

## How do new archaeological discoveries impact our ideas on the origins of humans as spiritual beings?

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Did Adam and Eve live over 50,000 years ago? When did man begin to have the spiritual dimension that makes him special? Recent discoveries provide clues.



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### 45,500-Year-Old Sulawesi Warty Pig Painting Found in Indonesian Cave

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A team of archaeologists from Australia and Indonesia has discovered two figurative paintings of the [Sulawesi warty pig \(\*Sus celebensis\*\)](#) – a species of small (40 to 85 kg), short-legged pig with characteristic facial warts – in Leang Tedongnge and Leang Balangajia 1 caves on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. The warty pig painting from Leang Tedongnge cave dates to at least 45,500 years ago, making it the earliest known representational work of art in the world.



The 45,500-year-old Sulawesi warty pig figure in the rock art panel at Leang Tedongnge cave, Sulawesi, Indonesia. Image credit: Brumm et al., doi:10.1126/sciadv.abd4648.

On January 13, 2021 a report was published reporting the “earliest known representational work of art in the world”. ([SciNews](#), Brumm, et al, 2021). The authors reported paintings of pigs in Indonesia dated 45,500-years BP (before present). Such reports have some interesting implications for questions about when humans arose. Have you ever made the comment, “well, I am only human”? Maybe “only human”

is still pretty remarkable. It has been said that the human brain is the most advanced feature that we know about in the universe. In scientific terms, that is probably true. While we are weak and fallible, the Bible tells us that God considers us worth dying for. Christians today debate whether or not the creation accounts in Genesis demand a literal Adam, and if so, when did he live, and were there other humans alive at the time. Tim Stafford's intriguing book, "the adam quest" gives the stories of "eleven scientists who held on to a strong faith while wrestling with the mystery of human origins". The scientists range from young earth creationists to old earth creationists to theistic evolutionists. I took the view in my book, "[A Texas-Sized Challenge to Young Earth Creation and Flood Geology](#)" (Mitchell, 2018) that realistic options can be generalized under four different types but we cannot categorically reject any. I find that some fit the data better than others, but even so, some of the others remain possible. (As you may know, I find the young earth option to be disproven.)

The data uncovered by science must be explained by our explanations for humans. It is not perfect or complete, but it is real and a good interpretation should deal with it. Joshua Swamidass in his book, "The Genealogical Adam & Eve" reported that there are many options in how to define "human". These options raise a lot of interesting theological questions and there is real debate about the intersection of theology with science. I want to define humans as those who have a spiritual dimension. At the moment, I don't necessarily care about the anatomy. I can imagine that anatomically human beings existed that did not have a spiritual dimension. I am looking for those that God has placed here with the capacity and given them the need for a personal relationship with Him.

What does it mean to be human in the Bible? Here are some key characteristics.

- Specially created by God (Gen 1:26-27)
- Speaking in language (Gen 2:15f)
- Having growing dominion over nature (Gen 1:28)
- Spiritual being (Gen 1:27, Jn 4:24)
- Fallen, sinners (Gen 3)

How do you decide from bones and artifacts that these characteristics were present? Early hominids have been identified with various levels of intelligence. We don't know what spiritual capacity they had. God reveals that He calls humans to come to Him, but we don't know what his relationship with the early hominids was, any more than we know what His relationship is with any other intelligent life that He created elsewhere in the universe. We are responsible for how we respond to His revelation to us regardless of how He deals with other beings.

