

EXECUTION-INDICATIVE SHARP-FORCE INJURIES IN MOHACS MASS GRAVE III – FORENSIC MEDICAL ASPECTS

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Background: One of the five known mass graves associated with the Battle of Mohacs preserves the remains of approximately 370 individuals. Preliminary forensic observations suggested that many of the fatal injuries were more consistent with execution than battlefield combat.

Objective: To identify patterns of perimortem trauma and evaluate the hypothesis of mass execution.

Materials and methods: A representative sample of 45 individuals was selected from the mass grave using expert selection. Potentially fatal injuries and the immediate causes of death were assessed using conventional forensic anthropological methods complemented by modern medical imaging techniques.

Results: In nearly two-thirds of the examined individuals, death resulted from a sword strike delivered from behind to the occipital region adjacent to the spine and the C1–C3 vertebrae, causing spinal cord injury. Approximately one-third died from injuries to the major cervical vessels caused by frontally inflicted sword blows to the face and neck. Multiple repeated strikes and a non-random distribution of non-fatal injuries were also documented.

Conclusions: The observed injury patterns strongly support the hypothesis that these individuals were killed in a mass execution rather than in battlefield combat, with no primary intention of decapitation.

Keywords: Decapitation; Cervical spine trauma; Mass grave; Sharp-force injuries; Execution.

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