

BrIAS Workshop 02
Eating From the Wild
Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Wild Plant Use and Foraged Food
 Thursday January 20th 10.00 am – 14.00 pm

Location: This event is online-only via Microsoft Teams. To participate, please use this [link](#).
Organisers: Andrea Pieroni & Frits Heinrich

- 10.00 ***Opening and introduction to BrIAS***
 Prof. Dr. em. Frank Deconinck, BrIAS co-Director
- 10.15 ***Wild plant use and consumption in the Ancient World. Historical and archaeobotanical perspectives on an underrepresented resource.***
 Dr. ir. Frits Heinrich, Social and Cultural Food Studies (FOST), Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Belgium / BrIAS Academic co-Director.
- 10.40 ***Bromus secalinus : weed, « near-crop », or occasional food resource? Investigation based on 338 case studies in northern France, from 1325 BC to 1500 AD***
 Prof. Dr. Véronique Matterné CNRS/Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle Paris, France, M. Derreumaux, B. Pradat, P. Luccioni, M.-P. Ruas & F. Toulemonde.
- 11.05 ***„Nim dürre Schlehen/koch sie in Wasser....“ Wild plant use in recipes of late medieval and early modern cooking books compared to the archaeobotanical evidence.***
 Dr. Julian Wiethold, Inrap Grand Est, Centre des recherches archéologiques de Metz, Laboratoire archéobotanique. France.
- 11.30 ***Biodiversity and culinary use of edible wild plants in Apulia, Italy***
 Prof. Dr. Antonella Pasqualone, Department of Soil, Plant and Food Science (DISSPA), University of Bari, Italy
- 11.55 ***Field to fork: wild food plants in the ethnobotany of the Catalan-language territories (Europe).***
 Prof. Dr. Joan Vallès, Laboratori de Botànica – Unitat associada CSIC, Facultat de Farmàcia i Ciències de l’Alimentació - Institut de la Biodiversitat IRBio, Universitat de Barcelona / Secció de Ciències Biològiques, Institut d’Estudis Catalans, Barcelona, Airy Gras, Teresa Garnatje, Montse Parada.
- 12.20 ***Wild Plants as an Essential Human Food during the Conflict in Syria***
 Naji Sulaiman, PhD Candidate, Department of Crop Sciences and Agroforestry, Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague.
- 12.45 ***How Iraqi is the wild plant portion of the Mediterranean Diet? Shifting geographies of dietary systems using ethnobotanical data***
 Prof. Dr. Andrea Pieroni, University of Gastronomic Sciences, Pollenzo, Italy
- 13.10 - 13.55 **Roundtable and discussion**
- 13.55 - 14.00 ***Closing statement***

About BrIAS

The newly founded Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies (BrIAS), co-founded by the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), aims to expand upon the mission of other IASes as an incubator of ideas and research by focusing on current and urgent themes with a great societal impact. Located in the heart of Brussels, it aims to attract the very best scientists, artists or designers, coming from various fields or countries and with no philosophical or political restriction, and provide the opportunity to work in an atmosphere of complete freedom, collaboration, mutual emulation and cross-fertilisation. In this context, BrIAS aims to facilitate collaborations with countries facing critical challenges pertaining to sustainability. For more information and updates about BrIAS, our upcoming events, and our current research theme *The past, present and future of food, climate and sustainability*, Follow us on our [webpage](#), on [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#)!

Abstracts

Wild plant use and consumption in the Ancient World. Historical and archaeobotanical perspectives on an underrepresented resource.

Frits Heinrich

This paper provides a brief overview of wild plant food use in the ancient world, drawing on both historical and archaeobotanical evidence. The economic and dietary importance of wild plants as a food source has often been underrepresented in the historical debate – with many scholars regaling wild plant foods off to having been mainly used as ‘famine foods’ in times of need. This paper aims to widen this narrow view and provide insights into the diverse roles of wild food plants, not only within local rural subsistence economies, but also within the context of commercial (over)exploitation in the globalized economy of the Roman Empire. The paper will also touch upon the conceptual issue of the blurring of lines with respect to what is the exploitation of wild plants proper, and where some form of (de facto) management begins. Lastly, the paper addresses the interpretative difficulties of recognizing wild plant food use in archaeobotanical assemblages.



