Skeletal metastatic carcinomas from the Roman period (1st to 5th Century AD) in Hungary.

According to paleopathological records, tumors have a great antiquity. The prevalence of cancer in ancient populations might have differed from that in modern humans because of substantial differences in environmental factors, life expectancy and the availability of treatment. This study presents 3 cases of probable skeletal metastatic carcinoma from the Roman period (1st-5th century AD) in Hungary, showing the development of bone metastases of cancer without chemo- and radiotherapy. All skeletons were subjected to a careful macroscopic investigation, which was extended by radiological, stereo- and scanning electron microscopic analyses. In 1 case, the mixed nature and localization of the lesions, as well as the sex and age of the individual, suggested breast cancer as the primary focus. In the other 2 cases, based on the mostly osteoblastic nature and the localization of the lesions as well as on the sex and age of the individuals, the most probable diagnostic option is prostate carcinoma with skeletal metastases. In view of the scarcity of cancer metastases that have been diagnosed in archeological specimens in general, identification of all examples of cancer in antiquity represents an important contribution both to paleopathology and to modern medicine.