



The Neanderthal's Necklace: In Search of the First Thinkers

Juan Luis Arsuaga , Andy Klatt (Translation)

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Neanderthals are at the center of this compelling narrative by Europe's leading anthropologist, not because they were our ancestors but because they were not. Members of a parallel humanity that evolved in Europe for hundreds of thousands of years, they were in direct competition with Cro-Magnons — modern humans. The way Neanderthals lived and the reasons why they disappeared 50,000 years ago offer a surprising mirror in which we can examine and learn more about ourselves. Illustrated, concise and readable, this is a fascinating exploration of human origins. "Lively, personal, refreshing, and instructive, this book should be read by anyone interested in their own origins and our extinct relatives." — Ian Tattersall, author of *The Fossil Trail*, *The Last Neanderthal*, and *Becoming Human*

The Neanderthal's Necklace: In Search of the First Thinkers Details

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From Reader Review The Neanderthal's Necklace: In Search of the First Thinkers for online ebook

Daphne Melegrito says

This book meanders. The author never gets to the point directly. An entire chapter was devoted to prehistoric landscape, and another to prehistoric animals in the Iberian peninsula. Don't buy this book. I repeat, DO NOT BUY THIS BOOK. James Shreeve's Neandertal Enigma provides a much better written and compelling account.

Not convinced? Here is an excerpt:

"The insignis pine, also known as the Monterrey pine, is a species native to California, but it is very widespread in our North, above all in the Basque country. In Guizcupoa is covers 46% of the forested area and no less than 62% in Vizcaya. These expanes of non-native pines, along with large areas of other conifers and of Eucalyptus, an Australian import, should really be considered tree farms rather than forests. Their biodiversity is far less than that of any naturally occurring forest, and apart from the maximization of short-term economic gain, the latter are much more variable in every sense.

Apart from a few remnant white pine forests in Leon and Palencia, there are no native pines in the northern band of green comprising the Basque country and the Cantrabian Range west to Galicia. Some Galician forests of maritime pine, also known as pinaster pine or resin pine, may be native, but we cannot be sure because this species has been widely replanted, so much so that it now covers more area in Spain than any other pine."

The idea of 'prehistoric Iberian hunters' (referring to both Cro-magnons and neanderthals) does not appear until four pages later. The term 'Neanderthal' itself appears only after 14 pages. The author does not know which info is relevant or not, so he dumps a bunch of unnecessary details on you, and after all that effort, does not explain the link to the Neanderthals with satisfactory depth.

Donovan Foote says

It's safe to say I was expecting something a little different from this book. I think with a romanticized title like "The Neanderthal's Necklace" I was expecting something a bit lest scientifically focused. I was hoping for some unscientific conjecture and maybe even some outlandish hypothesis, but what I got was a series of facts especially in the first half of the book. I suppose also given the title I was expecting more neanderthal-focused reading and I wouldn't say they received much more attention than the other hominids. There wasn't much to savor in this read, but I blazed along and learned a few things.

Mel says

As part of my continuing search to learn more about Neandertals I picked up Juan Luis Arsuaga's book The Neanderthal's Necklace. I read it over the past couple days, and found it fairly enjoyable though really only about half of it was the information I was looking for. The book had been translated from the original Spanish, and I feel that there was something lost in the translation. Several paragraphs seemed a bit

disorganized and it felt like it might have made more sense in the original.

The first chapters were about the history of hominids, where they started when they diverged, interesting to go over again but not all that much that was new. The first Neandertal chapter was interesting, looking at where their similarities with Cro Magnon were and where they were different, looking at how you can figure out differing brain sizes and why this is important. There was then a divergent into looking at the flora and fauna in Spain and how this had changed over time, and about the different game available during the ice age, which I admit to skipping. The last third of the book was devoted to understanding more about Neandertals. Arsuaga looked more at the life span of Neandertals and the great trouble in figuring it out from the fossil record but several ways it was being done. He also looked at language, how the Neandertals physiology affected their ability to speak. And the reasoning behind that. He also looked at their use of fire, and the fact that they buried their dead.

