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Case Report

Identification of the skeletal remains of the Czech communist regime crime victim, priest Josef Toufar

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ABSTRACT

Parish priest Josef Toufar died as a direct consequence of torture committed by Communist State Security Service agents, forcing him to confess that “miraculous” movement of crucifix above the main altar during the Holy Mass held in the Roman-Catholic church in Číhošť was staged by using a technical equipment. Josef Toufar was presumably buried in a mass grave at the cemetery in Prague-Ďáblice under a false name Josef Zouhar. In 2013 the Czech Bishops' Conference grant an approval to begin the process of his beatification. However, the beatification required the exhumation and identification of the remains.

In this case report, we describe the process of searching, exhumation, and the combined A-STR/Y-STR DNA analysis of remains of Pater Josef Toufar. His identification was feasible due to kinship analysis: buccal swabs of three family members (niece, grand-niece, and grand-nephew) were available for testing.

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1. Introduction

In the former Czechoslovakia, 83,000 persons were sentenced and 227 persons were executed by communist regime between 25.2.1948 and 29.12.1989 in fabricated political trials <http://www.policie.cz/clanek/obeti-komunisticko-rezimu.aspx?q=Y2hudW09Mg%3d%3d>. However, other hundreds of persons were killed while trying to escape through iron curtain <https://www.ustrcr.cz/uvod/dokumentace-usmrce-nych-statni-hranice/> or as a consequence of interrogation (i.e. bishop Josef Hlouch, cardinal Štěpán Trochta, philosopher Jan Patočka, and attorney Pavel Wonka). One of the victims of communist regime without identification and adequate burial was also Pater Josef Jindřich Toufar (Fig. 1).

According to the testimony of 19 parishioners in the local Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Číhošť, on 11th of December, 1949, during the Holy Mass the third Sunday of Advent, half a meter tall crucifix above the tabernacle on the main altar moved. Parish priest Josef Toufar reported this incident to the

authorities. Communist State Security Service exploited the situation as an excuse to religious repression and propaganda. State police (StB) officers 28.1.1950 kidnapped P. Josef Toufar from Číhošť, imprisoned him in Valdice jail and forced him by battering and thirst to sign the confession that miracle was staged using cables and leverage. This accusation was not substantiated by any evidence and crucifix movement was never reasonably explained.

For the filming propaganda film “Woe to him by whom the offense cometh!”, in a sorry state after repeated torture during interrogation, with ruptured gastric ulcer, Toufar was taken back to his church for camera shot on the pulpit. After surgery of peritonitis Toufar died the following day (25.2.1950) while his death was kept secret for four years even from his relatives. Toufar niece Marie Pospisilova was searching for his remains since 1954. Recently, evidence accumulated that he may have been buried in a mass grave at the Ďáblice cemetery, shaft no. XVI, under a false name Josef Zouhar. In April 2013, the Czech Bishops' Conference gave approval to begin the process of beatification of Josef Toufar, which required the exhumation and identification of the remains.

Between 1943 and 1961, 70 mass graves with 4 layers of 10 coffins each were used in Ďáblice cemetery for burial of unidentified dead, aborted foetuses, still born children, and anatomic and pathological waste [1]. In the course of Nazi occupation, active participants of the anti-fascist resistance have been buried here. After WWII, the cemetery was used for burial of convicted and executed Germans and

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¹ This paper is dedicated to the memory of our wonderful colleague, Dr. Markéta Šaňková, who participated in this project from its start and recently passed away.

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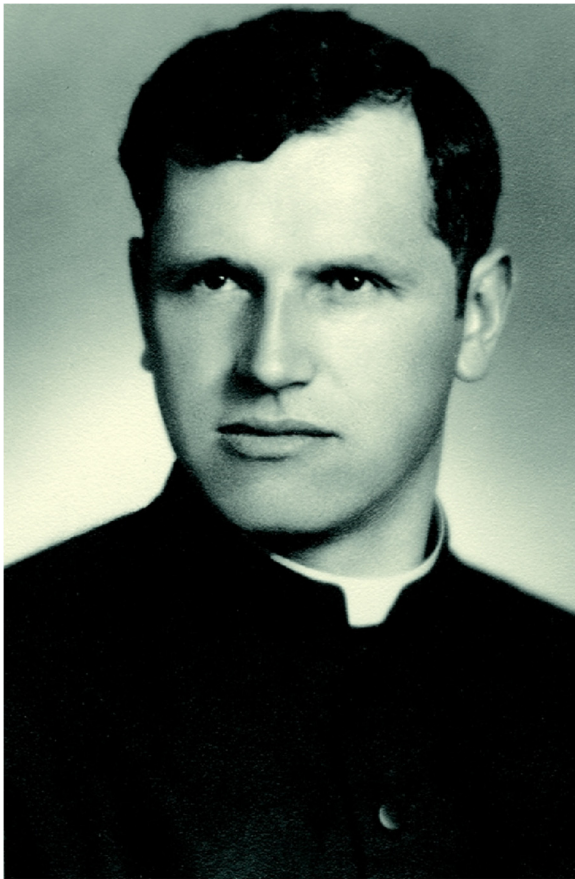


