Position statement of the Biological Anthropology Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA AOTB)

At the request of the Institute of Hungarian Research (MKI), the Biological Anthropology Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences has issued a statement regarding the reports on the identification of King Matthias's skeleton. The document is available in Hungarian and English.

16 January 2026

Remarks of the MTA AOTB concerning:

- the article published on April 15, 2025 by Mandiner magazine entitled "Hungarian Scientists May Have Identified the Skeleton of King Matthias" (https://mandiner.hu/kultura/2025/04/mandiner-ertesules-magyar-tudosok-azonosithattak-matyas-kiraly-csontvazat),

- the video entitled "Tell-tale Bones: Have the Skull of King Matthias Been Found?!" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJo6gNzbV6c),

- as well as further online articles published in the hours and days following the Mandiner report, e.g.: https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/2025/04/hunyadi-matyas-kiralyunk-csontvaz-szekesfehervar#google_vignette, https://index.hu/tudomany/2025/04/16/matyas-kiraly-koponya-arcrekonstrukcio-corvin-janos/, https://hungarytoday.hu/have-the-long-lost-remains-of-king-matthias-been-found/),

taking into account additional documents, professional discussions, and current knowledge in biological anthropology and related disciplines.

1. The common feature of the videos and articles that have appeared on the Internet and still available is that they present to the public a scientific sensation of extraordinary historical/archaeological and anthropological importance, giving the appearance of objectivity (with the use of the conditional mode to indicate doubt). In many cases, the reader's doubts are dispelled by the use of loud, conclusive statements *(„Külföldi szakvélemény is megerősíti...", „Az egyetlen lehetőség, ..., hogy ez Hunyadi Mátyás csontváza", „a valószínűsége, hogy valóban Mátyás király földi maradványait találták meg, rendkívül magas"* – "A foreign expert opinion confirms...', 'The only possibility ... is that this is the skeleton of Matthias Hunyadi', 'the probability that the remains of King Matthias were indeed found is extremely high");

2. The video, the Mandiner article, or any articles based on it, do not contain any real scientific data;

3. On a morphological basis (e.g. using data obtained by analyzing measurable features of the skull or the morphological characteristics of teeth), it is possible to calculate a so-called biological distance that correlates well with genetic distances between different populations or individuals, and which can be used to infer past biological relationships between populations. There have been many scientifically based studies on this in the anthropological literature over the last 100 years. However, it should be stressed that these

methods have their limitations, and it can be stated that they do not allow to prove a direct kinship (family) link between two individuals. Statements to the contrary are not well founded;

4. The press materials are full of statements that are misleading to readers who are not experts in the field. (E.g.: "*„(a rekonstrukció készítője) a videóban részletesen elmagyarázza, hogyan jutott arra a következtetésre, hogy az I/10-es sírszámú lelet koponyája Corvin János korábban már genetikailag azonosított koponyájával rendkívül közeli rokonságot mutat" – „(*the creator of the reconstruction) explains in detail in the video how they came to the conclusion that the skull found in grave number I/10 is extremely closely related to the skull of János Corvin, which had previously been genetically identified.")

5. Most writings base their assertion that the remains are those of King Matthias on the professional opinion of a German forensic anthropologist. The German expert informed the Commission in writing of the following:

    5.1. He did not have the opportunity to personally examine the original skulls or the replicas made from their 3D models, he only saw their photographs. After viewing the photographs, the expert stated that his opinion was only preliminary and that substantially more information would be needed to form reliable findings;

    5.2. Answering the question whether there is a possible close relationship between the two skulls in the pictures sent to him, given the same chronological and geographical background, the expert replied that this seemed likely based on the surface similarities, but also stressed that morphological and osteometric similarities were only circumstantial evidence, and even parallels of inherited anatomical differences did not constitute direct proof;

    5.3. The German expert told the MTA AOTB that if the aim is to prove genetic relatedness, archaeogenetic studies are essential. Contrary to what has been reported in the press, the expert did not claim that even in the absence of genetic analyses, there was a 90% probability of a relationship between two individuals.

