

Clothing or nakedness in reconstructions of prehistoric humans

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Zusammenfassung

Bekleidung oder Nacktheit bei Rekonstruktionen von prähistorischen Menschen

Menschen der Altsteinzeit werden häufig als Teil von Museumsausstellungen oder wissenschaftlichen Beiträgen rekonstruiert, vermehrt aber erst seit den 1990er Jahren. Diese Praxis existiert jedoch schon seit den Anfängen der Vorgeschichtsforschung und stützt sich stark auf die Fantasie der »Paläo-Künstler«, insbesondere wenn es um die Entscheidung geht, paläolithische Menschen entweder bekleidet oder nackt darzustellen.

Diese Studie basiert auf einer Untersuchung von ca. 1300 Rekonstruktionen von 143 dem Paläolithikum zugeordneten Individuen (Männer, Frauen und Kinder) aus der Zeit von vor 7 Mio. Jahren bis vor 10 000 Jahren vor heute. Die Beispiele stammen vornehmlich aus 132 Museen weltweit und umfassen den Zeitraum von 1875 bis heute. Darunter sind etwa 500 Ganzkörperdarstellungen. Diese Werke bieten die Gelegenheit, die Entscheidungsgrundlagen der »Paläokünstler« und ihrer Auftraggeber in Bezug auf Nacktheit oder Kleidung zu diskutieren. Der vorliegende Bericht analysiert den Typ der Bekleidungsform (Nacktheit, Lendenschurz, Tunika, warme Kleidung) je nach Spezies (Australopithecus, Homo erectus, Neandertaler, usw.), sucht nach den archäologischen Elementen, die die Quelle dieser Wahl gewesen sein könnten, und versucht zu bestimmen, welche davon rein imaginär sind oder den jeweiligen Zeitgeist widerspiegeln.

Schlagwörter Rekonstruktionen, Kleidung, 19. Jahrhundert, »Paläo-Künstler«, Museographie

First images in publications

Historically, the earliest references to prehistoric humans are drawings published as illustrations for scientific articles. The earliest is *l'homme fossile* by T. Sushemil to illustrate a text by P. Boitard in a French publication, *Musée des familles* (Boitard 1837, 209). It depicts a man with simian face and hairy body, standing alone near a cave and holding an axe, wearing a lion skin tied around his neck (Fig. 1).

According to an article by A. Leguebe (1986, 15), P. Boitard was aware of A. von Schmerling's discoveries of fossil human remains at Engis, Belgium, and of a few other discoveries. Long before anyone else, and decades before the Neanderthal type specimen was found near Düsseldorf, Germany, P. Boitard was also a spokesman for the acceptance of the existence of 'fossil man' (Leguebe 1986, 15).

Summary

Palaeolithic people have often been reconstructed as part of museum displays or scientific contributions, especially since the 1990s. However, this practice has been around since the beginnings of the discipline of Prehistory and has included a large share of imagination, especially when it concerns the decision to display Palaeolithic peoples as either dressed or naked.

This study is based on a survey of c. 1300 reconstructions of 143 identified Palaeolithic individuals (men, women and children) dating from 7 mya to 10 kya, mainly from 132 museums around the world, represented in reconstructions that were made from 1875 to the present day. Of these, around 500 are full-body representations. These works provide an opportunity to discuss the choices made by 'palaeo-artists' and those who commissioned their work regarding nudity or clothing.

The present report analyses the proportion of clothing choices (nudity, loincloths, tunics, warm clothing) according to species (Australopithecus, Homo erectus, Neanderthals, etc.), searches for the archaeological elements that may have been the source of these choices, and attempts to determine which are purely imaginary or reflect zeitgeist biases.

Keywords Reconstructions, clothes, 19th century, 'palaeo-artists', museography

This early image was followed many years later by another drawing of *l'homme fossile*, this time by Moreau, to open P. Boitard's book, published posthumously in 1861 (Fig. 2). The man – still at the edge of a cave – now protects his wife and child, who are hiding inside.

Very hairy, almost naked, clad in skimpy animal skins tied around their necks, these early human figures have a rather simian appearance even before Darwin's famous publications, and clearly combine the 'wild' men and women of medieval folklore, the mythological figure of Hercules, and the idea of primitiveness (Fig. 3–4).

Famous early images, still used to illustrate articles, include etchings created by E. Bayard for publications by L. Figuier (1870a; Figuier 1870b; Figuier 1882). In them, the appearance and clothing of *l'homme primitif* changed with edition. The first edition, dating from the beginning of 1870

(Figuier 1870a), presents humans (*Homo sapiens*) of white European ›Aryan‹ appearance (as Figuier calls them), wearing skimpy tunics, while the second edition (1870b), presents them as ›Lapps‹ – shown not only by their faces but also their warmly sewn clothing because in the meantime, anthropological studies by M. Pruner-Bey had associated the freshly discovered fossil skulls at Solutré, Dép. Saône-et-Loire and Cro-Magnon, Dép. Dordogne, both France, with ›Mongoloids‹ (Roussot 2003). As L. Figuier (1870b, 104) writes: »In the scenes of human life during the era of the great bear and the mammoth, we have taken as our model the nowadays Lapp. This type will remain the same throughout the following period, i.e. during the reindeer era«. We can see that this purely morphological association is immediately followed by changes in clothing: it suddenly becomes much warmer and covering.

It should be noted that L. Figuier's book does not present any reconstructions of Neanderthals, even when there are etchings from the ›age of the great bear and the mammoth‹, as the Middle Palaeolithic was known at the time. All hominins depicted are presented as anatomically modern humans. According to A. Roussot (2003, 76), L. Figuier was clearly asserting his creationist point of view and neglecting any ideas of evolution. Today, the warm garments adapted to glacial climates seem much more accurate, but it's not those images that still appear. When they are reproduced, today's media mostly prefer those from the first edition (Figuier 1870a), which are more in line with our modern collective imagination.

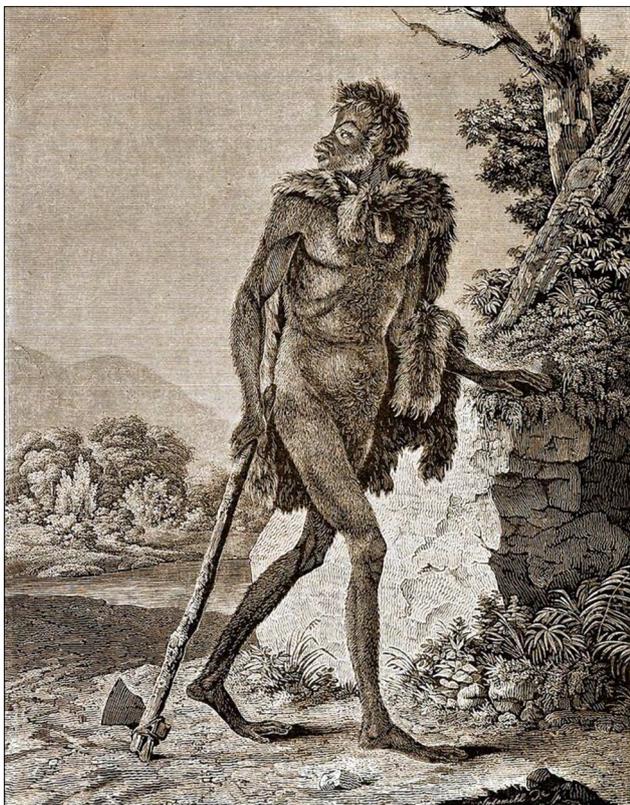


Fig. 1 ›L'homme fossile‹ by T. Sushemil for P. Boitard in *Magasin Universel* 1838.

Abb. 1 ›L'homme fossile‹ von T. Sushemil für P. Boitard im *Magasin Universel* 1838.

At the end of the 19th century, many artists were inspired by prehistory, such as F. Cormon, P. Jamin, and L. M. Faivre (Dagen 2003). Some of their characters were depicted naked, some with loincloth or tunic, and a few well-covered by clothing.

Museum displays

The first reconstructions in the form of busts or whole bodies (i.e. mannequins) arrived at the end of the 19th century, accompanying the first presentations of archaeological objects. They were found at the Paris World's Fairs (1889 and 1900) and in the first museums from 1876, as in Musée de l'Artillerie, Paris (Robert 1889, 10–13).

