

Even Egypt's Ancient Rulers Suffered From Hunger And Disease

March 7, 2013

[Lawrence LeBlond](#) for redOrbit.com – Your Universe Online

A long-standing belief that ancient Egyptian governors and rulers lived the high life is being called into question. A recent excavation of the Qubbet el-Hawa necropolis, in the region of Aswan, has offered up evidence that not even the wealthy rulers of the time could avoid hunger, [malnutrition](#), disease and high [infant mortality](#) rate.

Researchers from the [University of Jaen](#), along with anthropologists from the [University of Granada](#), analyzed a large number of mummies and skeletons from one of the necropolis' tombs and drew the conclusion that these wealthy ancients did not live in such good condition as previously believed. They also uncovered evidence that the governors of Aswan and their families regularly interbred with the black peoples of neighboring Nubia (present-day Sudan).

The [Qubbet el-Hawa project](#), which also received assistance from the [Supreme Council of Antiquities](#) of the Arab Republic of Egypt, involved excavation of tomb no. 33, which was constructed during the 12th Dynasty (1939-1760 BC). The tomb housed the corpse of one of the leading luminaries of the period, a figure whose identity is still not known today.

The tomb was later re-used by the 18th, 22nd and 27th Dynasties as well, and is one of the largest sites in the necropolis. The team views this site as archaeologically significant, since it houses at least one chamber that remains untouched and intact, containing three decorated wooden sarcophagi.

Prof. Miguel Botella Lopez, of Granada's Laboratory of Physical Anthropology, was the lead anthropologist on the case, taking part in the analysis of the bones of the mummies and calculating the number of individuals belonging to the more recent dynasties entombed at the site. In all, more than 200 mummies were taken from tomb no. 33.

The team's results have led to some very new understanding about how the ancient rulers lived. Not only do their data reveal interesting conclusions about physical characteristics of these ancients, but also reveal facts about the living conditions during the period.

In explaining the [findings](#), Prof. Botella said, "although the cultural level of the age was extraordinary, the anthropological analysis of the human remains reveals the population in general and the governors – the highest social class – lived in conditions in which their health was very precarious, on the edge of survival."

The life expectancy of the time was roughly 30 years old and even that was a stretch. They suffered young and died early as a result of "malnutrition and severe gastrointestinal disorders, due to drinking the polluted waters of the Nile," said the team.

This conclusion can be met due to the fact that the bones of children had no marks on them, “which demonstrates that they died from some serious infectious disease.” Many of the mummies unearthed in the tomb were also of young adults between 17 and 25 years old, putting the proverbial nail in the coffin on the early mortality rate theory.

Prof. Botella also made mention of the fact that the tombs of the Qubbet el-Hawa necropolis also contain inscriptions “of great historical importance, not only for Egypt, but for the whole of Humanity.” He found inscriptions in the tomb of Governor Herjuf (2200 BC) detailing several journeys he had made to central Africa, during one of which he brought back a pygmy. According to Prof. Botella, this is the oldest mention made of the African ethnic group.

Other inscriptions in the tomb tell the tale of Egypt’s interracial relations with Nubia, which had gone on for nearly 1000 years.

Qubbet el-Hawa has become one of the most important archaeological sites in all of Egypt due to the wealth of information obtained from the necropolis’ tomb, the researchers conclude.