Fig. 1. Josef Toufar.

their quislings. After communist takeover in February 1948, the cemetery was used for the victims of fabricated political processes. Contrary to other shafts, a copy of burial record of shaft no. XVI was preserved.

In this case report, we describe the process of searching, exhumation, and identification of remains of Pater Josef Toufar through the DNA profiling and analysis of kinship in a broader family tree.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Consent

The identification of the skeletal remains was conducted in compliance with Czech laws, with the approval of Pater Toufar's family and under the guidance of the Bishop of Diocese Hradec Králové, Mayor of the Capital City of Prague, National Heritage Institute, Ministry of Regional Development, and Prague Cemeteries Directorate. The family pedigree was drawn up with the assistance of Mr. Toufar's family members (Fig. 2) and all available living persons from pedigree were contacted, following recommendation no. 4 of DVI guidelines [2]. An informed consent for buccal swab analysis was obtained from living relatives of Josef Toufar: niece BN, grand-niece JC, and grand-nephew LT.

Persons with initials were available for mouth swabbing and DNA analysis. JT? is a proband, presumed to stand for Josef Toufar.

2.2. Archeological research

Identification of the skeletal remains was an integral part of the archeological research of mass graves, carried out in accordance

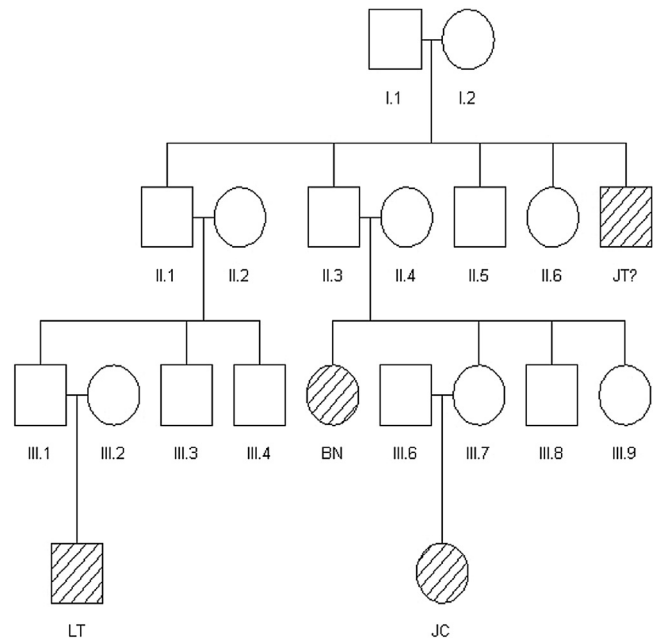


Fig. 2. Toufar pedigree.

with Act no. 256/2001 Coll., on Regulations and Rules on Funerals and Cemeteries and on Amendments to Certain Other Acts, as Amended. Owing to the fact that the Ďáblice cemetery is not only a currently used burial ground, but also a National cultural heritage, archeological works was approved in compliance with Act no. 20/1987 Coll., on State Landmark Conservation, as Amended not only by the operator of the burial ground and Archaeological Institute, but also by the National Heritage Institute.

In November 2014, three potential burial pits were probed. The third one was successful. The coffin (Fig. 3) was discovered with the help of the uniquely preserved funeral register for mass grave no. XVI from year 1950 under two later burials at a depth of 1.7 m below the current ground level. The remains of body were recovered by the team of anthropologists from the National Museum, archeologists from the National Heritage Institute, coroner, and forensic genetics expert (details to be published elsewhere).

Standard procedure for the archeological excavation was applied with the use of geodetic methods, photogrammetry, photography, and contextual information recording (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3. Mass grave in Ďáblice cemetery.

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