

LEPROSY IN THE 10–13TH CENTURY AD  
IN EASTERN HUNGARYZS. CSÓRI<sup>1</sup>, H.D. DONOGHUE<sup>2</sup>, A. MARCSIK<sup>3</sup>

In the examination of the skeletons of past human populations, the various aspects of the pathological changes provide useful information about their living circumstances and may be indicators of their health conditions. The purpose of this study is two-fold: firstly, to review the published cases of the osseous leprosy in Eastern Hungary, and secondly, to present a new case dated to the 10–13th century of a region of present-day Eastern Hungary. In this region 8 cases have already been published from the 10–12th centuries. The new case of osseous leprosy (Hajdúdorog-Szállásfölk) – from the 12–13th centuries – is housed at the J6sa Andr6s Múzeum in Nyíregyháza. The paleopathological investigation was carried out using macroscopic observation and the isolation and analysis of DNA for the detection of *Mycobacterium leprae* was carried out in London. The bone changes were manifested in the skull.

**Key words:** paleopathology, osseous leprosy, *facies leprosa*, osteoarcheological samples, Hungary, *Mycobacterium leprae* DNA.

## INTRODUCTION

The anthropological study of infectious diseases in antiquity is complex and challenging. The interplay of many variables – host resistance, pathogen virulence, cultural practices, ecological settings, malnutrition, crowding – needs to be considered. Accurate interpretation depends on the proper methodology: adequate sample size, accurate age and sex determination, careful recording of the lesion's localization, set in the context of cultural environment so far as it is possible.

The study of specific infectious diseases, including leprosy has been especially emphasized, for these diseases were among the most important selective factors in human populations in antiquity.

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Evolutionary Zoology and Human Biology, University of Debrecen, Hungary.

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Infectious Diseases and International Health, Department of Infection, University College London, UK.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Anthropology, University of Szeged, Hungary, marcsik@bio.u-szeged.hu