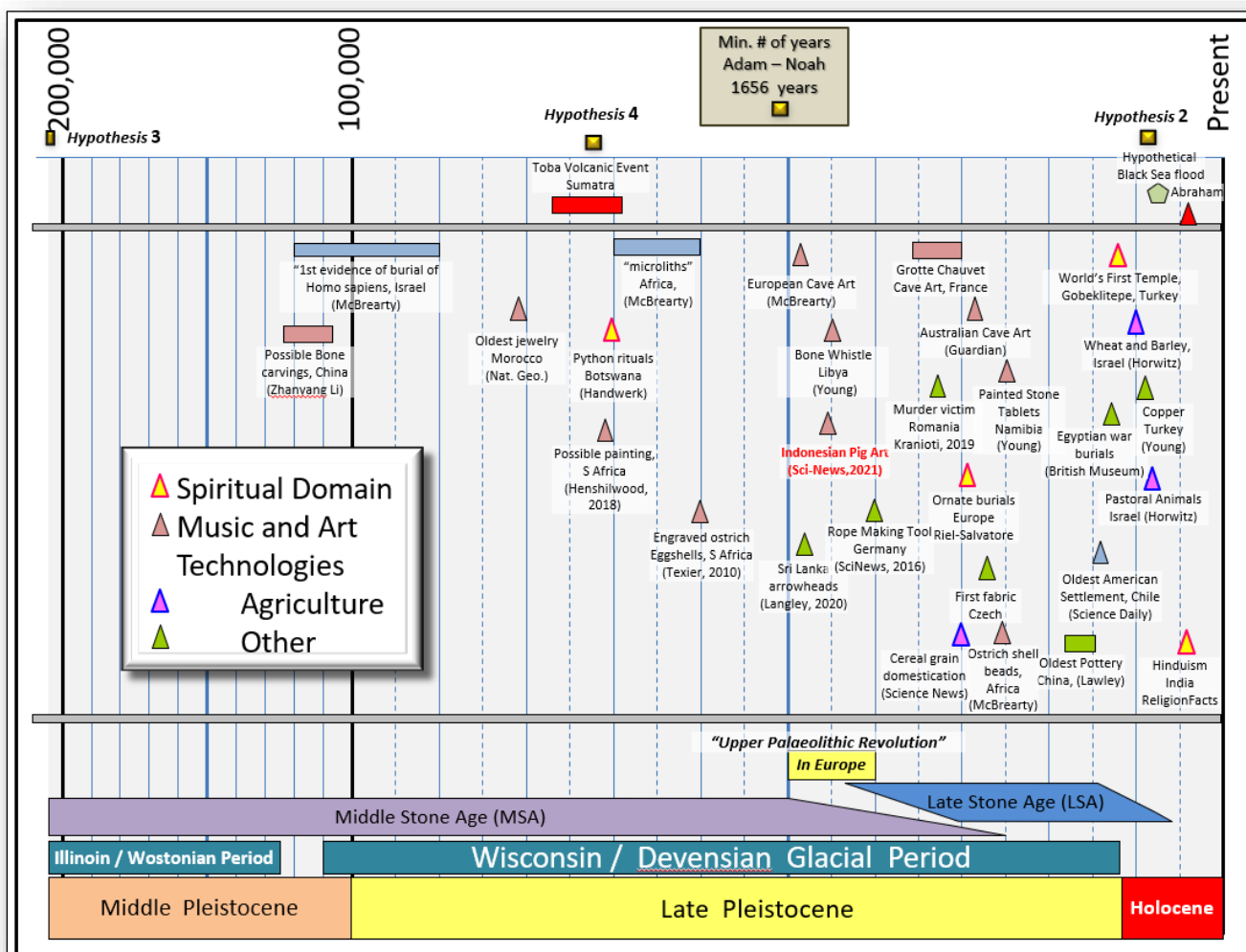
Some archeological discoveries that are reported do not prove that their origins were from humans, particularly in the sense that I have defined as human. For instance, stone tools do not prove human behavior. Some animals utilize tools, and thus the fact that a more intelligent hominid can make more advanced tools is not surprising. Burial of the dead does not prove human spirituality. For instance, elephants mourn and bury their dead and certainly are not human. ([An Elephant funeral](#))

Anthropologists Sally McBrearty and Allison Brooks described the characteristics of human behavior this way:

"We would argue that modern human behavior is characterized by:

- Abstract thinking, the ability to act with reference to abstract concepts not limited in time or space.
- Planning depth, the ability to formulate strategies based on past experience and to act upon them in a group context.
- Behavioral, economic and technological innovativeness.
- Symbolic behavior, the ability to represent objects, people, and abstract concepts with arbitrary symbols, vocal or visual, and to deify such symbols in cultural practice. (McBrearty and Brooks 2000)

These modern distinctively human behaviors are sometimes reflected in archaeological finds and provide evidence of human existence, though sometimes not conclusive. We can't test directly for language but finding complex burial arrangements are sure consistent with it. Imagine a group trying to arrange a funeral when none of them are capable of speech.



Here is presented a figure consisting of a timeline on which I have posted various archaeological artifact discoveries. They represent key or first documented occurrences of various technologies and

indications of higher mental / spiritual capacities. It was originally published in my 2018 book, but many additions have been made. All were identified as related to “anatomically modern *Homo sapiens*”. When we look at reports of such finds, it is worth remembering some of the uncertainties associated with them. These include:

- Date uncertainty

For instance, McBrearty and Brooks in 2000 reported that European cave art dated back to ~48,000-years BP while the report from 2021 reported that the Indonesian pig drawings are the oldest “earliest known representational work of art in the world” at 45,500-years BP”. It is not unusual for new dating techniques to modify earlier dates.

