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alimentation on the Baltic frontier*

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# Feeding the Crusades: archaeobotany, animal husbandry and livestock alimentation on the Baltic frontier

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## Abstract

Integrated micromorphology, plant macro, pollen, phytolith, and non-pollen palynomorph analyses from two 13<sup>th</sup> century Teutonic Order castles, Karksi (Livonia), and Elbląg (Prussia), examine the livestock management and alimentation practices by the initial military colonisers during the Crusades. At Karksi, a key administrative centre in Livonia, in the area which later became the High Castle, the investigation of a midden and of the organic-rich sediment beneath allow the diachronic use of this area to be examined. Freshwater aquatic indicators are consistent with the occurrence of shallow stagnant water, as also suggested by a water-laid pond sediment identified in thin-section. Coprophilous spore taxa suggest the use of the pond as a watering hole. Plant macrofossils from the midden represent a range of habitats, mostly from wet/damp areas, as well as pastures and meadows, and also woodlands. Fragments of millet are embedded within herbivore dung in micromorphological thin-section showing the use of this grain as fodder. At Elbląg in Prussia, the initial Order headquarters, *Trichuris* sp. eggs may derive from animal feces as dung with parasite eggs was observed in thin-section, and a range of coprophilous taxa were extracted. The results from both sites show early colonisers use a mixed grain/leaf fodder diet for livestock, with a move to grain and grass later on. The results represent an important study of medieval castles from the period of active Crusading, and reveal the diachronicity of the range of livestock that the Teutonic Knights kept, whereabouts within the castles they were stabled, and livestock alimentation.

## Keywords

Crusades; micromorphology; plant macroremains; palynology, non-pollen palynomorphs

## 38 Introduction

39 The beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. sees a period of active crusading activity in the eastern Baltic  
40 region. Crusading armies unleashed a relentless holy war against the last indigenous pagan societies  
41 in Europe. The territories of these tribal groups were replaced with new Christian polities largely run  
42 by a militarised theocracy, consisting of the Teutonic Order, bishops and their cathedral chapters. They  
43 constructed castles, encouraged colonists, developed towns and introduced Christianity (Bartlett  
44 1994; Berend 2005; Murray 2001; Pluskowski 2012; Pluskowski 2019). In this context of conquest and  
45 colonisation on the Baltic frontier, two 13<sup>th</sup> century Teutonic Order castles (Fig. 1), Karksi in Estonia  
46 (Ger. Karkus in medieval Livonia), and Elbląg in Poland (Ger. Elbing in medieval Prussia), were  
47 subjected to detailed environmental analysis (using micromorphology, plant macroremains, pollen,  
48 phytoliths, and non-pollen palynomorphs) to examine the livestock management and alimentation  
49 practices associated with the initial military colonisation during the period of active crusading.  
50 Livestock management and alimentation practices are examined at these strategic castles in relation  
51 to their use and the impact of the arrival of Teutonic Order and initial colonising behaviours. This  
52 research examines specifically what animals were kept, where were livestock stabled, how were  
53 livestock being fed, how does the use of fodder reflect the use of the wider landscape, and how do  
54 these issues change through time. The integrated application of these techniques enables plant  
55 macroremains and microfossils to be examined in relation to the microstratigraphic formation  
56 processes that occurred within the unit that they were collected from.

57

58 Before the Crusades, in the area that later became Livonia as more native territories were conquered,  
59 the indigenous societies of the eastern Baltic had an established pastoral culture, revolving around  
60 the raising of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and poultry (Blomkvist 2009, 444; Maltby *et al.* 2019; Maldre  
61 2003). Documentary sources, particularly Henry's *Chronicle of Livonia* (Brundage 2003) and the  
62 anonymous *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, indicate that a complex provisioning system was essential  
63 from the earliest arrival of crusading armies in order to support the influx of crusaders, merchants,  
64 colonists and their heavy cavalry. The pastoral economy at this time of flux would have been highly  
65 volatile, with raiding accentuating the impact of environmental factors on herds (Goldschmidt 1979).