There was one very interesting part where he talked about Sima de la Huesos (the bone pit) which was a 300,000 year old burial pit containing over 2000 skeletal remains, from so far what is estimated to be around 30 people. (though the numbers are growing). The skeletons were taken and put into a cliff in a cave. From the excavations they determined that most of the people there died around the same time and perhaps were victims of a natural disaster. Arsuaga then went to tell the sad story of the people who had been victims of drought or some other form of starvation who wandered to the area where the caves were, with the older members dying on the way, only to have most of the group die of hunger or exhaustion when they got there.

Another interesting thing that I would have liked a lot more detail on, was talking about the necklaces found at Neandertal sites in France. Apparently these necklaces were only found at sites that had been shared with Cro Magnon. Neandertals that lived isolated from Cro Magnon never developed necklaces on their own. (Apparently France has just always been a more fashionable place to live.) The conclusion being that they borrowed the technology from the Cro Magnon. I wish more was know about the time 10,000 years that the two lived together in Europe and how much interaction they had. One of the interesting things talked about was how Cro Magnon would have appeared "Cute" to Neandertals, in that sense that babies and young animals look cute to mammals with bigger eyes and softer foreheads.

Arsuaga's conclusion seemed to be that while Neandertals had the capacity for speech and thinking they did not have the talent for story telling and abstract communication that our ancestors did, and this led to their demise. This seemed a little abstract to me, how you could accuse their lack of creativity as their downfall and how exactly they showed they were uncreative. Even if they didn't independently develop their own body decorations they did bury their dead, often with grave goods, which would seem to imply to me some level of creative thinking. A belief in something more, or at least a need for something.

The author talked about the work of Erik Trinkus a lot, apparently he's the leading expert on Neandertals at the moment, which made me wish his book had talked more about them and less about the history of evolution. But perhaps he's written another I should go and check. Still I did learn a few interesting things from this book it is one I'd recommend. Though my search to learn more continues.

Dennis Littrell says

The Neanderthal as a nearly contemporary, parallel species.

This is a fine book that sheds further light on what the Neanderthals were like and what happened to them. Written in an engaging, clear and almost poetic style (the translation by Andy Klatt is first rate, his surprising

use of "irregardless" on page 182 notwithstanding), this book gives us a sense of the latest understanding with an emphasis on evidence from the Sierra de Artapuerca excavation site in Spain where paleoanthropologist Professor Arsuaga is co-director. The black, white and gray illustrations by Juan Carlos Sastre nicely augment the text.

Arsuaga begins with the observation that today we exist almost alone in the sense that there are no very similar species extant, the last one being the Neanderthal in Europe. Arsuaga then traces our descent until he arrives at "Domesticated Man" in the Epilogue. His detours and asides are very interesting. I was especially pleased to learn that there are well-preserved wooden lances (or spears) used by archaic humans fully 400,000 years ago. (p. 182-183) I also found interesting his digression on what caused the extinction of the megafauna of America some 10,000 years ago (in Chapter Six, "The Great Extinction").

Primarily, though, this book is about the cultural, behavioral and conceptual abilities (as derived from the archaeological evidence) that separate humans from other living creatures, especially the Neanderthals. Arsuaga reveals his purpose on page 280: "I have been trying to summarize the evidence available concerning the thorniest problem of human evolution, the development of consciousness, which is the defining characteristic of humankind." He had asked in the Prologue on page ix, "Apart from us, has there ever been a life form on earth that was conscious of its own existence and of its place in the world?" In short his answer is yes, the Neanderthal, whom he defines as our contemporary, not as an archaic human species. (p. 278)

Arsuaga's story begins about 2.5 million years ago when *Homo habilis* emerged in Africa (presumably from another post-australopithecine species) with a noticeably bigger brain than the first upright walking apes. "A short while later" (geologically-speaking) *Homo ergaster* (probably the same as *Homo erectus*) appeared. Arsuaga sees *Homo ergaster* as the first hominid to migrate out of Africa about 1.5 million years ago, spreading to Europe and southeast Asia. Not only did these proto-humans have a significantly larger brain than *Homo habilis*, they had also begun "to create a social and cultural environment...that afforded them ever more independence from the physical environment," which is one of the reasons they were able to survive in diverse climates, especially in the cold of the northern latitudes.

