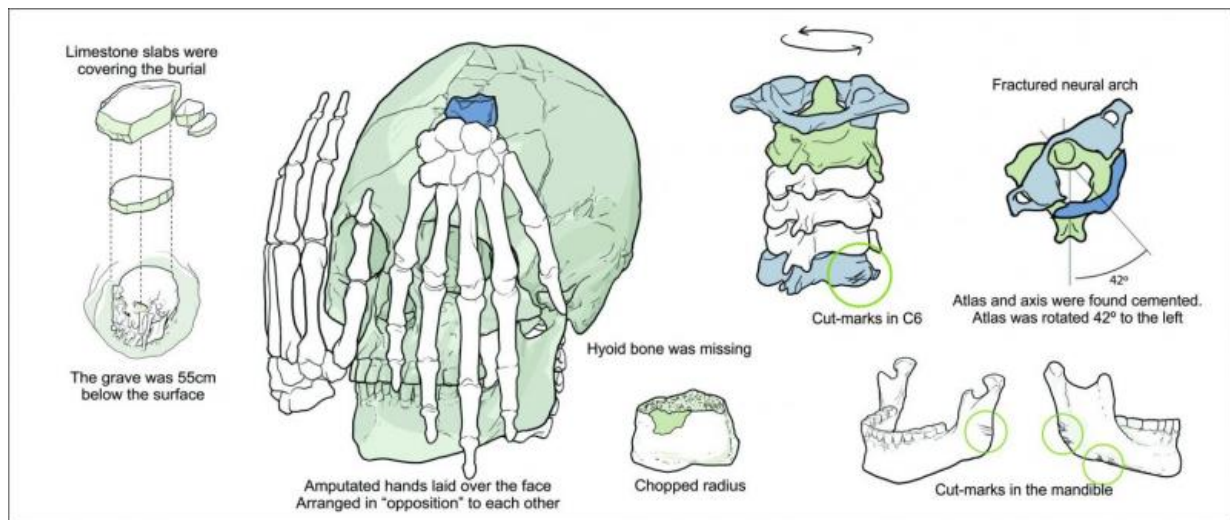


9,000 year-old ritualized decapitation found in Brazil

September 23 2015



A schematic representation of Burial 26 from Lapa do Santo. Credit: Drawing by Gil Tokyo.

A 9,000 year-old case of human decapitation has been found in the rock shelter of Lapa do Santo in Brazil, according to a study published September 23, 2015 in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by André Strauss from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Germany and colleagues.

An archaeological site called Lapa do Santo, located in east-central Brazil, contains evidence of human occupation dating back to ~12,000

years ago. In 2007, researchers found fragments of a buried body, Burial 26, including a cranium, jaw, the first six cervical vertebrae, and two severed hands at the site. They dated the [remains](#) back to ~9,000 years ago using [accelerator mass spectrometry](#). The researchers found amputated hands laid over the face of the skull arranged opposite each other and observed v-shaped cut marks on the jaw and sixth cervical vertebra.

Based on strontium analysis comparing Burial 26's isotopic signature to other specimens from Lapa do Santo, the researchers suggest Burial 26 was likely a local member of the group. Additionally, the presentation of the remains, lead the authors to think that this was likely a ritualized decapitation instead of trophy-taking. If this is the case, these remains may demonstrate sophisticated mortuary rituals among hunter-gatherers in the Americas during this time period. The authors think this may be the oldest case of decapitation found in the New World, leading to a re-evaluation of the previous interpretations of this practice, particularly with regards to its origins and geographic dispersion.

More information: Strauss A, Oliveira RE, Bernardo DV, Salazar-García DC, Talamo S, Jaouen K, et al. (2015) The Oldest Case of Decapitation in the New World (Lapa do Santo, East-Central Brazil). *PLOS ONE* 10(9): e0137456. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0137456](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0137456)

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