

Archaeologists go high-tech in 2,500-year-old Greek cold case

15 July 2017, by Catherine Boitard



Archaeologists in Athens believe they may have found some of the remains of an army raised by nobleman Cylon 2,500 years ago.

More than 2,500 years ago, an Athenian nobleman named Cylon—the first recorded Olympic champion—tried to take over the city of Athens and install himself as its sole ruler.

According to Thucydides and Herodotus, Athenian and Greek historians who wrote about the coup, Cylon enticed an army of followers to enter the city and lay siege to the Acropolis.

They were defeated, but Cylon managed to escape.

Now archaeologists in Athens believe they may have found some of the remains of Cylon's army in a mass grave in Phaleron, four miles (6 kilometres) south of downtown Athens.

The discovery of the 80 skeletons of men is "unequaled" in Greece, said site project director Stella Chrysoulaki.

The men, young and well-fed, were found lying in

the unmarked grave in three rows, some on their backs while others were tossed facedown on their stomachs.

All of the men had their hands in iron chains and at least 52 of them had their hands tied above their heads.

They died from blows to the head, victims of a "political execution" that dates back to between 675 and 650 BC according to pieces of pottery found in the grave, Chrysoulaki said.

At the time, Athens was just being formed and the city was transitioning towards a democracy, Eleanna Prevedorou, a bioarchaeological researcher on the project, said.



Eleanna Prevedorou is a bioarchaeological researcher on the project, which will see high-tech methods deployed akin to those seen on TV shows such as 'CSI' to examine the skeletons.

And it was happening "against a backdrop of political turmoil, tensions between tyrants, aristocrats and the working class," she added.

'Crime Scene Investigation'

Bioarchaeological scientists use forensic research, such as DNA profiling, to investigate and ultimately uncover how humans lived and died by examining skeletons.

"We are going to use, roughly speaking, the methods made famous by television series on forensics crime science," joked Panagiotis Karkanas, laboratory director and geoarchaeologist at the Malcolm H. Wiener Laboratory at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens.

Probably the most famous of these TV series, CBS' "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation", which chronicles the cases of an elite team of police forensics investigators, has spawned the shorthand CSI to describe the technology the agents use.

Karkanas' team, though technically not crime scene investigators, will apply similar high-tech methods using some of the same tools.

They will perform a battery of tests—particularly gene, radiographic and isotopic analyses—to uncover the mysteries hidden inside each skull and [skeleton](#) fragment.

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