Researchers find 3,000-year-old shark attack victim
23 June 2021

"We were initially flummoxed by what could have caused at least 790 deep, serrated injuries to this man," say the Oxford pair. "There were so many injuries and yet he was buried in the community burial ground, the Tsukumo Shell-mound cemetery site."

They continue, "The injuries were mainly confined to the arms, legs, and front of the chest and abdomen. Through a process of elimination, we ruled out human conflict and more commonly-reported animal predators or scavengers."

Since archeological cases of shark reports are extremely rare, they turned to forensic shark attack cases for clues and worked with expert George Burgess, Director Emeritus of the Florida Program for Shark Research. And a reconstruction of the attack was put together by the international team.

The team concluded that the individual died more than 3,000 years ago, between 1370 to 1010 BC. The distribution of wounds strongly suggest the victim was alive at the time of attack; his left hand was sheared off, possibly a defense wound.

Individual No. 24's body had been recovered soon after the attack and buried with his people at the cemetery. Excavation records showed he was also missing his right leg and his left leg was placed on top of his body in an inverted position.

According to the pair, "Given the injuries, he was clearly the victim of a shark attack. The man may well have been fishing with companions at the time, since he was recovered quickly. And, based on the character and distribution of the tooth marks, the most likely species responsible was either a tiger or white shark."

Co-author Dr. Mark Hudson, a researcher with the Max Planck Institute, says, "The Neolithic people of Jomon Japan exploited a range of marine resources... It's not clear if Tsukumo 24 was..."
deliberately targeting sharks or if the shark was attracted by blood or bait from other fish. Either way, this find not only provides a new perspective on ancient Japan, but is also a rare example of archeologists being able to reconstruct a dramatic episode in the life of a prehistoric community.


Provided by University of Oxford

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