

**SYMPOSIUM**

## Identification of Hungarian historical persons

Éva Susa\*

Forensic Medicine Institute, Budapest, Hungary

**ABSTRACT** This review summarises the anthropological descriptions and the factual biological reconstructions – personal identifications – of famous Hungarian dead persons of the bygone and of the recent history (sovereigns and their family members, aristocrats, famous citizens, and martyrs of the nation), and gives details about those who died as martyrs and were exhumed from the mass graves. The author publishes the reasons, the circumstances and the results of more than 70 cases of forensic exhumations and personal identifications. According to the selected literature she claims that a historian - archaeologist - anthropologist - forensic doctor co-operation can give us very valuable and useful pieces of information about the characters of the past events.

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**KEY WORDS**

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Interestingly, the better understanding of the real historical events can be obtained by not only historical researches. On one hand, it is beneficial to be of a certain time distance to judge an event, on the other hand it is bad, because information and documents can be lost about the truth.

One field of the forensic anthropology, which is an applied anthropological science and which belongs to the natural sciences, is personal identification. This science seeks to answer the questions of recent history. Personal identification is primarily a criminalistic task, but it is also applied in case of borderline sciences (Susa 1995).

During the last century personal identification gained a wide-range interest in connection with wars and different political events. In Europe the mass graves of the second world war and of the victims of the political trials are to be mentioned, whereas in the Anglo-Saxon countries the personal identification of those died during the 2 world wars and the Vietnam war became significant. The question of personal identification arises in the routine practice in case of dissection of corpses, parts of corpses, remains of bones, skeletons of victims of mass catastrophes or even in case of living persons (Sótonyi 1996).

Every personal identification is different depending on what kind of actual biological and historical background details are at our disposal. The most important premise is that the following conditions must be known to us: the burial place of the person to be identified, the circumstances of the burial, a determining supplement on the clothing or nearly, knowledge of the biological specification (body markers, teeth, illnesses acquired during life, injuries during life, blood

type, etc., and most importantly any kind of description about him/her).

Without the above-mentioned data it is not probable that we are able to identify the person. The sex of the skeleton can be predicted on the basis of the measurable and describable phenomena in 95% of the cases, but the age (biological age) can be estimated only with a 10-15 years difference. This rough estimation can only be limited in case of children and young people. Without these data we can only give a general description about the remains. Time interval since death can also be specified within a 50-100 years period (Bartucz 1966a; Éry 1990).

Moreover, the success of the identification is determined by the condition of the skeleton (intact, decomposed, deficient, complete) and by the number of skeletons it is chosen from, whether it is a mass-grave, etc. (Bartucz 1966d; Har-sányi 1968; Zoffmann 1982; Éry and Susa 1994b) (Table 1).

If we have reliable historical facts about the place and the method of the burial, and about the circumstances of the death, the probability of a successful identification significantly improves. Apart from the professional knowledge, this work requires moderation and responsibility since the result can deeply affect the feelings of the families involved or even a whole nation (for example, negative identification, in case of Sándor Petőfi) (Kovács 1992).

Skeletons are generally excavated in order to bury the remains of the deceased person to a permanent grave (deeper in the ground). According to the published cases, Éry (1990) claimed that in Hungary the excavated and examined skeletons can be divided into 3 groups (Table 2). The first group consists of the sovereigns, their family members and the lords (Török 1894a, 1894b, 1900; Bartucz 1927, 1935, 1938; Lontainé Santora et al. 1979, 1980; Szathmáry 1980; Susa