Neanderthals (first reconstructions)

›Neanderthal man‹ was the first fossil man to be reconstructed from concrete archaeological remains. However, reconstructions did not begin until around 20 years after the discoveries made in 1856 at Kleine Feldhofer Grotte (Neandertal, Mettmann District, Germany) and the recognition of the finds as a possible fossil representative of the human lineage.

An early etching, dated to 1873, shows a male Neanderthal, wearing a skin tunic and accompanied by two dogs, while inside a cave, a female sleeps under blankets. Turn-

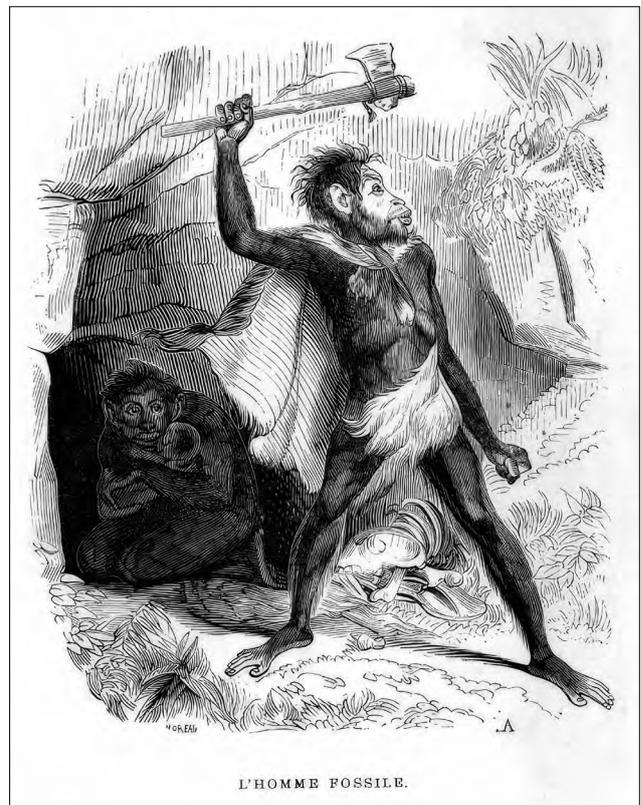


Fig. 2 ›L'homme fossile‹ by Moreau for P. Boitard's posthumous book, *Paris avant les hommes* 1861.

Abb. 2 ›L'homme fossile‹ von Moreau für P. Boitards postum erschienenes Buch, *Paris avant les hommes* 1861.



Fig. 3 J. Bourdichon, ›The Wild Condition‹ from *Four Conditions of Society*. Circa 1505–1510. Tempera on vellum. 16 x 12 cm.

Abb. 3 J. Bourdichon, ›Der wilde Zustand‹ aus *Vier Zustände der Gesellschaft*. Circa 1505–1510. Tempera auf Pergament. 16 x 12 cm.



Fig. 4 ›Hercules and Cacus‹ by H. Goltzius, 1613.

Abb. 4 ›Herkules und Cacus‹ von H. Goltzius, 1613.

ing towards the entrance, the man holds a fitted stone axe (Holyoke 1993). It was first published in *Harper's Weekly* (Moser 1998). A few years later, F. Cushing (working for J. P. Maclean, 1875/1877 or 1880) and H. Schaaffhausen (1888) first tried to depict the individual's face in drawings (Giacobini/Maureille 2009, 35; Semal et al. 2010; Lambers et al. 2022, 35).

The first sculpted bust of a Neanderthal (Fig. 5). was made in the 1880s by G. Mitchell (Lambers et al. 2022, 35). Nude and black, he has a beard that merges with his chest hair and descends in a vertical band down the torso, suggesting that the individual is naked; it closely resembles F. Cushing's drawing.

In terms of whole-body reconstructions, it seems that the first were exhibited at the *Musée de l'Artillerie* (Paris, France) around 1876 (Fig. 6, right), followed by those in the diorama at the 1889 Paris World's Fair (Fig. 7).

While the Neanderthal¹ of the *Musée de l'Artillerie* is warmly dressed, those at the 1889 World's Fair are virtually naked. In both cases, they are highly humanised and

in no way simian. Those at the World's Fair are a man and a woman, both positioned close to the ground; he is sitting on the ground while she is kneeling. She is wearing a loincloth, a sort of cape (although it does not cover her breasts²), and a hairband. He wears a fur-lined loincloth. The official exhibition catalogue describes them as follows (Catalogue Exposition universelle internationale Paris 1889, 120):

›The first industrialists – A flintknapping workshop (Mammoth Age)‹. At the foot of a hollow tree, which may provide them with an asylum, a man and a woman chip and carve flint, to make their first weapons and tools. The scene was inspired by a drawing by T. Baines (San Augustin-Filarctos 2003, 54–56), depicting modern-day Aboriginal Australians performing the same industrial operations. The Aboriginal Australians of Queensland and Western Australia are indeed the best characterised of the Palaeolithic industry it was intended to portray.

It seems that at the time (viewed through a racist and colonialist prism), Aboriginal Australians were considered to be at the ›same stage‹ of evolution as Neanderthals (Cohen 1999).

1 A drawing inspired by the mannequin of the *Musée de l'Artillerie* is presented as ›Moustérian man‹ in H.-R. Du Clezou's book (1887, 204), but at that time this industry has not yet been

associated with Neanderthal. This link will be established in later in 1887 with the publication of the discoveries at Spy, Province of Namur, in Belgium (Giacobini/Maureille 2009, 35).

2 The breasts of prehistoric women, especially Neanderthals, are almost always shown exposed, even until today.



Fig. 5 ›Ideal reconstruction‹ based on the Neanderthal skull by Ward/Mitchell, 1880s.

Abb. 5 ›Ideale Rekonstruktion‹ basierend auf dem Neandertaler-Schädel von Ward/Mitchell, 1880er Jahre.



Fig. 6 Warrior Costumes. Prehistoric ages. Left: La Madeleine type (*Homo sapiens*); right: Moustier Type (Neanderthal). Paris, *Hôtel des Invalides, Musée de l'Artillerie*. Postcard, 1876.

Abb. 6 Kriegerrekonstruktionen. Prähistorische Zeitalter. Links: La Madeleine-Typ (*Homo sapiens*); rechts: Moustier-Typ (*Neandertaler*). Paris, *Hôtel des Invalides, Musée de l'Artillerie*. Postkarte, 1876.

The short description of the diorama was followed by a list of sites and remains used as sources for the reconstruction: Spy, La Naulette, Province of Namur, Belgium, and Gourdan, Dép. Haute-Garonne (France; the Neanderthal skull from The Kleine Feldhofer Grotte is not mentioned). The authors of the catalogue added that soft parts were reconstructed from ›atavistic types‹ around Paris and Belgium (!). ›The axe is from Western Australia. The costume elements are borrowed from various modern-day wild peoples‹ (Catalogue Exposition universelle internationale Paris 1889, 120).

In 1908, following the famous discovery of a complete Neanderthal skeleton, M. Boule's description and study of the La Chapelle-aux-Saints Man was to leave its mark. This led to a return to frankly simian and highly aggressive rep-

resentations, such as F. Kupka's famous drawing (Cohen 2007, 36–37)³ – nude and very hairy, or N. Montecucco's 1909 bust for C. Lombroso, which bares his teeth⁴ (Cohen 2007, 46–47; Giacobini/Maureille 2009, 39). However, these representations of Neanderthals with high levels of simian hair were to remain very rare.

These images strongly contrast with a drawing by A. Forestier for A. Keith, produced in 1911 (i.e. at almost the same time) for the front page of the *Illustrated London News* (Cohen 2007, 38–39; Giacobini/Maureille 2009, 38). This image also showed the man from La Chapelle-aux-Saints, Dép. Corrèze (France), wearing a skin loincloth, but appearing calm, simply knapping flint. An attached text says (on the front page of the magazine), ›Not in the gorilla stage‹, emphasising the opposition of A. Keith to M. Boule's opin-

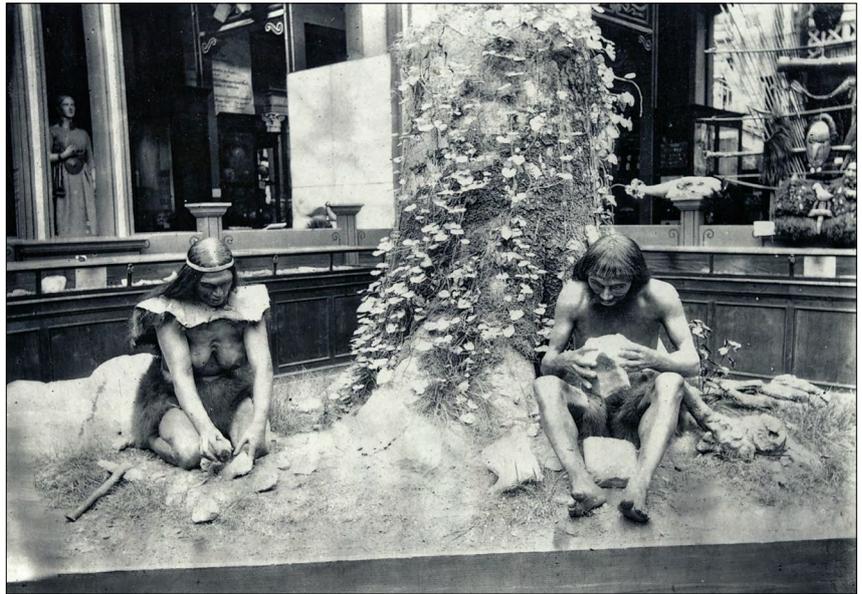
³ Produced in 1909 for the magazine *L'illustration* and the *Illustrated London News*. This image is often used today to illustrate how much better reconstructions are done today than in the past.