Then about 300,000 years ago Arsuaga sees the development independently in Europe and Africa of a "second great expansion of the human brain" producing "somewhat different results." (p. 307) When modern humans again emerged out of Africa about 150,000 years ago they arrived in Europe to find the Neanderthal. The somewhat different results of their independent evolution prevented the species from merging and eventually the Neanderthal died out.

Although some authorities have emphasized competition with modern humans as the reason for the Neanderthal's demise, Arsuaga believes we need more information before we can say "in a convincing fashion" what happened. (p. 292) He does say somewhat imprecisely that the Neanderthal was "defeated by the cold" while the Cro-Magnons due to "superior technology," especially with bone awls and needles to fashion well-fitting animal skins, etc., were able to survive the glacial maximum 25,000 years ago. (p. 302) However on page 78 while noting that the Cro-Magnons had developed physical features that made them look relatively childlike--a gracile build and a "small, minimally protruding face," ("neoteny" is the technical term for this phenomenon)--Arsuaga may have tipped his hand. He observes, "Cro-Magnons must have looked cute to the Neanderthals! They may have discovered later, to their dismay, what kind of people they were dealing with, and as sweet as the Cro-Magnons may have looked, what kind of behavior they could expect."

(I had a sudden vision here of an abandoned Cro-Magnon child found by a Neanderthal family. They tenderly take the child in, nourish it and bring it up as their own. At a certain age, the child realizes that it is not Neanderthal and... Well, I'm sure there are a few science fiction stories that resolve this premise for better or for worse.)

Arsuaga's account therefore presents the Neanderthal as a co-existing species, not our ancestor, with whom there was little to no interbreeding. Nonetheless Arsuaga has great respect and affection for the Neanderthal. He writes on page 284 that "It would thrill me more than anything if I could say that I had even a drop of Neanderthal blood to connect me with those powerful Europeans of long ago." His portrait is of a "human" species different from (not less than) ourselves that had culture and ritual and self-adornment (as evidenced by, e.g., the Neanderthal's necklace found at Grotte du Renne in France), a being that had achieved consciousness, although of a sort undoubtedly different than ours. In one particular, Arsuaga argues that the fossil evidence suggests that the Neanderthal's phonetic apparatus would not have been able to produce "sounds as distinct as ours," (p. 268). This physical characteristic may have reduced its ability to develop a culture as extensive as the Cro-Magnon's which we know about in part through the cave murals that they painted in France and Spain.

What one feels strongly from Arsuaga's account is the sense of loss that the Neanderthal is no longer with us. How much we could have learned from a being that was at once much like ourselves, but intriguingly different.

--Dennis Littrell, author of "Understanding Evolution and Ourselves"

Captain Sir Roddy, R.N. (Ret.) says

Juan Luis Arsuaga's *The Neanderthal's Necklace: In Search of the First Thinkers* (2002) is an excellent and compelling addition to my collection of paleoanthropological books. Dr. Arsuaga is a Spanish anthropologist and has spent much of his career at the famous archaeological sites at the Sierra de Atapuerca. He and his team are known for discovering the largest collection of pre-Neandertal hominins--some 2,000 human fossils, comprising maybe as many as thirty-two individuals. According to Professor Arsuaga, all of these fossils are likely an ancestral species to both the Neandertals (*Homo neandertalensis*) and anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens*), and are classified as either *Homo heidelbergensis* or *Homo antecessor*. This human species occupied the Iberian peninsula and other portions of western Europe for a very long period of time, from approximately 780,000 years before present to perhaps 130,000 years before present.

