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Revealed: the face of the first European **35,000-year-old skull fragments found in Romania are made flesh by scientists**

By Steve Connor, Science Editor Monday 04 May 2009



The face of the first anatomically-modern human to live in Europe has been revealed. It belonged to a man – or woman – who inhabited the ancient forests of the Carpathian Mountains in what is now Romania about 35,000 years ago.

The artist's reconstruction – a face that could be male or female – is based on the partial skull and jawbone found in a cave where bears were known to hibernate. The facial features indicate the close affinity of these early Europeans to their immediate African ancestors, although it was still not

possible to determine the person's sex.

Richard Neave, the forensic artist who reconstructed the facial features in this clay model, based his assessment on a careful measurement of the bone fragments and his long experience of how the soft tissues of the face are built around the bones of the skull.

The reconstruction was made for the forthcoming BBC 2 series *The Incredible Human Journey* which documents human origins and evolution, from our birthplace in Africa to the long migratory routes that led us to populate the most distant parts of the globe. It is impossible from the bones to determine the skin colour of the individual, although scientists speculate it was probably darker than modern-day Europeans, reflecting a more recent African origin.

Mr Neave's clay head of the "first modern European" now sits on the desk of Alice Roberts, the Bristol University anthropologist who will introduce the BBC series, which is scheduled for screening next Sunday evening on BBC 2. "It's really quite bizarre. I'm a scientist and objective, but I look at that face and think 'Gosh, I'm actually looking at the face of somebody from 40,000 years ago', and there's something weirdly moving about that," Dr Roberts told the *Radio Times*.

"Richard creates skulls of much more recent humans and he's used to looking at differences between populations. He said the skull doesn't actually look European, or Asian, or African. It looks like a mixture of all of them. And you think, well, that's probably what you'd expect of someone who was among the earliest populations to come to Europe."

Potholers discovered the lower jawbone of the first modern European in 2002 in *Pestera cu Oase*, the "cave with bones", located in the south-western Carpathians. The remaining fragments of skull were unearthed in 2003.

Scientists have dated the bones using radiocarbon analysis to between 34,000 and 36,000 years ago when Europe was occupied by both Neanderthal man, who had lived in the region for tens of thousands of years, and anatomically-modern humans – *Homo sapiens* – who had recently arrived on a migratory route from Africa via the Middle East.

Although the skull shares many modern features of human anatomy, it also displays more archaic traits, such as very large molar teeth, which led some scientists to speculate the skull may belong to a hybrid between *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals – an idea discounted by other experts.

Erik Trinkaus, professor of anthropology at Washington University in Missouri, and one of the first specialists to study the bones in detail, said the jaw was the oldest, directly-dated modern human fossil. "Taken together, the material is the first that securely documents what modern humans looked like when they spread into Europe," he said.

Neanderthal man

*Lived in Europe for 300,000 years, surviving a number of ice ages before dying out 25,000 years ago. No one is sure why. Original fossil remains were found in 1856 in the Neander valley, near Dusseldorf, Germany. Socially advanced but left no signs of art, decoration or jewellery. But archaeologists have discovered a flute and have tested their toolmaking skills, suggesting a higher level of sophistication than first thought.

Homo sapiens

*Arrived in Europe some 35,000 years ago, competing with Neanderthal man for 10,000 years. DNA studies suggest the two species did not interbreed. First remains of Homo sapiens – modern humans – found in 1868 in a cave in the Dordogne, France, and known as Cro-Magnon man. Left cave paintings at Chauvet, Lascaux and Altamira, suggesting a sudden development of art.

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