⁴ At the same time, A. Rutot's Neanderthal woman from La Quina, Dép. Charente (France), and that of H. Martin, are also very much in the simian style. H. Martin (1913, 86) writes in justification: ›The eyes, nose and ears, having left no palpable traces, have been

executed under the inspiration of the broad lines observed on the Chimpanzee; I consider that this is a right, for this anthropoid, in offering us in its skeleton certain incontestable similarities with the Neanderthals, can and must have other similar organs‹.

Fig. 7 Diorama. Reconstructions of Neanderthals (man and woman). World's Fair, Paris 1889.

Abb. 7 Diorama. Neanderthalerrekonstruktionen (Mann und Frau). Weltausstellung, Paris 1889.



ion. Two theories then exist: either Neanderthals were our ancestors and were depicted in a very humanised fashion, or they represented an extinct evolutionary branch. In the latter case, they were dumbed down and bestialised. Since 2010, when Neanderthals were linked to our ancestors by aDNA (Green et al. 2010 quoted by Frayer 2019, 357), representations have once again become more sympathetic (Frayer 2019).

In the first half of the 20th century, the question of whether Neanderthal hair was simian or not became less a topic of debate (per. obs., P. Coste) as representatives of older hominin species were discovered, such as Java Man, East Java, Indonesia, the australopithecine child from Taung, North West Province, South Africa, the Peking Man, the »faked« Piltdown man, and the *Homo rhodensis*.

In 1920, the artist C. Knight created two large paintings for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. The first painting depicted a group of Neanderthals at Le

Moustier, Dép. Dordogne (France), while the other showed a group of Cro-Magnons painting the cave of Font de Gaume, Dép. Dordogne (France). Unsure about the question of clothing, C. Knight consulted H. Breuil, the most famous prehistorian of the time, who told him to illustrate them naked. In the end, however, to respect the public's modesty and on the advice of his boss, R. Osborn, C. Knight opted for skin loincloths (Clary 2022).

In 1928, a diorama was prepared by F. Blaschke for the Field Museum of Chicago (Fig. 8a). According to the museum catalogue published shortly afterwards (Farrington/Field 1929), the reference individuals had been the man from La Chapelle-aux-Saints for the older adult male, the skull from Forbes' Quarry, British Overseas Territory of Gibraltar, United Kingdom, south of the Iberian Peninsula, for the two women, and that from Devil's Tower, British Overseas Territory of Gibraltar, United Kingdom, south of the Iberian Peninsula, for the adolescent. Those were the

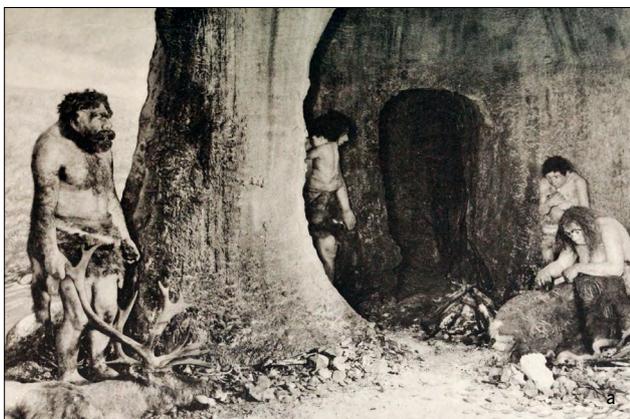


Fig. 8a–b a Reconstruction of a Neanderthal family. Group by F. Blaschke in the Ernest E. Graham Hall, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, USA (1929); b Pioneer lineup at the exposition on the origin of man (Leningrad 1959). Sculptures by M. M. Gerasimov. In the middle: the figure of the Neanderthal boy from Teshik-Tesh Cave (1945).

Abb. 8a–b a Rekonstruktion einer Neanderthalerfamilie. Gruppe von F. Blaschke in der E. E. Graham Hall, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, USA (1929); b Erstausstellung auf der Ausstellung über den Ursprung des Menschen (Leningrad 1959). Skulpturen von M. M. Gerasimov. In der Mitte: die Figur des Neanderthaler-Jungen aus der Teshik-Tesch-Höhle (1945).

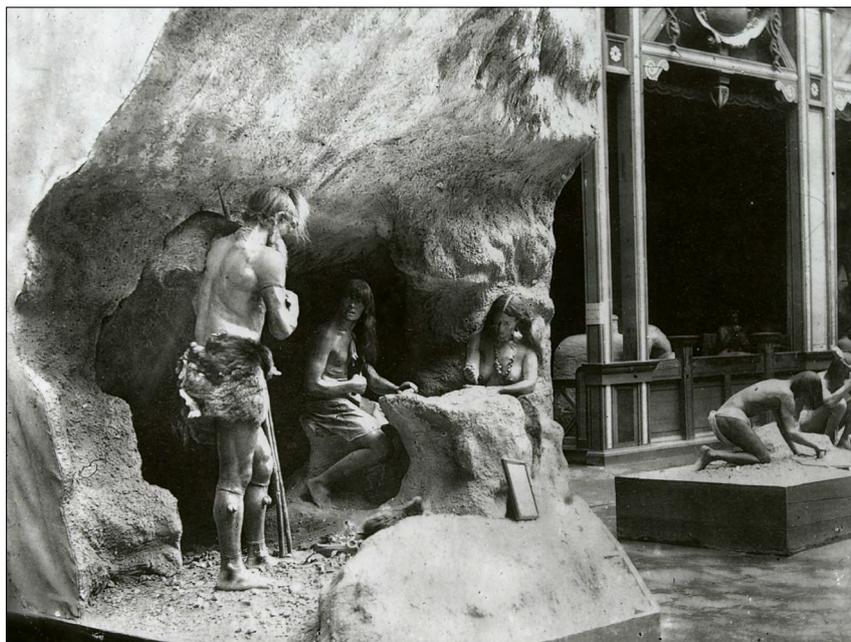


Fig. 9 Diorama. Laugerie-Basse rock shelter (Vézère Valley, Dép. Dordogne [France]), with group of Cro-Magnons (Cro-Magnon 1, 'the old man', standing facing a young man and a woman). World's Fair, Paris 1889.

Abb. 9 Diorama. Laugerie-Basse Felsdach (Vézère-Tal, Dép. Dordogne [Frankreich]), mit einer Gruppe von Cro-Magnons (Cro-Magnon 1, »der alte Mann«, stehend gegenüber einem jungen Mann und einer Frau). Weltausstellung, Paris 1889.

best-preserved skulls and complete skeletons known at the time. The diorama was supposed to evoke a scene at the site of Le Moustier, it was inspired by a field trip and information-gathering session with the great specialists of the time: A. Keith (who had supervised the reconstruction of the skull from Forbes' Quarry), and H. Breuil. It's possible that the baby shown in the diorama referred to the 1914 discovery of a baby (Moustier 2) at the same site, but the catalogue does not mention this. Surprisingly, the teenager is not based on finds at the Le Moustier site (Moustier 1). All individuals are shown almost naked, wearing simple fur loincloths tied around the waist (except for the baby, who is completely naked). The adults have extensive, human-type hair. The man stands, appearing to be in a daze. The two women stare into space; one stands, holding the baby, and the other crouches, tanning a skin⁵. The teenager is standing and chewing some meat. As in the description of M. Boule, they are all depicted without necks – an interpretation later refuted by C. Arambourg: the old man analysed by M. Boule had neck problems, but not all Neanderthals did (Y. Coppens in the preface of Albarello 1987, 11)!