**Table 1.** Exhumation and identification from mass-graves in Hungary.

Place and time of death	n	Years after death	Examiner
Kuruczhalom (Kiskunhalas) 1703	min. 54 men (after cranium)	200	Bartucz
Mohács 1526, from 5 mass graves	700 -1,000 persons? 221 individual descriptions	450	Zoffmann
Soroksári street (Budapest) World War II ?	min. 39 men	50?	Éry, Susa
Apafa 1944, October	63 men	1	Horváth, Ökrös
Doboz World War II	20 persons (men, women, children)	12	Földes-Budavári
Sárkeresztúr World War II	6 persons men,women	12	Földes-Harsányi
Nagylengyel from 2 mass graves, World War II	14 persons 3-6-persons	22	Földes-Harsányi

and Varga, 1981; Hankó and Kiszely 1990; Józsa et al. 1995; Susa and Józsa, 1995a; Pap et al. 1998b; Éry et al. 1999), the so called famous people belong to the second group (Peresz-lényi 1904; Bartucz 1930b, 1966c; Malán 1952; Susa and Éry, 1995b; Pap and Susa, 1998a; Susa et al. 1996), and third group is made up of the martyrs of the nation (Bartucz 1930a, 1961, 1966b; Pajcsics 1993; Éry and Susa, 1994a, 1996; Susa 1998).

It can be seen from Table 2, that the search for the recent political victims was the reason of the largest number of exhumations and individual identifications. In connection with the change in the political system, on the ground of the initiation of TIB (Historical Justice Committee), and later on the requests of relatives, the individual exhumation and identification of those died and buried between 1947-1960 under uncertain circumstances began in the summer of 1988 (Pajcsics 1993; Kő 1994; Susa 1998).

The decision of the Political Committee of the MSZMP on November 29, 1988, gave way to arrange the questions concerning the death of Imre Nagy and his comrades (Miklós Gimes, Pál Maléter, Géza Losonczy, József Szilágyi) and of those convicted in connection with the events of 1956. The

invited professional committee completed the forensic personal identification of 6 people between March 29 and April 5, 1989, and of another 71 people until 1994 on the requests of 67 relatives.

The aim of the biological reconstruction is to certify the individual personal identity of the exhumed person. The process consists of the following steps: the definition of sex, estimation of age, reconstruction of height and weight, analysing the teeth, analysing the injuries and illnesses acquired during life, examination of blood markers, the comparison of the cranium and photo(s), superimpositions, reconstruction of the face (only in 2 cases). The relatives were allowed to observe the exhumations and the examinations of the experts. Having received the expert- opinion, the corpses were reburied according to the requests of the families.

It can be seen that the experience gained from the individual case helps the historical reconstruction in general. Together with Kinga Éry and Alán Kralovánszky we collected data about the circumstances of death and burial of the 1945-1962 period with special attention to the following questions: Who died, when, how, and where did he die?

**Table 2.** Individual identification of famous Hungarian dead of the bygone and recent history (after Éry 1990, completed by Susa 1999).

	Identified persons, and time of dead	Examiner
<b>Sovereigns, and their family members, aristocrats</b>	King Béla III and his wife Anna (1196,1183) Prince Béla of Macsó (1272)? Prince Mihály Apafi I., II. (1691,1713) Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II. (1735) Count Antal Grassalkovich and his family 6 persons (1771-1864)	Török; Éry et al. Bartucz Bartucz Bartucz; Szathmáry Pap et al.
<b>Famous citizens</b>	Palatine Joseph von Habsburg and his family, 11 persons (1801 - 1927) Balassi, Bálint (1594) poet Csokonai Vitéz, Mihály (1805) poet Simon, Antal (1808) priest and linguist Katona, József (1830) dramatist Simmelweis, Ignác (1865) physicist Steimetz, Imre (1945) military officer	Hankó, Kiszely; Susa Török Malán; Thoma Susa, Pap Bartucz Bartucz Susa, Éry
<b>Martyrs of the nation</b>	Hungarian Jacobins, 7 persons (1795) Martyrs of Arad, 13 persons (1849) Nagy, Imre and his comrades, 5 persons (1957,1958) Martyrs of the recent history, 71 persons (1948-1962)	Bartucz Bartucz Nemeskéri, Susa Éry, Susa

(Executed, died in prison, died in prison-hospital, was a victim of volley fire, is there any uncertainty about the death)? Who was buried where, when and how?

