



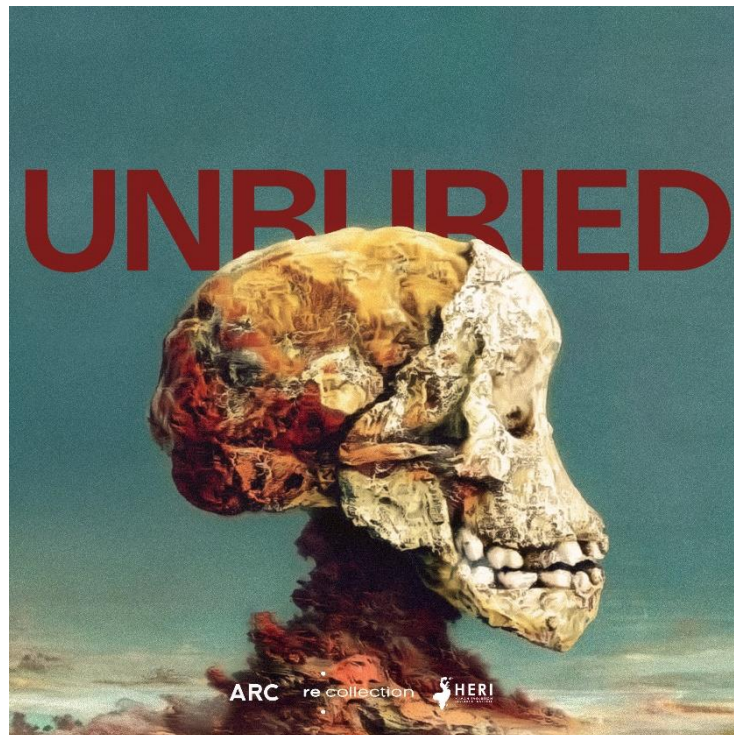
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9 October 2025

UCT researchers reshape the story of human evolution through the Taung Child



UCT researchers reshape the story of human evolution through the Taung Child.
Photo: HERI

The University of Cape Town (UCT), through its [Human Evolution Research Institute \(HERI\)](#), has partnered with ARC documentary channel to produce *Unburied Season 2: The Taung Child*. This powerful new podcast tells the story of one of the world's most important fossils and how it reshaped science, challenged bias and placed Africa at the centre of human evolution.

The fossilised skull of a three-year-old child, silent for over two million years, continues to speak. In this compelling new season, listeners are transported back to 1924 Taung, South Africa, where a single discovery overturned colonial narratives, challenged scientific

authority and forced the world to confront what many had refused to believe: that humanity's origins lie in Africa.

"The Taung Child is one of the most valuable fossils in the world, and part of our rich cultural heritage in South Africa. But few know the full story and the way in which it became significant – this is as important as the fossil itself and only now has been properly told," said HERI co-director, Associate Professor Robyn Pickering, a geologist at UCT.

Across four episodes, *Unburied S2* traces the reverberations of the Taung Child's fossilised skull not just in science, but in race, identity and justice. Featuring the voices of geologists, paleoanthropologists, historians and the Taung community, it surfaces forgotten voices and confronts colonial prejudices to ask what ethical science means in history and today.

"The Taung Child is a prism through which we can understand the history of modern science and South Africa. It is a story of pride and knowledge but also prejudice and the damage done by scientists blinded by their own privilege," said ARC's Rasmus Bitsch.

This year marks the centenary of the 1925 *Nature* publication in which Raymond Dart described the fossil remains as *Australopithecus africanus*. Dubbed the "Taung Child", it was the first evidence that early human relatives lived and walked in Africa. Yet its reception was cool. Many scientists in Europe and Asia dismissed Dart's findings, unwilling to shift long-held assumptions about human origins.

That rejection was based as much on scientific bias as it was on colonial prejudice. The Taung Child was not just ignored — the stories around it were shaped, moulded and sometimes silenced by the bias. *Unburied S2* revisits these stories to question who found the fossil, who named it, who was left out, and how the so-called lone-hero narrative came to dominate.

Much of *Unburied S2* draws on the South African Journal of Science special issue, "The Taung Child Then and Now: Commemorating its Centenary in a Postcolonial Age", which was guest edited by several UCT and HERI researchers. Recognising the legacy of the Taung Child and the advances in research since its discovery, the podcast skilfully packages scientific reflection with relevance, making these otherwise specialist papers accessible to a much wider audience.

"This goes beyond the discovery of the Taung Child to explore the bigger picture. It is about who is doing the science, where it happens, and why that context matters just as much as the fossils themselves," said Associate Professor Lauren Schroeder, HERI member and University of Toronto academic.

"By centring current South African researchers and the Taung community, this podcast invites listeners to think about the science of human evolution not just as a series of exciting discoveries, but as a human story shaped by place, historical context and perspective."

Unburied Season 2: The Taung Child is available now across all major podcast platforms, including [Apple Podcasts](#) and [Spotify](#). It is brought to you by ARC, in partnership with HERI and UCT. It is written, produced and sound-designed by Rasmus Bitsch and Neil Liddell; hosted by Rasmus Bitsch.

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