europeans.

Many other fossils, some older and some more recent than those cited above, have confirmed the pattern. Carleton S. Coon, in his monumental work, *The Origin of Races*, assembled virtually all the evidence available up to 1962 and conclusively demolished the egalitarians' "hat rack" theory of human evolution. Dr. Coon traced

separate developmental lines for Europeans, Australoids, Negroes, Mongoloids, and Capoids (Bushmen) back to the middle Pleistocene, although his absolute time scale has since been corrected.

The Importance of Winter

When one studies the series of fossils in the various races' lines of development, one is struck by the markedly different rates of evolution which are apparent. The general rule is that those races which evolved in the earth's temperate zones did so more rapidly than those in the tropics.

The reasons were, first, the much sharper seasonal changes in the temperate zones than in the tropics; and, second, the much more drastic climatic changes which occurred in the temperate zones as the great ice sheets advanced and retreated repeatedly throughout the Pleistocene epoch.

Both types of change exerted strong selective pressure, the seasonal changes by requiring foresight and resourcefulness in preparing for the winter, and the climatic changes by eliminating life forms which could not adapt to long-term shifts in temperature and humidity.

Thus, for fossils of any given age, the temperate-zone European and Mongoloid lines will show a higher state of development than will the tropical Negroid and Australoid lines.

Which Way Is Up?

We might consider for a moment what we mean by a "higher" state of development. There is a natural tendency to think of man as more highly evolved than the living apes, of primates as more highly evolved than other mammals, of mammals as more highly evolved than fish, and so on. This tendency can sometimes be a bit misleading.

Since the ancestral lines of man and the apes split, some 25 million years ago, both have been evolving for exactly the same length of time, and both lines have undergone substantial changes. Those changes, however, have been in different directions — the apes' line toward a better adaptation to one mode of existence and man's line toward another. How are we justified in saying man's direction of evolution has been more nearly "upward" than that of the apes?

Defining a Criterion

In attempting to answer this question we should note that there is no problem at all in saying a particular specimen is further evolved than another with regard to some specified characteristic. That is, we can pick any characteristic we want — cranial capacity, tooth size, degree of prognathism (projection of the lower portion of the face), or what have you — which changes with time along two or more ancestral

lines of evolution; we can note the direction of change with time; and we can then pick contemporaneous specimens from two of the lines and note which line was further evolved at that time in the specified characteristic than the other.

If we then pick a second characteristic, we may find that, at the time in question, the line which was further evolved in the first characteristic may be less evolved in the second. Thus, at present, it is clear that apes are better brachiators, while man is a better cerebrator; likewise, Negroes are better sprinters, and Whites are better thinkers.

We can only speak of higher and lower grades of evolution if we pick a particular characteristic and a direction of change of that characteristic which we define as “upward.” The characteristic which we will always have in mind for this purpose is consciousness, and the direction of change is that of the Cosmos as a whole, namely, toward more and more fully developed states of consciousness.

Subman and Higher Man

Thus, from this point of view, we are justified in saying that man’s line of evolution turned generally upward when it separated from the apes’ line some 25 million years ago. And we are justified in referring to an earlier breed of manlike creatures with a less-developed sense of consciousness than we have as submen, just as we can correctly refer to a new breed with a more fully developed sense of consciousness as higher men.

Likewise, we can order the living races of man as to evolutionary grade.

In order to assign evolutionary grades to fossils, however, we must choose measurable characteristics which can be related to the level of consciousness. Characteristics of this sort which have been used are brain size, the shape of the cranial vault, tooth size, and the ratio of brain size to tooth size.

The use of brain size is obvious. The other three characteristics, however, are also related to the same developmental trend leading from small-brained, large-jawed skulls to large-brained skulls with smaller jaws and teeth. This trend progressively de-emphasized the lower face, with its biting and feeding functions, and emphasized the cranial vault, the seat of consciousness. Thus, as brains increased in size, teeth tended to shrink and prognathism to decrease simultaneously.

It is useful to have all these characteristics as criteria, because fossil skulls are often incomplete or badly damaged. Sometimes — as in the case of Heidelberg Man — only jaws and teeth have been found, and an estimate of evolutionary grade based on brain size alone is impossible.

In addition to the characteristics of the fossils themselves, cultural evidence is also used in judging evolutionary grade: the quality and diversity of the tools found with

the fossils, indications of the use or non-use of fire, etc.

The First Human Beings

As we follow the lines of development for the various races through the Pleistocene, we find them reaching different evolutionary grades at different times. One grade of some interest is that at the erectus-sapiens threshold.

Vertesszoelloes Man had already crossed this threshold 700,000 years ago. The pre-Mongoloids crossed it approximately 150,000 years ago. And the predecessors of the modern Negroes crossed it less than 30,000 years ago.

The oldest hominid remains thus far unearthed in Europe are a massive lower jaw, with its teeth, found in 1907 in the German village of Mauer, six miles southeast of Heidelberg. The jaw, belonging to a creature known as Heidelberg Man, is 900,000 years old.

