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Neanderthals may have been first human species to create cave paintings

Several times in the past 10 years scientists have had to rewrite the textbooks on Neanderthals, the latest species of human to go extinct. (...)

Contrary to their dim-witted image Neanderthals have been found to have used tools, to have worn jewellery, and, lastly, to have interbred with our *Homo sapiens* ancestors to such an extent that 4% of every modern European's genome is traceable to Neanderthal origins. Now comes what could be the final nail in the coffin of the "unintelligent Neanderthals" myth: they might have been the first human species to paint in caves. Using state-of-the-art techniques scientists have dated cave paintings at 11 locations in north Spain, including the Unesco World Heritage sites of Altamira, El Castillo and Tito Bustillo. Samples from 50 paintings of different styles were collected and the scientists discovered that a red disc on the wall of the El Castillo cave had to be more than 40,800 years old. "This is currently Europe's oldest-dated art, by at least 4,000 years (...). We know the modern humans arrived in Europe between 42,000 and 41,000 years ago." Nearby hand stencils, formed by blowing paint against a hand pressed against a cave wall, were at least 37,300 years old.

Neanderthals arrived in Europe about 250,000 years ago and, if the dates of the cave paintings at El Castillo are correct, it is probable that they made them. "Perhaps we should start thinking of [Neanderthals] as the European brand of *Homo sapiens*, morphologically different from what we call the modern humans in Africa (...). But they were sapient people as well – that is probably the implication of the last decade of results. (...)

If Neanderthals were decorating their caves, it might mean that language and advanced cognition were present in the human lineage further back than suspected – perhaps since the time of Neanderthals' and modern humans' last common ancestor, who lived at least half a million years ago.

Alok Jha - *The Guardian*, Thursday 14 June 2012,

Sum up this article and explain the main ideas using your scientific knowledge.