

# Preface

This special volume of the Supplementary Series of the Estonian Journal of Archaeology is one of the multiple outcomes of five years of research within the project “Foreign vs local in the eastern Baltic medieval and early modern foodways: tracing the changing food consumption through provenance analysis”. This multidisciplinary research was conducted with personal research funding, a financing scheme of the Estonian Research Council, which is aimed at supporting high-quality R&D projects carried out by a researcher or a research group working at Estonian R&D institutions. Our group of researchers from Tallinn University and the University of Tartu got funding in 2018–2022 for implementing the abovementioned project (grant No. PRG29). The current publication includes some of the results of these five-year studies and much more, since the team members have long-term experience in provenance analysis (see also the Acknowledgements section at the end of every article).

Our starting point for the research project was the recognition that there is no single-valued normal or natural human diet, but a very diverse and individual approach to food-related issues. This diversity relies on marine and terrestrial environments, mass production and extensive trade. The key challenge is to extract and produce food in a manner that will sustain resources, employment, social fabric and cultural heritage in coastal and other relying communities. Recent advances in research have demonstrated the potential of archaeological/historical findings in the studies of the human diet, both on a population and individual level. Stable isotope analyses offer evidence of different types of food in diet (e.g. marine vs terrestrial, plant vs animal), whereas individual humans can display dietary markers on their skeleton (e.g. in the case of metabolic disorders). Osteological analyses of faunal remains (mammals, fish and fowls) from archaeological contexts reflect the resources available to the population, based on the presence and abundance of species in various sites.

Additional information is provided by written sources (e.g. ledgers, medieval recipe books, lists of provisions) and various archaeological finds related to eating and food processing. In certain favourable circumstances, these allow studying the food of a single household in a limited time period. Combined, these lines of evidence give a good overview of the variety of foods consumed by people in the past. Provenance analyses are increasingly used to study various (pre-)historical items and practices. These analyses can potentially help distinguish between foreign/imported and local food(ways), either through the detection of foreign/imported species in the faunal osteological record, or through the use of analytical techniques, such as stable isotope analysis and archaeogenetics. Although palaeodietary studies are becoming more common in the archaeological research of prehistory, the

historical periods have generally received less attention. To fully understand the dietary choices, possibilities, patterns and needs of past communities, a long-term perspective and an interdisciplinary approach is necessary. Therefore, our aim was to detect the origin of various food sources and the consumption trends among the 13th to 18th century urban and rural populations in the eastern Baltic region, more specifically in the area that is historically known as Livonia (present-day Estonia and northern Latvia).

The main goal of our research was to investigate trends in food consumption and historical foodways with the focus on the distinction between foreign vs local and urban vs rural. We also tried to find answers to the questions whether imports were determined by necessity, especially during the times of famine or food shortages, and whether cultural patterns were introduced by western settlers, or a luxury dictated by contemporary food trends. Are written documents in agreement with urban and rural archaeological finds concerning imported food, and was the latter available to peasants? Was the importance of fish as described in historical sources overestimated in some cases? In addition, we sought to explore how famines came to be at the end of the Middle Ages and in later periods. While natural resources (e.g. fish) remained available during crop failures, written documents suggest that they were not used to ease the hunger. The hypotheses were tested by investigating human, faunal and other related archaeological remains and literary evidence.

Making use of our expertise and the current publication, our research envisaged the creation of a platform for international transdisciplinary studies and approaches regarding complex issues in human history and animal origin and domestication, with a focus on Estonia as a particularly rich northern study region in terms of the abundance of eco- and artefacts. New original data broaden the existing knowledge base and support more detailed research projects in the future. The volume is aimed at the wider scientific community with the goal to contribute to international discussion on the above topics with like-minded researchers and various institutions.

The editors of the present publication express their sincere gratitude to the editorial office of the Estonian Academy Publishers for their professional handling of the editing process. We are also extremely grateful to our team members for their contribution over the past half a decade, hoping that the finished project was a good stepping stone for several new engagements that will bring new exciting results in the near future.

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