What Professor Arsuaga accomplishes in this book is to eloquently tell the history of the early human species that occupied western Europe, especially the Iberian peninsula from the Middle Paleolithic through the early Upper Paleolithic and the extinction of the Neandertals. What I particularly appreciated was Dr. Arsuaga's melding of the data associated with regional climatic and ecological conditions in telling the story of these early hominin species who occupied these habitats so many millenia in our past in Spain during those fluctuating periods of extreme world-wide glaciation and interglacials. Over the years that I have been reading books and technical papers about human origins, I have come to better understand and appreciate that data and information associated with the effects of global and regional climate change and regional ecological conditions are every bit as important as the fossil and genetic evidence.

Personally, I think Professor Arsuaga's book, *The Neanderthal's Necklace: In Search of the First Thinkers*, is an important book and goes far in helping fill in the details about our human origins between what we currently know about the dispersal of *Homo erectus* from Africa between approximately 1.5-1.2 million years ago, and the arrival of fully-functioning anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) in western Europe about 45,000 years ago. I also strongly suggest that Professor Arsuaga's book makes an excellent companion to Clive Finlayson's relatively recent (2010) book entitled, *The Humans Who Went Extinct: Why Neanderthals Died Out and We Survived*. In reading both of these books, the reader will come away with a clear understanding of the role of the early hominin species in western Europe and the role that climate

change and ecological conditions played in ultimately reaching the point that only one human species--*Homo sapiens*--remained on the planet.

Vixie says

Jean Luis Arsuaga's 'The Neanderthal's Necklace: In search of the First Thinkers' seemed to be an ideal book for someone like me, who is both intrigued and excited by the prospect of other species of man and their potential intelligence. And the title, Neanderthal's Necklace, really suggested a comprehensive look into the intelligence of our extinct cousins (although extinct may not be appropriate here as there is proof *Homo Sapiens* and Neanderthal's interbred).

What I got instead was a book that both excited and disappointed in equal measure. The first chapter almost turned me off this book because it seemed to be an elaborate advertisement of Spain. Come to Spain we have some of the best fossilised evidence of man, come to Spain and admire the natural beauty and heritage that proves Spain was a major stepping stone in human evolution. Please do not get me wrong, Spain is part of Europe and therefore an integral part of all-natural evolution and history but for me having this at the first chapter painted the author in a less than favourable light. I picked up this book for the historical study of human evolution and our ancestors and cousins, not to listen to the author harp about how beautiful his homeland is. I bet Spain is beautiful but its beauty is not important here and there are other equally important sites that reveal evolution is other parts of the world. So why I respect Arsuaga's love of his homeland, it has not place here in this book.

But ignoring this initial slip up, we move on to a more subject related and appropriate content where Arsuaga lays out the facts in a comprehensive, understandable way. It contains a lot of jargon, admittedly, of human anatomy and other such things but all of it is carefully explained in such a way that the reader can follow with good understanding about where the author is taking them. Scientifically what Arsuaga has to say is a beautiful and elaborate explanation of evolution involving key members of our hominid family. He discusses brain capacity as well as skeletal structures, although brain capacity is clearly a more vital feature that divides us from our ape like cousins. It is here that I was astonished by the sheer mathematical formulae that proved without a doubt that Neanderthal's (the main subject of this book beside *Homo Sapien*'s) shared a similar brain size, indicating their intelligence or potentially that brain size is not necessarily all that effects intelligence. It is certainly quite fascinating to consider how Neanderthal's would have seen us. Biologically, Neanderthal's have underdeveloped vocal chords and a couple of other features making them different from us and yet very similar to a young *Homo Sapien* child, yet had they seen us would they have seen an under-developed 'cute' human like Arsuaga suggests? It certainly raised my eyebrow and interest.

For much of the book I was inundated with facts, the environment and ecological system, the reason why different types of man may or may not have evolved to adapt to said environments. How our ancestors somehow overcame their own natural weakness by using intelligence to overcome environments that the Neanderthal's had biologically adapted to so that we eventually overcame them and out-survived them when it got that little bit colder. It was a fascinating if slow read which gave an understanding of the past in both nature and in the hominid species.