The Field Museum catalogue states: »Unfortunately for the completion of the restorations there are no data from which information as to the type, quality, and quantity of the hairy covering of the heads and bodies of people of this race could be obtained. In as much, however, as the primitive men of Australia have several Neanderthaloid characteristics, including heavy brow ridges, it was decided to follow their hirsute type« (Farrington/Field 1929, 7).

Once again, an association is made with Aboriginal Australians. It's also contradictory to see the figures so scantily clad when mention is made of an Ice Age site on the following page: it is as if there were no causal links between the two pieces of information. This is all the more puzzling

since the flints had been analysed: they were known to have been used for »skinning and preparing hides« (Farrington/Field 1929, 11). Here again, these facts and data were not associated.

In the 1930s and 1940s, full bodies and busts of Neanderthals were reconstructed in France (e.g., the man of Le Moustier by Y. Parvillier and M. Faure for the National Prehistory Museum of Les Eyzies in France), while in Austria, F. Fahrwickl proposed a full-body reconstruction of the man from La Chapelle-aux-Saints for the National History Museum of Vienna (Lambers et al. 2022, 53). All these Neanderthal individuals are shown naked, some with large amounts of body hair.

In Russia from the 1940s to the 1960s, M. M. Gerasimov left his mark on the world of reconstruction. As L. Verzé explained: »[M. M. Gerasimov] first had to create a routine or system for quantifying those parts of the skull where the overlying tissue is thinnest and would be most invariant and reproducible. He then had to develop a way to determine the muscular structure of an individual head. Gerasimov thus created what was referred to as the Russian method« (Verzé 2009). He produced many forensic reconstructions as busts and drawings, but few full-body models; one exception was the Teshik-Tesh, Surxondaryo Region, Uzbekistan, Neanderthal child, cast in bronze and represented entirely naked (Fig. 8b).

Other Neanderthals were also reconstructed in Germany in the 1960s or earlier, probably by G. Wandel in Bonn; these full-body figures wore a simple loincloth (Giacobini/Maureille 2009)⁶. From the 1950s but mainly spread in the 1980s, the most famous images of Neanderthals were painted by Z. Burian (Cohen 2007, 50–51; 61–68, Giacobini/Maureille 2009, 41–42)⁷; they invaded school textbooks and scientific works around the world, leaving their mark on the

5 Another constant in reconstructions is that Neanderthal women are almost always shown tanning hides.

6 G. Wandel's Neanderthals sculptures are now in Monrepos Museum, Germany.

7 More information about Z. Burian's work: <<https://www.daildeli.cz/burianmak5.html>> (10.06.2025).

collective imagination for a long time to come. There was no real change in physical appearance: the Neanderthal is stocky, with marked but human hair, hunched over and without a neck (as in M. Boule's description), and dressed in a loincloth. A certain constancy has become established in unchallenged reconstructions.

Homo sapiens (first reconstructions)

The first reconstructions of complete mannequins of Palaeolithic *Homo sapiens* in dioramas are probably those from the *Musée de l'Artillerie* (well clothed, circa 1880; cf. Fig. 6) and those from the 1889 Paris World's Fair (Fig. 9).

The latter diorama shows three individuals in a rock shelter, identified as the Laugerie-Basse in the Vézère Valley, Dép. Dordogne (France; Catalogue Exposition universelle internationale Paris 1889, 120–121). An elderly man (probably individual Cro-Magnon 1) stands, talking to a woman (probably Cro-Magnon 2) and a young man (either Cro-Magnon 3 or Laugerie-Basse 4). The woman and the young man are wearing ornaments similar to those found at the Cro-Magnon shelter in 1868 (*Littorina littorea* and ivory pendants), while the standing man's ornaments are those of Laugerie-Basse 4 (most known as ›L'homme écrasé‹) (*Cypraea*) worn in duplicate on the ankles, wrists, knees and on either side of the forehead (Girod/Massenat 1900; Groenen 1997). The figures are all almost naked, clad in simple fur loincloths rolled into waist-length skirts. The standing man's ›houpe‹ (tuft of hair) hairstyle is inspired by an engraving found at Laugerie-Basse, showing a ›Man hunting aurochs‹⁸ (Fig. 10; Girod/Massenat 1900, 97; Pl. XI). This astonishing hairstyle was later reproduced on a gilded plaster bust of Cro-Magnon 1 in the *Musée de l'Homme*, dated approximately 1891, as part of a series of four heads in the Hamy collection, including the Neanderthal type specimen (now called ›Kleine Feldhofer Grotte‹, found in the Neandertal), and Furfooz 1 and 2, Province of Namur, Belgium (Lafont-Couturier 2003, 48–49). The close similarity in date and the resemblance between these busts and the mannequins in the World's Fair dioramas suggest they were created by the same artist.

The 1889 exhibition catalogue explains the *Homo sapiens* diorama as follows: ›The three figures are reconstructed using almost complete skeletons found in rock shelters in the region, Laugerie-Basse, Cro-Magnon etc., thanks to which we were able to fix the proportions of the body, the essential shapes of the skull and face. The soft parts are based on several individuals of similar race, and in particular on heads moulded from Berbers, of the Cro-Magnon type‹. Concerning the clothing, the author adds: ›The skin garments are purely conventional (we know nothing of the costume of these troglodytes from the south of France); but we have not hesitated to reduce them considerably and to represent almost naked men who must have lived exactly like the redskin hunters of the Upper North America that

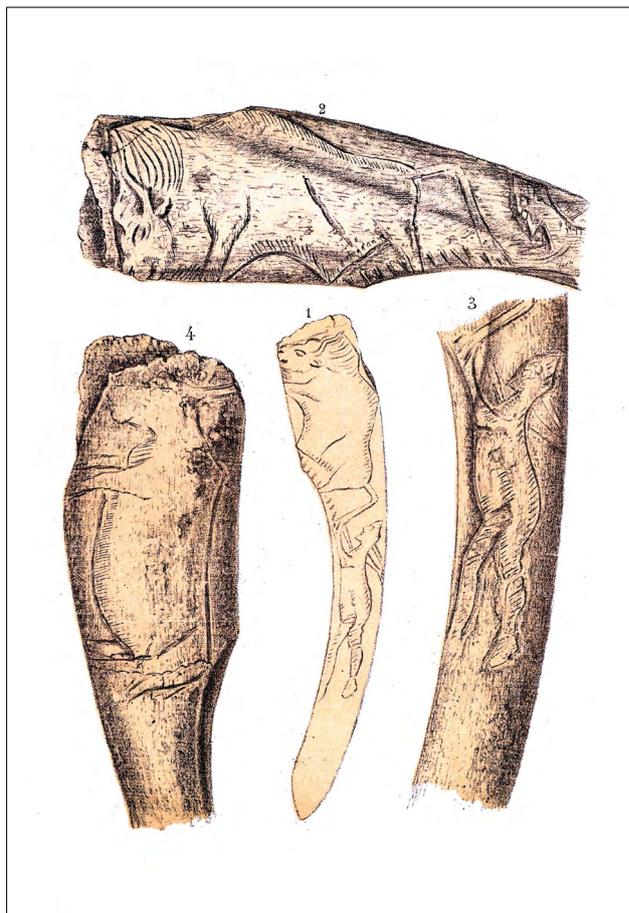


Fig. 10 ›Hunting auroch‹ from Laugerie-Basse rock shelter (Dép. Dordogne [France]). From Girod/Massenat 1900. On the right: detail of human representation: a man with a ›houpe‹ hair style, who inspired the hair style of 1889's Cro-Magnon 1 in the World Fair's diorama. O. M.

Abb. 10 ›Jagd auf einen Auerochsen‹: aus dem Felsenhaus von Laugerie-Basse (Dép. Dordogne [Frankreich]). Aus Girod/Massenat 1900. Rechts: Detail der menschlichen Darstellung: ein Mann mit einer ›Houpe‹-Friseur, die die Frisur des Cro-Magnon 1 von 1889 im Diorama der Weltausstellung inspirierte. No scale.

travellers represent to us as such« (Catalogue Exposition universelle internationale Paris 1889, 120–121).

Later, around 1890, Cro-Magnon 1 was reconstructed in sculpture by P. Richer titled ›Le premier artiste‹ (Dagen 2003, 43). It shows the shells found on the skull as a headband and the hair held in a bun by a bone pin. The individual is smiling, naked, and has just finished a mammoth sculpture.

