The *MUC19* Gene: An Evolutionary History of Recurrent Introgression and Natural Selection

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Abstract:

We study the gene *MUC19*, for which some modern humans carry a *Denisovan-like* haplotype. *MUC19* is a mucin, a glycoprotein that forms gels with various biological functions. We find diagnostic variants for the *Denisovan-like MUC19* haplotype at high frequencies in admixed Latin American individuals, and at highest frequency in 23 ancient Indigenous American individuals, all predating population admixture with Europeans and Africans. We find that the *Denisovan-like MUC19* haplotype is under positive selection and carries a higher copy number of a 30 base-pair variable number tandem repeat, and that copy numbers of this repeat are exceedingly high in American populations. Finally, some Neanderthals carry the *Denisovan-like MUC19* haplotype, and that it was likely introgressed into human populations through Neanderthal introgression rather than Denisovan introgression.

One-Sentence Summary: Modern humans and Neanderthals carry a Denisovan variant of the
MUC19 gene, which is under positive selection in populations of Indigenous American ancestry.

Main Text:

Most modern humans of non-African ancestry carry both Neanderthal and Denisovan genomic
variants [*1–3*]. While most of these variants are putatively neutral, some archaic variants found in
modern humans have been targets of positive natural selection [*4–9*]. Interbreeding with
Neanderthals and Denisovans may have thereby facilitated adaptation to the myriad novel
environments that modern humans encountered as they populated the globe [*10*]. Indeed, several
studies have identified signatures of adaptive introgression in Eurasian and Oceanian populations
[*11–20*]. Indigenous American populations, however, present great potential for studying the
underlying evolutionary processes of local adaptation [*21*]. In the 25,000 years since the first
individuals populated the American continent, these populations would have encountered
manifold novel environments, far different from the Beringian steppe, to which their ancestral
population was adapted [*22*].

Previous studies identified *MUC19*—a gene involved in immunity—as a candidate for adaptive
introgression among populations from the 1000 Genomes Project (1KG). These studies found the
region surrounding *MUC19* to harbor several Denisovan variants in Mexicans (MXL) [*23*]; and
reported that this region has one of the largest densities of Denisovan alleles in Mexicans [*24*].
MUC19 was also reported to be under positive selection in North American Indigenous
populations using Population Branch Statistic (*PBS*) and integrated Haplotype Scores (*iHS*)
methods for detecting positive selection [*25*].

In this study, we confirm and further characterize signatures of both introgression and positive
selection at *MUC19* in MXL. We find an archaic haplotype segregating at high frequency in most
populations on the American continent, which is also present in two of the late high-coverage
Neanderthal genomes—Chagyrskaya and Vindija. MXL individuals harbor Denisovan-specific
coding mutations in *MUC19* at high frequencies, and exhibit elevated copy number of a tandem
repeat region within *MUC19* compared to other worldwide populations. Our results point to a
complex pattern of multiple introgression events, from Denisovans to Neanderthals, and
Neanderthals to modern humans, which may have played a unique role in the evolutionary history
of Indigenous American populations.

Results

Signatures of adaptive introgression at *MUC19* in admixed populations from the Americas

We compiled introgressed tracts that overlap the NCBI RefSeq coordinates for *MUC19* (hg19,
Chr12:40787196-40964559) by at least one base pair. Figure 1A shows the density of introgressed
tracts for all non-African populations in the region, using introgression maps inferred with `hmmix`
[*26*]. All non-African populations harbor introgressed tracts overlapping this region, but at much

lower frequencies than the American populations (AMR tract frequency: ~0.183, non-AMR tract
frequency: ~0.087; Proportions Z-test, *P-value*: 5.011e-14; Fisher's Exact Test, *P-value*: 2.144e-
12; Table S1). Mexicans (MXL)—a population with a large component of Indigenous American
genetic ancestry (~48%; [27])—exhibits the highest frequency of the introgressed tracts (0.305;
Table S2). Given this, we examined a 742kb window containing the longest introgressed tract
found in Mexicans (hg19, Chr12:40272001-41014000; Figure S1). This region contains 135
Denisovan-specific SNPs, classified as such because they are rare or absent in African populations
(<1%), present in MXL (>1%), and shared uniquely with the Altai Denisovan. All 135 of these
SNPs are sequestered within a core 72kb region (hg19, Chr12:40759001-40831000; shaded gray
region in Figure 1A) that has the highest introgressed tract density amongst individuals in the 1KG
(see [51]), making both the 742kb and 72kb region outliers for Denisovan-specific SNP density in
MXL (742kb region *P-value*: <3.164e-4; 72kb region *P-value*: <3.389e-5; Figure S2; Table S3-
S4). In contrast, there are 80 Neanderthal-specific SNPs in MXL found within the larger 742kb
region (*P-value*: 0.159; Figure S3; Table S5), with only four located in the 72kb region (*P-value*:
0.263; Figure S3; Table S6).

To test if natural selection is acting on this region, we computed three statistics; one developed to
detect adaptive introgression ($U_{A,B,C}(w, x, y)$, *A:* African super population, *B:* non-African
populations, *C:* Altai Denisovan; (*w, x, y*) are allele frequency thresholds in *A, B* and *C,* [24]), and
two for positive selection (*PBS*, and *iHS*). For each gene, we computed $U_{AFR,B,Denisovan}(w=1\%,$
$x=30\%, y=100\%)$, which measures the number of Denisovan alleles found in the homozygous
state (100%) that are almost absent in Africans (<1%) and reach a frequency of at least 30% in a
given non-African population. Figure 1B shows that *MUC19* in MXL is an extreme outlier, as no
other gene in any non-African population exhibits such a large value of $U_{AFR,B,Denisovan}(1\%, 30\%,$
100%). When we compute the same statistic in windows instead of per gene, the *MUC19* region
is an outlier only in MXL and is zero for all other non-African populations (*P-value* 72kb region:
<3.284e-5; *P-value* 742kb region: <3.139e-4: Figure S4; Table S7-S8). Furthermore, we compared
the windowed $U_{AFR,B,Denisovan}(w=1\%, x=30\%, y=100\%)$ results with their corresponding
$Q95_{AFR,B,Denisovan}(w=1\%, y=100\%)$ value, which quantifies the 95th percentile of the Denisovan
allele frequencies found in a given non-African population *B* for the Denisovan alleles found in
the homozygous state (100%), that are almost absent in Africans (<1%), we find that for both the
72kb and 742kb *MUC19* regions that $Q95_{AFR,MXL,Denisovan}(w=1\%, y=100\%) = $ ~30%, which
suggests that both the 72kb and 742kb *MUC19* regions exhibit signals consistent with adaptive
introgression that are not observed in any other 1KG population (Figure S5-S6; Table S9).

