

BIRTH OF HUMANITY

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What defines “humanity” or “to be human?”

Being human has both biological and behavioural (technology, symbolism, etc.) dimensions. Identifying them clarifies the meaning of the archaeological data.

Our biological evolution:

What does the genetics of humans and their closest relatives (hominins) tell us?

What does the fossil record tell us and is it consistent with genetic data?

Evolution involves environmental conditions. What were the fundamental conditions behind the rise of the great apes and humans?

The most important hominin fossils: the *Australopithecus* and *Homo* lineages.

Geography of our evolution

What’s the geographic distribution of our earliest ancestors and what does it mean?

Complications: The *Homo naledi* and *Homo floresiensis* discoveries

In 2004 and 2015 anthropologists reported hominin fossils from Indonesia and South Africa that don’t fit into any model of human evolution. What do they mean?

The first evidence of technology: the tales that stones can tell

What do we know about our first technologies? We’ll focus on the Oldowan and Acheulian traditions. The first tools appear just over 3 million years ago.

Was Neanderthal human?

Neanderthal has become part of our popular culture and the headlines often speak of how much Neanderthal DNA we might retain. Who was Neanderthal?

When do we (modern humans) appear and under what circumstances?

Significant developments toward modern human behaviour.

164,000 yrs ago: Mossel Bay, South Africa--first evidence of marine resources and use of pigments. 60,000 yrs ago the first evidence of birds, fur seals, wild boar and sea turtles being hunted..

The first architecture and the creative explosion

When did we start building shelters? When and why do symbols appear?

Recommended reading:

<http://humanorigins.si.edu>

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/human-origins/>