

PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS TARGETING PERIMORTEM CUT MARKS FROM THE MASS GRAVE 3 CONNECTED TO THE BATTLE OF MOHACS, 1526 CE

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Background: This year the 29th of August is the 500th anniversary of one of the most decisive battles of Late Medieval Europe. Five mass graves are known to be directly connected to the Battle of Mohács from the Ottoman expansion era. The pits contain human remains belonging to members of the defeated army of the Kingdom of Hungary. Between August of 2020 and October of 2022, mass grave 3 was completely excavated in three seasons revealing high number of perimortem cut marks on the remains.

Objective: According to our theory, the buried individuals may have been executed rather than falling in the battlefield or having been slaughtered in the attacked camp site. To test the execution hypothesis, we have created a sample of 35 individuals with different excavation dates and good preservation of most major body parts, representing the entire extent of the grave.

Results: Several perimortem cut marks were observed and recorded according to their location on the skeleton. More than 85% of all perimortem cut marks affect the skulls and the cervical vertebrae, and 80% of lesions are in the posterior regions. Our opinion is that most of the individuals were executed by decapitation or at least targeted cuts to the occipito-cervical region. Relatively few early modern battlefield mass graves are known and analysed applying modern standards; our examinations provide unique opportunity for detailed insight into the events of an early modern battle.

Conclusion: Currently, approximately 10% of the bioarchaeological material is examined. In the next few years, comprehensive anthropological and forensic investigation will be carried out, yielding more detailed results and well-established conclusions concerning one of the most important events of the history of Hungary.

Keywords: Perimortem cut marks; Paleopathology; Execution; Decapitation; Battle of Mohacs.

Acknowledgement / Funding Source: This study was carried out within the framework of the Mohacs 500 project, with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Hungarian Government (government decree nos. 1159/2023., IV. 27. and 1288/2024., IX. 19.).