

## Re-examination and possible identification of human remains discovered near Tromsø in 1946

Lars Uhlin-Hansen<sup>1\*</sup>, Eric F. Bergseth<sup>2</sup>, Daniel Kling<sup>2</sup> and Marguerethe Stenersen<sup>2</sup>

In the summer of 1946, on a small island close to Tromsø, it was made a discovery of some skeletal human remains. No clothing or soft tissue was observed - the remains were obviously old. After an examination by the local police, revealing two skeletons, the remains were uncovered and removed to a burial site at the nearest churchyard. Many years later, this hypothesis was put forward; could the identity of the remains be Birte Olsdatter and her brother Benjamin? Both siblings were sentenced to execution in 1741, accused of the murder of Birte's husband.

In 2019, in an attempt to confirm the hypotheses, it was performed an exhumation of the skeletons, followed by an anthropological examination. The examination confirmed that one of the skeletons belonged to a young woman and the other one to a young man, both at the same age as Birte and Benjamin at the time of the execution. Furthermore, conventional DNA-analysis confirmed that they were siblings.

Neither Birte nor Benjamin had any children, but they had several siblings. Some of the siblings have living descendants, and according to genealogical data, one male descendant is related to Benjamin through a paternal line six generations back. One attempt to prove that the remains were actually Birte and Benjamin was to compare Y-chromosomal data from the male relative of Benjamin and the male skeleton. Several differences were observed; 19 out of 25 Y-markers from the male remain and the putative male relative are different, so a positive identification by these data was not possible. In any further attempts to reach a conclusion on the identity of the two remains, different DNA-sequencing techniques have to be considered. See abstract and presentation by Erik F. Bergseth et al.

\*lead presenter

<sup>1</sup> Lars Uhlin-Hansen@unn.no University of Tromsø, Faculty of Health Science, Institute of Medical Biology

<sup>2</sup> Oslo University Hospital, Dept. of Forensic Sciences, Section of Forensic Genetics – Kinship and Identity