Left: Silver Attic drachm (ca.510-470 BC) with a *Silphium* seed. Right: Didrachm of Magas of Cyrene (ca. 300-275 BC) with on the reverse a *Silphium* plant. Figure: Wikimedia commons.

Bromus secalinus : weed, « near-crop », or occasional food resource? Investigation based on 338 case studies in northern France, from 1325 BC to 1500 AD.

Véronique Matterné, M. Derreumaux, B. Pradat, P. Luccioni, M.-P. Ruas & F. Toulemonde

Rye-brome, a wild grass from the Poaceae family, has been regularly found together with cereal crops, sometimes in large quantities, as if the seeds had been collected for themselves. Consumption and even cultivation of rye-brome have been suggested by several authors, and the plant has been qualified as a "near-crop" species. In northern France and other parts of Europe, the discovery of seed-lumps fragments made of brome-grass seeds speak for its potential consumption during the Metal Ages. But rye-brome is also an aggressive arable weed in cereal fields. Despite the fact that the plant doesn't form any seed-bank, it could be difficult to get rid of it as the caliber

of its seeds resemble the one of cereals. Depending on how far post-harvest processing are efficient in grain cleaning, rye-brome seeds have a chance to be maintain itself through sowing. The question thus deserves a closer examination in order to specify the possible exploitation and uses of a “minor” crop, or an occasional food resource. On the basis of the carpological results of 338 occupations in northern France, dated from 1325 BC to 1500 AD, we’ll try to assess the status of rye-brome. A careful examination of the frequencies of rye brome over the time span shows that high rates clustered before the 2nd c. BC, when a shift in crop choices happens. Hulled wheats, especially emmer, then declined to the profit of free-threshing wheats. High rye-brome rates appear to reveal changes that happened in the processing techniques specifically applied to each of the wheat types.



Left: *Bromus secalinus*. © J. Wiethold, Inrap. Right: Charred caryopses of *Bromus*, identified as *Bromus secalinus*, 5th c. B.C., site of Tagnon, Ardennes departement, northern France. Scale bar 5 mm. © V. Matterné

„Nim dürre Schlehen/koch sie in Wasser....“ Wild plant use in recipes of late medieval and early modern cooking books compared to the archaeobotanical evidence.

Dr. Julian Wiethold

During the Middle Ages and early modern times, wild plants have widely been used as important complements to human diet. The late medieval and early modern cooking books are giving evidence of the use of different wild fruits (f.e. sloes, wild strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries...) and how they were used and prepared. In contrast to early herbals, which are mainly focusing on medicinal aspects, these early cooking books are strictly indicating wild plants used for human consumption.

The aim of the presentation is to discuss some written sources concerning late medieval and early modern recipes and to compare the written sources with the evidence of wild fruits in human diet revealed by archaeobotanical analysis. Two of them should be addressed in more detail: At first, the *Büch von güter spise*, the first cooking-book written in Mittelhochdeutsch, an old version of the German language, dated around 1350 AD, also known as “cooking book from Wurzburg”. This cooking book is a collection of recipes conserved in the second volume of the *Hausbuch des Michael de Leone* also known as “*Würzburger Liederhandschrift*”. This medieval document is kept today in the university library of Munich (E; 2° Cod. Ms. 731). Michael Leone (syn. Michael Jude) was the emperor’s notary in Wurzburg, belonging to the town social elite. Volume 2 is a collection of 285 parchment folios (34,5 × 26,5 cm), the text is written in gothic letters. A reprint is available to gain easy access to the texts.

The second important cooking book written in German and used here as an example is the renaissance “Ein new Kochbuch”, edited in 1581 by Marx Rumpolt, head chef (chef cuisinier) of prince Daniel Brendel from Homburg. This cooking book was edited as manual for teaching young apprentices, trying to be most complete and exhaustive collection of recipes, presenting even rare and extraordinary dishes, not commonly in use. Nevertheless, also in this cooking book wild plants are frequently mentioned, but played only a minor role in comparison to expensive and exotic importations like for example the spices pepper, ginger, cardamom and nutmeg.