Sculptures of *Homo sapiens*, based on specific remains and reconstructed as whole bodies, were quite rare before the 1980s/1990s. Strictly speaking, reconstructions representing a specific individual were, for a long time, mainly based on the remains of Cro-Magnon 1, Chancelade or Combe Capelle, all Dép. Dordogne (France; all men), and very often, only busts or heads were involved. Later, in the 1960s–1970s, Z. Burian sometimes depicted *Homo sapiens* in loincloths and tunics and warmly covered at other times.

⁸ Probably a bison (collection Musée d'Archéologie Nationale Saint-Germain-en-Laye, No. 53819).

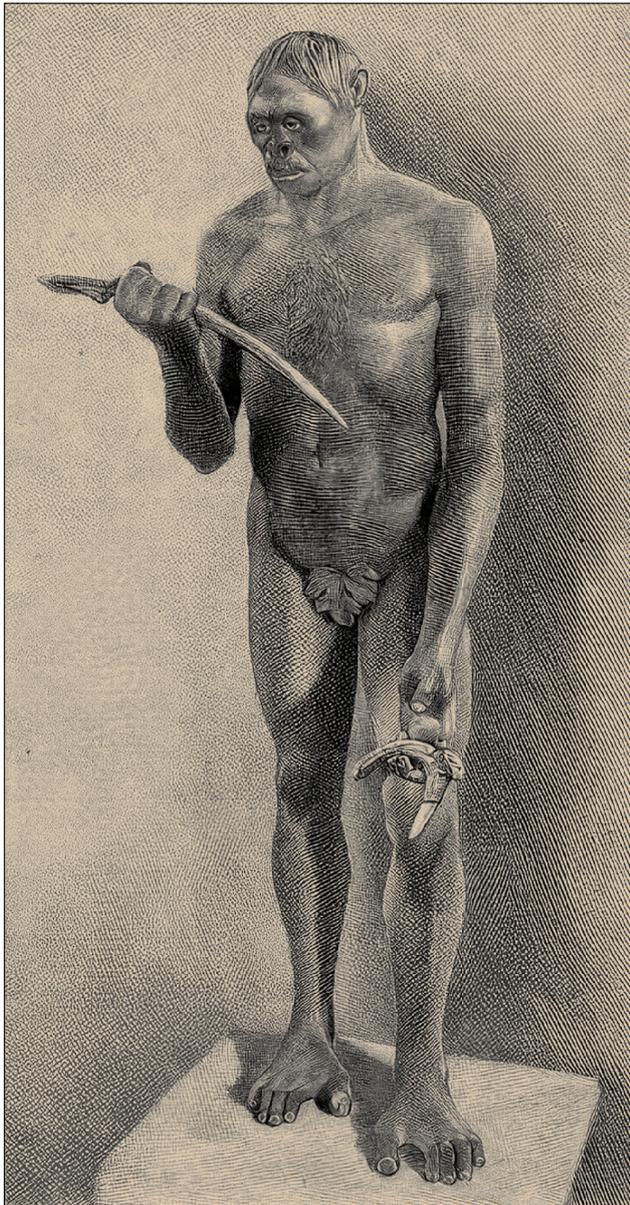


Fig. 11 Reconstruction of the *Pithecanthropus erectus* (‘man-monkey’) presented at the Paris World Exhibition in 1900 by E. Dubois.

Abb. 11 Rekonstruktion des *Pithecanthropus erectus* (‘Menschenaffe’), der 1900 von E. Dubois auf der Pariser Weltausstellung präsentiert wurde.

***Homo erectus* and *Homo heidelbergensis* (first reconstructions)**

At the turn of the 20th century, the species now dated at around 500 kya were the oldest known: *Homo erectus* (at that time called *Paranthropus erectus*) discovered in Java by E. Dubois in 1891 (Jelinek 1983, 73), then the Heidelberg Man found at Mauer in 1907, Rhein-Neckar District, near Heidelberg in Germany (Jelinek 1983, 82). They were soon overtaken in notoriety by the Piltdown Man, ‘discovered’ in 1912 in East Sussex County, United Kingdom (i.e. in Europe – an advantage for European-centrism), which was claimed to be ‘the oldest’ at the time. The Piltdown Man was only unmasked as a fake in the 1950s with the help of the first ¹⁴C dates, but in the meantime, he had become a house-

hold name (De Beaune/Balzeau 2009, 12). In the 1920s, the remains of the Peking Man (then known as *Sinanthropus pekinensis*, now called *Homo erectus*) from the Lower Cave at Zhoukoudian, China (Schwartz/Tattersall 2003; Jelinek 1983, 79), *Homo rhodensis* (sometimes called *Homo heidelbergensis* today) after a discovery at Broken Hills, Rhodesia (now Zambia), today named ‘Kabwe’, and the australopithecine child from Taung, Gauteng Province, South Africa, became the stars of their time. To this day, they are the subject of numerous reconstructions. The Peking man was often portrayed as a woman at that time (e.g. L. Swan’s bust in 1937).

The first *Homo erectus* to be reconstructed with its entire body was the Java Man, recreated for the 1900 Paris World’s Fair (Fig. 11). His reconstruction is based on a skull cap, a femur and a few other bones. The individual is shown naked, hairless, with opposable toes, and holding a stick. It is preceded by a ‘theoretical’ *Pithecanthropus allalus* (‘mute’, i.e. without associated remains). A male and female, both naked and very hairy, were painted by G. von Max in 1894. This theoretical ‘missing link’ between men and apes was propagated by E. Haeckel, who gave E. Dubois the idea of going to Java to search for it. A few years later, in their series of 15 busts (half body) of human evolution produced between 1909 and 1914, the French sculptor L. Mascré and archaeologist A. Rutot (Hauzeur/Mairesse 2003, 116) presented, in addition to Neanderthal and *Homo sapiens*, busts of the Java Man, the Piltdown Man, and also the Mauer Man (the *Homo heidelbergensis* type specimen of which only a mandible had been found). Their ‘precursor’ (the Java Man) is depicted as very simian (Hauzeur/Mairesse 2003, 111; Leguebe 1992) and clad in tree leaves, while the others, with the exception of Neanderthal Man who wears a fur tunic strap, and *Homo sapiens*, the ancient species are shown naked, the lower torso covered with a skin resembling a fur or blanket.

Today

The 1990s and 2000s saw the return and increase of mannequins in museography. It is fair to say that since 2000–2010, reconstructed images have proliferated to the point of invading magazine covers and becoming an almost obligatory part of recent museography. These individuals mostly represent archaic hominins, followed closely by Neanderthals, while *Homo sapiens* is less frequently reconstructed and featured less prominently in the press, or if so, only in the form of old images.

First hominins (7–2 mya)

To date, for the period between 7 and 2 mya ago, the individuals shown in their entirety (92 reconstructions for 13 individuals) are always presented naked (100%; Fig. 12–13), with varying degrees of simian hair, whatever the species: Toumaï (*Sahelanthropus tchadensis*), *Orrorin tugenensis*, *Ardipithecus (ramidus)*, various australopithecines (*A. africanus*, *A. afarensis*, *A. sediba*, *A. garhi*, *A. bahelghazali*), and *Paranthropus*.

