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The questionable contribution of the Neolithic and the Bronze Age to European craniofacial form

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Abstract

Many human craniofacial dimensions are largely of neutral adaptive significance, and an analysis of their variation can serve as an indication of the extent to which any given population is genetically related to or differs from any other. When 24 craniofacial measurements of a series of human populations are used to generate neighbor-joining dendrograms, it is no surprise that all modern European groups, ranging all of the way from Scandinavia to eastern Europe and throughout the Mediterranean to the Middle East, show that they are closely related to each other. The surprise is that the Neolithic peoples of Europe and their Bronze Age successors are not closely related to the modern inhabitants, although the prehistoric/modern ties are somewhat more apparent in southern Europe. It is a further surprise that the Epipalaeolithic Natufian of Israel from whom the Neolithic realm was assumed to arise has a clear link to Sub-Saharan Africa. Basques and Canary Islanders are clearly associated with modern Europeans. When canonical variates are plotted, neither sample ties in with Cro-Magnon as was once suggested. The data treated here support the idea that the Neolithic moved out of the Near East into the circum-Mediterranean areas and Europe by a process of demic diffusion but that subsequently the *in situ* residents of those areas, derived from the Late Pleistocene inhabitants, absorbed both the agricultural life way and the people who had brought it.