

Kindred: Neanderthal Life, Love, Death and Art

Dr. Rebecca Wragg Sykes

Friday, March 25, 2022

14:00-16:00

Foredragssalen (4205-139)

Reception afterwards



biography

Dr Rebecca Wragg Sykes is an archaeologist, writer and Honorary Fellow in the School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology, University of Liverpool. Alongside her academic expertise, Rebecca has earned a reputation for exceptional public communication as a speaker, in print and broadcast. Her writing has featured in *The New York Times*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *Aeon* and elsewhere, and she has appeared on numerous radio programmes, podcasts and other media. Her first book *KINDRED: Neanderthal Life, Love, Death and Art* (2020) is a critically acclaimed bestseller, winner of the PEN Hessel-Tiltman Prize for history 2021, and winner of Current Archaeology Book of The Year 2020.

Materials,
Culture &
Heritage

abstract

The Neanderthals occupy a singularly seminal place within human origins. They were the first hominin beyond ourselves to be discovered, are the closest to us in evolutionary terms and have by far the richest array of evidence with which to understand their lives. This lecture will situate Neanderthals within the history of human origins as a discipline, and bring things up to date by exploring how the picture of this ancient species, and their Pleistocene world, has evolved over more than 160 years. Improved dating and palaeoclimatic frameworks, together with recognition of their vast geographic range, mean that notions of Neanderthals as primarily arctic-adapted fall short. Rather, we also see them living in warmer conditions, and landscapes from woodlands to coastal contexts. Moreover advances in science and archaeology over the past three or four decades have revolutionised thinking about their lives. This talk will review the evidence for complex cognition in technologies they mastered and invented, and consider the growing range of emergent materially-focused aesthetic behaviours together with diverse ways of dealing with the dead. Far from confined and unvarying, the overall impression of Neanderthal minds is that they were focused on quality and efficiency, yet also flexible and creative. The lecture will conclude by reflecting on the eventual disappearance of Neanderthals.

