

The 300,000-Year-Old Story of Money and Power

Retrieved Wednesday 28th of June 2017 07:17:23 PM
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DUBLIN – Is Donald J. Trump a Neanderthal? Yes, of course. We all are.

One of the most interesting stories we're following is some 300,000 years old. It is the story of our species.

What does this have to do with money? We'll get to that...

Prehistoric Hanky-Panky

Two weeks ago came news of a long-lost cousin discovered in Morocco. The human family is much bigger... and much older than we had thought.

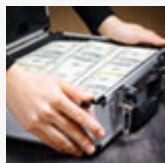
The new findings are possibly 300,000 years old – about 100,000 years older than the oldest as-yet-discovered “human.”

Scarcely 10 years ago, people believed the simple “out of Africa” story. Its hero was a single species of humans... perhaps descending from a single mutant. The tribe survived and spread all over the world, adapting to local conditions as necessary.

At least the story was easy to remember.

But it wasn't true.

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In the last few years, anthropologists have identified several other human species. The first, already well known, was *Homo neanderthalensis*, presumed to be our closest relative.

There are enough bones around, so we have a pretty good idea of what he looked like – heavier than modern humans, often depicted with red hair, and perhaps smarter.

The surprise came when scientists traced a small percentage of the modern human genome to these Neanderthal ancestors.

Europeans and Asians, but not Africans, all have a Neanderthal swinging from their family tree.

Then, it came out that there were several other skeletons in the closet.

Homo naledi was discovered in South Africa. *Homo sapiens Denisova* was found in Siberia. *Homo floresiensis* was uncovered in Indonesia. And the latest – the aforementioned bones found in Morocco – were found to be very close to human.

Many of these relatives lived in the same place and the same time as *Homo sapiens sapiens* – aka us.

So far, the DNA record shows a connection between us and Neanderthals as well as Denisovans.

As for the others, we wouldn't be surprised to find that they got up to hanky-panky from time to time, too, and that there are traces still of other human forerunners or competitors in us all.

So what?

It's none of our business who did what to whom out in the woods.

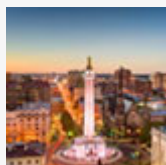
But one of the things we've been thinking about lately is how civilization came to be and what it meant. And it relates to money... real money... and the role it plays in our civil society.

Romanized Men

According to Freud (and many others), the distinguishing feature of civilization is restraint.

He didn't have to be a genius to come up with the idea. All he had to do was read Roman-era historians. They described the difference between Romans and barbarians as the difference between "reason" and "tempers and... insatiable desires."

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The Romans of the fifth century found it impossible to stop the barbarians from crossing the Rhine into the empire. The best they could hope for, they said, was to turn these unwanted immigrants into new, Romanized men... who would reject impulsivity and instead rely on rational thought and calm reflection.

It was a tall order. And it inevitably went bad. You could take a barbarian out of the forests, but you couldn't take the forest out of him.

The barbarians – Tervingi, Saxons, Salian Franks, Goths, Vandals, Huns... and tribes too numerous to mention – turned on their hosts, massacred and enslaved the Romans, and laid waste to most of Europe west of the Rhine.

That's the way civilization goes. Two steps forward. One step back.

Rome wasn't built in a day. It's not as easy as turning on a light. Civilization takes thousands of years and is never complete.

Even though, today, he puts on his Under Armour rather than his bearskin cloak, *Homo sapiens sapiens* has not noticeably changed in at least 200,000 years.

We still carry the genes of the forest, bog, and savannah creatures we come from... Neither bad nor good, but always subject to influence, we are still capable of slaughtering our rivals... and sacking Rome, just like our barbarian ancestors.

And when the money goes bad... restraint gives way... We show our teeth... and pull out our knives.

More to come...

Regards,