

Archaeologists unseal 2000-year-old mummy discovered in Italy's 'Tomb of Cerberus'

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In the painting, Hercules is seen battling the three-headed hound of Hades, cerberus, in his twelfth and final labour. Photograph:(Others)

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

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Archaeologists unsealed a 2,000-year-old sarcophagus during the investigation of the "Tomb of Cerberus". The discovery also included a remarkably well-preserved body wrapped in a shroud.

The archaeologists found the chamber tomb within cultivated land situated in the municipality of Giugliano in Campania, near Naples, Italy in 2023. Ever since, they have been examining the tomb with microcameras.

The research team was led by Dr Simona Formola, who found the "supine inhumed" body. The remains belonged to someone who was in an "excellent state of conservation", a translated statement noted.

Archaeologists said that the remains have been preserved by plant-based creams that were applied over the bodies before they were sealed. The climatic conditions of the burial chamber could have aided the process of that person's preservation. The shroud was also mineralised.

The mummified person was accompanied by several objects, including ointment jars and other things which are often used to clean the body during burial.

The perfect preservation suggests that the person could have been related to the individual for whom the tomb was being constructed. However, the research team has been examining the preserved body to understand whether or not the individual had a privileged upbringing.

Last year, archaeologists were led to the unsealed tomb during excavations at the necropolis border. They came across many frescoes across the untouched chamber's ceilings. The walls were found in pristine condition.

A stunning fresco of Cerberus, the three-headed hound from Greek mythology believed to be the protector of the underworld, graced the tomb's entrance. It is said that the multiheaded beast keeps the dead from escaping from hell's vengeance.

In a statement, superintendent Mariano Nuzzo said: "In recent months, in fact, laboratory analyses conducted on samples taken from the inhumations and the depositional beds have returned a considerable amount of data on the treatment of the deceased's body and the funerary ritual carried out, significantly enriching the panorama of our knowledge."

The experts are conducting DNA analysis to identify the mummified human remains with funding from Italy's Ministry of Culture.