

‘Ata’ was no alien: DNA analysis solves mystery of tiny mummified Chilean skeleton

In the 14 years since it was found in an abandoned mining town in Chile’s Atacama Desert, the bizarre 6-inch skeleton has inspired fervid speculation, including theories of unearthly origins.

...Was this a stillborn baby? A nonhuman primate of some sort? An alien being?

Now, genetic science has given these mummified remains a species (*Homo sapiens*), a gender (female), an age (she probably died shortly after birth) and as many as 52 genetic clues to her extreme physical abnormalities (her bones appear to have aged at an accelerated pace).

...

The mummified skeleton has been called “Ata,” and, starting roughly four years ago, researchers from Stanford University and UC San Francisco isolated and purified its DNA from marrow inside its tiny, preserved bones. Then they put a new generation of genetic sequencing technology to work.

Some of the genetic mutations they found have not been recorded before — not so surprising in a field in which the function of most genes, and of whole genetic regions, remains a mystery...

The authors of the study, published Thursday in the journal *Genome Research*, speculated that the nitrate mining that had drawn settlers to the region in which Ata was found may have exposed her pregnant mother to some environmental toxin that contributed to the genetic wreckage.

But it may as easily have been a chance event.

Read full, original post: [Mystery solved: Tiny skeleton belonged to a human girl with a combination of rare genetic defects](#)