We next computed $PBS_{MXL:CHB:CEU}$, where the Han Chinese (CHB) and Central European (CEU)
populations were used as control populations, for both the region corresponding to the longest
introgressed tract in MXL—742kb—and the 72kb region in *MUC19*, and find that both regions
exhibit statistically significant $PBS_{MXL:CHB:CEU}$ values compared to other 742kb ($PBS_{MXL:CHB:CEU}$:
0.066; *P-value*: 0.004) and 72kb ($PBS_{MXL:CHB:CEU}$: 0.127; *P-value*: 0.002) windows of the genome
respectively (Figure S7; Table S10-S11). We then computed $PBS_{MXL:CHB:CEU}$ for each SNP in the
742kb region. Figure 1C shows that in MXL there are many SNPs with statistically significant
PBS values in that region (417 out of 6144 SNPs), all which present values above the 99.95th
percentile of genome-wide $PBS_{MXL:CHB:CEU}$ values (Benjamini-Hochberg corrected *P-values*:
<0.01; see Supplemental Section S1 in [51]). We note that some SNPs have a larger
$PBS_{MXL:CHB:CEU}$ value near the *SLC2A13* gene than within the 72kb *MUC19* region, but this is due

to changes in the archaic allele frequency in CHB and CEU, as the introgressed tracts in these
populations are more sparse than the introgressed tracts in MXL (see tracts in Figure 1C). When
we partition the MXL population into two demes, consisting of individuals with more than 50%
and those with less than 50% Indigenous American ancestry genome-wide [27], and recompute
PBS, we find that *PBS* values for archaic variants are elevated among individuals with a higher
proportion of Indigenous American ancestry, suggesting that this region was likely targeted by
selection before admixture with European and African populations (Figure S8; Table S10-S11).

To exclude the possibility that demographic events such as a founder effect explain the observed
signatures of positive selection, we simulated the best fitting demographic parameters inferred for
the MXL population [28] to obtain the expected null distribution of *PBS* values. We first showed
that *PBS* has power to detect adaptive introgression under this demographic model (see
Supplemental Section S1 in [51]). We found that demographic forces alone result in lower *PBS*
values compared to what is observed at this gene region (see Supplemental Section S1 in [51]),
even when we consider a very conservative null model of heterosis. Furthermore, to also consider
haplotype-based measures of positive selection, we computed the integrated haplotype score (*iHS*)
for every 1KG population using `selscan` [29] to provide haplotype-based evidence of natural
selection ([51]). Among all 1KG populations, MXL is the only population with an elevated
proportion of SNPs with normalized |*iHS*| > 2 in either the 742kb (599 out of 2248 SNPs) or 72kb
region (229 out of 425 SNPs; Table S12-S13). In MXL we find that 130 out of the 135 Denisovan-
specific SNPs in the 72kb region have normalized |*iHS*| > 2, reflective of positive selection (Figure
S9; Table S12-S13, see Supplemental Section S2 in [51]), which supports our previous allele
frequency-based tests of natural selection.

<u>Admixed individuals exhibit an elevated number of variable number tandem repeats at *MUC19*</u>

MUC19 contains a 30 base pair variable number tandem repeat (VNTR; hg19, Chr12:40876395-
40885001; Figure S10), located 45.4kb away from the core 72kb haplotype, but within the larger
742kb introgressed region. To test if individuals who harbor an introgressed tract overlapping the
repeat region differ in the number of repeats compared to individuals who do not harbor
introgressed tracts, we calculated the number of repeats of the 30bp motif in the 1KG individuals
(see [51]; Figure S11; Table S14-S15). For each individual, we first report the average number of
repeats between their two chromosomes. The genomes of the four archaic individuals do not harbor
a higher copy number of tandem repeats (Altai Denisovan: 296 copies; Altai Neanderthal: 379
copies; Vindija Neanderthal: 268 copies; and Chagyrskaya Neanderthal: 293 copies). Among all
individuals from the 1KG, we identified outlier individuals with elevated number of repeats above
the 95th percentile (>487 repeats; dashed line in Figure 2). We found that MXL individuals have
on average ~493 repeats and individuals from the admixed American super population have on
average ~417 repeats (Figure 2A; Table S16-S17). In contrast, non-admixed American populations
have an average of ~341 to ~365 repeats (Figure 2A; Table S16). Out of all the outlier individuals
from the 1KG (>487 repeats), a significant proportion of them (~77%) are from admixed American
populations (Proportions Z-test, *P-value*: 3.971e-17; Table S18-S21; Figure S12). Outlier
individuals from the Americas also carry a significantly higher copy number of tandem repeats
compared to the other outlier individuals from non-admixed American populations (Mann-

Whitney U, *P-value*: 5.789e-7; Figure S12; Table S18-S21). In MXL, we find that exactly 50% of individuals exhibit an elevated copy number of tandem repeats (Table S16).

Within individuals exhibiting an outlier number of repeats (>487), a significant proportion (~86%) have an introgressed tract overlapping the repeat region and these individuals harbor an elevated number of repeats compared to outlying individuals who do not harbor an introgressed tract overlapping the VNTR region (Proportions *Z*-test, *P-value:* 2.127e-29; Mann-Whitney U, *P-value:* 1.398e-06; Figure S13; Table S18-S21). All outlying MXL individuals carry at least one introgressed tract that overlaps with the VNTR region (Figure 2). MXL has more individuals exhibiting an elevated copy number (>487 repeats) than any other 1KG population, and there is a positive correlation between the number of repeats and the number of introgressed tracts that overlap with the VNTR present in a MXL individual (Spearman's ρ: 0.885; *P-value*: 2.839e-22; Figure 2B; Figure S14; Table S22). We find that among MXL individuals, the number of repeats and the Indigenous American ancestry proportion at the repeat region is significantly positively correlated (Spearman's ρ: 0.483; *P-value*: 2.940e-4; Figure 2C; Figure S15, Table S23-S24), while the African (Spearman's ρ: -0.289; *P-value*: 2.072e-2; Figure S15, Table S23-S24) and European (Spearman's ρ: -0.353; *P-value*: 4.191e-3; Figure S15, Table S23-S24) ancestry proportions have a significant negative correlation. Taken together, in MXL, we find that an individual's VNTR copy number is highly predicted by the number of introgressed tracts that overlap the VNTR. To a lesser extent, the VNTR copy number is also predicted by the Indigenous American ancestry proportion in the repeat region, indicating that individuals with elevated VNTR copy number have higher proportions of Indigenous American ancestry and harbor the introgressed haplotype. Individuals who carry an elevated number of the *MUC19* VNTR are likely to also carry the archaic haplotype, especially in admixed American populations where the archaic haplotype of *MUC19* is found at highest frequencies (Mann-Whitney U, *P-value:* 1.597e-87; Figure S13; Figure 2; Table S18-S21).

