**Scientific abstract**

**Centre and periphery—The ‘in-site’ story: Tracking intra-site culinary variability at Tel Tsaf (ca. 5,200–4,700 cal BC)**

In its various aspects of selection, production, and consumption, food incorporates matters of subsistence, taste, and cultural identity. Therefore, food and foodways are widely considered sensitive gauges of social, economic, and cultural circumstances. This project will trace and study the patterns and variability of these food-related features across the Middle Chalcolithic site of Tel Tsaf (ca. 5,200–4,700 cal. BC), the Jordan Valley. Doing so will provide an opportunity to better understand and appreciate the Neolithic-Chalcolithic transition, an episode of momentous cultural change encompassing technological developments, novel economic structures, and new modes of social organisation.

Tel Tsaf is notable for its remarkably rich and well-preserved assemblages, including floral and faunal remains, organic components, elaborate mudbrick architecture, food storage and cooking facilities, and a wide range of paraphernalia for food processing, storing, and serving. The project will capitalise on these highly favourable empirical conditions to determine if and how the choice, production, and consumption of foods varied in time, across households, or both. Drawing on these observations, it will then proceed to establish a coherent account of the evolution of Levantine food culture, culminating in the crystallisation of the Mediterranean diet. Special attention will be devoted to the circumstances, tempo, dynamics, and inter-relations among dietary preferences that underpin these developments.

Notably, while considerable research and discussions have been devoted to food-related preferences surrounding the establishment of early urban centres, little has been done for the preceding Chalcolithic period that set the stage and laid the foundations for the Early Bronze Age urbanism. The current project that combines high-resolution excavation and strict sampling strategies with state-of-the-art bio-archaeological procedures and devices will construct several datasets covering various food-related indices (e.g., seed, phytoliths, starch) that can then be scrutinised for temporal and spatial patterns. Finally, we will cross-reference these patterns with other lines of evidence to assess the impact of external influence (e.g. long-distance trade) on the diet of the inhabitants of Tel Tsaf.

By examining the variability in food choices and culinary practices in the village of Tel Tsaf, we expect to track the delicate mechanisms underlying the adoption of the Mediterranean style diet and its various economic and social implications. Furthermore, the pursuit of this research project will provide us with the unique opportunity to explore food-related social differentiation (e.g., between public and private settings or households), underscoring internal social dynamics that are likely to have driven the broader cultural processes ultimately leading up to Levantine urbanism.