

BIOARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF EARLY IRON AGE PRE-SCYTHIAN BURIALS FROM HUNGARY

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Background: The transition between the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and the Early Iron Age (EIA) in the Carpathian Basin was marked by major cultural changes. During the 9th century BC, the Mezocsat group emerged in the Great Hungarian Plain, the adjacent northern foothills, and southwestern Slovakia. Known mainly from cemeteries, the absence of settlements suggests a mobile pastoral lifestyle. Their inhumation burials and grave goods indicate strong connections with the Caucasus, the Ponto-Caspian steppe, and the Northern Balkans.

Objective: This ongoing bioarchaeological study aims to investigate the mobility, biological relationships, subsistence strategies, and health status of the Mezocsat group, while assessing their affinities with preceding LBA and contemporary EIA populations of the Carpathian Basin.

Subjects and methods: The study examines the majority of available skeletal remains attributed to the Mezocsat group, most originating from northeastern Hungary. Standard anthropological methods were applied to assess biological characteristics, metric and morphological variation, pathological conditions, trauma, activity-related skeletal changes, and dietary patterns.

Results: Metric and morphological analyses indicate that the Mezocsat population formed a relatively homogeneous biological group. Skeletal trauma is uncommon and rarely associated with interpersonal violence, suggesting relatively peaceful living conditions. Regional variation in physiological stress markers may reflect episodes of nutritional stress or infectious disease. Advanced degenerative joint disease is generally absent; however, repetitive lumbar spine microtrauma in several individuals indicates specific habitual physical activities. Dietary evidence suggests a greater reliance on animal-derived foods, particularly meat and dairy products, than in other LBA and EIA populations of the Carpathian Basin.

Conclusions: The bioarchaeological evidence supports the interpretation of the Mezocsat group as a biologically homogeneous population with distinct lifestyle and subsistence patterns. Their skeletal characteristics provide important insights into mobility, health, and adaptation during the cultural transformations that accompanied the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age.

Keywords: Early Iron Age; Pre-Scythian; Mezocsat group; Bioarchaeology.

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