Given the difficulties of calling numbers of repeats from short-read data, we examined long-read sequence data from the Human Pangenome Reference Consortium (HPRC) and Human Genome Structural Variant Consortium (HGSVC) [42]. These corroborated our findings (Figure S10; Figure S16), revealing an extra 424 copies of the 30bp *MUC19* tandem repeat exclusively in American samples, arranged in four additional segments of 106 repeats (at 3,171 bp each). This structural variant is exceptionally large; it effectively doubles the size of the ~12kb coding exon that harbors the tandem repeat (Figures S10).

Introgression introduced missense variants at *MUC19*

Inspecting the 135 Denisovan-specific SNPs and 4 Neanderthal-specific SNPs in the core 72kb region reveals that some modern humans carry two Denisovan-specific synonymous sites and nine Denisovan-specific non-synonymous sites (Table S25). We quantified the allele frequencies for these nine Denisovan-specific missense variants in present-day populations and in 23 ancient Indigenous American genomes that predate European colonization and the African slave trade (Figure 3A; Table S26-S33). In the admixed American superpopulation, we find that the Denisovan-specific missense mutations are segregating at the highest frequencies (frequency range

in AMR,: ~0.154 - ~0.157) compared to all other 1KG superpopulations (frequency range in non-
AMR,: ~0 - ~0.108; Table S27-S28). When we stratify by population instead of by
superpopulation, we find the Denisovan-specific missense mutations are segregating at
frequencies between ~0.069 and ~0.305 amongst admixed American populations, at varying
frequencies between ~0.005 and ~0.157 throughout European, East Asian, and South Asian
populations, and at the highest frequency in MXL where all nine Denisovan-specific missense
mutations are segregating at a frequency of ~0.305 (Figure 3A; Table S29). We find the mean
Denisovan-specific missense mutation frequency to be positively correlated with the introgressed
tract frequency per population (Pearson's ρ: 0.976; *P-value*: 5.306e-16; Figure S17).

We then evaluate the frequency of the nine Denisovan-specific missense mutations in 23 ancient
pre-European colonization American individuals, and find that each of the nine Denisovan-specific
missense mutations are segregating at higher frequencies than in any admixed American
population in the 1KG, but at statistically similar frequencies with respect to MXL (see [51]; Figure
3A; Table S29-S32). These ancient individuals were sampled from a wide geographic and
temporal range (Figure S18; Table S26; [51]) and do not comprise a single population, yet we detect
the presence of the Denisovan-specific missense mutations in sampled individuals from Alaska,
Montana, California, Ontario, Central Mexico, Peru, and Patagonia (Table S30). When we
quantify the frequency of these mutations in 22 unadmixed Indigenous Americans from the Simons
Genome Diversity Project (SGDP), we find that all nine Denisovan-specific missense variants are
segregating at a frequency of ~0.364, which is statistically similar to the ancient American
frequencies (see [51]; Table S31-S32), and higher than any admixed American population in the
1KG, albeit at statistically similar frequencies with respect to MXL (Table S31-S32). Given that
all nine of the missense mutations are found within a ~17.5kb region, we quantified the frequency
of the Denisovan-specific missense mutation at position Chr12:40808726 in both the ancient
individuals and admixed Americans in the 1KG, as this position has genotype information in 20
out of the 23 ancient American individuals (Table S30). We then assessed the relationship between
Indigenous American ancestry proportion at the 72kb region, and this Denisovan-specific missense
mutation frequency. We find a positive and significant relationship (Pearson's ρ: 0.489; *P-value*:
1.982e-23; Figure S19) between an individual's Indigenous American Ancestry proportion and
their respective Denisovan-specific missense mutation frequency, which suggests that recent
admixture in the Americas may have diluted the introgressed ancestry at the 72kb region. We also
quantify the frequency of these variants in 44 African individuals from the SGDP, and find all nine
Denisovan-specific missense variants at a frequency of ~0.011, in a single chromosome from a
Khomani San individual (Table S33).

To estimate the potential effect of these missense mutations on the MUC19 protein, we relied on
Grantham scores [30]. One of the Denisovan-specific missense mutations found at position
Chr12:40821871 (rs17467284 in Figure 3B) results in an amino acid change with a Grantham
score of 102. This substitution is classified as moderately radical [31] and suggests that the amino
acid introduced through introgression is likely to impact the translated protein's structure or
function. This Denisovan-specific missense mutation falls within an exon that is highly conserved
across vertebrates (PhyloP score: 5.15, *P-value:* 7.08e-6; Figure 3B) [*32*], indicating that this
amino acid residue is likely functionally important, and that the amino acid change introduced by
the Denisovan-specific missense mutation may have a significant structural or functional impact.
Furthermore, this missense mutation falls between two Von Willebrand factor D domains, which

play an important role in the formation of mucin polymers and gel-like matrices [*33*]. Our results
suggest that this Denisovan-specific missense mutation is a potential candidate for impacting its
translated protein and may affect the polymerization properties of *MUC19* and the viscosity of the
mucin matrix.