    5.4. Contrary to press reports, the German anthropologist did not receive the full documentation of the research, only photographs of the skull replicas. He approved his opinion to be used in a scientific article. He then received a draft of the study in English for linguistic proofreading, to which he made mainly stylistic and grammatical corrections, as he had no knowledge of the archaeological background or the history of the find.

    5.5. The expert was later provided a text in Hungarian, but due to lack of time he was unable to translate and review it in full. He asked for his comments the be taken into account. In particular, he pointed out that one of the paragraphs in the manuscript, which had been highlighted, was given too much emphasis in the manuscript and did not fit in with the style or content of the text. The expert stressed that he had only sent a few brief comments based on the pictures, not a text that would be suitable for publication. He asked that this information be better integrated into the study.

    5.6. According to the expert's knowledge the manuscript was in a preparatory stage to be followed by more detailed research - analysis of all bone remains and DNA

analysis/comparisons. The next day, however, he received a longer English version of the article and shortly afterwards was informed that the study had been submitted for publication.

5.7. The expert anthropologist informed the Committee that he was surprised by and felt uncomfortable with the speed and the lack of transparency of the procedure. He was not given any further information, nor was his consent sought to the use of his name or the preliminary opinion he sent in the Hungarian press, in videos or on any video-sharing site or in any statement.

6. When watching the YouTube video, we are confronted with a number of problems (in chronological order):

- 3:45-3:51: "*and now I'm not fighting anymore for them to be different*." –This sentence shows a lack of scientific methodology and critical thinking.

- 7:49-8:16: *„I dare to say that professionally, this is a relationship based on morphological similarity, I dare to do that."* – In this section, the sculptor artist explains that there is no scientific evidence behind the argument and concept, but she nevertheless claims a relationship;

7. Beyond their sensationalist nature and the misinformation they spread among the public, media reports are also harmful in that they contain false information about the possibilities and limitations of certain fields of expertise. For example, they suggest that biological anthropology can determine age with annual precision based on a skeleton: „(*a rekonstrukció készítője) a videóban részletesen elmagyarázza, ... hogy a koponya tulajdonosa a rekonstrukció szerint 47 éves korában hunyt el – pontosan annyi idős volt Mátyás király is halálakor”* - “(the creator of the reconstruction) explains in detail in the video ... that according to the reconstruction, the owner of the skull died at the age of 47 – exactly the same age as King Matthias at the time of his death."

It is a historical fact that King Matthias died at the age of 47. However, grave number I/10 was a middle-aged person belonging to the so-called Maturus age group, according to modern age estimation methods his age can be morphologically estimated to be in the range of plus or minus eight to ten years.

The age estimation conducted by Kinga Éry more than 20 years ago also assumed a wider age range: "The estimated age at death is 43-47 years, averaged over the lower and middle values for the external cranial sutures (35 and 44 years), pubic bone (46 and 52 years), humerus (45 and 54 years) and femur (35 and 44 years), and adding +/- 2 years. Nevertheless, the dense cortex of the femur and the almost complete absence of pathological lesions suggest a slightly lower age at death." (Éry K. (2008): A székesfehérvári királyi bazilika embertani leletei 1848-2002. p. 109).

Kinga Éry's age estimation scheme combined elements of several existing age estimation methods, which, to the best of our current knowledge, is of questionable accuracy.

In this situation, the Biological Anthropology Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA AOTB) makes the following professional recommendations, suggestions and comments:

1. The find gr. no. I/10, which is of considerable historical value, and which is assumed to be linked to one of our Hungarian kings, deserves to be re-analyzed. It would be advisable for the find to be examined in detail by competent anthropologists specializing in this field, using modern scientific methods.
2. Given the importance of this issue for the history of Hungary and its people, and the fact that previous genetic tests have not led to clear results for the two individuals concerned, it may be appropriate to carry out further genetic sampling and analysis. This could ensure that identification is not based solely on morphological similarities, which in themselves - due to methodological limitations - do not provide sufficient reliability.
3. The honorable recognition of the historical role of King Matthias requires that the scientific results related to him - especially concerning his biological heritage - are presented to the public in a form that is both professionally sound and credibly represented by the researchers and institutions concerned. It is important that the information made available to the public reflects scientific objectivity and reliability.