NEANDERTHALS ’SANG AND DANCED’

Steve Mithen of Reading University is in the news again about his forthcoming book – another on cognitive archaeology and evolution.

The BBC have picked up on his argument about neanderthals, language and symbolic behavior [Link]

Prof Mithen thinks the cave- dwellers would have enjoyed the rhythms and sounds made by rap artists.

He said: “People often portray Neanderthals as dull and grumpy but they had a strong sense of music.”

Their songs would have covered emotions such as embarrassment and happiness.

More than words

Prof Mithen told the BBC News website: “All people are

musical in the sense that they appreciate it in some way. We all respond to it.

“Music and language developed together. The Neanderthals would have had set songs and phrases, which could not be broken down like modern language.

“They would have used singing, clapping and dancing to communicate their state of mind. They didn’t have words.

“In a sense they were more musical than we are.”

Neanderthals would have sounded rather “nasal” in their singing because of their larger noses, Prof Mithen said.

Their get-togethers in caves helped group bonding.

Prof Mithen said: “There would have been a lot of singing together. Music is still used for a bonding groups today. Just look at football crowds, church choirs or kids in the playground.

I love the picture of the neanderthal (looks as if he’s wearing a denim shirt though) :

Neanderthals – they sang their way through history (photo BBC)

Contrast my comment of another account of dumb neanderthals and this fascinating topic of the coevolution of biology and culture – [Link]