Neanderthal extinction hypothesis offered

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A Spanish study suggests climate changes might have caused the extinction of the Neanderthals on the Iberian Peninsula.

The University of Granada study of Gorham's cave on Gibraltar shows the Neanderthal extinction could have been determined by environmental and climate changes, and not by competitiveness with modern humans.

Professor Miguel Ortega Huertas, who led the research, said the findings of the multi-disciplinary research are an important contribution to the understanding of the Neanderthal extinction and the colonization of the European continent by Homo sapiens.

The study -- based on climate reconstructions -- suggests Neanderthal populations suffered fluctuations related to climate changes before the first Homo sapiens arrived on the Iberian Peninsula. The study found Neanderthals, 24,000 years ago, had to face the worst weather conditions of the last 250,000 years.

Huertas said the most important finding is that the data differ from the current scientific paradigm that makes Homo sapiens responsible for the Neanderthal extinction.

The research that included Francisco Jose Jimenez Espejo, Francisca Martínez Ruiz and David Gallego Torres, along with scientists from the Gibraltar Museum, Stanford University and the Japan Marine Science & Technology Center, recently appeared in the Quaternary Science

Reviews journal.