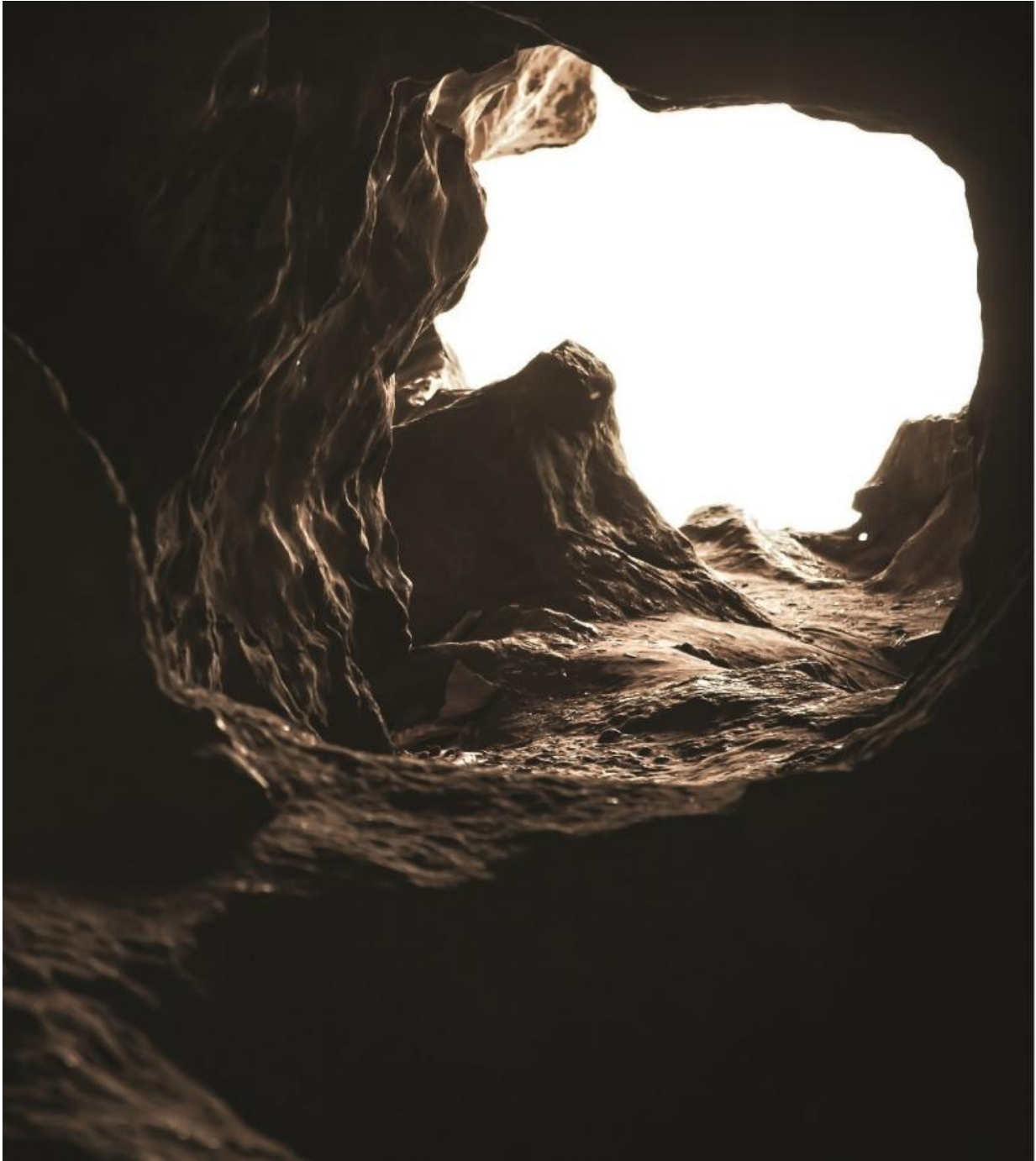


Exploring the prehistory of Palawan Island through human remains

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Credit: Witthaya Phonsawat

Researchers are excavating human remains from caves in Palawan Island

in the Philippines to learn more about the diversity of burial and other cultural practices over the past 10,000 years.

Since 2004, archaeologists from the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD) have systematically excavated and processed [human remains](#) from caves in northern Palawan Province. So far, this work has yielded numerous human skeletal materials ranging in age from the late Palaeolithic (9,000 Before Present), through the Neolithic (~4,000 BP) and Metal Periods (~1,000 BP), to the late millennium.

Skeletal remains have been found in diverse burial modes. Human skeletons from the late millennium were buried as whole bodies, lying on their backs and directed towards the cave mouth. Remains from the Metal Periods were found dispersed within a layer, possibly because of disturbances by subsequent burials or re-burying performed at later stages. However, two complete skeletons dating to the Neolithic were found covered with large rocks. The remains found at the late Palaeolithic level were cremated and deposited as piles of bone fragments, says project leader Victor J. Paz of UPD's Archaeological Studies Program.

Next on the team's agenda is to describe the human remains in more detail, including age-at-death, sex, disease, cultural modifications (such as intentional changes in the skeleton or dentition) and other parameters. "Describing these variables will help us understand the diversity of mortuary practices," says Dr Paz. This research will also provide data for comparison with findings from other archaeological sites in South-East Asia, thereby contributing to an understanding of cultural diffusion within the region.

Provided by ResearchSEA

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