<u>Identification of the most likely donor of the introgressed haplotype at *MUC19*</u>

To identify the most likely archaic donor, we investigated the patterns of haplotype divergence at
MUC19 by comparing the modern human haplotypes in the 1KG in the 72kb region (see Methods;
shaded region in Figure 1A) to the high-coverage archaic humans. We calculated the sequence
divergence—the number of pairwise differences normalized by the effective sequence length—
between all haplotypes in the 1KG and the genotypes for the Altai Denisovan and the three high-
coverage Neanderthal individuals (Figure S20-S22; Tables S34-S35). Haplotypes from the
Americas exhibit a bimodal distribution of sequence divergence for affinities to the Altai
Denisovan, which we do not observe for the African haplotypes (Figure 4A), as expected for an
introgressed region. When comparing to all four high-coverage archaic genomes at the 72kb region
(Figure 4B), there is a clear pattern of sequence divergence for the introgressed haplotypes found
in the American super-population of the 1KG (AMR). Interestingly, Figure 4B shows that African
haplotypes are closer in sequence divergence to the Altai Neanderthal than to the Altai Denisovan,
but the value is not statistically significant (Dataset 1 [52]; [51]). The Altai Neanderthal itself is
significantly more distant than expected from the Altai Denisovan (sequence divergence:
0.003782*, P-value:* 0.002, Figure S23, Table S36), and this larger than expected divergence
explains why African haplotypes appear closer to the Altai Neanderthal in this region. We
corroborate the pattern observed in Figure 4 using PCA to visualize the haplotype structure in this
region (Figure S24).

Despite our $U_{AFR,MXL,Denisovan}$*(1%, 30%, 100%)* and archaic SNP density results demonstrating that
the introgressed haplotype at the 72kb region shares the most alleles with the Altai Denisovan
(Figure 4B), we find that this region is not statistically significantly closer to the Altai Denisovan
individual than expected from the genomic background of sequence divergence (sequence
divergence: 0.00097*, P-value:* 0.237, Figure S25, Table S37). However, this is not unusual, given
that the Altai Denisovan is not genetically closely related to Denisovan introgressed segments in
modern humans (see Supplemental Section S5 in [51]), which might suggest that the Denisovan
donor population of the 72kb region in *MUC19* is not closely related to the Altai Denisovan
individual. Furthermore, the 72kb region is also not statistically significantly closer to
Neanderthals than expected from the genomic background of sequence divergence (sequence
divergence from the Altai Neanderthal: 0.003648*, P-value:* 0.995; Chagyrskaya Neanderthal:
0.001818, *P-value:* 0.811; Vindija Neanderthal: 0.001816, *P-value:* 0.806; Figure S25, Table S37).

As an additional approach, we used the *D+* statistic to assess which archaic human exhibits the
most allele sharing with the introgressed haplotype at the 72kb region in *MUC19* [34, 35]. We
performed *D+ (P1, P2; P3, Outgroup)* tests with the following configurations: the Yoruban
population (YRI) as *P1*, the focal MXL individual (NA19664) with two copies of the introgressed
haplotype with an affinity to the Altai Denisovan as *P2*, and one of the four high-coverage archaic

genomes as *P3*; we use the EPO ancestral allele call from the six primate alignment as the Outgroup. We exclusively observe a positive and significant $D+$ value ($D+$: 0.743, *P-value*: 1.386e-5; Figure S26; Table S38) when the Altai Denisovan is used as *P3* (the putative donor population). Conversely, when any of the three Neanderthals are used as *P3*, we observe non-significant $D+$ values (*P3*: Altai Neanderthal, $D+$: -0.622, *P-value*: 0.999; *P3*: Chagyrskaya Neanderthal, $D+$: 0.175, *P-value*: 0.183; *P3*: Vindija Neanderthal, $D+$: 0.182, *P-value*: 0.174; Figure S26; Table S38). These $D+$ suggest that the introgressed haplotype at the 72kb *MUC19* region shares more alleles with the Altai Denisovan, which is not observed with any of the three Neanderthals and provides evidence that the introgressed haplotype found in modern humans is *Denisovan-like*.

When we consider the 742kb region in MXL, we find that it is closest to the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals, and significantly closer than expected from the genomic background (sequence divergence from the Chagyrskaya Neanderthal: 0.000661, *P-value*: 0.006; from the Vindija Neanderthal: 0.000656, *P-value*: 0.007; Figure S27-S30; Table S39-41; Dataset 2 [52]; [51]. We also tested whether this region is statistically significantly closer to the Altai Denisovan than expected from the genomic background and found that this tract in MXL is also significantly closer than expected to the Altai Denisovan, albeit not as close when compared to the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals (sequence divergence from the Altai Denisovan: 0.000806, *P-value*: 0.019; Figure S27-S30; Table S39-S41). We then performed $D+$ analyses for the 742kb region with identical configurations as for the 72kb region and observe positive and significant $D+$ values when *P3* is Chagyrskaya ($D+$: 0.381, *P-value*: 7.375e-6; Figure S31; Table S42), and Vindija Neanderthals ($D+$: 0.383, *P-value*: 7.505e-6; Figure S31; Table S42), but not when the Altai Neanderthal is *P3* ($D+$: 0.091, *P-value*: 1.442e-1; Figure S31; Table S42). $D+$ is, however, significant when the Altai Denisovan is *P3* ($D+$: 0.377, *P-value*: 9.889e-8; Figure S31; Table S42). These $D+$ results are consistent with our sequence divergence results, which indicate that the introgressed haplotype at the 742kb *MUC19* region has a high affinity for the Altai Denisovan and the two late Neanderthals, but not the Altai Neanderthal (Figures S20-S31; Tables S34-S42).

Given the high density of Denisovan-specific alleles (Figure S2; Table S4), the sequence divergence, and $D+$ results for the 72kb and 742kb region, the most parsimonious explanation is that a Denisovan population could have introduced this haplotype into non-Africans. However, our 742kb results also suggest a Neanderthal population could have introduced the introgressed haplotype. This is further supported by the sequence divergence results at the 72kb region where late Neanderthals exhibit intermediate distance to the introgressed haplotype (Figure 4B), suggesting they harbor some of the Denisovan alleles.

