

Ahom skeletons to be tested for DNA

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Guwahati: For the first time in the northeast, a team of archaeologists will conduct DNA tests on skeletal remains excavated from a burial mound of the famed Charaideo Maidam to determine their origins.

The team will find out whether the remains belong to members of the erstwhile Ahom royal family by extracting DNA and comparing it with that of living descendants of the royal family.

The Guwahati circle of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute will collect DNA samples from living members of the royal



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family, who hail from the Tai Ahom community, and compare it with DNA extracted from the bones.

Though the human remains were collected from Maidam number 2 (a burial mound at the Ahom monument of Charaideo) almost a decade ago, they were analyzed only recently. Five skulls are part of the

remains, but it is believed that six persons were buried in the mound.

Twenty DNA samples were collected from the remains and 16 samples were collected from living male members of the royal family. Two samples were collected from female members who married into the royal family and two from

members of other families.

"The purpose of the comparison is to find out if the skeletal remains belong to a king or to plunderers. For centuries, the mounds of Charaideo were plundered. The DNA analysis will reveal the truth," said Madhujyoti Rajkonwar, a member of the royal family.

"Earlier, we believed there were five individuals, but now, it is clear that six individuals were buried. The bones were kept at the ASI's office in Sivasagar. We opened the box on Monday. The DNA results will take time. It is important to know whether the remains belong to members of the royal family," said Veena Mushrif Tripathi, assistant professor at Deccan

College Post Graduate and Research Institute.

There are more than 130 maidams or burial mounds in Charaideo. Ahom nobles and family members were all buried there. The mounds are considered to be holy and carry a sentimental value for the Tai Ahom community.

"This is the most ambitious archaeological analysis in the region. For the first time in the northeast, such a comparison between ancient and modern DNA is being carried out," said Milan Kumar Chauley, superintending archaeologist, Guwahati circle, ASI.

The Charaideo Maidam is on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.