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Neanderthal, Homo sapiens split 500,000yrs older than believed

From ANI

Washington, June 24: DNA-based analyses has revealed that the separation of Neanderthal and Homo sapiens might have occurred at least one million years ago-at least 500, 000 years earlier than previously thought.

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A doctoral thesis conducted at the National Center for Research on Human Evolution (Centro Nacional de Investigacion sobre la Evolucion Humana) - associated with the University of Granada-, analysed the teeth of almost all species of hominids that have existed during the past 4 million years.

After employing quantitative methods, they managed to identify

Neanderthal features in ancient European populations.

The main purpose of this research -whose author is Aida Gomez Robles- was to reconstruct the history of evolution of Human species using the information provided by the teeth, which are the most numerous and best preserved remains of the fossil record.

Thus, they analysed a large sample of dental fossils from different sites in Africa, Asia and Europe.

The morphological differences of each dental class was assessed and the ability of each tooth to identify the species to which its owner belonged was analysed.

The researcher concluded that it is possible to correctly determine the species to which an isolated tooth belonged with a success rate ranging from 60 to 80 percent.

Although these values are not very high, they increase as different dental classes from the same individual are added.

That means that if several teeth from the same individual are analysed, the probability of correctly identifying the species can reach 100 percent.

Aida Gomez Robles explained that, from all the species of hominids currently known "none of them has a probability higher than 5 percent to be the common ancestor of Neardenthals and Homo sapiens. Therefore, the common ancestor of this lineage is likely to have not been discovered yet".

What is innovative about this study is that computer simulation was employed to observe the effects of environmental changes on morphology of the teeth.

The results of this research were disclosed in two articles published in Journal of Human Evolution.

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