In contrast to the written sources archaeobotanical data from cesspits, wells and rubbish layers are often limited to state the simple presence of collected and used wild plants, but in most cases, they do not indicate food preparation and wild plant use in detail. Concerning archaeobotanical studies of wells and cesspits it remains difficult to decide, whether the plant macrofossils are deriving from faeces, from household and kitchen waste, or from both sources together. Some examples of archaeobotanical analysis of rubbish from kitchen waste and food preparation give additional information concerning the trading and use of wild plants in human diet. Nevertheless, we have to assume that local and regional trade of wild plants, especially between town and their rural hinterland, must have been quite common during medieval and early modern times, but is rarely reflected in written documents. This commercial activity is most difficult to trace by written sources (tax registers and other official documents). Therefore, the study of written sources combined with the exploitation of archaeobotanical data from cesspits and from household and kitchen waste is the most promising interdisciplinary approach to study wild plant use of urban and rural societies.

Biodiversity and culinary use of edible wild plants in Apulia, Italy

Antonella Pasqualone

Biodiversity is essential to food and agriculture. It makes food production systems more resilient to shocks and stresses, including those related to climate change. It is also a key resource to increase food production while limiting negative impacts on the environment. The wild edible plants (WEP) are a source of biodiversity, usually harvested in marginal areas such as grasslands, roadsides, sandy coastal areas, and poor pastures. Some of them are moderately salt tolerant and have been proposed for soil desalinization. The collection and use of WEP is deeply rooted in the culinary tradition of the Apulia region (Southern Italy), where they are a fundamental ingredient of many regional recipes. However, the limited number of young people involved in the collection of wild herbs and the growing anthropogenic activities that affect and pollute some WEP collection areas, represent risk factors that can lead to the loss of this traditional activity. Several research projects are therefore aimed at preserving the knowledge related to WEP identification and correct use which, in turn, help maintaining this culinary identity model as well as proposing innovative recipes and cooking methods. So, the simple act of collecting and using WEP has environmental, economical, social and cultural implications.

