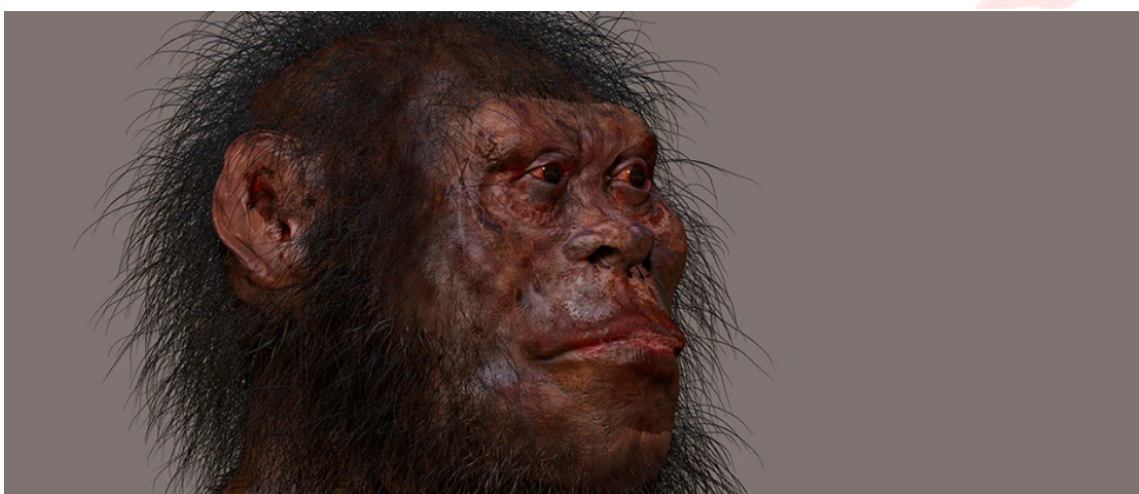


Homo Naledi [UPSC Notes]

The Rising Star Cave system in South Africa has yielded significant findings related to the extinct human species *Homo naledi*. Recent studies claim evidence of deliberate burial, rock art, and the use of fire by *Homo naledi*, challenging existing theories. However, these claims have faced criticism and require further investigation. In this article, you can learn more about *Homo naledi*, the recent findings and the controversy surrounding it. This topic is relevant for the current affairs and history sections of the [IAS exam](#).

Homo naledi



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Homo naledi refers to a previously unknown species of extinct human that was discovered in South Africa's Rising Star cave system in 2013.

- The initial discovery, made by speleologists Rick Hunter and Steven Tucker, unveiled an extraordinary collection of hominin fossils.
- *Homo naledi* is characterized by its short stature and small brain size.
- These ancient cousins are believed to have lived in Southern Africa between 335,000 and 241,000 years ago.
- The discovery of *Homo naledi* has significant implications for our understanding of human evolution and adds another piece to the complex puzzle of our ancient relatives.

Did *Homo naledi* bury their dead?

The new research suggests *Homo naledi* practised deliberate burial, potentially pushing back evidence of advanced mortuary behaviour.

- The earliest secure evidence of intentional human burial in Africa dates to 78,000 years ago.
- The claimed Homo naledi burials, allegedly preceding this evidence, lack compelling proof of deliberate excavation and anatomical alignment of skeletal remains.
- Skeletal elements at Rising Star Cave show spatial association, but their scattered distribution hinders the reconstruction of their original positions.

Did Homo naledi make rock art?

One publication claims Homo naledi left rock art in Rising Star Cave, implying cognitive abilities for representation and abstract symbols.

- Rock art has been predominantly linked to Homo sapiens and occasionally to some large-brained ancestors.
- The rock art at Rising Star Cave remains undated, making it premature to associate it exclusively with Homo naledi.
- Firm dates can be established through dating techniques on associated residues or materials linked to the art.

Did Homo naledi use fire in Rising Star Cave?

The researchers propose evidence of hearths and strategic use of fire for illumination during mortuary and engraving activities.

- However, scientific research confirming the use of fire has not been published.
- Previously obtained radiocarbon dates distanced the apparent hearths from the remains of Homo naledi by several hundred thousand years.

Conclusion

- The controversial claims surrounding Homo naledi discoveries at Rising Star Cave require further investigation and scrutiny.
- The evidence presented for deliberate burial, rock art, and the use of fire by Homo naledi remains insufficient and lacks corroborating data.
- Scientists are cautious in accepting these inferences without additional research and validation by the broader scientific community.