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ORAL PRESENTATION – O25

EXAMINATION OF PERIMORTEM INJURIES TO THE POSTCRANIAL SKELETON IN THE HUMAN BONE MATERIAL FROM MASS GRAVE 3 ASSOCIATED WITH THE BATTLE OF MOHACS (AUGUST 29, 1526 CE)

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Background: The mass graves linked to the Battle of Mohacs (1526) are located at the Mohacs National Memorial Site in southern Hungary. Historical sources suggest that around 2,000 prisoners were executed after the battle and buried in these graves. After excavations in 1960 and 1976, mass grave 3 was re-excavated between 2020 and 2022, enabling detailed archaeological and anthropological analyses.

Objective: To conduct an osteoarchaeological analysis of the human remains from mass grave 3, focusing on perimortem trauma observable on the postcranial skeleton, and to expand the previously limited dataset to refine the interpretation of injury patterns within the assemblage.

Materials and methods: The analysis includes skeletal remains of 161 individuals recovered from mass grave no. 3. After excavation, the bones were systematically examined using macroscopic osteological methods.

Results: Perimortem trauma was identified in 100 individuals, including 190 cut marks, 13 stab wounds, and 43 fractures. The larger sample provides a more complete picture of injury patterns and reveals greater trauma diversity than previously recognized. Postcranial injuries were less common than cranial and cervical trauma. While historical evidence supports an attempted escape scenario, the exact circumstances of these injuries – combat, captivity, escape, or execution – remain uncertain.

Conclusion: The Mohács mass graves are rare in Europe and offer exceptional archaeological and anthropological insight into both the battle and its aftermath.

Keywords: Bioarchaeology; Paleopathology; Sharp force injury; Execution.

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