Prof. Dr. Joanita Vroom – The Archaeology of Eating Habits in Byzantium

Although perhaps the biggest cliché in recorded human history, the proverb ‘you are what you eat’ has spawned a wealth of archaeological research. From hunter-gatherer societies to Empires, food is crucial to the organization of our economies. In order to survive, people need daily rations of calories and nutrients. What people gathered or grew, how they processed this in order to feed themselves, what they ate and drank, and the manner in which they served food and drink has always been a cornerstone in archaeological interpretations of past societies.

In this tutorial you will learn about some archaeological case studies (ca. 6th/7th to 15th century) from the Byzantine Empire, also known as Byzantium, in the eastern Mediterranean.

As preparation please visit the website/visual exhibition of ‘The Archaeology of a Byzantine City’: <http://www.bijleveldbooks.nl/ResearchSeminar/introduction.html>

Assignment:

Please have a look at this website in order to familiarize yourself with the Byzantine Empire and the period of time. Browse to ‘Daily Lífe’, then to ‘The Byzantine House’ or to ‘Household Archaeology’, and then for instance to ‘Contexts of a House’, ‘Byzantine Diet’, ‘The Pottery’ or ‘Glazed Tablewares’.

The evidence shown on the website suggests archaeological examples of eating habits in the Byzantine Empire, but how are these visible? How can we learn what was consumed? And what can we say about taste and meaning in that period of time? Can you find other archaeological evidence and/or literature (articles, books) to enlarge our knowledge? Please think about these questions so that we can discuss them during the tutorial.