

MULTIPLE/MASS BURIALS FROM THE LATE BRONZE AGE AND THE EARLY IRON AGE OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN – A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Background: The Gava culture dominated the Eastern Carpathian Basin (12–9th c. BCE) is characterised by a homogeneous material culture, settlement with a high density of archaeological finds and distinctive Hajduboszormeny-style metallurgy. Despite its prominence, cemeteries associated with the culture are largely unknown. In the 9–8th centuries BCE, the appearance of steppe-related Mezocsat culture introduced significant changes, including rare inhumation burials concentrated at key transport hubs. Recently discovered Early Iron Age mass burials provide new insights into this transitional period.

Objective: The research focuses on the Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age transition (9–8th c. BCE), a period marked by numerous settlements but few known cemeteries, through the bioarchaeological analysis of 3 archaeological sites (Pusztataskony-Ledence, Hodmezovasarhely-Kopanacs XI, and Tiszabo-Galamb-dulo).

Methods: Osteological analyses were conducted on human skeletal remains from the 3 sites, including the assessment of preservation, minimum number of individuals (MNI), age at death and sex estimation, and the examination of pathological and traumatic lesions.

Results: The skeletal remains are generally well preserved, showing limited taphonomic alteration and high anatomical completeness. The reconstructed demographic profiles indicate that subadults are represented in proportions consistent with expected prehistoric mortality patterns, unlike many contemporary cemetery populations where children are underrepresented. The preservation of the remains enables detailed investigation of stress markers, trauma and infectious lesions that may reflect the living conditions and mortality patterns of these communities.

Conclusion: The main question regarding these complex funerary structures is interpretation: do they represent the consequences of an epidemic, a massacre or a specific mortuary ritual?

Keywords: Carpathian Basin; Mass burials; Paleopathology; Bioarchaeology; Prehistory.

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