

Ancient human kin's DNA code illuminates rise of brains

DNA analysis of an extinct human ancestor that lived 80,000 years ago has pinpointed fundamental genes tied to the brain's evolution, showing how genome testing is changing anthropology and archaeology along with medicine.

At least eight genes that rose to prominence in human DNA since the time of the ancient relatives, called Denisovans, affect nerve growth and language, an international team of researchers said today in the journal *Science*. The cognitive power conferred by these genes may have keyed the development of complex thinking skills, culture and civilization said Svante Paabo, a researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany.

"This is perhaps in the long term, to me, the most fascinating part about this; what it will tell us in the future about what makes us special in the world," he said yesterday on a conference call.

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