Neanderthals introduce *Denisovan-like* introgression into non-African modern humans

Based on sequence divergence, the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals carry a 742kb haplotype that is most similar to the Altai Neanderthal, with the exception of the 72kb region. To understand why the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals exhibit intermediate levels of sequence divergence with the introgressed haplotype present in MXL at the 72kb region in *MUC19* relative to the Altai Denisovan and Altai Neanderthal (see the α ellipse in Figure 4B), we computed the

number of heterozygous sites for each archaic human. Because the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals present intermediate sequence divergences, we expected these two individuals to have more heterozygosity than the Altai Neanderthal. At the 72kb region in *MUC19*, we observe that the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals carry an elevated number of heterozygous sites (Chagyrskaya heterozygous sites: 168, *P-value:* 2.307e-4; Vindija heterozygous sites: 171, *P-value:* 3.282e-4; Figure 5A; Figure S32; Table S43) that is higher than those of the Altai Neanderthal (heterozygous sites: 1, *P-value*: 0.679; Figure5A; Figure S32; Table S43) and the Altai Denisovan (heterozygous sites: 6, *P-value*: 0.455; Figure5A; Figure S32; Table S43). The Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals carry a higher number of heterozygous sites than all African individuals (~75, *P-value*: 0.424; Figure 5A; Figure S33; Table S44), and have a more similar pattern to non-African individuals carrying exactly one *Denisovan-like* haplotype (~287, *P-value*: 3.157e-4; yellow X's in Figure 5A; Figure S33; Table S44). This observation runs opposite to the genome-wide expectation for Neanderthals, as archaic humans have much lower heterozygosity than modern humans (genome-wide heterozygosity is ~0.00014 - ~0.00017 for the Neanderthals, ~0.00019 for the Denisovan, and ~0.001 for Africans modern humans; Figure S34; Table S45).

Within modern humans, we find that individuals carrying exactly one *Denisovan-like* haplotype at the 72kb region harbor significantly more heterozygous sites at *MUC19* compared to the rest of their genome (average number of heterozygous sites: ~287, *P-value*: 3.157e-4; Figure S33; Table S44), which surpasses the number of heterozygous sites at *MUC19* of any African individual (Figure 5A). Individuals carrying two *Denisovan-like* haplotypes harbor significantly fewer heterozygous sites than expected at *MUC19* relative to the rest of their genome (average number of heterozygous sites: ~4, *P-value*: 6.945e-4; Figure S33; Table S44), while African individuals harbor the expected number of heterozygous sites (average number of heterozygous sites: ~75, *P-value*: 0.424; Figure S33; Table S44). Given that the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals and non-African individuals who harbor one copy of the *Denisovan-like* haplotype exhibit an excess of heterozygous sites at the 72kb region, we hypothesized that the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals also harbor one *Denisovan-like* haplotype. This arrangement would explain the elevated number of heterozygous sites and the intermediary sequence divergences with respect to the introgressed haplotype.

To test this hypothesis, we first performed additional tests for gene flow between the archaic individuals using the *D+* statistic within the 72kb *MUC19* region that provided evidence that the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals harbor one copy of the *Denisovan-like* haplotype. For these comparisons the Altai Neanderthal is *P1*, either the Chagyrskaya or Vindija Neanderthals are *P2*, and the Altai Denisovan is *P3*, we observe significant and positive *D+* values supporting gene flow between the Denisovan and the Chagyrskaya (*D+:* 0.783; *P-value:* 0.029) and Vindija (*D+:* 0.819; *P-value:* 0.018) Neanderthals (Figure S35; Table S46). To further investigate whether the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals harbor one *Denisovan-like* haplotype in the 72kb region, we used BEAGLE to phase the 72kb region. As no phasing has been done for archaic humans, we tested the reliability of using the 1KG as a reference panel by constructing a synthetic 72kb region. We sampled one allele from the Altai Neanderthal and one allele from the Altai Denisovan at heterozygous sites in either the Chagyrskaya or Vindija Neanderthals. We found that we could phase the synthetic individual perfectly at this region (see Supplemental Sections S3-S4 in [51]). Encouraged by these results, we phased the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals at the 72kb

region, and confirmed they carry one haplotype that is similar to the Altai Neanderthal, and one haplotype that is similar to the *Denisovan-like* haplotype in MXL. Relative to the Altai Neanderthal, the Chagyrskaya *Neanderthal-like* haplotype exhibits 3.5 differences, and the Vindija exhibits 4 differences (Figure 5B; Table S47). Relative to the Altai Denisovan, the Chagyrskaya *Denisovan-like* haplotype exhibits 43 differences, and the Vindija haplotype exhibits 41 differences (Figure 5B; Table S47). As expected, the phased *Denisovan-like* haplotype in these two Neanderthals is closest to the *Denisovan-like* haplotype in MXL; the Chagyrskaya exhibits 5 differences, and the Vindija Neanderthal exhibits 4 differences (Figure 5B; Table S48). We show that, in the 72kb region, the introgressed haplotype in MXL is statistically significantly closer to the phased *Denisovan-like* haplotype present in Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals (sequence divergence from Chagyrskaya Neanderthal haplotype: 0.000104, *P-value:* 0.003; sequence divergence from Vindija Neanderthal haplotype: 0.000083, *P-value:* 0.002; Figure S36; Table S48; Dataset 3 [52]; [51]). Due to the potential introduction of biases when phasing ancient DNA data, to investigate if the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals carry a *Denisovan-like* haplotype we developed an approach called Pseudo-Ancestry Painting (*PAP*, see [51]) to assign the two alleles at a heterozygous site to two source individuals. We found that using an MXL (NA19664) and a YRI (NA19190) individual as sources maximizes the number of heterozygous sites in the Chagyrskaya (*PAP* Score: 0.94, *P-value:* 3.683e-4) and Vindija (*PAP* Score: 0.929, *P-value:* 8.679e-05) Neanderthals (Figure S37; Table S49).

In sum, our analyses suggest that some non-Africans carry a mosaic region of archaic ancestry: a small *Denisovan-like* haplotype (72kb) embedded in a larger Neanderthal haplotype (742kb), that was inherited through Neanderthals, who themselves acquired Denisovan ancestry from an earlier introgression event (Figure S38). This is consistent with the literature, where Denisovan introgression into Neanderthals is rather common [*37, 38*]. Thus, we refer to the mosaic haplotype found in modern humans as the archaic haplotype.

Discussion

The study of adaptive archaic introgression has illuminated candidate genomic regions that affect the health and overall fitness of global populations. In this study, we pinpointed several aspects of the gene *MUC19* that highlight its importance as a candidate to study adaptive introgression: one of the haplotypes that span this gene in modern humans is of archaic origin; modern humans inherited this haplotype from Neanderthals, who in turn inherited it from Denisovans; the haplotype introduced nine missense mutations that are at high frequency in both Indigenous and Admixed American populations; individuals with the archaic haplotype carry a massive coding VNTR expansion relative to the non-archaic haplotype, and their functional differences may help explain how mainland Indigenous Americans adapted to their environments, which remains under-explored. This study adds an example to the growing literature of natural selection acting on archaic alleles at coding sites, or possibly an example of natural selection acting on human VNTRs, a developing research frontier [see, 39].