By the end of the book I was more hooked by the factual information he was inundating me with. However, by the end of the book I was met with another point that I strongly disagreed with and that was his opinion of the intelligence of species other than our own. The concept that we as humans are the only species with a 'language'. However, if we were the only ones with the intelligence to craft a language why would we have experts taking the time to understand whale song and dophin communication. On top of that we have been in awe of the memory of elephants and the clear and admirable intelligence of whales. We talk about how long

these animals live and that they 'remember' what man has done to them. The ability to remember, to communicate (no matter how primitively Arsuaga and his colleagues may think) are clear signs of intelligence. The fact that pods of Killer Whales have their own unique hunting methods that is passed down from mother to daughter and so on until each pod is so vastly different that they are sometimes consider a new sub-species proves that animals have great potential for intelligence. Therefore Arsuaga's assumptions that our primitive ancestors like *Homo Habilis* may not have had the same intelligence as the later species like our own seems greatly unfounded. Bones do not reveal intelligence and the appearance of tools, no matter how primitive do attribute to the idea the intelligence began long before our own species. To be fair to Arsuaga, he does acknowledge that our ancestors had intelligence and that hominid intelligence began long before *Homo Sapiens*' appeared. It is my own bias, my love for animals that have made me see Arsuaga in a less than favourable light, since he plainly says that animals can be exploited for the 'Greater Good' humanity, which I completely and utterly disagree with. The concept that humans are superior rubs me the wrong way considering what our 'superiority' has led to, religion, money and the concept of 'power', world wars, ethnicity crimes, nuclear warheads, exploitation of resources... But again, this is my own bias speaking so I will return to the topic.

Bringing this review back on topic, what you have in this book is nothing like the promised title. When I picked up *Neanderthal's Necklace* I was expecting to find an elaborate telling and exploration of our cousin species. What I found instead was a scientific essay that was both informative and at many times biased (not that I am above bias- looking up at my writing) and while it was a fascinating if tedious read at times it was certainly not a book I have come to favour. In fact, I was glad to reach the end. That is not to say it was terrible read but in the end, it was simply a repeat of factual information that I had already learned from alternative books and documentaries. But there are a few things that I will take with me from this book.

The first is not so much a new lesson I've learned but an awakening, if that is the appropriate word. When people speak of Neanderthal's and our ancestors we acknowledge that they lived side by side. But Arsuaga's brief considering of how Neanderthal's would have seen us really made the fact that we lived side by side really hit home. It is one thing to consider how we might have interbred from a modern perspective but it is a completely alternate viewpoint to consider how Neanderthal's would have seen us, very much alien and unthought of. Were we 'cute' as Arsuaga suggests? Or as alien to them as the idea of 'little green men' are to us?

The second thing I'll take from this book is the sudden and ego-shattering concept that our ape like ancestors were potentially the 'first' intelligent 'men'. Which makes it even more shocking and perhaps exciting to consider what would have happened had Neanderthal's survived and not their feeble little cousins, us. With almost identical brain size and the potential for similar intelligence is it so farfetched to see the modern world as a result of hands beside our own? And if Neanderthal's interbred with us what is to say that this alternate future was not at all possible? Perhaps we should see the world as built by more than one hominid species. After all we only need to look at another species, the mysterious Denisovan's which may have attributed to a certain race's ability to live at high altitudes. Are humans the ultimate intelligence? Well there is evidence to say we were and are not the most intelligent beings on Earth, just the lucky ones.

The final thing I can take from this book is the final two paragraphs:

'Someone wrote that when a language dies, those who spoke it in the past die a second time. The same can be said for the death of old myths and their replacement with new ones. We will never fully understand cave paintings because they do not speak to us. But something even more terrible has happened. The natural world also stopped speaking to humans. The stone arch of my childhood has ceased to be a bridge from the days of giants. The only sounds to be heard in the forest are the quarrying machinery in the entrails of the mountain, the factories where limestone is processed into cement, the chainsaws felling timber, and the passing of traffic on the highway.