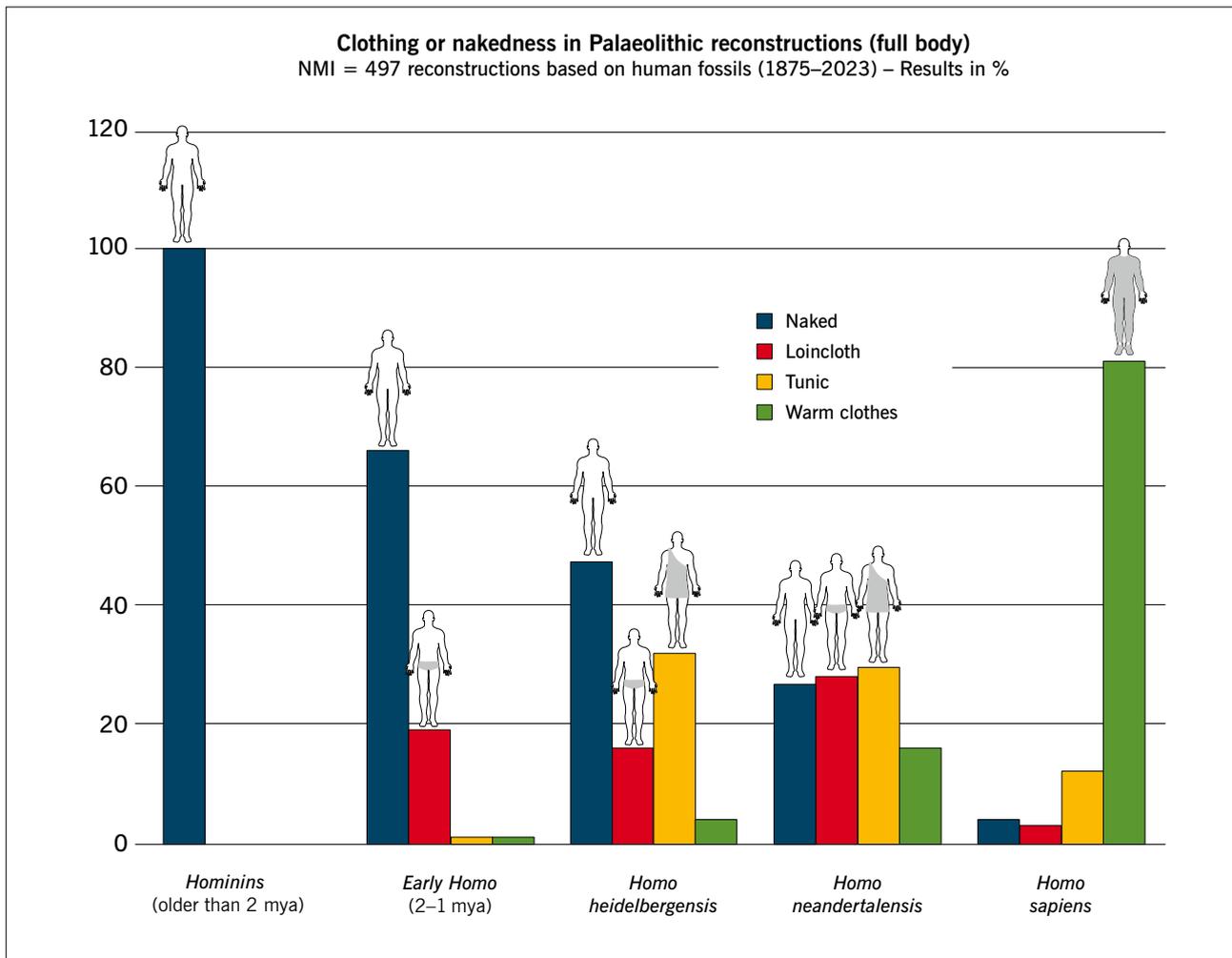


Fig. 12 Degree of clothing or nakedness in reconstructions depending on species.

Abb. 12 Grad der Bekleidung oder Nacktheit bei Rekonstruktionen je nach Art.

According to the present research, Lucy's body⁹ is by far the most frequently reconstructed since its discovery in 1972 (especially from the 1990s onwards). She is very often shown with a taller male australopithecine, nicknamed Lucien or Lucky (reconstructed according to skull AL444-2). It must be said that, for these early periods, this is the most complete skeleton. Lucy and Lucien are frequently shown walking in ashes, suggesting the footprints found in Laetoli, Tanzania, a site of similar age, which was also discovered in the 1970s and has also become famous.

The Taung child and Mrs. Ples, Gauteng Province, South Africa (both fossils classified as *Australopithecus africanus*) are also often reconstructed, and always naked. Mrs. Ples has largely been upstaged by Lucy, but the Taung Child is still frequently reconstructed.

Before more discoveries, the absence of skin or hide-working use-wear on lithic tools and, above all, the tropical climate in which these individuals lived make the nudity of these periods credible.

Early Palaeolithic (2 mya–500 kya)

For the Early Palaeolithic, we can distinguish different choices in terms of clothing, with a very large majority of individuals shown naked. In all, out of 69 Early Palaeolithic reconstructions of all hominin species (*Homo habilis*, *H. erectus*, *H. georgicus*, *H. ergaster*, *H. antecessor*), 63 % are nude ($n = 44$), 18 % wear a loincloth ($n = 13$), extremely marginally, less than 3 % are presented with warm clothing ($n = 2$), and only a single specimen has a warm tunic-type garment.

There is also a wide variety of hair types in reconstructions from this period. While not always simian-like, hair is sometimes very pronounced and other times completely absent. While the Turkana Boy, *Homo ergaster*, now dated at 1.47 mya (McDougall et al. 2012), is always presented as hairless, Sangiran 17 (~ 0.7 mya) *Homo erectus* is often very hairy, while for *Homo georgicus* of Dmanisi (1.8 mya) there is great variability in terms of hairiness in reconstructions.

⁹ »Lucy« is an *Australopithecus afarensis*, also known as AL288-1, and her reconstruction is

often associated with another remain, AL417-1, as AL288-1 is virtually lacking a skull.



Fig. 13 Jeongok Prehistory Museum, South Korea, 2011. Full body hyper realistic reconstructions by E. Daynès. Leading the group: Toumaï (*Sahelanthropus tchadensis*) 7 mya, followed by Lucy and Lucien (*Australopithecus afarensis*) around 3,5 mya. The corresponding skulls are presented below.

Abb. 13 Vorgeschichtsmuseum Jeongok, Südkorea. Hyperrealistische Ganzkörper-Rekonstruktionen von E. Daynès. Führend in der Gruppe: Toumaï (*Sahelanthropus tchadensis*) vor 7 Mio. Jahren, gefolgt von Lucy und Lucien (*Australopithecus afarensis*) um 3,5 Mio Jahre. Die entsprechenden Schädel werden im Folgenden vorgestellt.

Today, most reconstructions put this ›hair frontier‹ somewhat arbitrarily between 1 and 2 mya. Before 2 mya, individuals are always shown naked, often with simian hair. After 1 mya, ›human-like hair‹ (rather hairless) is in the majority.

Homo heidelbergensis

For palaeo-artists, the problem of body hair and clothing becomes more complicated after 500 kya, starting with *Homo heidelbergensis* and continuing with Neanderthals.

43 % of reconstructed *Homo heidelbergensis* are shown naked (23/49), although clothing is beginning to appear in reconstructions, especially tunics (n = 16) and, more rarely, warm clothing (n = 2).

Apparently with no specific reason (except maybe a ›more human‹ morphology?), *Homo heidelbergensis*, *Homo antecessor*, the Neanderthals and *Homo sapiens* are shown without simian hair. Meanwhile, for their later contemporaries such as Flores and Naledi, the choice of hair varies, and they are almost always shown naked (more ›*Homo erectus*-like?').

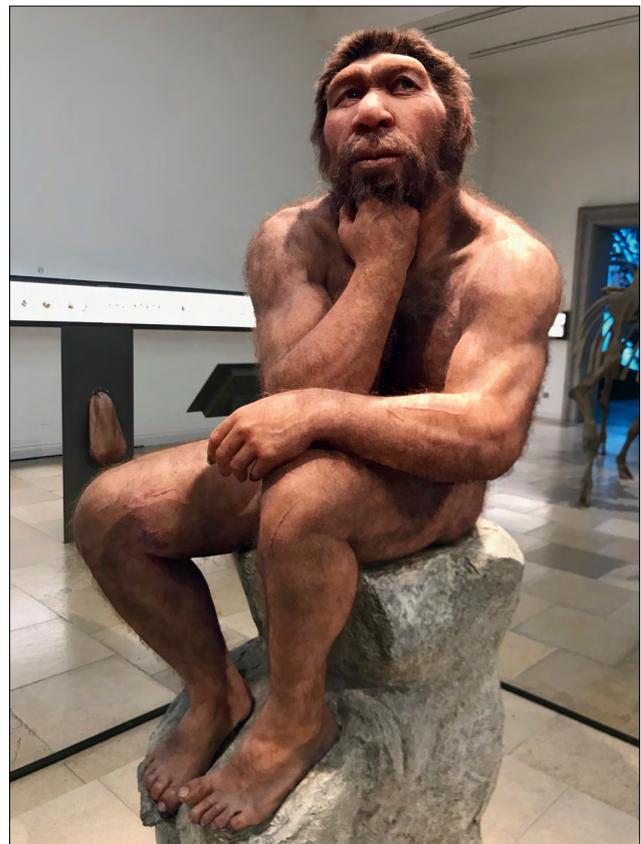
It seems that actual evidence of hide working might have begun around the MIS 12/13 transition, some 450 kya ago, as indicated by use-wear studies¹⁰. Given the cold periods these populations lived through, why imagine them naked, like Arago 21 (found in Tautavel in 1971, Dép. Pyrénées Orientales (France), -450 kya) reconstructed by E. Daynès for the Forschungsmuseum, Schönning, Ger-

many or Petralona (found in Greece, in 1960) reconstructed by E. Daynès in 2003 for Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte Halle, Germany; Fig. 14), or also Altamura, (found in Apulia, Italy in 1993) reconstructed by the Kennis brothers in 2017 for a local museum in Italy?