A larger implication of our findings is that archaic ancestry could have been a useful source of standing genetic variation as the early Indigenous American populations adapted to new

environments, with genes like *MUC19* and other mucins possibly mediating important fitness
effects [*40*]. The variation in the *MUC19* coding VNTR in global populations dovetails with this
idea and adds to a growing body of evidence for the important role of structural variants in human
genomics and evolution [*41-42*]. In American populations, particular haplotypes carrying the most
extreme copy numbers were selected and are now relatively frequent. This VNTR expansion
effectively doubles the functional domain of this mucin, indicating an adaptive role driven by
environmental pressures particular to the Americas. However, we cannot know whether the non-
synonymous variants or the VNTR is driving natural selection as they are linked in haplotypes,
and our evidence for positive selection is tied to SNP variation and not to the VNTR itself.

Another interesting aspect of *MUC19* is the evolutionary history of the introgressed region. Our
observation of a 72kb Denisovan haplotype found in Neanderthals and non-African modern
humans that is nested within a larger Neanderthal haplotype, suggests that the smaller Denisovan
haplotype was first introgressed into Neanderthals, who later admixed with modern humans to
introduce the full 742 kb haplotype. While the Altai Neanderthal does not harbor the Denisovan
haplotype at the 72kb region, the other two chronologically younger Neanderthals (Chagyrskaya
and Vindija) do. We phased these younger Neanderthals (see Supplementary Sections S3-S5 in
[*51*]) and showed that they harbor exactly one Denisovan-like haplotype, which explains why they
exhibit an excess of heterozygosity. The *Denisovan-like* haplotype in the younger Neanderthals is
also statistically significantly closer to the archaic haplotype present in MXL (Figure S36; Table
S48), providing additional evidence that modern humans obtained this haplotype through an
interbreeding event with Neanderthals. Despite the introgressed archaic haplotype having an
excessive amount of shared alleles with the Altai Denisovan at the 72kb region, the Altai
Denisovan harbors several private mutations—14 and 6 mutations in the homozygous and
heterozygous state respectively—that are absent across all 287 *Denisovan-like* haplotypes in the
1KG, suggesting that the introgressing Denisovan population may not be closely related to Altai
Denisovan (see Supplemental Section S5; [*51*]). Indeed, the introgressed haplotype in the 72kb
region is present at low frequencies in other non-African populations including Papuans—where
the genome-wide Denisovan ancestry of Papuans has been estimated to originate from a population
of Denisovans that was not closely related to the Altai Denisovan [*33*]. Finding two highly
divergent haplotypes maintained in polymorphism in two Neanderthal populations, and finding
the archaic haplotype at high frequencies in American populations but not at fixation may point to
a balanced polymorphism [*45*]. More generally, the evolutionary history of this region suggests a
complex history that involves recurrent introgression and natural selection, and it parallels
complex introgression patterns from other regions of the genome [*46–48*].

Finally, we find a single San individual who carries the nine Denisovan missense variants in
heterozygous form, uniquely among all African individuals considered here. The sequence
divergence between this San haplotype and the archaic MXL haplotype at the 72kb region is high
(0.001342), further supporting the origin of the archaic haplotype in non-Africans as introgressed.
Khoe-San populations are estimated to have diverged from other African groups 120 thousand
years ago [*43*]. Finding a divergent haplotype in the San is consistent with a previous study [*44*],
as ~1% of their ancestry can be attributed to lineages diverged from the main human lineage
beyond 1 million years ago. We note that this San individual does not harbor an extended number
of repeat copies of the VNTR (301 copies), which further supports the importance of the VNTR

expansion in the Americas. Furthermore, we cannot determine if this variant found its way into the San through modern admixture of non-African ancestry into Sub-Saharan populations.

Perhaps the largest knowledge gap concerning why the archaic haplotype of *MUC19* would be under positive selection is its underlying function. Mucins are secreted glycoproteins responsible for the gel-like properties and the viscosity of the mucus [*49*]. Mucins are characterized by proline, threonine, and serine (PTS) tandem repeats, which in *MUC19* are structured into 30bp tandem repeats. The massive difference in copy numbers of the 30bp PTS tandem repeat domains carried by individuals harboring the *Human-like* and archaic haplotypes strongly suggests *MUC19* variants differ in function as a consequence of different molecular binding affinities between variants. This is the case in other mucins, such as *MUC7*, where variants carrying different numbers of PTS repeats exhibit different microbe-binding properties [*40*]. If the two variants of *MUC19* also have differential binding properties, this would lend support to why positive selection would increase the frequency of the archaic haplotype in American populations. Yet, there is limited medical literature associating variation in *MUC19* with human fitness. Further experimental validation of how VNTRs and the Denisovan-specific missense mutations affect MUC19 function is necessary to understand the effect the archaic haplotype may exert on the translated *MUC19* protein, and how it modifies its function during the formation of mucin polymers.

Methods developed in evolutionary biology can be useful for identifying candidate variants underlying biological functions. Future functional and evolutionary studies of the *MUC19* region will not only provide insight into specific mechanisms of how variation at this gene confers a selective advantage, but also specific evolutionary events that occurred in the history of humans. Beyond improving our understanding of how archaic variants facilitated adaptation in novel environments, our findings also highlight the importance of studying archaic introgression in understudied populations, such as admixed populations from the Americas [*50*]. Genetic variation in American populations is less well-characterized than other global populations; it is difficult to deconvolve Indigenous ancestries from European, African, and—to a lesser extent—South Asian ancestries, following 500 years of European colonization [*29*]. This knowledge gap is exacerbated by the high cost of performing genomic studies, building infrastructure, and generating scientific capacity in Latin America—but it is a worthwhile investment—as our study shows that leveraging these populations can lead to the identification of exciting candidate loci that can expand our understanding of adaptation from archaic standing variation.

