

PRESS RELEASE

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DNA analysis confirmed the identity of three Franciscan monks killed in 1945

ZAGREB – A study published in the new thematic issue of the Croatian Medical Journal used the analysis of genetic material to identify three Franciscan monks killed in 1945 in Zagvozd village near Imotski, in Bosnia and Hercegovina. The authors of the study are Marija Definis Gojanović and Davorka Sutlović from the Department of Forensic Medicine of the Split University Hospital and School of Medicine.

In April 2005, skeletons of 18 persons were excavated from the mass grave in the village Zagvozd near Imotski. According to the survivors' testimonies, after partisans had captured the Franciscan monastery in the town of Široki Brijeg, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in February 1945, 8 friars were killed somewhere in the region of Dalmatian mountain range on their way to Split in Croatia. In the 1970s, there were allegations that 19 civilians were killed in the village of Zagvozd in 1945, including 8 friars from neighboring Herzegovina. Allegedly, they were buried near the house they had been tortured. After a few days, the remains were removed to a field near the village. Intensive investigation and data collection at the possible site of their execution started in 1990. In April 2005 the first bones had been discovered.

Almost all skeletons found in the mass grave near Zagvozd were bound with a wire around their necks, arms, or legs. No clothes and footwear were found, except few buttons and some

remains of a textile material. The bones were transported for further analysis to the Department of Forensic Medicine at the Split University Hospital.

At the same time, blood samples for DNA analysis were obtained from the living relatives of missing friars. Samples were also collected from living and deceased relatives of other friars killed during 1944 and 1945 in the region of Herzegovina.

Morphological investigation revealed that the remains from the Zagvozd mass grave belonged to 18 adult male victims, mostly middle-aged. The DNA analysis confirmed the identity of 3 persons out of 18 in the grave. One of them was a friar captured in Široki Brijeg, while two other were also friars, allegedly captured in 1945 and killed somewhere near Ljubuški, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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