

The food supply of armies in the Middle Ages and its effects on the rural and urban population

According to the anonymous author of the *Dhikr bilād al-Andalus*, seven hundred Muslim combatants died of thirst during one of Muḥammad b. Abī 'Āmir al-Manṣūr (978–1002) campaigns against the Christian territories in the north of the Iberian Peninsula. The death toll was most likely exaggerated, as was often the case, in the process of reporting the news. However, references to the difficulties faced by the Andalusi and Maghrebi armies in obtaining food and drink for their military expeditions are found in numerous Arabic texts. In this respect, the Islamic prohibition on the consumption of wine and pork is well known. In any case, problems with food supplies also existed in the Christian armies and in this case there were not the cultural restrictions that affected their rivals. In this regard, several questions arise. What did the medieval armies eat and drink, and how did they meet the challenge of feeding themselves in a hostile territory? It has been written that they did this mainly by looting.

Could this have been the only solution adopted when their adversaries were aware that they were under attack? In fact, some medieval authors explain how the defenders tried to harvest their crops and gather their livestock in time to guarantee their subsistence in the event of a siege and to make it difficult for their aggressors. A similar question can be posed about naval warfare. How did the crews and combatants who spent several days at sea without touching land feed and hydrate themselves? The answers to these questions are complex and require attention to be focused on issues such as the selection, conservation and storage of plants and animals, not forgetting the decisive importance of logistics and the problems it caused. These difficulties included not only the challenge of getting provisions to troops far from their home, but also the collateral effects that such a high and sudden demand for foodstuffs could have on the rural and urban population of the country itself.

This specialisation course aims to address these questions by convening a diverse group of experts in medieval history and archaeology, offering a comprehensive chronological, geographical and cultural perspective. The course will explore the realities of warfare in different thematic contexts: in the Germanic kingdoms, the Muslim conquest of Sicily, the caliphal aceifas, the Cidian campaigns, the crusades in

the Holy Land, warfare in the Castilian–Leonese sphere, the expansion of the Aragonese crown throughout the Mediterranean, the creation of the Ottoman empire, the Nasrid armies and the archaeology of the battlefields. These thematic contexts will be analysed to explore how medieval armies were supplied and the impact that these requirements had on the population.

Topics of each session and lecturers:

1. La guerra y el avituallamiento en los reinos visigodo y asturleonés (Amancio Isla, Universitat Rovira i Virgili).
2. Sicily as a Frontier Region (*Thaghr*) between Byzantium and Islam: Settlements, Institutions and Socioeconomic Framework (ss. VIII–XI) (Michelangelo Messina, École française de Rome).
3. El aprovisionamiento de los ejércitos omeyas y 'āmiríes en al-Andalus (Josep Suñé, CSIC).
4. La alimentación de los ejércitos peninsulares durante las guerras cidianas (David Porrinas, Universidad de Extremadura).
5. Guerra, cruzada y hambre en el Occidente medieval, siglos XI–XIII (Pere Benito i Monclús, Universitat de Lleida).
6. La guerra y el aprovisionamiento en Castilla y León durante la Plena y Baja Edad Media (Francisco García Fitz, Universidad de Extremadura).
7. Las Navas de Tolosa (1212) desde el punto de vista arqueológico (Irene Montilla, Universidad de Jaén).
8. El ejército nazarí y la logística en las campañas de Muhammad V (1365–1370) (Javier Villaverde, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos).
9. Los efectos del corso y de la piratería en el abastecimiento de las ciudades marítimas de la Corona de Aragón (Victòria A. Burguera, Universitāt Heidelberg).
10. Military logistics in medieval Anatolia and the Balkans in the Seljukid and Ottoman periods (Kahraman Şakul & Cihan Piyadeoğlu, İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi).

ONLINE COURSE

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Image: Venus und Mars. Das mittelalterliche Hausbuch aus der Sammlung der Fürsten von Waldburg Wolfegg, c. 1480, fol. 51v–52r.(Detail)

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Research project linked to the specialization course:

Medieval Appetites: food plants in multicultural Iberia (500-1100 CE) (MEDAPP)