

# The Department of Anthropology

*2009-2010 Colloquium Series*

*Presents:*

## João Zilhão

University of Bristol

Friday, April 9, 2010

4:00 P.M.

40 Schaeffer Hall

*“There is no such thing as a free Darwin:  
Neandertals and symbolic behavior”*

Recent research has demonstrated that, some 50,000 years ago, ten millennia before modern humans are first recorded in Europe, Iberian Neandertals used personal ornaments made of perforated and painted marine shell beads. In retrospect, these findings should come as no surprise, given equivalent evidence from the slightly later, so-called "Transitional" technocomplexes of France, Germany, Italy, Greece and Bulgaria, which, as proven for the Châtelperronian by the associated fossils, were made by Neandertals too. This evidence, however, has been stubbornly rejected by supporters of the notion that symbolism is an exclusive attribute of modern humans and that Neandertals, supposedly a different species, could not, by definition, have had the same cognition and the same behavior. The roots of this notion, refuted over the last decade by archeology, human paleontology and genetics, go back to Victorian views of evolution as progress and to the role played by Neandertals in those days as the "half-ape, half-man" missing link proving that humans had evolved too. The pervasive and enduring cultural influence of this notion goes a long way into explaining why Neandertal cognition remains a controversial issue.

*If you are a person with a disability who requires an accommodation in order to participate in this program, please contact the Department of Anthropology in advance at 335-0522.*