66

67 Documentary sources, particularly Peter of Dusburg's *Chronicle of Prussia* (Scholz and Wojtecki 1984),  
68 describe the Prussians as maintaining herds of cattle, sheep and goats in valley meadows and  
69 woodland clearings. The historical sources all emphasise the importance of horses for riding, although  
70 like oxen they could also be used for ploughing. Consumption of horse meat is clearly evident, but the  
71 majority of chroniclers noted the consumption of mare's milk (Popłoński 1862, 7). The arrival of the

72 Teutonic Order in Prussia prompted new developments in animal husbandry and related alimentary  
73 culture. The most significant changes occurred in livestock husbandry; whilst the older system was  
74 dominated by pigs and cattle, the latter became the main staple meat under the new regime with pigs  
75 still forming an important part of the diet (Makowiecki *et al.* 2019).

76

77 So far, excavations of Teutonic Order castles have provided little in the way of detailed environmental  
78 evidence to understand the subsistence systems of the earliest colonisers (Pluskowski 2012, 296-297)  
79 and the organisation of these systems within castle sites has primarily been reconstructed from  
80 written sources (Pluskowski 2012, 151). This research, within the framework of The Ecology of  
81 Crusading project, seeks to redress this imbalance to provide a more nuanced understanding of the  
82 diachronic use of space and subsistence systems within castles and their commandaries, particularly  
83 during the initial period of colonisation. The Ecology of Crusading research project has now  
84 accumulated substantial environmental data from across the eastern Baltic to further our  
85 understanding of the impact of the Crusades (Pluskowski 2019; Pluskowski *et al.* 2019b).

86

## 87 The Sites

88 Archaeological deposits were sampled from two castles: Karksi Castle (Ger. Karkus) located in present-  
89 day Estonia, and Elbląg (Ger. Elbing) located in present-day northern Poland (Fig. 1)

90

91 Karksi Castle was an important administrative centre in Livonia, governed by an advocate. This official  
92 was based in the castle and had the role of managing resources and the provision of security. The site  
93 is situated above the valley of the River Halliste and on sandy clay loam glacial till surface geology. The  
94 multi-proxy investigation in Trench 1 (Fig. 2) of a midden that overlies 'anthropogenic peats' in the  
95 area directly below where the High Castle was later constructed, presented a unique opportunity to  
96 examine the waterlogged deposits to understand development and diachronic use of this area during  
97 the pre-construction and construction phases of the early castle (Banerjea and Badura 2019; Brown,  
98 2019; Valk *et al.* 2012). A spring ran through the site in the area of Trench 1, which became apparent  
99 during the excavation of the site (Valk *et al.* 2012). The radiocarbon dates, modelled using the BACON  
100 Bayesian statistical program (Blaauw and Christen, 2011), suggest that these sediments were  
101 deposited rapidly between AD 1230-1280 (Valk *et al.* 2012). During excavation, the deposits above the  
102 midden, contexts 8, 9, and 10, were described (respectively) as a dark soil with organics, red clayish  
103 loam, and a dark grey soil with wood chips. The midden material comprised numerous leather  
104 fragments, ceramics, wood chips, nut shells, abundant animal and fish bones, fragments of wooden

105 vessels, wooden gaming pieces and tally sticks (Valk *et al* 2012). The formation processes of these  
106 stratigraphic units have been refined further using micromorphology (Banerjea and Badura 2019).

