COULD ANCIENT DNA REVEAL WHO MADE CAVE PAINTINGS?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Scientists have found ancient human DNA in samples taken from prehistoric cave walls in Spain and Portugal. The DNA came from places connected with rock art, including a red painted dot in Escoural Cave in Portugal. Researchers do not yet know whether the DNA belonged to the person who made the painting. It might have come from an artist, someone who helped them or a later visitor who touched the wall. The team collected tiny samples from cave walls and paintings while wearing protective clothing and using sterile tools. The discovery is important because prehistoric artists usually left no written names or clear personal clues. DNA could provide information about the people who visited caves thousands of years ago. It may eventually help researchers study their sex, ancestry or relationships with other groups. However, scientists warn that DNA can be moved by water, animals or later visitors, so the results must be examined carefully.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

Prehistoric paintings are some of the oldest evidence of human imagination, but we rarely know who created them. Ancient DNA could add a personal story to pictures of animals, hands and symbols. At the same time, the discovery reminds us that evidence can be exciting without giving a simple answer.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“What could DNA tell us about people who visited prehistoric caves?”

Source: National Geographic

https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/ancient-dna-cave-walls-rock-art