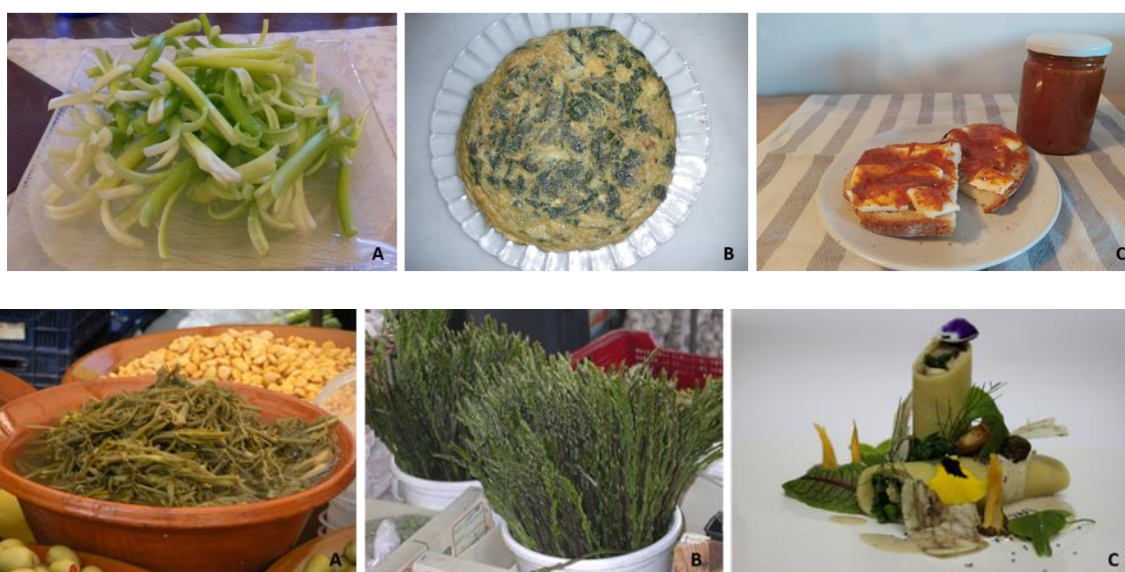


Sea fennel (*Crithmum maritimum* L.). Figure: Antonella Pasqualone

Field to fork: wild food plants in the ethnobotany of the Catalan-language territories (Europe).

Joan Vallès, Airy Gras, Teresa Garnatje, Montse Parada.

Wild food plants (WFP) have always been present in our kitchens. In the Catalan linguistic area (CLA), they were fundamental during the Spanish civil war (1936-1939) and World War II (1939-1945), as well as long before and thereafter, and a large memory and some uses persist nowadays. We will present a meta-analysis of the WFP dataset of the CLA (regarding edible uses, drinks excluded), with data from around 1,700 informants, having produced more than 10,000 use reports of almost 300 taxa. The very high informant consensus factor, 0.97, accounts for the robustness of the information. This common pool of plants and knowledge is often and mainly underestimated and underutilised, although it has a big potential for food security and sovereignty, and for gastronomy too. Its consideration is an opportunity to promote closer and more sustainable agriculture and to propose old, in some cases forgotten foods that could be newly introduced onto the market, first, but not only, at a local level, which could be also interesting for new crop development in the frame of a valorisation of territorial identity.



Wild plants foods from the CLA. Figure: Gras, A., Garnatje, T., Marín, J., Parada, M., Sala, E., Talavera, M., Vallès, J. 2021. The power of wild in feeding humanity: a meta-analytic ethnobotanical approach in the Catalan linguistic area. Foods, 10:61

Wild Plants as an Essential Human Food during the Conflict in Syria.

Naji Sulaiman

Wild food plants have been an important source of human nutrition since ancient times, and it particularly revives when conventional food is not available due to emergency situations such as natural disasters and conflicts. The war in Syria has entered ten years since it started in 2011, and it caused the largest war-related crises since World War II. Nearly 60% of the Syrian population (12.4 million people) are food insecure. Wild leafy vegetables are already culturally important in the region and may be supplementing local diets during this conflict. This presentation will highlight the wild leafy vegetables consumed by local people during the current crisis. The data have been collected during a fieldwork carried out between March 2020 and March 2021 in the Tartus governorate located in the coastal region of Syria. The presentation will cover: plant uses, plant parts used, modes of preparation and consumption, change in wild leafy vegetables use between pre and during the conflict, informants' perceptions towards wild food plants, and nutritional value of some species. A variety of photos and videos from the field will be presented.



Popular Syrian wild plant-based dishes. 1: Sleet dish; 2: Zaatar dish with olive oil; 3: Louf soup; 4: Shabshuleh dish. Figure: Naji Sulaiman.

How Iraqi is the wild plant portion of the Mediterranean Diet? Shifting geographies of dietary systems using ethnobotanical data.

Andrea Pieroni

The Mediterranean Diet, nowadays also officially representing a intangible cultural heritage of humanity, has been and still partially is a food system that during several months is based upon wild vegetables, which have been often neglected in both bio-scientific and historical-anthropological food studies. The presentation will address the larger frame of the field ethnobotanical studies we conducted during the past two decades among diverse populations of the Central and Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, and the Near East, and will especially discuss the case of Assyrian/Chaldean and Kurdish communities in Iraqi Mesopotamia. We will show that the most commonly gathered and used Assyrian/Chaldean and Mediterranean wild vegetables are synanthropic species, growing in anthropogenic environments, thus confirming that the Mediterranean wild plant foodscape mainly emerged from the development of horticulture in the Neolithic period in the Fertile Crescent. We will eventually discuss also the idea that traditional wild vegetables could be considered indelible signatures for understanding the origin of dietary systems.