107

108 In the absence of comprehensive excavation and preservation of early occupation phases of Elbląg  
109 castle, relatively little is known about the internal layout of the Order's thirteenth-century *castra* in  
110 the eastern Baltic (Pluskowski 2012; Pluskowski 2019; Pluskowski *et al* 2019b). The *castra* at Elbląg  
111 was the administrative centre of the Teutonic Order until 1308 when it moved to Malbork (Ger.  
112 Marienburg), which then became its official headquarters. However, distinct spaces are specified in  
113 the Order's Rule, and written sources provide information on the variety of spaces within some of the  
114 larger convents from the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Józwiak and Trupinda 2012). The excavations that were  
115 conducted in 2012 and 2013 ahead of development at Elbląg have produced the only example where  
116 the timbers have survived *in situ* from multiple phases of rebuilding (Fig. 3). The early *castra* was  
117 constructed in timber before it was rebuilt in stone (Fonferrek, 2019). An exceptionally well-preserved  
118 and well-stratified sequence of organic-rich deposits that were interspersed with depositions of  
119 alluvial sediment was revealed. Geological, faunal and floristic investigations of the sediment under  
120 the castle demonstrate that the sediments which underlie the courtyard of the Museum of  
121 Archaeology and History in Elbląg document the evolution of this area from a relatively deep lake,  
122 Lake Druzno, through a shallowing water body, to a waterside zone, where the Elbląg River flowed  
123 into the Vistula Lagoon, by the time the timber castle was erected (Nitychoruk *et al.* 2016). Timbers at  
124 the base of this sequence produced a dendrochronology date of c. AD 1245, which means that the  
125 lowest deposits within this sequence represent the very earliest occupation and use of the *Vorburg*,  
126 or outer ward, of the early *castrum*.

## 127 Materials and Methods

### 128 Sampling methods

129 Monoliths were collected from both sites to sample all major stratigraphic units and their boundaries.  
130 At Karksi (Fig. 2), two, overlapping 0.5 m monoliths, 241 and 242, were collected from Trench 1 and  
131 were sub-sampled for micromorphology, pollen, NPPs, and phytolith analysis, but only data from 241  
132 is relevant to this study. The upper deposits in 242 are probably 14<sup>th</sup> century and there may have been  
133 some truncation when the first of the cobble pavements was constructed – and that included artefacts  
134 of 15<sup>th</sup> century date, and so do not relate to the period of active crusading. Archaeobotanical samples  
135 (c. 5 kg) were collected from the separate contexts of Trench 1. All samples represent waterlogged  
136 material with varying admixture of wood chips and small twigs. At Elbląg, two 0.25 m and two 0.1 m  
137 monoliths were collected from an area of the profile from Trench 2 with some particularly organic

138 layers that were interspersed with deposits of alluvium (Fig. 3) and eight micromorphology thin-  
139 sections were prepared from them, along with samples for pollen, NPPs and phytoliths from the key  
140 stratigraphic units. During excavation in Trench 2 nine samples (c. 2 kg) for macrobotanical analysis  
141 were also collected. They represent separate contexts connected with moat and nearby useful layers  
142 in which organic material was visible. The uppermost context, 17, dated to the second quarter of 14<sup>th</sup>  
143 century, was composed of charred grains and charcoals and there was evidence of fire.

144

145 Faunal remains were recovered during excavations at both sites (Makowiecki *et al.* 2019; Maltby *et al.*  
146 2019; Rannamäe, Lõugas 2019), and the data are drawn upon here.

147

## 148 Laboratory Methods

### 149 *Micromorphology*

150 Six thin-sections, 11.5 x 7.5 cm, were prepared from sub-samples monolith 241, Karksi (Fig. 2), and  
151 eight from Elbląg were prepared in the thin section unit, University of Reading, UK (Fig. 3). The samples  
152 were oven-dried to remove all moisture and then impregnated with epoxy resin while under vacuum.  
153 The impregnated samples were placed in an oven to dry for 18 hours at 70 °C, then cut and mounted  
154 to onto a frosted slide. The sample was then cut, ground and polished to the standard geological  
155 thickness of 30 µm.

156

157 Micromorphological investigation is carried out using a Leica DMLP polarising microscope at  
158 magnifications of 40x – 630x under Plane Polarised Light (PPL), Crossed Polarised Light (XPL), and  
159 where appropriate Oblique Incident Light (OIL). Thin-section description is conducted using the  
160 identification and quantification criteria set out by Bullock *et al.* (1985) and Stoops (2003), with  
161 reference to Mackenzie, Adams (1994) and Mackenzie, Guilford (1980) for rock and mineral  
162 identification, and Fitzpatrick (1993) for further identification of features such as clay coatings. The  
163 identification of organic components was carried out with reference to materials at the IPNA,  
164 University of Basel, Switzerland.