Earlier reconstructions of Arago 21 are dressed in a simple goatskin tunic as in the Tautavel Museum diorama by E. Daynès in 1992, but is it more accurate? From this time

Fig. 14 Reconstruction of a *Homo heidelbergensis* or Neanderthal by E. Daynès from Petralona skull. State Museum of Prehistory, Halle (Germany).

Abb. 14 Rekonstruktion eines *Homo heidelbergensis* oder Neandertaler von E. Daynès auf der Grundlage eines Schädels aus Petralona. Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte Halle (Deutschland).



¹⁰ Zupancich et al. 2015; Lemorini et al. 2020; Nicoud et al. 2022; Verheijen et al. 2023.

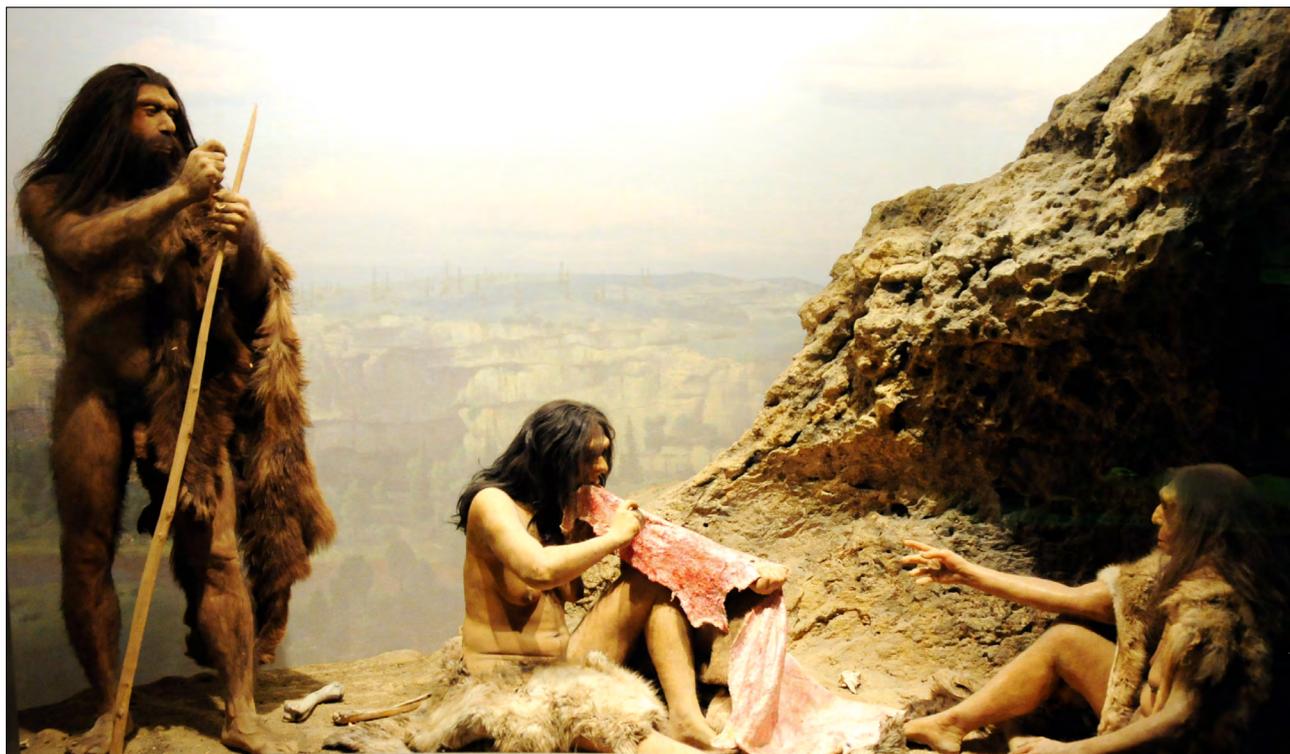


Fig. 15 Diorama of a group of Neanderthals: a man with a spear standing next to a young woman chewing a fur and an old woman sitting next to her. It is intended to recreate the site of Le Moustier, Dép. Dordogne (France). American Museum of Natural History, New York (USA) in 1993.

Abb. 15 Diorama einer Neandertaler Gruppe: ein Mann mit einem Speer, der neben einer jungen Frau steht, die ein Fell kaut, und eine alte Frau, die neben ihr sitzt. Es soll den Fundort Le Moustier, Dép. Dordogne (Frankreich), nachstellen. Amerikanisches Museum für Naturgeschichte, New York (USA) 1993.

onwards, evidence of hide-working and fur exploitation has been accumulating at various sites. Is this the starting point of the first potential garments? It seems that we need to start asking the question from this period onwards; the diversity of artists' proposals is a good marker for the fact that science does not yet have a precise answer to the question of clothing or nakedness for people of that time.

Neanderthals (~ 250–40 kya) in present-day reconstructions

For Neanderthals, if we consider the entire period (1875–2024), we find almost equal numbers of all variants (nude 30 %, loincloth 31 %, tunic 33 %, warm clothing 18 %), with fewer individuals in the latter category.

The most well-covered individuals were made in the 1990s (W. Schnaubelt and N. Kieser for German museums¹¹, such as the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn and the LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn and E. Daynès for the Neanderthal Museum in Mettmann, Germany), or recently F. Fogliazza in 2010 for the Museo de la Evolución Humana in Burgos, Spain; O. Nielsson for the Brighton Museum, United Kingdom, but in all cases, the well-covered reconstructions are quite rare compared to the others.

In the 1990s also, several dioramas were created for the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York. The Neanderthal diorama at AMNH was created by C. Leone under the supervision of I. Tattersall and G. Sawyer (Tattersall 1992). It includes a standing man and two seated women; one is elderly and wears a fur cape, and the other chews on a skin. The naked man is holding a pointed stick. Here again, as in the T. Sushemil reconstruction of 1838 (cf. Fig. 1) or F. Blaschke's diorama of 1929 for Chicago's Field Museum, we find the idea of a man standing – returning or going hunting – and women seated in the cave, involved in domestic activities around a hearth. The position of the individuals reinforces the idea of male domination. Regarding the clothing, the figures are less covered than those in F. Blaschke's diorama, who wear loincloths (cf. Fig. 8a); in contrast, the individuals shown in the AMNH 1990s diorama are naked or almost naked (Fig. 15).

To justify the figures' nakedness, even though hide scraping was known, I. Tattersall explained: 'The first major shock always came with the addition of hair to a formerly glabrous head – an old friend was suddenly transformed into a stranger. Draping the naked figures with animal hides that obscured the results of hundreds of hours of laborious body detailing was equally jarring for us. Predictably,

¹¹ About W. Schnaubelt and N. Kieser (Wild Life Art): their busts of human evolution are in Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, Ger-

many and Naturhistorisches Museum Basel, Switzerland.



Fig 16 Diorama of Neanderthals by E. Daynès. Krapina Cave, Krapina-Zagorje County (Croatia), 2010.

Abb. 16 Diorama von Neandertalern von E. Daynès. Krapina-Höhle, Gespanschaft Krapina-Zagorje (Kroatien), 2010.

perhaps, our Neanderthals ended up with rather minimalist clothing» (Tattersall 1992, 85).

In terms of whole-body representation, from the late 1990s onwards E. Daynès quickly made a name for herself with her hyperrealistic mannequins (Daynès 2011). Her greatest diorama work is undoubtedly that of the Krapina Museum, Krapina-Zagorje County, in Croatia, made around 2008, featuring a dozen individuals – men, women and children (Fig. 16). Although they are supposed to represent the inhabitants of the Krapina Cave, which has yielded numerous Neanderthal individuals, they are inspired by many different, well-preserved skulls and skeletons from other sites, sometimes representing »different versions« of the same individual (2x La Chapelle-aux-Saints; 3x Devil's Tower; 1x Shanidar 1, Erbil Governorate, Iraq; 1x Saccopastore, Rome, Italy; 1x Roc de Marsal, Dép. Dordogne [France], etc.). In the scene, the men return from hunting while the women sit around the hearth in the cave with their children. All are dressed in loincloths or skimpy tunics, or else they are naked, maybe again the same old »clichés« inherited from the 19th century.

