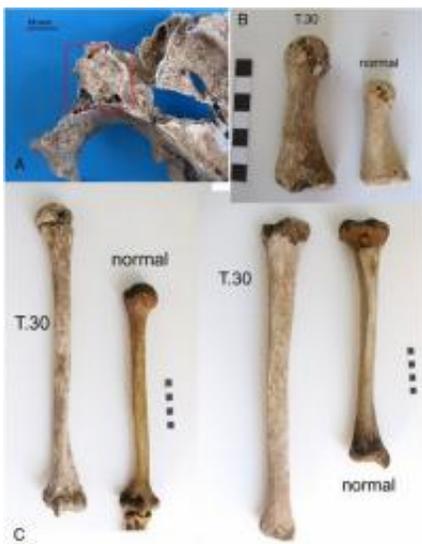


Paleopathologist finds gigantism in third century Roman skeleton

November 19 2012, by Bob Yirka



Credit: (c)2012 [i]Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism[/i], doi: 10.1210/jc.2012-2726

(Phys.org)—Paleopathologist Simona Minozzi and her team working at the University of Pisa, have published a paper in the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* describing the skeletal remains of a Roman man from the third century that was first partially unearthed in 1991 in Italy. It is believed the man had gigantism, a metabolic condition that causes people to grow exceptionally tall. The skeleton was believed to have been from a man between the ages of 16 and 20 when he died, who would have stood 6 feet, 8 inches tall.

Gigantism generally occurs due to a tumor in the [pituitary gland](#) that causes [growth hormones](#) to be released in an abnormal manner while a person is still young. It's extremely rare, occurring in just three people in a million, causing them to grow to heights ranging from seven to nine feet tall. In early Roman times, such a tall person would have stood out from the crowd, as the average height for a man in the third century Roman world, was just 5 feet, 6 inches.

In studying the skeleton, Minozzi and her team found evidence of skull damage that appears to have occurred as the result of a tumor causing distention, a frequent occurrence with those that have the condition today. They also found evidence that the man had not yet ceased growing, another common symptom found with people that have the disorder. Dying young is also common for those that have gigantism as such growth tends to lead to other problems such as with the [circulatory system](#). Thus far, the research team has been unable to identify the cause of death in this case, however.

The team also looked for clues that might provide some insight into how the man was treated by people around him as surely his great height would have made him a curiosity. Unfortunately, his tomb, which was originally discovered back in 1991 held no artifacts, though the manner in which he was laid to rest indicated that his burial was no different from others of his time. During the original dig, it was noted that the tomb was unusually long, but it wasn't opened until recently. Noting the unique skeleton, the remains were sent to Minozzi's facility for further study.

More information: Pituitary Disease from the Past: A Rare Case of Gigantism in Skeletal Remains from the Roman Imperial Age, Published online before print October 2, 2012, [doi: 10.1210/jc.2012-2726](https://doi.org/10.1210/jc.2012-2726)

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