Sub-Saharan Africans likely trysted with pre-modern human ‘ghost’ species

In saliva, scientists have found hints that a “ghost” species of archaic humans may have contributed genetic material to ancestors of people living in Sub-Saharan Africa today.

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Past studies have concluded that the forebears of modern humans in Asia and Europe interbred with other early hominin species, including Neanderthals and Denisovans. The new research is among more recent genetic analyses indicating that ancient Africans also had trysts with other early hominins.

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As part of this investigation, the team examined the MUC7 gene in more than 2,500 modern human genomes. The analysis yielded a surprise: A group of genomes from Sub-Saharan Africa had a version of the gene that was wildly different from versions found in other modern humans.

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[According to Omer Gokcumen, assistant professor of biological sciences, University at Buffalo College of Arts and Sciences.]
Based on our analysis, the most plausible explanation for this extreme variation is archaic introgression — the introduction of genetic material from a ‘ghost’ species of ancient hominins. […] This unknown human relative could be a species that has been discovered, such as a subspecies of Homo erectus, or an undiscovered hominin. We call it a ‘ghost’ species because we don’t have the fossils.

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The team calculated that the ancestors of people who carry the Sub-Saharan MUC7 variant interbred with another ancient human species as recently as 150,000 years ago, after the two species’ evolutionary path diverged from each other some 1.5 to 2 million years ago.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: In saliva, clues to a ‘ghost’ species of ancient human