165

### 166 *Plant Macroremains*

167 At Karksi and Elbląg, a 300 cm<sup>3</sup> sub-sample of sediment was selected from each of waterlogged sample,  
168 following the standard procedure use in the Laboratory of Palaeoecology and Archaeobotany,  
169 University of Gdańsk, Poland. Samples from Karksi were pre-treated directly on the site. Flotation was  
170 conducted with 2.0, 0.5 and 0.2 mm mesh sieves. In the laboratory all fractions were checked for the  
171 presence of plant macroremains. At Elbląg, materials were soaked for 24 hours in weak solution of

172 KOH and washed through 2.0, 0.5 and 0.2 mm mesh sieves. The remaining material from the sample  
173 was wet-sieved only through the coarse sieve in order to obtain large diaspores, normally  
174 underrepresented in the base sample. Charred material from context 17 was dried and analysed as a  
175 whole (1500 cm<sup>3</sup>) to address the preservation bias arising from the charring process, which could  
176 destroy completely diaspores, such as weeds. Taxa names have been used after Mirek *et al.* (2002)  
177 and their ecological affiliation was established according to Matuszkiewicz (2008). The set of results  
178 presented in the tables is related to plants whose ecological affiliation was determinable.

179

#### 180 *Pollen and Non Pollen Palynomorphs*

181 For analysis of pollen and non-pollen palynomorphs, samples c. 1 cm<sup>3</sup> in volume were taken from  
182 monolith 241 (Karksi) and samples E1 to E4 (Elbląg). One *Lycopodium* tablet was added to enable  
183 calculation of pollen concentrations. Samples were prepared following standard laboratory  
184 techniques (Moore *et al.*, 1991) including the use of hydrochloric acid (removal of carbonates),  
185 hydrofluoric acid (removal of silica) and acetolysis (removal of cellulose), with the caveat that this step  
186 may dissolve some types of parasite eggs (Reinhard *et al.* 1986), but it was necessary in order to  
187 analyse the same slides for both, pollen and non-pollen microfossils. Samples were mounted in  
188 glycerol jelly and stained with safranin. A minimum of 500 pollen of terrestrial species were counted  
189 for each level. Pollen percentages are calculated based on terrestrial plants. Fern spores, aquatics and  
190 *Sphagnum* are calculated as a percentage of terrestrial pollen plus the sum of the component taxa  
191 within the respective category. Identification of cereal pollen followed the criteria of Anderson (1979).  
192 Identification of indeterminable grains was recorded according to Cushing (1967). The pollen diagram  
193 was produced using Tilia version 1.7.16 program (Grimm, 2011).

194

195 The calculation for NPP concentration is based on a minimum sum of 200 (exotic markers +  
196 microfossils), in order to obtain reliable estimates (Finsinger and Tinner 2005). Identifications were  
197 made under light microscopy at 400x magnifications. Considering the anthropogenic nature of the  
198 deposit, formed over a short span of time and probably including dumping events, the use of NPP  
199 concentrations seems more appropriate than the use of accumulation rates, that appear more  
200 suitable to investigate natural sequences (Baker *et al.* 2013, 2016; Wood and Wilmshurst 2013; Yeloff  
201 *et al.* 2007).

202

#### 203 *Phytoliths*

204 Phytoliths were extracted from each sample using the protocol developed at the Institute of  
205 Archaeology, University College London, UK (Jenkins and Rosen 2007), which, in summary uses the



206 following stages: (1) removal of the coarse fraction >0.5 mm; (2) 1 g of the sieved fraction was weighed  
207 out; (3) removal of calcium carbonate using a dilution of 10% hydrochloric acid; (4) clay removal using  
208 a settling procedure and sodium hexametaphosphate (Calgon) as a dispersant; (5) samples were  
209 placed in a muffle furnace for two hours at 500 °C to remove organic matter; (6) phytoliths were  
210 separated from the remaining material using a heavy liquid calibrated to a specific gravity of 2.3; (7)  
211 approximately two milligrams of phytoliths per sample were mounted onto microscope slides, using  
212 the mounting agent Entellan®.

