

SOCIAL STATUS AND BODY ARE SIGNIFICANTLY RELATED AMONG MALES BUT NOT AMONG FEMALES IN AN EARLY MEDIEVAL AVAR POPULATION

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Background: Adult body height reflects the growth process during the subadult phase of life and varies not only between biological sexes and populations, but also in a diachronic pattern and between different social groups within a population.

Objectives: This study investigates the association between estimated body height and social status among early medieval Avars. A significant positive association between body height and social status was hypothesized.

Subjects and methods: A total of 348 skeletons (182 males, 166 females) from the Avar times burial ground Vienna Csokorgasse were included in the present study. This is 46% of the 755 burials and about 79% of the individuals older than 20 years excavated there. Only adult individuals from undisturbed or unrobbed graves were included in the sample. Body height was reconstructed based on the long bones. Social status was determined by a new classification scheme, developed for this study based on grave goods and burial characteristics.

Results: In males, body height increases significantly from low to very high social status, while the coefficient of variation declined from low to very high social status. Males of very high social status were on average 6.5 cm taller than males of low status. In contrast, no significant differences in body height between different social strata could be observed in their female counterparts. The difference between the tallest and shortest body heights is only 0.9 mm.

Conclusions: The significance of body height as an indicator of social status is only evident in the biological male sex. This could be related to social inequality between the sexes in this Avar sample. Further research is needed to better understand the significance of gender roles among the Avars.

Keywords: Early medieval Avars; Sex differences; Body height social status.

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