Since the 2010s, the Dutch Kennis brothers have also provided full-body reconstructions to museums in the UK, Ger-

many and Denmark and for a book by A. Roberts et al. (2012). Provocative and smiling, the figures are very often nude or wearing skimpy clothing (cap, leggings, loincloths). Their most famous work is undoubtedly »Mister N« in the Neanderthal Museum in Mettmann, Germany, with whom visitors like to photograph themselves, maybe because of his smiling and sympathetic face (Fig. 17; Anderson 2011).

It is important to remember that, according to archaeological data, Neanderthals lived through several ice ages and interglacial periods in Europe, and they clearly had tools that indicate hide working (Claud et al. 2019). The study of their teeth also supplies evidence of hide working (Krueger et al. 2017), as do faunal cut marks (Russo et al. 2023). While their work with skins is well known, in fact often represented in reconstructions as an action or gesture, particularly by women shown processing skins in dioramas from various eras, there does not seem to be any link to showing Neanderthals in appropriate clothing.

We can therefore imagine three scenarios: first, that the palaeo-artists – imbued with over 150 years of images of reconstructions of prehistoric people – couldn't imagine Neanderthals as anything other than nude or in loincloths;

second, they saw them as less gifted at sewing – not yet having the needle – and so chose to depict a simpler garment; or finally, they pictured them during milder interglacial phases and therefore less warmly dressed.

What has changed a bit since the 2010s, however, is the knowledge that Neanderthals used pigments (red and black), large feathers, and adornments such as raptor talons and shells (Fig. 18; Frayer 2019). Some reconstructions, therefore, have added these elements. The representations have also become more humanised since learning from aDNA analyses in 2010 that Neanderthals and modern humans interbred (Green 2010). Even though these reconstructions do not appear warmly dressed, they seem much more friendly than in earlier versions.

Fig. 17 Mister N. Neanderthal by A. Kennis and A. Kennis. Neanderthal Museum in Mettmann (Germany).

Abb. 17 Mister N. Neandertaler von A. Kennis und A. Kennis. Neanderthal Museum in Mettmann (Deutschland).



Fig. 18 Neanderthal bust by F. Fogliazza, Museo de la Evolución Humana, Burgos (Spain).

Abb. 18 Neanderthalerbüste von F. Fogliazza, Museo de la Evolución Humana, Burgos (Spanien).

Homo sapiens (300–10 kya ago) in present-day reconstructions

While Neanderthals tend to be depicted ›undressed‹ over the course of the 20th century – the reconstructions in which they are warmly clothed being the earliest – the opposite has happened with *Homo sapiens*. Recent representations of *Homo sapiens* in museums tend to show them warmly clothed for the most part (81%). Taking into account the cold climate, access to sewing needles and the desire (again and again) to emphasise our modern human superiority, individuals have tended to be better covered. Reconstructions are still inspired by ethnographic analogies but have shifted to individuals living under similar climatic and ecological

conditions, usually involving reindeer, such as Inuits or Chuckchi (Beyries 2002). These ethnographic comparisons are no longer associated with the idea of savagery, as most recent museums, such as the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris, or the *Musée des Confluences* in Lyon (France) address ethnographic questions with much greater respect and sensibility.

Archaeological evidence for hide working and sewing is better known for *Homo sapiens* than for Neanderthals – even for the Aurignacian and Gravettian periods before eyed needles – with numerous finds of scrapers (Aleo et al. 2021), punches, and more recently, evidence for shoes from the Cussac Cave (Ledoux et al. 2021).

Even so, arms, legs and feet are often shown bare, even for reconstructions of individuals who lived during the last glacial maximum. Dark skin colour for *Homo sapiens*, known from aDNA (Jablonski 2021; Ju/Mathieson 2021), has been gaining ground in new productions by paleo-artists since about 2014, albeit with considerable inertia, since the first mention by S. Belez et al. (2013) of a lightening of skin colour pigmentation for Europeans and Asiatic people between -19 kya to -11 kya (Belez et al. 2013, 24) or much later after 6 kya (Jablonski 2021, 720). For example, the



Fig. 19 Lady of Cavillon, by E. Daynès 2022. Cosquer Méditerranée, Marseille (France).

Abb. 19 Die Lady von Cavillon von E. Daynès. Cosquer Méditerranée, Marseille (Frankreich).

famous french sculptor E. Daynès – who had worked closely with scientists – did a reconstruction of the Pataud woman (Pataud 1, Dép. Dordogne) for the Musée des Confluences, Lyon (France), in 2014 with – for the first time – a more darker skin than she used to do for her previous Palaeolithic reconstruction. She did the same, more recently for her »Lady of Cavillon« of Cosquer Méditerranée Museum, Marseille (France), in 2022 (Fig. 19)¹². In 2018 or 2019, P. Froesch, on the indications of the anthropologist A. Balzeau, changed the 3D reconstruction of Cro-Magnon 1 he did, and add a darker skin pigmentation shortly after first public press publications (A. Balzeau 2023, pers. comm.).

In the United Kindom, the swedish sculptor O. Nilsson did a reconstruction of a bust of Cro-Magnon 1 with a dark skin, around 2019, facing a white skinned and red haired Neanderthal woman for the Brighton Museum.

For two illustrators used to work with museum as painters, A. Roudier and G. Tosello, the change in skin colour for *Homo sapiens* happened

for the first one in 2016 (Balzeau/Roudier 2016, 22, 65) and for the second only in 2024 for the »La vie au grand air«, a special exhibition of the Musée National de Préhistoire, Les Eyzies, Dordogne (France; La vie au grand air 2024, 149, 153) about open air settlements of the Solutrean culture, on the indications of the scientific comitee (C. Cretin, pers. comm.).

It is also to notice that dark skin colour for *Homo sapiens*, started to be more often reconstructed mainly since 2021 for TV documentaries (*First peoples*, 2015; *Ladies and Princes of Prehistory*, 2021; *Lady Sapiens*, 2021).

Conclusion

In the various examples cited here, one can see that palaeo-artists often sought to keep abreast of the archaeological knowledge of their time, even in the early 19th century, and that they often drew inspiration from ethnography (for good or bad). This seems only natural for such a thorny

12 2014 is also the beginning of much more prehistoric women (*Homo sapiens*) being reconstructed. In June 2025, for the

Lascaux 3 travelling exhibition in Bordeaux she modified the colour skin for her four *Homo Sapiens* individuals by darkening their

skin (Chancelade man, Lady of St Germain la Rivière, Cap Blanc Magdalenian woman and a non identified child).

issue as clothing, which was rarely preserved; nevertheless, the sources of comparison were not always taken from similar climatic and ecological conditions.

We might wonder whether old clichés engendered always the same images, creating what W. Stoczkowski, inspired by R. Barthes, called a ›misleading reality effect‹ (Stoczkowski 2010, 65): the more an image is repeated, the truer it seems to us. This is even more the case the more often an image is reproduced, to the point of forgetting that we don't know much about the body hair of Palaeolithic people or what they actually wore.

It is amusing to see images become credible again today after having previously been dismissed by scientists. For example, *Homo sapiens* are now shown well and warmly covered, as were the mannequins in the *Musée de l'Artillerie* since 1876 and the second edition of L. Figuiet's *L'homme primitif* in 1870, or are now reconstructed with dark skin, as were some L. Mascré's and A. Rutot's busts c. 1909–1914.

When it comes to the clothing of Neanderthals, the question continues to divide prehistorians. For example, Gilligan

(2018) and Collard et al. (2016) say that Neanderthal clothing must have been simple since they did not yet have eyed needles. But is this so obvious? Is it really evidence? As mentioned above, an article of É. Claud et al. (2019) put formal traceology of Neanderthal's tools showing evidence of use-wear associated with cutting, scraping and hide piercing.

So, do we clothe prehistoric mannequins in museums for reasons of archaeological knowledge or for the modesty of the audience? Do we leave them naked to display their anatomy or because we think they lived naked? Or is it because of the ›impression of reality‹, the heritage of ancient images and, therefore, the repetition of errors or approximations from the past, that we prefer recreating them in nakedness or loincloths instead of clad in warm clothes? Do we want – consciously or not – to give the impression that *Homo sapiens* is superior to other species? It is high time we asked ourselves these questions.

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