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THE TESHIK-TASH CHILD: EVOLUTIONARY MONTAGE DURING THE MIDDLE PALEOLITHIC

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Background

Discovered in 1938 in the Bajun district of southern Uzbekistan, Teshik-Tash 1 represents a juvenile male hominin, aged between nine and eleven years old. He was classified as Homo neanderthalensis. Two pertinent characteristics of the find’s in situ context provided the backdrop for this classification. Firstly, the Teshik-Tash child was buried with associated grave goods surrounded by a Middle Paleolithic assemblage which has been described as “Mousterian-like” (Glantz et al. 2009: 45). Secondly, the very location of this find was the furthest eastern extent of hominin discoveries outside of the Levant. Recent research, however, challenges this boundary by questioning whether Teshik-Tash 1 is truly a Neanderthal specimen (Glantz, 2008). The Teshik-Tash juvenile is thus an important fossil to understand the dynamics and possible cultural links between the hominins of the Near East and those of Central Asia.

The Site

- Single, deliberate burial
- Three cultural layers
- Middle Paleolithic assemblage
- Mousterian-like lithics
- Ritual artefacts: grave goods?
- Neanderthal burial?

The Cranium

- Severely crushed; possible animal attack
- Original reconstruction flawed
- Mosaic morphology (Glantz, 2009)
- Not wholly Neanderthal
- Neanderthal, early modern human or transitional?

Results

- Mosaic craniofacial anatomy
- Close similarity to Qafzeh 11, La Chapelle-aux-Saints 1
- Larger than modern human sub-adult
- Close similarity to adult modern human
- Dental eruption = same as modern human

Conclusions

- Clear example of mixed traits
- Illustrates variability in Late Pleistocene hominin record
- Cannot be termed wholly Neanderthal or wholly modern human

Implications

- Challenging for comparison: scarcity of Central Asian finds
- More research necessary to draw further conclusions
- Valuable study for phylogenetic tree

Further References


