



Claims of Burial and Rock Art by Homo Naledi

Why in News?

Recently, a study has been published, which suggests that ***Homo Naledi, an ancient human species***, may have buried their dead and created meaningful symbols in a cave.

- However, these claims have **sparked controversy within the scientific community.**

What is Homo Naledi?

- ***Homo Naledi*** is a species of human discovered in the **Rising Star cave system, a UNESCO World Heritage Site** in South Africa in 2013.
 - The remains of at least 15 individuals, including adults, juveniles, and infants, were found, making it the largest collection of a **single hominin species in Africa.**
- Homo naledi exhibits **a combination of primitive and modern features** and is not a direct ancestor of modern humans.
 - These **short-statured, small-brained ancient cousins** are thought to have lived in Southern Africa between **335,000 and 241,000 years ago (possibly up to 2 million years ago).**



What Are the Key Highlights of the Study?

- **Burial Claims:**
 - Homo Naledi deliberately buried their dead, which would challenge existing **notions about advanced mortuary behavior.**
 - Humans exhibit a unique behavior among primates by burying their dead, which sets them apart from other animals. This behavior is known as Mortuary behavior, characterized by **social acts and a complex understanding of death.**
 - Previously, the earliest evidence of Mortuary behavior was found among Neanderthals and

modern humans, occurring more than 100,000 years after Homo naledi.

▪ **Rock Art Claims:**

- Homo naledi may have created rock art in Rising Star Cave. This is intriguing because **rock art has traditionally been associated with Homo sapiens and other large-brained ancestors.**
- The report describes **engravings in the form of deeply impressed cross-hatchings and geometric shapes** such as squares, triangles, crosses and X's.
- Additionally, a rock-like object found near a **Homo naledi body suggests it could be a stone tool.**

▪ **Use of Fire:**

- Homo naledi used **fire strategically for illumination during mortuary** and engraving activities in the cave.

What is the Controversy?

- There is **no compelling evidence of deliberately excavated pits** or anatomical alignment of skeletal remains.
- The **spatial association of some skeletal elements does not confirm intentional** burial, as it could be attributed to natural processes such as trampling or cave collapse.
- However, the absence of dating for the engravings raises doubts about their attribution to Homo naledi. Without firm dates obtained through associated residues, **natural deposits, or archaeological layers**, it is premature to ascribe the engravings to Homo naledi.

What is the Significance of the Study?

- While the discoveries at Rising Star Cave **have the potential to reshape our understanding of early humans**, it is crucial to subject these claims to rigorous scrutiny.
- The presented **evidence for intentional burial, rock art, and the use of fire falls short of meeting the scientific community's standards.** Excavation of the alleged burials, dating of the engravings, and comprehensive research on the use of fire are necessary to validate these claims and gain broader acceptance among scientists.

[Source: DTE](#)

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