- Ambiguity in what features actually were

For example, some question whether or not the holes forming the “bone whistle” were man-made and whether the Botswanan “python” really represented a snake.

- Interpretation options

What do the features that we identify tell us about who made them? For instance, were the lines drawn on the South African ostrich eggs of religious significance? Were crushed skulls the result of accidental death or murders? The answers to such questions involve interpreting beyond the data.

The timeline above shows that we are finding increasing evidence of advanced human activity that started 50,000 – 70,000 years ago. We find evidence of abstract thinking, agricultural and technological development, and symbolic behavior. Cave art, such as the Sulawesi pig paintings in Indonesia and Grotte Chauvet in France, show the ability to represent their world and involved not just skill but imagination. The paintings of pigs are interesting in part because they are from Sulawesi, Indonesia that is far from Europe or the fertile crescent. I find it hard to imagine a group of *Homo sapiens* setting around, painting such works, with no ability to communicate in words. In my mind, these works were the work of true human beings. In fact, I suspect that the artists were as intelligent as people today. Many of the discoveries are consistent with a people who had a drive to express themselves artistically through music and painting and creating other artistic objects. This fits well with spiritual beings with a desire to be creative and, in this way, were like their marvelous Creator. Even the earliest finds could be related to religious beliefs, but that is not necessarily proven. Ornate burials strongly suggest a spiritual connection.

What about sin? Were the finds made by fallen humans? In Genesis, the first sin was to disobey God’s command. We learn from Cain and Abel that they already believed in worship through sacrifices. We also see violence and murder, beginning with Cain’s murder of Abel. This continued and grew so that Genesis 6:11 records “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence.” (ESV). Man is certainly not the only animal to kill members of his own species, but he is the only one that we know has been commanded not to. Man is responsible for his actions. While there are many types of sins, evidence of violence is clearly evidence of a sinful nature. National Geographic described the death of an 430,000-year-old hominid as “World’s Oldest Murder Mystery”. What about *Homo sapiens*? How early can we date evidence of murder? One candidate might be the death of a man in present day Romania, some 33,000 years ago. His skull was discovered in 1941 with evidence of two

blows that resulted in skull fractures. The cause of death was “blunt force trauma”, possibly from some sort of bat held in the left hand, sounding like one of the police dramas on TV. A later example on a larger scale comes from a cemetery in Egypt. A British Museum report describes the find this way:

*Dr Wendorf found a cemetery (site 117) containing at least 61 individuals dating back to about 13,000 years ago. This discovery was of great significance for two reasons. First, as a designated graveyard, evidently used over several generations, it is one of the earliest formal cemeteries in the world. Prior to this discovery, only isolated graves, or clusters of up to three bodies had been known within the Nile Valley. But perhaps even more significant, of the 61 men, women and children buried at Jebel Sahaba, at least **45% of them died of inflicted wounds, making this the earliest evidence for inter-communal violence in the archaeological record.** Chips and flakes of chert, the remnants of arrows or other weapons, were found mixed with and in some cases still embedded in the bones of 26 individuals, while cut marks were found on the bones of others. (Emphasis added) (Friedman, 2014)*

It seems likely that humans were present, with a willingness to kill one another, through much of the period over which we have evidence for humans, using the Biblical criteria that I gave earlier. I suggest that it is likely that human beings existed that had a spiritual capacity and had a sinful nature for at least the last 50,000 to 70,000 years. If that is true, then that raises some very interesting questions theologically. These would include:

- If the Bible tells us that Adam and Eve were literal people, did they live at least that long ago?
- If they lived later than that, what was their relationship to the earlier people?
- How did God create the early first spiritual people? Did He work by guiding the processes of natural selection and genetic variation (evolution)?
- Did God create Adam and Eve directly as adults or were they also descended by more natural processes?
- How do we understand the Biblical references to Adam and Eve in the New Testament?
- If there were earlier sinful people, how would we understand the doctrine of original sin?
- If man was sinful before Adam and Eve how did their sin arise? Were they accountable for it?

Many Christian authors are discussing these issues today, such as John Walton, Hugh Ross, Fazale Rana, Denis Lamoureux, John Collins, Joshua Swamidass, Mark Moore, William Lane Craig, and many others. All are trying to be faithful to scripture while not denying real scientific data. I also am trying to understand what options are available and what are not really faithful options. I work through multiple working hypothesis. We do not have the data we would need to absolutely answer many of the questions. I have my preferred option, but hold it tentatively. I will continue posting as I learn. I value your ideas.

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