

Introduction

In 2014, the South Asasif Conservation Project, directed by Dr. Elena Pischikova, discovered a previously unknown side chamber cut into the north wall of the sun-court of the Tomb of Karabasken (TT 391). The chamber contained an intact intrusive burial assemblage which included three mummies. One of these was most unusual, consisting of just the upper half of the body which was truncated at the waist. Initially thought to be a mummy that had suffered damage when being looted by tomb robbers, closer examination of the position of the mummy and its condition have revealed that the severance of the body was a *perimortem* event.



The Fate of the Half-Man

There has been much speculation about what kind of event could have resulted in the complete loss of the body below the mid-thorax. Theories have included speculation that the young man could have suffered a fatal attack by a crocodile or a lion in which the severed lower portion of his body was consumed and therefore impossible to recover.

Another idea proposed by the author is that there was an accident where the young man was killed by a rock-fall which crushed and buried the lower half of his body, leaving only the top half exposed and able to be recovered.

One final theory is that the half-man was not the victim of a traumatic *perimortem* event, but had instead been born without legs as a consequence of a congenital condition such as caudal recession syndrome or limb deficiency amelia. If this could be confirmed, the case of the half-man would be a valuable addition to the palaeopathology of ancient Egypt.

The Embalmer’s Art

The importance of the completeness of the body for the afterlife meant that if what remained of the lower half of the body could be retrieved, it would have been. The event which killed this young man would therefore presumably have been a traumatic event that occurred in such a way that it was not possible for the lower section of the body to be recovered, and for some reason, no false limbs created so that he would be complete in the hereafter. The case of half-man is also interesting as it displays the creativity and ingenuity of the embalmers who conducted the mummification of what remained of his body. They utilised a wooden box to stabilise what was left of the torso, presumably right at the beginning of the mummification process where the body was still malleable enough to be manipulated.

Although, in the case of the half-man, the missing portion of the body was too large to be reconstructed, there are several published cases of mummies which have been prepared with artificial limbs to substitute those lost in life or at around the time of death. These include Mummy 1770 in the Manchester Museum which has been equipped with prosthetics to replace the lower legs that had been lost *perimortem*. Similarly, Mummy 2343 from the collection of the Archaeological Museum of Naples has been equipped with wooden prosthetic feet.

Significance of the Half-Man and His Presence in TT 391

The half-man was one of three mummies found in the side chamber. Two had been deposited during the 25th dynasty, and then the third was interred much later when the chamber was reused during the mid-Ptolemaic period. Analysis of the burial equipment associated with the half-man and the mummy of an elderly woman suggests that they are contemporary in date.

Interestingly, both mummies had bilateral olecranon foramina, a heritable non-metric trait where there is a hole through the olecranon fossa of the distal humerus. A study into the prevalence of this trait amongst the modern Egyptian population found a frequency of 7.9%. The presence of two individuals with the same non-metric trait in the same chamber indicates that there may be a genetic link between the pair.

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