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Acknowledgments: We would like to thank Alyssa Funk for contributing to the development of the *PBS* analysis, Ratchanon Pornmongkolsuk for early visualizations of global frequencies of *MUC19*, and Diego Ortega del Vecchyo and Paolo Provero for their insightful comments and discussion. We would also like to thank the Crawford and Ramachandran laboratories, especially Ria Vinod, Julian Stamp, Chibuikem Nwizu, Cole Williams, and Leah Darwin for their invaluable feedback and support throughout the duration of this project. Part of this research was conducted using computational resources and services at the Center for Computation and Visualization, Brown University.

Funding:

Author contributions:

Conceptualization: FAV, DP, EHS

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Competing interests: Authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Data and materials availability: The 1,000 Genomes Project Phase III, Simons Genome
Diversity Project, high-coverage archaic genomes, Human Pangenome Reference Consortium, and
Human Genome Structural Variant Consortium datasets are all publicly available. Ancient
American genomes are available after signing data agreements from the original publications. All
software used in this study is publicly available, and all statistical tests are described in the
methods. All the information needed to reproduce the results in this study is described in the
methods and supplemental methods. Additionally, the original code and final results can be found
at: https://github.com/David-Peede/MUC19; intermediary files used to produce our final results
can be found at: https://doi.org/10.5061/dryad.z612jm6pj; and the introgressed tracts, repeat
information, phased late Neanderthal haplotypes, and Datasets S1-S4 can be found at:
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15042423.

Supplementary Materials

Materials and Methods

Supplementary Text

Figs. S1 to S60

Tables S1 to S67

Datasets S1 to S4

References (*52-102*)

Figure 1. Signals of adaptive introgression at *MUC19*.

(**A**) Density of introgressed tracts inferred using `hmmix` that overlap *MUC19* for the 1KG (black
outline) and stratified by superpopulation—Admixed Americans (AMR) in bluish green, South
Asians (SAS) in reddish purple, East Asians (EAS) in blue, and Europeans (EUR) in vermillion.
The gray shaded region corresponds to the focal 72kb region, which is the densest contiguous
region of introgressed tracts longer than 40kb. (**B**) $U_{AFR,B,Denisovan}$(*1%, 30%, 100%*) values for each
non-African population, stratified by superpopulation, per NCBI Refseq gene (gray X's), where
MUC19 is denoted as a yellow X. (**C**) Population Branch Statistic (*PBS*) for the Mexican
population (MXL) in the 1KG using the Han Chinese (CHB) and Central European (CEU)
populations in the 1KG as control populations ($PBS_{MXL:CHB:CEU}$) for all SNPs in the 742kb region
that corresponds to the longest introgressed tract found in MXL. The orange squares represent
Denisovan-specific SNPs, the sky blue diamonds represent Neanderthal-specific SNPs, and the
reddish purple pentagons represent shared archaic SNPs—note that all of these archaic SNP
partitions are rare or absent in Africa and present in MXL (see [51]). The black triangles represent
SNPs present across both modern human populations and the archaics, while the gray circles
represent SNPs private to modern humans. The black dashed line represents the 99.95th percentile
of $PBS_{MXL:CHB:CEU}$ scores for all SNPs genome-wide, and the gray shaded region corresponds to
the focal 72kb region—the same gray shaded region in panel A. The *MUC19* and *LRRK2* genes
are fully encompassed within the 742kb region, while ~65% of *SLC2A13* overlaps the 742kb
region. Below the $PBS_{MXL:CHB:CEU}$ points are the introgressed tracts for MXL (bluish green), CHB
(blue), and CEU (vermillion) sorted from shortest to longest within each population.
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Figure 2. Copy number variation of a 30 base pair variable number tandem repeat motif in
the 1KG individuals at *MUC19*.

(**A**) Average number of repeat copies between an individual's two chromosomes for archaic
individuals (black X's), individuals who do not harbor an introgressed tract (sky blue X's),
individuals with one introgressed tract (yellow X's), and individuals with two introgressed tracts
(bluish green X's) determined by the number of introgressed tracts inferred using `hmmix`
overlapping the *MUC19* VNTR, for each population in the 1KG. The mean number of repeat
copies stratified by population is denoted by a grey diamond and the average number of repeat
copies amongst individuals who carry exactly zero, one, and two introgressed tracts are denoted
by sky blue, yellow, and bluish green circles respectively and are stratified by population. The
black dashed line denotes the outlier threshold, which corresponds to the 95th percentile of the
1KG repeat copies distribution. Repeat copies appeared similar to the reference human genome
(287.5 copies) in the Altai Denisovan (296 copies) and Altai (379 copies), Vindija (268 copies),
and Chagyrskaya (293 copies) Neanderthal genomes. (**B**) The relationship between the average
number of repeat copies between a MXL individual's two chromosomes and the number of
introgressed tracts overlapping the *MUC19* VNTR region. Note that there is a significant positive
correlation between the number of repeat copies and the number of introgressed tracts present in
an MXL individual (Spearman's ρ: 0.885; *P-value*: 2.839e-22). (**C**) The relationship between the
average number of repeat copies between a MXL individual's two chromosomes and the
proportion of Indigenous American ancestry at the *MUC19* VNTR region. Note that there is a

significant positive correlation between the number of repeat copies and the proportion of
Indigenous American ancestry in an MXL individual (Spearman's ρ: 0.438; *P-value*: 2.940e-4).

Figure 3. Frequency and protein sequence context of the nine Denisovan-specific missense
mutations at the 72kb region in *MUC19*.

(**A**) Heatmap depicting the frequency of Denisovan–specific missense mutations (columns)
amongst the four archaic individuals (n = 2; per archaic individual), 23 ancient pre–European
colonization American individuals (n = 46), the entire African superpopulation in the 1KG
(AFR; n = 1008), and admixed American populations in the 1KG—Mexico (MXL; n = 128),
Peru (PEL; n = 170), Colombia (CLM; n = 188), Puerto Rico (PUR; n = 208)—where the "n"
represents the number of chromosomes in each population. The left hand side of each row
denotes one of the nine Denisovan–specific missense mutations where the position and amino
acid substitution (hg19 reference amino acid → Denisovan–specific amino acid). The text in
each cell represents the Denisovan–specific missense mutation frequency, and for the ancient
Americans we also denote the 95% confidence interval. For the archaic individuals, each cell
is denoted with the individual's amino acid genotype and each AFR cell is denoted by the
homozygous hg19 reference amino acid genotype. (**B**) Denisovan-specific missense mutations
in the context of the MUC19 protein sequence. The first 2000 residues are depicted as the main
plot, the full protein sequence is displayed in the smaller subplot. Conserved exons are colored as
sky blue and the UniProt domains are colored orange, where the text corresponds to specific
UniProt domain identity—Von Willebrand factor (VFW) D domains, VWFC domain, and C-
terminal cystine knot-like (CTCK) domain. Each of the nine Denisovan-specific missense
mutations are denoted by their rsID, plotted with respect to residue index on the x-axis and their
corresponding Grantham score on the y-axis. The color of each Denisovan-specific missense
mutation denotes whether the mutation has a Grantham score less than 100 (black) or a Grantham

score greater than 100 (vermillion, and the marker denotes whether their respective exon has a
negative PhyloP score (diamonds) or a positive PhyloP score (crosses).

