

Neanderthals - The Artistic Humans

Why in news?

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A recent study found that Europe's cave paintings might have been drawn by Neanderthals.

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Who are Neanderthals?

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- Neanderthals were archaic humans that became extinct about 40,000 years ago.

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- They seem to have appeared in Europe and later expanded into Southwest, Central and Northern Asia.

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- Neanderthals, were long thought to have been the archetypal cavemen, brutish and intellectually un-evolved.

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- In early 1900s, scientific findings described Neanderthals as gorilla-like beasts, an extinct branch of humanity that could not compete with slender, brilliant humans.

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What are the findings of the recent study?

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- Earlier research shows that modern man and Neanderthals mated may have had the "cognitive capacity to create art".

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- It is also believed that they were capable of using sophisticated technology (for prehistoric times) and showed social behaviour previously thought complicated for them to exhibit.

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- Recent studies shows that they were much more intellectually capable, the first cave-paintings, it turns out, could have been made by them.

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What are the evidences for the recent findings?

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- Dating experts and archaeologists now agree that the simple paintings from three caves in Spain, outline of a hand, an array of lines and a painted cave formation are more than 64,800 years old.

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- Thus, these pre-date the arrival of the H. sapiens in Europe by at least 20,000 years.

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- The cave paintings and their possible link to Neanderthals means that the gap between human and Neanderthal intellectual faculties may not be as wide as believed.

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What are some counter arguments for the findings?

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- While some believe humans and their extinct cousins were cognitive equivalents, others believe that the latter definitely had sophisticated intelligence but their “cultural achievements fell short of modern humans”.

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- Cave art, with certain exceptions, was notoriously difficult to date until very recently and thus modern humans have been historically assumed to have created them.

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- Neanderthal art may be comparable to the art and symbolism of modern man across Africa, painted egg shells and minerals attributed to “our direct ancestors” have been found and these date back some 80,000 years.

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Source: The New York Times, Financial Express

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