

PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE PALEOPATHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE HUMAN SKELETAL REMAINS FROM MASS GRAVE 4 AT THE MOHACS NATIONAL MEMORIAL SITE (1526 CE), HUNGARY

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Background: At the Battle of Mohacs (1526 CE), the Christian army was defeated by an Ottoman force nearly three times its size. Historical sources indicate that during the battle, captives were taken, and about 2 thousand captives were executed two days later.

Objective: To better understand the fate of these victims, we examined patterns of perimortem trauma in the skeletons of the mass grave IV (237 individuals) at the Mohacs National Memorial (Satorhely, Hungary), one of the five known mass graves associated with the battle.

Materials and methods: The human remains were generally poorly preserved, and most skeletons were incomplete. Despite these limitations, the material was analysed using standard macroscopic methods by a team of osteologists and forensic practitioners.

Results: Our results indicate that sharp force perimortem trauma most frequently affected the left side of the body, particularly the parietal bones, the mandible, and the ulna. The highest number of perimortem cut marks recorded on a single individual was 18. The repeated, often parallel nature of many injuries makes them unlikely to have been sustained in interpersonal combat, as such wounds would have required a high degree of precision. In addition, the angles of several lesions suggest that the victims were in a vulnerable or defenceless position when the blows were delivered.

Conclusions: This project is unique not only in Hungary but also in Europe because of the size and archaeological context of the Mohacs mass graves, as well as the complexity of their investigation. The main limitations of the study were the poor state of preservation, misalignment of skeletal parts due to natural decomposition processes, and the limited amount of directly comparable material. Future research aims to continue the analyses and provide a comprehensive demographic, palaeopathological, and forensic anthropological assessment of the individuals buried in the grave.

Keywords: Paleopathology; Perimortem trauma; Execution; Sharp force injuries.

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