The sun set on the free and untrammelled bands of hunters, on "uncivilised" humanity. Farmers arrived and

with them comes the end of this book and my farewell to the reader, a farewell that I hope will be only temporary.'

By the end Arsuaga had redeemed himself in my eyes. My bias removed as he wrote those last two beautiful paragraphs. It is hard to remember at times that this book was written before a lot of recent discoveries and thus the facts he writes about are valid but on occasion out of date, although this does not make the facts 'wrong' as science is rarely wrong, perhaps it is best to say they've been amended, either way Arsuaga is exact in his presentation of facts and more of an expert than myself. The unfortunate reason I've given this book three stars is not because of my own bias, I may have disliked him terming animals and our ancestors as primitive intelligence or without intelligence, but I could easily overlook this. No what disappointed me was that the title was not lived up to. I was expecting a more personal look at the lives of Neanderthal's and as such was not anticipating such a scientific, if fascinating look at evolution of man and intelligence. Even with my bias included in the score, I would still give at least three stars because Arsuaga presents facts, it may be his own bias but animal intelligence is more understood and explored in recent times (by which I am referring to the last few years and the very recent declaration that scientists will try to decipher Dolphin chatter) then it was when this book was first published. So even with my bias I freely acknowledge the scientific foundation of Arsuaga's claims and therefore would not mark him down no matter how much I may dispute a few parts of his book.

Overall a good scientific read that many will enjoy and I may recommend this book to those who enjoy this genre but it would not be my first suggestion.

Susan says

I picked up this book at the library after reading an article in the New Yorker about the cro-magnon cave paintings in France. This isn't the best book for beginners, as the bulk of it contains technical discussions of cranial morphology and interglacial climate periods, but I'm just enough of a nerd to try to understand it all.

For instance, I never knew that humans did not descend from neanderthals. We evolved separately in Africa while they evolved in Europe. After humans migrated from Africa, both lived on the earth together, but did not mix genes, for almost 10,000 years until Neanderthals went extinct--for reasons explored in this book.

Now I am completely obsessed with the topic of human evolution and the human genome. I can see why people dedicate their lives to discovering what makes us human.

Tony says

I have a big interest in pre-history and ancient history, and especially the period when pre-history slipped into ancient history. One of the factoids I was happy to see included in this book was that the last of the woolly mammoths are believed to have died out at the same time as the first pyramid in Egypt was being completed. And I guess that's sort of the problem with this book. The info I was most interested in I already happened to know, and the info I didn't know was really dull. Unless you are a scientist you probably don't wish to wade through pages and pages of scientific terminology which you will forget the very instant you read it. Also, the book is translated from the Spanish language and the translation is pretty dry as it is. There's was too much about the general climate and environment of the primitive humans' time on Earth, and probably too much about the slight variations of skeletons between ancient human species. In spite of the fact the book is entitled The Neanderthal's Necklace, there is virtually nothing about the necklace, or cave

art, and frankly, very little at all about Neanderthals! I was hoping for a lot more insight about how Neanderthals regarded our ancestors, the Cro-Magnons, and what interactions between the two human species might have been like. What I remember most about the little that was actually in here about that was that Cro-Magnons regarded Neanderthals as a threat and Neanderthals probably regarded Cro-Magnons as looking very cute. The latter because the faces of adult Cro-Magnons (who were basically us) somewhat resemble baby Neanderthal faces. Insights like that though are few and far between, so if you want lots of tidbits like that you should look elsewhere. Look here only if you want pages and pages of passages like this: "I would like to propose a synthesis of the flora and fauna of Europe, dividing the continent into large-scale ecological units known as biomes, which correspond to general landscape descriptors."

Darth says

I got this on loan from my gfs dad. He is an emeritus of natural sciences at Utah State. It sounded interesting so he lent it to me.