No artifacts were found with Heidelberg Man's scanty remains, and it has not been possible to assign him with much certainty to a particular evolutionary grade, although it is generally considered that he was an advanced Homo erectus — perhaps just at the erectus-sapiens threshold.

The European Line of Descent

Returning to Europe, we can tentatively trace the European line through a period of three-quarters of a million years of evolution, all of it above the erectus-sapiens threshold. In the line of descent (ascent would be a more appropriate word, from the evolutionary viewpoint) from Vertesszoelloes Man, we have specimens from Swanscombe, in England, and Steinheim, in Germany, both about 500,000 years old. Then there are a number of fossil remains, all around 150,000 years old, scattered across Europe: Fontchevade, in France; Saccopastore, just outside Rome; Ehringsdorf, in Germany; Ganovce, in Slovakia; Krapina, in Croatia.

Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon

About 100,000 years ago, as Europe entered an intensely cold period of heavy glaciation, a type of Homo sapiens which differed in some respects from both earlier and later populations, appeared. This type has been named Neanderthal Man, after the river valley in Germany where his first fossil remains were unearthed, in 1856. Neanderthal Man was more prognathous, had heavier brow ridges, and also displayed other skeletal features regarded as more primitive than his immediate predecessors. But his brain was not only larger than that of his predecessors, it was larger than that of modern Europeans.

About 30,000 years ago the Neanderthal populations were replaced with a type of man which was essentially modern in all respects. He did not display Neanderthal

Man's prognathism or heavy brow ridges, but his brain was equally large — about 80 cubic centimeters larger than that of today's Whites. He has been named Cro-Magnon Man, after the site in the Dordogne region of France where his fossil remains were first excavated by scientists, in 1868.

Since Vertesszoelloes Man

As judged by the physical characteristics of their fossils, Europeans have not changed spectacularly in evolutionary grade during the last three-quarters of a million years. The earliest sapiens specimens we have found, at Vertesszoelloes, already had brains of essentially modern size, although 600,000 years later the Neanderthals had brains about 100 cubic centimeters larger.

There are reasons for believing that, considering size alone, brain evolution leveled off shortly above the erectus-sapiens threshold. The modern Mongoloids, for example, have brains as large as those of modern Europeans (1500 cubic centimeters), but their ancestors' brains were substantially smaller than those of our ancestors. We crossed the erectus-sapiens threshold 600,000 years before they did, but they have been catching up with us since then. The Negroes and the Australian aborigines, who have just crossed that threshold, of course, still have brains substantially smaller than ours (1350 and 1300 cubic centimeters, respectively).

Cultural Evidence

There are other ways in which brains have evolved besides increasing in absolute size. We can compare brain structures between modern Whites and modern Negroes, for example, and note the morphological differences: Whites have more highly developed frontal lobes, an increased area of the cerebral hemispheres due to folding and fissuring, and larger associative areas.

One cannot make such comparisons directly among fossils, of course, because only bone has survived. We do have some clues, however. The patterns of certain brain arteries are visible as indentations on the interior surfaces of a few well-preserved fossil skulls, and one can categorize the patterns as primitive or advanced. Evidence of this sort is still too scanty to tell us a great deal.

We must turn to the cultural evidence in order to trace European man's advance in consciousness more closely than we can from the evidence of his skeletal remains alone. That is the topic we will begin examining in the next installment in this series.

The Neanderthal Question

Because Neanderthal Man does not fit smoothly into a picture of continuous, unidirectional evolution between earlier and later European populations, paleontologists have suggested various explanations for his appearance in Europe

100,000 years ago and his disappearance 30,000 years ago. Of these explanations, only two are seriously considered today.

The first is that Neanderthal Man evolved from the preceding European population under the extreme selective pressure of the first Wuerm glaciation, developing his unique features as adaptations to the bitterly cold climate which prevailed during that period. Then, during the warmer period which followed, older features re-emerged, and the European population returned to the evolutionary track it had been following during the Riss-Wuerm interglacial period.

The second explanation is that Neanderthal Man was the product of racial mixture between Europeans and Mongoloids. Certainly, some of the Neanderthal peculiarities were suggestive of the Mongoloids of that day. Because the Mongoloids were already well adapted to cold weather, an admixture of their genes may have given a temporary survival advantage to a racially mixed population. As in the first explanation, when the climate later moderated the purely European genes re-emerged.

More Digging Needed

Which of these explanations — if either — is correct can only be decided after the paleontologists have gathered and carefully evaluated more fossil evidence.

Even more challenging than answering the Neanderthal question are the tasks of finding a few missing links between Heidelberg Man and Vertesszoelloes Man, and then of filling the gap between Heidelberg Man and the Olduvai Australopithecines. New evidence is coming to light practically every year, but a great deal more digging into the European past needs to be done before our knowledge of our identity can be completed.