

# Foetus in bishop's coffin was probably his grandson

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The bundle had been squeezed under the mattress in the coffin. Credit: Gunnar Menander

Bishop Peder Winstrup died in 1679, and is one of the most well-preserved human bodies from the 1600s. Researchers at Lund University in Sweden may now have solved the mystery of why a fetus was hidden in his coffin in Lund Cathedral. DNA from the bishop and the fetus, along with kinship analyses, has shown that the child was probably the

bishop's own grandson.

Something is protruding between Bishop Peder Winstrup's two calves. The X-ray reveals small bones. Could it be an animal? When the image is studied more closely, the osteologists from Lund University can see faint signs of what is to become the collarbones—it is a human fetus.

Inside the coffin they find the bundle, wrapped in a piece of linen cloth. Judging by the length of the femur, it was 5-6 months old and stillborn. The discovery raised a number of questions—one of them was why it was in the bishop's coffin.

"It was not uncommon for small children to be placed in coffins with adults. The fetus may have been placed in the coffin after the funeral, when it was in a vaulted tomb in Lund Cathedral and therefore accessible," says Torbjörn Ahlström, professor of historical osteology at Lund University, and one of the leading researchers behind the study.

The burial book from Lund Cathedral confirms that coffins of children were placed here, without them being related to the family.

"Placing a coffin in a vault is one thing, but placing the fetus in the bishop's coffin is quite another. It made us wonder if there was any relationship between the child and the bishop," says Torbjörn Ahlström.

Therefore, researchers at Stockholm University analyzed samples from Peder Winstrup and the fetus. The results show that it was a boy, and that they had a second-degree kinship, that is, they shared roughly 25% of the same genes. Since they had different mitochondrial lineages, but there was a Y-chromosome match, the relationship was determined to be on the father's side.

"Archaeogenetics can contribute to the understanding of kinship

relations between buried individuals, and in this case more specifically between Winstrup and the fetus," says Maja Krzewinska at the Center for Paleogenetics at Stockholm University, who was involved in the analysis.

As is the case for second-degree relationships, the following constellations involving Winstrup and the fetus are possible: uncles, nephews, grandparents, grandchildren, half-siblings and double cousins. What is the most probable relationship in this scenario can be deduced from the knowledge that exists about the Winstrup family.

By studying this, the researchers were able to rule out a number of possible relationships, however, one remained a distinct possibility.

"It is possible that the stillborn baby boy was Peder Pedersen Winstrup's son, and therefore the bishop was his grandfather," says Maja Krzewinska.

Perhaps it is a family drama we see the contours of here. Peder Pedersen Winstrup did not follow in his father's and grandfather's footsteps and study theology, instead he became interested in the art of fortification. He lost his father's property in the Great Reduction in 1680, and probably lived on alms from relatives during the latter part of his life. With Peder Pedersen Winstrup's death, the male lineage came to an end for the noble family Winstrup. Placing the deceased fetus in the bishop's [coffin](#) must have been a heavily symbolic act: he had given birth to a son, albeit stillborn.

**More information:** Maja Krzewińska et al, Related in death? A curious case of a foetus hidden in bishop Peder Winstrup's coffin in Lund, Sweden, *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jasrep.2021.102939](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2021.102939)

Provided by Lund University

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