

## What constitutes *Homo sapiens*? Morphology versus received wisdom

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**Summary** – Although Linnaeus coined *Homo sapiens* in 1735, it was Blumenbach forty years later who provided the first morphological definition of the species. Since humans were not then allowed to be ante-Diluvian, his effort applied to the genus, as well. After the Feldhofer Grotto Neanderthal disproved this creationist notion, and human–fossil hunting became legitimate, new specimens were allocated either to *sapiens* or new species within *Homo*, or even to new species within new genera. Yet as these taxonomic acts reflected the morphological differences between specimens, they failed to address the question: What constitutes *H. sapiens*? When in 1950 Mayr collapsed all human fossils into *Homo*, he not only denied humans a diverse evolutionary past, he also shifted the key to identifying its species from morphology to geological age – a practice most paleoanthropologists still follow. Thus, for example, *H. erectus* is the species that preceded *H. sapiens*, and *H. sapiens* is the species into which *H. erectus* morphed. In order to deal with a growing morass of morphologically dissimilar specimens, the non-taxonomic terms “archaic” (AS) and “anatomically modern” (AMS) were introduced to distinguish between the earlier and later versions of *H. sapiens*, thereby making the species impossible to define. In attempting to disentangle fact from scenario, I begin from the beginning, trying to delineate features that may be distinctive of extant humans (ES), and then turning to the fossils that have been included in the species. With the exception of Upper Paleolithic humans – e.g. from Cro-Magnon, Dolni Vestonice, Mladeč – I argue that many specimens regarded as AMS, and all those deemed AS, are not *H. sapiens*. The features these AMS do share with ES suggest the existence of a *sapiens* clade. Further, restudy of near-recent fossils, especially from southwestern China (~11-14.5 ka), reinforces what discoveries such as *H. floresiensis* indicate: “If it’s recent, it’s not necessarily *H. sapiens*”.

**Keywords** – *Homo sapiens*, Extant humans, “Archaic” versus “anatomically modern”, *sapiens* clade.

### Introduction

In 1735 Linnaeus created the genus and species *Homo sapiens*, which he defined not morphologically, but with the phrase *nosce te ipsum* (know thyself) (Linnaeus, 1735). Since designating type specimens was not then required, Nottin & Stringer (2010) are the most recent to argue that Linnaeus should be regarded as the lectotype of *H. sapiens*, and *H. sapiens sapiens* specifically. Their argument: Since Linnaeus described all races but *H. s. sapiens*, he saw himself as representative that group. Although

making some sense of *nosce te ipsum*, this intriguing proposal does not address defining *sapiens* much less *Homo* because, even if Linnaeus had described himself, he would have done so as with other races, in terms of geography, behavior, skin color, and hair type.

Thus it fell upon Blumenbach (1969) to provide the first morphological diagnosis of *Homo sapiens*. Although he believed he could identify races by different cranial shapes, he argued that they all belonged to *H. sapiens*, which he distinguished from other mammals by such features as a chin, small jaws, small canines abutting small

# Barbs Of Wisdom Aimed At Homo Sapiens

**Lauren Gardner**



**Barbs Of Wisdom Aimed At Homo Sapiens:**

## **Barbs Of Wisdom Aimed At Homo Sapiens** Book Review: Unveiling the Magic of Language

In an electronic era where connections and knowledge reign supreme, the enchanting power of language has become much more apparent than ever. Its ability to stir emotions, provoke thought, and instigate transformation is actually remarkable. This extraordinary book, aptly titled "**Barbs Of Wisdom Aimed At Homo Sapiens**," compiled by a highly acclaimed author, immerses readers in a captivating exploration of the significance of language and its profound effect on our existence. Throughout this critique, we will delve into the book's central themes, evaluate its unique writing style, and assess its overall influence on its readership.

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