Murder in Paleolithic age? Proof of ancient homicide found

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A Paleolithic man was bludgeoned to death with a club in a Transylvanian cave, new analysis of a 33,000-year-old skull has suggested. The man received two blows to the head in quick succession and was facing his killer before he fell to the ground, researchers believe.

The killer was probably left-handed and used a “clublike object”, according to a paper published in the journal Plos One.

The fossilised skull of the adult man, known as the Cioclovina calvaria, was found by miners digging for phosphate in the Pestera Cioclovina cave in Romania in 1941. They also found some stone tools and fossils of cave bears, but the body of the man was never found.

The fossil — one of the earliest modern humans known from Europe — has been extensively studied. The source of the trauma on the skull has long been disputed, but now, an international team of researchers, led by the University of Tubingen in Germany, believe they have settled the debate. “The results suggest that the Cioclovina fractures represent indisputable hard evidence of fatal interpersonal violence among early Upper Paleolithic modern humans of Europe,” the researchers wrote.

In order to find out what happened, scientists carried out simulations on synthetic bone spheres to work out how being hit with a bat, or a rock or falling from various heights damaged the skull. They also inspected the skull using computed tomography (CT) scans. Because no body has been found it is possible injuries may also have been sustained elsewhere. Scientists say it shows homicide was being practised by early humans at this time. THE INDEPENDENT