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Q3(c)

Should we still distinguish between 'classic' and 'progressive' Neanderthals? Discuss the controversy surrounding Neanderthal's position in human evolution

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Anthropology GS 1 · 15 marks · Neanderthal man

(c) Neanderthal man-La-Chapelle-aux-Saints (Classical type), Mt. Carmel (Progressive type).

Core demand of the question

- Should we still distinguish between 'classic' and 'progressive' Neanderthals? Discuss the controversy surrounding Neanderthal's position in human evolution
- Write about 200 words for 15 marks

Revision summary

Classic versus progressive was a European-versus-Levant type split.

Boule's **La Chapelle** cartoon inflated classic robustness.

Many Levant 'progressives' are early moderns plus contact.

Ancient DNA shows mixing, not a clean replacement without genes.

Denisovans break any two-box scheme.

Introduction

Older textbooks split Neanderthals into a robust 'classic' European type and a lighter 'progressive' Near Eastern type. Genetics and new fossils have made that split a poor evolutionary map.

Body

The old distinction

- **Classic** labels, built on **La Chapelle-aux-Saints** after **Boule**, pictured a bent, separate species.
- **Progressive** labels for **Tabun**, **Skhul**, and **Qafzeh** mixed Neanderthal and early modern traits and fed a story of evolution toward Homo sapiens.
- **Howell** and others used climate: cold Europe made the classic body; the Levant stayed gracile.

Why the split fails

- **La Chapelle** was arthritic. **Straus** and later workers unbent the cartoon.
- Levantine 'progressives' are now often early moderns with some Neanderthal contact, not a halfway species.
- **Svante Pääbo's** genomes show Neanderthals as a sister population that mixed with out-of-Africa moderns. Indian and Eurasian people still carry that ancestry.

- **Denisova** and **Jebel Irhoud** add more branches. A two-box classic/progressive scheme cannot hold them.

Position today

- Neanderthals are *Homo neanderthalensis* or a closely related form of *Homo sapiens* in a lumpers' language. The live question is admixture and culture, including **Shanidar** burial and **Châtelperronian** debate, not a racial grade inside Neanderthals.

Flow diagram

Neanderthals -> Classic cartoon Boule
Neanderthals -> So-called progressive Levant
Neanderthals -> Pääbo admixture
Pääbo admixture -> Living Eurasian ancestry

Conclusion

The classic-progressive split was a typological comfort. Neanderthals sit as a sister population that mixed with modern humans. Keep the fossils and the genomes; drop the two-type ladder.

Facts & figures

La Chapelle

An old male with osteoarthritis; Boule's reconstruction wrongly made all Neanderthals stooped.

Pääbo

Neanderthal genome proved interbreeding with modern humans outside Africa.

Shanidar

Iraqi cave burials used in debates on Neanderthal care and ritual.

Skhul and Qafzeh

Levantine early moderns once folded into a progressive-Neanderthal story.

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