

Study reveals that Pharaoh's throat was cut during royal coup

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Conspirators murdered Egyptian king Ramesses III by cutting his throat, concludes a study in the Christmas issue published on *BMJ* website today.

Ramesses III - the second Pharaoh of the 20th dynasty - is believed to have reigned from 1186 to 1155 BC. The discovery of papyrus trial documents show that in 1155 BC members of his harem made an attempt on his life as part of a palace coup.

The conspiracy was led by Tiye, one of his two known wives, and her son Prince Pentawere, over who would inherit the throne, but it is not clear whether the plot was successful or not.

The fate of Ramesses III has therefore long been the subject of debate among Egyptologists.

So a team of researchers, led by Dr Albert Zink from the Institute for Mummies and the Iceman of the European Academy of Bolzano/Bozen in Italy, undertook detailed anthropological and forensic analyses on the mummies of Ramesses III and unknown man E, the suspected son of the king.

CT scans of Ramesses III revealed a wide and deep wound in the throat of the [mummy](#), probably caused by a sharp blade – and which could have caused immediate death, say the authors.

A Horus eye amulet was also found inside the wound, most probably inserted by the ancient Egyptian embalmers during the mummification process to promote healing, add the authors. The neck was covered by a collar of thick linen layers.

Analysis of unknown man E revealed an age of 18-20 years, while an inflated thorax and compressed skinfolds around the neck of the mummy suggests violent actions that led to death, such as [strangulation](#), write the authors.

Furthermore, the body was not mummified in the usual way – and was covered with a "ritually impure" goatskin - which the authors say could be interpreted as evidence for a punishment in the form of a non-royal burial procedure.

The authors believe that unknown man E "is a good candidate for Pentawere." However, they stress that the cause of death "has to remain a matter of speculation."

Finally, DNA analysis revealed that the mummies share the same parental lineage, "strongly suggesting that they were father and son," they say.

The authors conclude that Ramesses III "was murdered during the harem conspiracy by cutting his throat." They add that the genetic relationship of unknown man E to Ramesses III, and his unusual mummification process, including the ritually impure use of a goat skin to cover the body, makes him a good candidate for Pentaware. Thereby, shedding new light on the harem conspiracy.

Provided by British Medical Journal

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