213

214 Microscope slides were assessed using a Leica DMLP polarising microscope using 100x and 400x  
215 magnifications. Slides were initially assessed to ascertain if there were a sufficient number of single  
216 cells phytoliths present to take the slide to a full count. Those with a sufficient concentration and  
217 preservation of remains were fully analysed. Analysis consisted of counting and identifying a minimum  
218 of 250 phytolith forms. Phytoliths were further classified as deriving either from woody (dicotyledon)  
219 or non-woody.

220

## 221 Formation processes within the microstratigraphic sequence at Karksi

222 Monolith 241 (Fig.2) was collected from the lowest stratigraphic layers infilling the shallow, basin-like  
223 depression located in the area of the later High Castle; deposits from the later, 14<sup>th</sup> century deposits  
224 are preserved in monolith 242. Modelling of radiocarbon dates from monolith 241 suggest that these  
225 deposits, which include midden material, formed rapidly between AD 1272 and 1290 (Valk *et al* 2012).  
226 Micromorphological analysis (Supplementary tables 1 and 2), outlined in detail in Banerjea and Badura  
227 (2019), refined the stratigraphic sequence (Fig. 2). Context 13, the 'peat deposit', comprises three  
228 separate depositional events: MU13a, MU13b, and MU13c. The lowest, MU13c, has been interpreted  
229 as pond sediment (Boyd 1995, 4–5). MU13b is a peat consisting mainly of organic components, 66%,  
230 with some mineral inclusions, 34%. There are no microlaminations and inclusions are unoriented,  
231 unrelated, random and unpreferred, both of these features are different to MU13a above, which is also  
232 peat, but has a microlaminated bedding structure and plant fragments are strongly oriented, aligned  
233 parallel to basal boundary. These 'peat' deposits are better classified as anthropogenic peats (Ismail-  
234 Meyer *et al.*, 2018). The formation process shows similar characteristics to natural peat forming  
235 processes, but where organic materials from around the settlement have rapidly accumulated where  
236 there is a high groundwater table, which has preserved the organic matter (Ismail-Meyer *et al.*, 2013,  
237 331; Ismail-Meyer *et al.*, 2018). Context 12, the 'midden', comprises two separate depositional events:  
238 MU12a, and MU12b. MU12a is a thin, 0.6-1.5 cm accumulation of leaf litter (Fig. 4a), which overlies a  
239 more substantial horizon formed from midden material, MU12b; this leaf litter is considered to

240 represent a period of stabilisation. Micromorphology provided further information on the richness of  
241 the midden material with fish bones, burnt egg shell, hazelnut shells, and herbivore dung identified.  
242  
243 Pollen was well-preserved within context 13, but a sizeable quantity of the cereal pollen was heavily  
244 crumpled and is identified only generally as *Cerealia*-type (Fig. 5). No pollen survived in samples from  
245 MU13b, with the majority of samples derived from MU13a. There is a wide range of herbaceous pollen  
246 types suggestive of damp and meadow environments in the vicinity. The immediate area around the  
247 castle appears to have been largely cleared of trees. There are clear differences between the pollen  
248 signal from the base of the sequence (MU13a-c) and the 'midden' deposits (MU12a and b).  
249 Microscopic indicators of freshwater habitats were recorded (Fig. 5), particularly in the lowest levels.  
250 Spores of Zygnemataceae (*Spirogyra* sp.) characterise shallow (c. 50 cm) eutrophic pools, mostly  
251 stagnant (van Geel 2001). Tests of thecamoebians, occurring on both sites (*Arcella* and *Euglypha* spp.),  
252 also belong to taxa typical of damp environments, and confirm the presence of a shallow pond on the  
253 site (Charman *et al.* 2000), as suggested by a water-laid pond sediment identified in thin section,  
254 MU13c (Fig. 2). Furthermore, macroremains of *Chara* sp. (stonewort) oospores, typical aquatic green  
255 algae, characteristic of fresh water occurred in context 14 at the very base of the dammed pond. Fish  
256 scales (Villagran *et al.* 2017), were identified by micromorphology (Fig. 4b) within the remains of  
257 MU13a and MU13b, the anthropogenic peats formed from leaf fodder accumulations. There is a  
258 significant peak in *Betula* (birch) pollen at the top of the midden (Fig. 5), which corresponds to a thin  
259 leaf litter layer identified on the top of the midden, MU12b (Fig. 4a).

