

TUBERCULOSIS IN AN 18TH CENTURY POPULATION OF VÁC, HUNGARY

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The infection caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* has been called by several names: lung disease, phthisis, tuberculosis, *morbus hungaricus*, etc. It was an endemic disease in Europe and it seemed almost eliminated 50 years ago, but is an increasing and major problem today.

The purpose of the study was to analyse tuberculosis patterns in a unique population living in the 18th century, before the development of antimicrobial therapy and antibiotic resistance.

Naturally-mummified individuals from the 18th century were discovered in the Dominican Church of Vác, Hungary. 265 individuals from coffins and another 46 remains from the ossuary were removed. Natural mummification was made possible by the special microclimate of the crypt. The anthropological material is stored in the Department of Anthropology, Hungarian Natural History Museum, Budapest, Hungary.

Morphological and radiological studies revealed several cases of vertebral tuberculosis (e.g. advanced-stage childhood Pott's disease, early-stage vertebral destructions due to tuberculosis, TB-calcifications)^{1,2}. On-going molecular biological studies of the whole sample reveal a very high prevalence of tuberculosis in this series^{3,4}. During our studies we took samples from different regions of the bodies of 253 mummies in order to demonstrate and characterise the DNA of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* by molecular examinations. Results show that the DNA of *M. tuberculosis* was detectable in 69.8 % of the specimens.

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