Figure 4. Haplotype divergence at the 72kb region in *MUC19*.

(**A**) Distribution of haplotype divergence—number of pairwise differences between a modern
human haplotype and an archaic genotype normalized by the effective sequence length—with
respect to the Altai Denisovan for all individuals in the Admixed American (AMR, black bars)
and African (AFR, gray bars) superpopulations. (**B**) Joint distribution of haplotype divergence
from the Altai Denisovan (x-axis) and the Neanderthals (y-axis)—Altai Neanderthal in sky blue,
Chagyrskaya Neanderthal in yellow, and Vindija Neanderthal in reddish purple—for all
individuals in the AMR (circles) and AFR (triangles) superpopulations. The three grey ellipses (α,
β, and γ) represent the three distinct haplotype groups segregating in the 1KG. The α ellipse
represents the introgressed haplotypes which exhibit a low sequence divergence from the Altai
Denisovan, a high sequence divergence from the Altai Neanderthal, and an intermediate sequence
divergence—higher compared to the Altai Denisovan but lower compared to the Altai
Neanderthal—with respect to the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals. The β ellipse represents
the non-introgresssed haplotypes which exhibit a high sequence divergence from the Altai
Denisovan, a low sequence divergence from the Altai Neanderthal, and an intermediate sequence
divergence—lower compared to the Altai Denisovan but higher compared to the Altai
Neanderthal—with respect to the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals. Note that the AMR
haplotype within the γ ellipse is positioned at intermediate sequence divergence values with
respect to the α and β ellipses, which represents one of seven recombinant haplotypes segregating
in the 1KG (see Figure S44 in [51]).

33
34
35

Figure 5. The high levels of heterozygosity in the Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals
are explained by *Denisovan-like* ancestry at the 72kb region in *MUC19*.

(**A**) Number of heterozygous sites at the 72kb region in *MUC19* per archaic individual (black X's),
1KG individuals without the introgressed haplotype (sky blue X's), 1KG individuals with exactly
one copy of the introgressed haplotype (yellow X's), 1KG individuals with a recombinant
introgressed haplotype (vermillion X's), and 1KG individuals with two copies of the introgressed
haplotype (bluish green X's). The average number of heterozygous sites stratified by population
are denoted by the grey diamonds and the average number of heterozygous sites amongst
individuals who carry exactly zero, one, and two introgressed haplotypes are denoted by sky blue,
yellow, and bluish green circles respectively and are stratified by population. (**B**) Haplotype matrix
of the 233 segregating sites (columns) amongst the focal MXL individual (NA19664) with two
copies of the introgressed haplotype; the focal YRI individual (NA19190) without the introgressed
haplotype; the Altai Denisovan; the Altai Neanderthal; and the two phased haplotypes for the
Chagyrskaya and Vindija Neanderthals, respectively. Cells shaded blue denote the hg19 reference
allele, cells shaded reddish purple denote the alternative allele, and cells shaded white represent
sites that did not pass quality control in the given archaic individual. Note that the focal MXL and
YRI individuals are homozygous for every position in the 72kb region in *MUC19* and that the
heterozygous sites for the Altai Denisovan and Altai Neanderthal—six and one heterozygous sites
respectively—are omitted.

A.

	Denisovan	Chagyrskaya Nean.	Vindija Nean.	Ancient Americans	MXL	PEL	CLM	PUR	AFR	Altai Nean.
40808672 Ser → Leu	Leu/Leu	Ser/Leu	Ser/Leu	0.361±0.21	0.305	0.218	0.08	0.087	Ser/Ser	Ser/Ser
40808726 Thr → Met	Met/Met	Thr/Met	Thr/Met	0.375±0.2	0.305	0.218	0.074	0.087	Thr/Thr	Thr/Thr
40809983 Asp → Glu	Glu/Glu	Asp/Glu	Asp/Glu	0.375±0.23	0.305	0.218	0.074	0.087	Asp/Asp	Asp/Asp
40814107 Ile → Val	Val/Val	. / .	Ile/Val	0.306±0.21	0.305	0.218	0.074	0.087	Ile/Ile	Ile/Ile
40814197 Val → Ile	Ile/Ile	Val/Ile	Val/Ile	0.406±0.24	0.305	0.218	0.074	0.087	Val/Val	. / .
40815060 His → Tyr	Tyr/Tyr	His/Tyr	His/Tyr	0.382±0.23	0.305	0.218	0.074	0.087	His/His	His/His
40821795 Glu → Lys	Lys/Lys	Glu/Lys	Glu/Lys	0.321±0.24	0.305	0.218	0.069	0.087	Glu/Glu	Glu/Glu
40821871 Arg → Leu	Leu/Leu	Arg/Leu	Arg/Leu	0.316±0.2	0.305	0.218	0.069	0.087	Arg/Arg	Arg/Arg
40826201 Val → Ile	Ile/Ile	Val/Ile	Val/Ile	0.367±0.22	0.305	0.218	0.069	0.091	Val/Val	Val/Val

1.00   0.75   0.50   0.25   0.00

Denisovan-specific Missense Mutation Frequency

B.

Grantham Score

rs4768252
rs4768253
rs142268259
rs149221842
rs211456
rs17467164
rs17467284
rs61736852
rs11564125

MUC19 Protein Sequence (Residue Index)

VWFC CTCK

Residue Index

VFWD1 VFWD2 VFWD3

■ Conserved Exon	■ UniProt Domain	■ Grantham Score < 100	◆ - PhyloP Score
■ Introgressed Hap.	■ Grantham Score > 100	✚ + PhyloP Score	