

Neandertals produced cave art

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New discoveries continue to confirm that Neandertals were fully human. For instance, it is common knowledge that the brain volume of Neandertals was larger than that of modern man. Recently, a more accurate measure was made, based on a larger sample, which takes into account the ontogenic age of the fossil. The study concludes Neandertal brains were about 3% larger than that of modern man.¹

Regardless, some paleoanthropologists resist thinking Neandertals were anything other than brute cave men (figure 1). They describe them as primitive, having evolved from *H. erectus*, or some other ‘archaic’ type within the genus *Homo*. They dispute some of their uniquely human attributes, such as the ability to draw sophisticated cave art, thought to be an attribute of only modern man, *Homo sapiens*. Art is considered the ultimate ‘symbolic behaviour’, therefore unique to modern man. Claims of Neandertal authorship of cave art have been questioned by these same paleoanthropologists.

Even some Christians, such as Fazale Rana and Hugh Ross of Reasons to Believe (RTB) ministry, claim that Neandertals were soulless, primitive subhumans:

“When all archaeological evidence is critically considered, it appears as though Neanderthals possessed some capacity for emotional expression and a level of intelligence, similar to that of the great apes today. Yet they clearly lived in nonhuman ways. To say that Neanderthals behaved like spiritual beings made in God’s

image stretches the evidence beyond reasonable limits. The archeological evidence more closely coincides with the RTB model's perspective on these creatures—they behaved more like animals than like humans.”²

Rock art from Spanish caves dated 20,000 years before modern man entered Europe

Uniformitarians believe Neandertals (or the precursor ‘archaic’ population they supposedly evolved from) entered Europe hundreds of thousands of years ago and modern man, e.g. *Cro-Magnon Man*, entered much later, around 45–40 thousand years (ka) ago. Practically all dates for cave art were previously considered to be less than 40 ka and



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Figure 1. Diorama of Neandertal Man in an American museum during the 1930s reflecting the misconception reinforced by Marcellin Boule's description of them as dull-witted, brutish, ape-like creatures.

attributed to modern man. A few claims of cave art dated much older than 40 ka were hotly disputed. Rock art is notoriously difficult to date, and so it is easy to dismiss ‘unorthodox’ claims.

Recently, cave art from three Spanish caves has been dated by a new technique with surprising and seemingly more solid results. The new technique used the uranium-thorium (U-Th) dating method on carbonate precipitates that have coated or lie next to the cave art. Layers of calcite must be gently peeled away to avoid damaging the art work. Fifty-three dates were obtained.

The new method of dating the rock art produced dates of about 64.8 ka, at least 20,000 years before modern man arrived on the scene.³ Since Neandertals were the only member of the genus *Homo* around at the time, the dates are automatically attributed to Neandertals. This would make Neandertals the mental equal of modern man: “These discoveries paint bulky, jut-jawed Neandertals as the mental equals of ancient humans.”⁴ In fact it is even possible that Neandertals *taught* modern man to draw.⁵

The new results open up the possibility that previously rejected results and dates may be ‘accurate’ according to the uniformitarian dating system. For creation science, these dates could give a relative sequence, not actual dates. Some of the questionable old dates that may be valid include a date of 176.5 ka for cave art in a French cave.⁴ It also suggests that the symbolic use of marine shells and mineral pigments by Neandertals dated greater than 115 ka is also valid.⁴ The authors believe they have *settled* the dispute over whether Neandertals produced cave art:

“By showing that the Châtelperronian is but a late manifestation of long-term indigenous tradition of Neandertal symbolic activity, our results bring closure to this debate.”⁵

A bombshell in paleoanthropology

These new results are a surprise to paleoanthropologists:

“But few researchers imagined them [Neandertals] engaging in one of the most haunting practices in human prehistory: creating paintings—vehicles for symbolic expression—in the darkness of caves.”⁶

A few still resist the new results. They challenge the U-Th method, claiming that small rock particles within the calcite can throw off the age estimates,⁵ and there are numerous other problems with uranium-series methods.⁷ Although admitting that there are many factors that undermine the ‘reliability’ of U-series dating on carbonate crusts, the lead author of the cave art study and others claim their technique is accurate.⁸

The authors of the new cave art dates state that they statistically corrected for contamination, and that the dates consistently increased down the layers from the surface of the carbonate crust. Moreover, the dates agreed with supposed geological evidence for low sea levels, low enough for Neandertals to enter the cave chamber.

Creation science implications

The new dates on cave art go a long way toward proving what creation science has been saying for a long time: Neandertals were just another type of people group that spread from the Tower of Babel area,⁹ and that Reasons to Believe ministry is wrong about Neandertals, as they are wrong about many other aspects of biblical earth history.¹⁰ Neandertals lived during the Ice Age just south of the ice sheets in Europe. To survive this harsh environment, they had to be an intelligent, robust people group.

The new results refute the idea that Neandertals were a cognitive ‘intermediate’ between an ape-like creature and man or a soulless

subhuman. Rather, they were fully human, reflecting the large cognitive gap between apes and people, consistent with the Bible.¹¹

References

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