## 260 Livestock management and alimentation at Karksi

261 All levels at Karksi Castle, in particular the lowermost one (MU13c) show the occurrence of obligate  
262 fungal spores (Fig. 5) which only use herbivore dung as a growing substrate (*Sporormiella*, *Sordaria*,  
263 *Arnium*, *Delitschia* and *Rhytidospora* spp.) (Krug *et al.* 2004). This evidence proves the presence of  
264 animal feces in the vicinity of the sampled deposit, as dung spores have a relatively low dispersal and  
265 are regarded as indicators of local events (van Geel *et al.* 2003; Mazier *et al.* 2009). Coprophilous spore  
266 taxa within MU13c could indicate the use of the pond as a watering place for the livestock.  
267 Micromorphological analysis showed fragments of coprolites from small herbivores such as sheep or  
268 goat within the midden material, MU12b (Fig. 4c). These lines of evidence would suggest that  
269 herbivores, including sheep or goats were kept in this area, which was to become the High Castle,  
270 during this early colonising period.

271

272 Several of the different proxies applied at Karksi provided evidence for the types of animal fodder  
273 used by the occupants of the site. Deposits MU13a and MU13b formed gradually, possibly as a result  
274 of material (foliage) being dumped at the edge of the pond. The pond would have served as a water  
275 source for livestock and mostly infilled with foliage that may represent the remains of leaf fodder, the  
276 lower unit representing leaf fodder that has been broken up by trampling (Banerjea, Badura 2019)  
277 (Fig. 2), with macroremains of *Betula* identified from sample 240 at the base of context 13 (Valk *et al.*  
278 2012). MU13b comprises predominantly wood and twigs; and MU13a predominantly tree leaves.  
279 Branches and twigs were an important addition to leaf fodder in times of food scarcity such as winter  
280 (Rasmussen 1993), particularly for cattle and sheep in the Baltic where branches and twigs of trees  
281 and shrubs were collected from wooded meadows (Kukk, Kull, 1997). Arguably, on the basis of their  
282 large size observed using micromorphology, >1 cm in transverse section, the wood and twig fragments  
283 within MU13b could represent uneaten fodder remains, which have been made available to the  
284 livestock, possibly as a result of clearance activities, adjacent to their water source; twigs and leaves  
285 with a diameter <5 mm have been recorded within cow pats and sheep/goat dung pellets (Akeret and  
286 Jacomet 1997; Akeret and Rentzel 2001; Akeret *et al.*, 1999; Fauve and Jacomet 1998).

287

288 Pollen evidence from context 13 (Fig. 5) suggests that grain and hay fodder was also dumped alongside  
289 the leaf fodder. There are large quantities of Poaceae (grass) and cereal pollen, particularly *Avena-*  
290 *Triticum* (oat-wheat). The poor production and dispersal rates of most cereals, excluding wind-  
291 pollinated *Secale* (rye) suggest nearby agricultural fields are unlikely to have been the direct source of  
292 the significant quantities of cereal pollen recorded from context 13. Instead the majority of cereal  
293 pollen is likely to derive from stored grain used for human consumption or as a component of animal  
294 fodder. The large quantity of Poaceae grains could derive from hay harvested from meadows/pastures  
295 as the primary component of animal fodder, but could also reflect pollen of a variety of grass species  
296 transported by wind over longer distances from vegetation growing within the vicinity of the site.  
297 Many of the ruderal and field weed pollen are likely to have been brought into the castle along with  
298 grain and hay, carried by insects attracted by rotting waste or derived from plants growing in the  
299 immediate vicinity. The dominance of both cereals and grass pollen within context 13 is therefore  
300 consistent with the micromorphological evidence of the deposit primarily as dumped fodder.

