



51,200 Year Old Cave Painting Discovered

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

Recent research has revealed that the **world's oldest known figurative cave painting** is **approximately 51,200 years old**, as determined by the **use of a new dating technique**.

- The painting is located on the ceiling of a limestone cave in the Island of Sulawesi, Indonesia.

What are the Key Observations about the Painting?



- **Artistic Representation:** The painting shows:
 - A **pig standing still** with its mouth partly open.
 - **Three human-like figures** surrounding the pig:
 - The largest figure with **outstretched arms** gripping a rod.
 - The **second figure in front** of the pig, holding a stick.
 - The **third figure upside-down**, with legs pointing upwards and one hand reaching toward the pig's head.
- **Technique Used in Dating:**
 - Researchers dated rock art using **uranium series (U-series) analysis** of **calcite deposits** in limestone caves.
 - Researchers used laser **beams to compare the ratio of a specific isotope of uranium to a specific isotope of thorium** in order to determine the age of the paintings.
 - An **isotope** is a **variant of an atom within the same element**, sharing the same atomic number and chemical properties but differing in atomic

mass and physical characteristics.

- This method was **also used to date another cave painting** at **Leang Bulu' Sipong 4**, initially estimated to be 43,900 years old.
 - The findings showed the painting is at least 4,000 years older than previously thought.
- There is a significant amount of rock art in locations such as Madhya Pradesh in India, but there has **not been a dating method of this kind**.
 - The **oldest paintings of Bhimbetka**, Madhya Pradesh are estimated to be around **30,000 years old**.
- **Significance:**
 - Researchers found that figurative art of humans and animals in scenes has deeper historical roots than previously thought.
 - **Neanderthals** began marking caves around **75,000 years ago**, but their **markings were non-figurative**.
 - This not only provides insights into the cultural practices of early humans but also suggests the emergence of a sophisticated narrative tradition that employed **visual arts to represent the relationships between humans and animals**.

Bhimbetka Rock Paintings

- **Location:** It is located **south of Bhopal in Vidhyan ranges** of Madhya Pradesh with rock shelters having more than 500 rock paintings.
 - The caves of Bhimbetka were discovered in **1957-58 by V. S. Wakankar**
 - It was declared a **UNESCO** World Heritage Site in 2003.
- **Timeline:** The oldest paintings are estimated to be **30,000 years old** and have survived due to its location deep inside the caves.
 - There is **marked continuity in occupancy** of the caves from **100,000 BC to 1000 AD** with many paintings being painted on top of another.
 - In some places, there are as many as 20 layers of paintings, one on top of another
 - The paintings at Bhimbetka belong to **Upper Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Chalcolithic, early historic** and medieval period.
 - However, most of the paintings belong to the Mesolithic age.
- **Painting Techniques:** Various colours like red ochre, purple, brown, white, yellow and green are used, obtained from natural resources.
 - Haematite ores were used for red colour and white probably from Limestone.
 - Green prepared from a green coloured rock called Chalcedony.
 - The Brushes were made of plant fibre.
- **Themes of the Paintings:** Every-day life of prehistoric men often in stick-like human figures.
 - Various animals like elephant, bison, deer, peacock and snake are depicted.
 - Hunting scenes and war scenes with armed men.
 - Simple geometric designs and symbols.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. The well-known painting “Bani Thani” belongs to the (2018)

- (a) Bundi school
- (b) Jaipur school
- (c) Kangra school
- (d) Kishangarh school

Ans: (d)

Q. The painting of Bodhisattva Padmapani is one of the most famous and oft-illustrated paintings at (2017)

- (a)** Ajanta
- (b)** Badami
- (c)** Bagh
- (d)** Ellora

Ans: (a)

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