

WHAT WAS IT LIKE LIVING WITH LEPROSY IN THE AVAR AGE COMMUNITY OF KISKUNDOROZSMA-KETTŐSHATÁR I (HUNGARY)? - A CASE STUDY

Olga Spekker^{1,2}, Balázs Tihanyi^{1,3}, Luca Kis^{1,3}, Csaba Szalontai⁴, Tivadar Vida², György Pálfi¹, Antónia Marcsik¹, Erika Molnár¹

¹ *Department of Biological Anthropology, University of Szeged, Szeged, Hungary*

² *Institute of Archaeological Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary*

³ *Department of Archaeogenetics, Institute of Hungarian Research, Budapest, Hungary*

⁴ *Archaeological Heritage Protection Directorate, Hungarian National Museum, Budapest, Hungary*

The aim of our study is to demonstrate an individual (KK61) from the 8th-century-CE cemetery of Kiskundorozsma-Kettőshatár I (Hungary), who appears to have lived with leprosy (Hansen's disease). The severity and extent of the detected bony changes imply that KK61, a middle-aged male, suffered from the disease for a long time prior to his death. It has affected not only the rhinomaxillary region of his face but also his lower limbs, with severe deformation and disfigurement of the involved anatomical areas. Consequently, he would have experienced disability in performing the basic activities of daily living; and thus, he would have required regular and substantial care from others to survive. Despite his very visible disease and associated debility, that clearly marked the middle-aged male as afflicted with leprosy, he has not been segregated but buried within the cemetery boundaries, among others from his community. His grave has conformed to the mortuary practices characteristic of the Kiskundorozsma-Kettőshatár I cemetery. Based on the above, there seems to have been no distinction, leper from non-leper, in death in the late Avar Age community of Kiskundorozsma-Kettőshatár I. These findings are in accordance with the results of previous studies on other Avar Age cemeteries from the present-day territory of Hungary, indicating that prior to the 13th century CE, lepers have not been segregated from the healthy population, at least in death. It should be noted that distinction or segregation in life do not preclude normative treatment in death. Nevertheless, the long-lasting survival of KK61 with Hansen's disease indicates that he would not have been abandoned but cared for by others. The detailed contextual analysis of KK61 illuminates both the biological and social consequences of living and dying with leprosy in the late Avar Age community of Kiskundorozsma-Kettőshatár I.

Keywords

palaeopathology, leprosy, disfigurement, debility, social stigma, late Avar Age

Note/comment