In March 1989, the only data we had were the investigation data of the ORFK (Investigating Office of Police) and the information from the family members. Apart from the professional committee, the representatives of the Ministry of Justice, Home Office, BV (Enforce a Punishment) and TIB (Historical Justice Committee) were present. Later the experts were left alone and they had a wider access to investigate the filing systems. Apart from the statements of the family members and relatives (which were very precise after 30 - 40 years!), we also had the data of the book of the cemetery (X. district Újköztemető), the registration of prisons (X. district Kozma street Prison and Jail), the registers of those districts where institutions of criminal proceeding, and of ÁVH (State Security Authorities).

The scenes of the exhumations were the 301, 298, 235, 233, 248 plots of the Budapest Újköztemető and the prisoners cemetery in Márianosztra. We collected data in the prisoners' cemetery in Vác and we investigated the skeletons of the prisoners cemetery in Sopronkőhida too. 41% of the exhumed people had died before 1956 and 59% died after 1956. It was an important observation that 21 people had not been found in other graves than it was officially registered. We still have unfinished cases (we have not found 9 people in the registered places). The time of the burials took place between 1948 and 1962.

Our exhumations proved that there had been excavations in the 301 and the 298 plots and also in Vác (where the victims of the political conceptional trials were searched in 1964). That is why we met bothered graves in the course of this work. At the same time we can see that the filing system always worked and after the hectic ÁVH (State Security Authorities) period a book was kept in Kozma street prison to register the dead people from January 1953. The match between the registry of the book and the aluminum disk of the skeleton also signalled the identity.

There are a lot of data about the number of the exhumed people. According to our research, which is not finalised yet, and to the published sources, we can state that the number of people executed because of political reasons between 1948-1956 is between 267-291, the number of people executed between 1945-1956 because of war crimes is 382, the number of those executed because political reason between 1956-1961 is between 261-265.

The pietyly exhumations proved a 29-44 years of the times after death. There are differences between the periods before and after 1956 in the depths of the graves, the situation of corpses, the aluminum tag around the ankle and the quality of the caskets. The people died after 1956 were buried not as deep as previously, many of them were lying on their bellies not in caskets but in poor quality wooden boxes.

We had an opportunity to reconstruct the graves of the 298 and 301 plots of the Budapest Újköztemető.

In the 301 plot there are 28 rows, each having 40 graves (altogether 1,120 graves). Most of the graves are called "gratis graves", which contain unknown deeds of hospitals, remains of bodies from dissection rooms and the corpses of little animals used in experiments. The graves were made between January, 1952 and 1977. The present condition of the plot is mostly secondary due to the 1961 excavations and the 1989 landscaping. The 298 plot, which is right next to the above-mentioned one, is a bit smaller. It consists of 23 rows, each containing 45 graves (altogether 1,035 graves). This plot gives resting place to the victims of an earlier turbulent period. From 1945 the graves were made from two directions and the middle of the plot became full in December, 1951. This plot also contains "gratis graves". Its present condition shows a third picture due to the previous excavations and landscaping.

According to the memo of the Office of the Chief Major of Budapest, the 298, 301 and 300 plot with the Monument, are considered to be memorial plots.

Until the foundation of the National Pietyly Committee, the pietyly work committee of the above mentioned office was to decide in pietyly questions. In the questions in connection with the 298 plot the PEK s (Alliance of Political Convicted) decision in determining, whereas in questions about the 300, 301 plots the TIB's (Historical Justice Committee) decisions are to be followed.

This article cannot be more than a brief publication of facts; its short length does not allow us to give a detailed analysis. A part of our results (the expert's opinions) can be found as archives. Our general professional observations on the biological reconstructions are published in periodicals, while our summary on the historical reconstruction is to be published in a separate volume.

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