It is easy to call books like this the cure for insomnia - as they are often dry and full of facts that just do not keep you turning the pages the way a good fiction book can. I can't tell you how many nights I dozed off as the author went off on another off topic rant about ancient trees in Spain.

Parts of this were surprising to me - as someone not familiar with how they class pre-human fossils. Now, the folks that do this definitely have a tough task - but to read they guess at specifics based on cc's of a cranium is unfathomable to me - that it can be called science. You couldn't get a consistent cranium cc measure on 5 random modern humans - take a look at the hat section of a place that sells hats - so why would you think you can class pre-human fossils on the same basis? To a laymen like myself - it just doesn't sound scientific.

Further guessing at when pre-humans got self awareness detracts from the credibility level this might otherwise have had. If you can't know something, guessing, and then presenting it as fact seems shaky to me. Also the assumption that nothing else on Earth is self-aware seems kind of arrogant. The author runs down cats and dogs because some do not recognize themselves in mirrors, as not being self-aware. I know my cat recognizes herself in the mirror, because my cat attacks all other cats, but will walk right by her own reflection without regarding it at all. Cats and dogs aside, the fella writing this seems to ignore dolphins and whales as potential for cognition despite their well documented intelligence and chooses to skip over them altogether.

Also this was CHOCK FULL of what seemed to be way too much of the pre-history of Spain - for a book that was supposed to be about Neanderthals. Frankly it seemed a little like the author went on one dig, decided he wanted to write it up, and went on the fluff up 265 more pages on vaguely related topics. This certainly was not the worst thing I ever read, but it was pretty bad...

Patri says

Un libro fantástico, con él que aprender sobre los orígenes de la humanidad.
Me ha servido, también, para apreciar la importancia de los yacimientos arqueológicos de la Península

Ibérica (que ocupa un lugar privilegiado en el mundo). Otro aspecto que destacaría es el recurso al conocimiento interdisciplinar, desde la biología, la geología, la psicología, hasta la antropología, la filosofía y la ética.

En definitiva, un libro ameno para aquel al que le gusten estos temas y que recomiendo vivamente. Seguiré leyendo sobre este tema, del mismo autor.

Kristie Stauffer says

Some parts of it were very confusing, grammatically. They may be in part due to it first being written in Spanish, then translated into English. He did do a pretty good job of dumbing down the science for us lay people. He also went off of some odd tangents, some interesting, some not so much.

Kris says

The title is somewhat misleading as there is really not much information specific to Neanderthals in it. However, it is an interesting look at Paleolithic site on the Iberian Peninsula. Dr. Arsuaga uses easy to understand language, although this might be to the credit of the translator, Andy Klatt, and a touch of humour to make the subject palatable to laypersons. The middle section on the environment of the Middle and Upper Paleolithic is rather dry however and the mind does wander if you aren't actually obsessed with paleo-environments already. Overall a good read that imparts a decent amount of information in a style easily read.

Jim says

Interesting read.

Fishface says

This is a pretty decent book overall, giving an overview of what was going on in Europe at the time the Neanderthals lived there and what happened next, when the Homo saps showed up. He spelled out a few points that may be clear to any paleontologist, but which I'd never known before, e.g. that the Neanderthals actually evolved in Europe from a direct ancestor shared with us. He throws out a few tidbits then doesn't tell you what they mean, which was probably intended to make you buy his next book. It worked on me. There is a ton of information in here, and I'll read it again with pleasure. That's true except for the section where the author starts to make some rather odd, anthropocentric and weakly-founded speculations about the nature of human and animal consciousness.

Ard says

I found this book not as interesting as I had hoped. It has a great many asides, such as the development of flora in certain prehistoric areas, that I found quite boring. Although the author predicted that we would find this sort of information in only two chapters, other chapters also have more than their share of it. When

starting the book, the style of Arsuaga reminded me of one of a passionate tourguide, who knows basically everything about his subject and loves to expand on his favorite topics. But after a while I found myself skipping more and more pages and wondering when it would finally become interesting again. It's not an easy topic to write a book about, no doubt, but this one couldn't really keep my interest.
