Summary

The overview of the archaeobotanical investigations on Byzantine sites, from the early to the late Byzantine period (395-1453 AD), shows not only a great diversity of crop species, furthermore supra-regional and diachronic similarities and differences in the crop plant spectra can be grasped. On the one hand, these are based on local and regional environmental conditions; on the other hand they can be understood as adaptations to historical developments and events.

The diet was based on cereals, among which the free-threshing wheat species, bread wheat *Triticum* aes*tivum* and *durum* wheat *T. durum*, many-rowed hulled barley *Hordeum vulgare* var. *vulgare* gain the highest value and the widest distribution throughout the entire investigation period. In addition, pulses, oil and fibre plants as well as garden and gathered plants are of great importance. Among them lentil *Lens culinaris*, olive *Olea europaea*, grape vine *Vitis vinifera*, fig *Ficus carica*, date *Phoenix dactylifera* and almond *Prunus dulcis* belong to the most frequent and common crops in the entire study area, from the early to the middle and late Byzantine periods. With the cereals they provided the basis of the vegetable food economy.

Predominantly, a local and regional provision of crops is noticeable within the regions. Furthermore, some regions have been supplied by imports of specific species, e. g. olive. These imports, which have been partly transported over long distances, emphasize the importance of specific species in the Byzantine food culture. That is particularly true for the olive tree, which cultivation is restricted to the Mediterranean climatic zones due to the plant's habitat requirements. While olive was a staple crop in its growing areas, e. g. the Mediterranean influenced zones of North Africa or Greece, it was a luxury import that was not available to all social classes, in those regions that were far from its cultivation areas and supplied by trade. The same applies to imports from India, such as black pepper *Piper nigrum*, sesame *Sesamum indicum* or rice *Oryza sativa*. Due to their sporadic and regional or even local occurrence such imports have a special status and it is likely that they were neither part of the daily diet nor available to the entire population and only provided to a restricted group of people.

An adaptation to the environmental conditions can be seen from the regional crop spectra. This is particularly evident in the semiarid and arid areas in which drought-tolerant species were apparently selected for cultivation. In addition to the drought-tolerant hulled barley, *durum* wheat was also cultivated, which is distinguished from bread wheat by its particular drought tolerance and resistance to high temperatures. In addition, other drought-tolerant species are prevalent, e. g. date or watermelon *Citrullus lanatus*.

Further adaptations to local conditions are reflected in the high diversity of crops grown in the early Byzantine Balkan region, its spectrum differs from the other regions mainly due to its four main cereal types: rye *Secale cereale*, bread wheat, hulled barley and broomcorn millet *Panicum miliaceum*. This high diversity can be regarded as an adaptation to the difficult living conditions in the Balkans, which were characterized by repeated invasions, power struggles and settle by different »barbarian« groups already during the 4th/5th century and until the early 7th century. Therefore the increase in diversity has to be interpreted as a measure of security of supply.

Such adaptations are also evident in the archaeobotanical analysis of the early Byzantine city of Caričin Grad in southern Serbia. Rye, bread wheat, broomcorn millet and hulled barley, broad bean as well as locally cultivated and collected fruits and nuts such as grapevine, wild pear *Pyrus* sp. and walnut *Juglans regia* formed the basis of nutrition and testify to a diversified food economy. However, few imports of pickled olives and dried figs show that despite the critical living conditions, trade contacts were maintained to the Mediterranean region. However, the composition and ecological characteristics of the weed flora suggest, that the supply of the city Caričin Grad was based mainly on the local or regional cultivation of the main crop types.