

Description

On July 13, 1793, the radical journalist and revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat was stabbed in his medicinal bath by Charlotte Corday, a Royalist sympathizer who plunged a kitchen knife into his chest. A DNA sample labeled "Marat" was later extracted from the blood-stained parchment he was holding at the moment of his death — one of the most extraordinary forensic specimens in the history of genetics. The analysis confirmed his identity and, remarkably, provided a clinical diagnosis: Marat suffered from a debilitating skin condition, the likely cause of his constant need for medicinal baths.

Before becoming one of the Revolution's most feared voices, Marat had been a physician and scientist who studied heat and electricity. He transformed himself into a radical journalist, using his newspaper L'Ami du peuple to launch vicious attacks on the aristocracy and call for the mass execution of enemies of the Republic. His assassination elevated him immediately to revolutionary martyr. His eulogy was delivered before the National Convention by the Marquis de Sade.



Jacques-Louis David, The Death of Marat (1793).

The skin condition identified in Marat's DNA, seborrheic dermatitis, was a fungal infection likely contracted during the years he spent hiding in the sewers of Paris to evade authorities. Researchers suggest that he also suffered from a secondary bacterial super-infection. This provides a direct clinical explanation for his constant immersion in medicinal baths. That routine, in turn, created the vulnerable circumstances Charlotte Corday exploited to assassinate him. The document he clutched in his final moments became the medium through which modern science could read his body, his illness, and his identity. Few historical DNA samples carry such a direct chain of causation: a lifestyle, a disease, a location, a death — all confirmed by a single bloodstained piece of parchment.

Modern population	Distance
French (Normandy)	3.900
French (Grand Est)	4.101
Austrian	4.198
French (Hauts-de-France)	4.241
German	4.242
French	4.280
Dutch	4.447
Hungarian	4.468
English (Kent)	4.553
Serb (Croatia)	4.563

Source

Date: 1743–1793 CE

mtDNA: H2a2a1f

Location: France

Research: Metagenomic analysis of a blood stain from the French revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat (1743–1793)

Sample(s): Marat