301

302 The midden deposits, MU12a and MU12b, contained further evidence for livestock alimentation at  
303 Karksi. Coprolites from small herbivores such as sheep or goats were identified in thin section within  
304 MU12b. Small fragments of millet (*Panicum* sp.) were identified embedded within the actual herbivore  
305 coprolites (Fig.4c). No macroremains of millet were recovered from the midden deposits, which

306 suggests that processing waste was not discarded here, but that the grain was instead ingested as  
307 fodder. The other macroremains from Karksi represent a range of habitats, mostly diaspores of species  
308 from wet/damp areas, as well as ruderal places (Banerjea and Badura 2019). It is possible that the  
309 plant remains characteristic of the meadows/pastures come from places where animals were grazed.  
310 Traces of cereals (rye, barley, oat, wheat) were recovered, which could be used both as an element of  
311 human food or animal fodder. Preservation of pollen in 'midden' deposits (context 12) was more  
312 sparsely preserved, with the exception of the upper sample from the accumulation of leaf litter,  
313 MU12a (Fig. 5). There is less pollen of Poaceae and cereals and instead greater quantities of  
314 Brassicaceae (mustards), Ranunculaceae (buttercups), Caryophyllaceae (champions), meadowsweets  
315 (*Filipendula*) along with pollen of Rosaceae (rose family) and Apiaceae (carrot family).

### 316 Formation processes within the microstratigraphic sequence at Elbląg

317 Micromorphology identified four main changes in the deposition of sediment and use of the earliest  
318 outer ward (Supplementary tables 3 and 4; Banerjea 2019). The earliest deposits were first trampled  
319 by caprines, and were then followed by a period comprising several flooding events depositing  
320 alluvium. The analysis shows that context 26 at the base of the sequence is three microstratigraphic  
321 units (MU26i–26iii) comprising mixed lenses of trampled herbivore dung with low abundances of  
322 faecal spherulites, and alluvium (Fig. 3); the survival of faecal spherulites in a waterlogged sequence  
323 is unusual and may result from very localised preservation conditions that can occur in archaeological  
324 occupation deposits (Banerjea *et al.* 2015). These mixed lenses most probably formed as a result  
325 trampling activity by livestock while low level flooding took place, which deposited alluvial sediment  
326 that was subsequently trampled by animals and mixed with dung. MU26i-26iii are then overlain by a  
327 more substantial deposit of alluvium, MU25, which formed as a result of more substantial flooding of  
328 this area of the earliest Vorburg. This is interspersed with a trampled occupation surface containing  
329 fragments of charred wood and phytoliths (MU23b) with framboidal pyrite. These commonly occur in  
330 marine and perimarine environments and form at the oxic-anoxic interface (Kattenberg and  
331 Aalbersberg 2004; Mees, Stoops 2018), but also in freshwater environments due to bacterial  
332 degradation of organic matter (Ismail-Meyer *et al.*, 2013) and in this context their formation is situated  
333 with a changing marine, fluvial and lacustrine system (Nitychoruk *et al.* 2016) The occupation surface  
334 is overlain by more alluvium, MU23a, although this is less substantial in thickness than MU25.

335

336 A floor-raising 'brush wood' (branches from small trees and shrubs) platform (MU20b and MU20c)  
337 was constructed over the alluvial flooding deposits, on which stabling deposits from large herbivores  
338 formed *in situ*. It is also possible that rather than being a platform, the 'brush wood' material

339 represents a collapsed fence. Micromorphology shows that there is change later in this sequence in  
340 MU16a4 and 18b, which represent *in situ* stabling waste: elongated organic strands rather than pellets  
341 are strongly oriented and aligned parallel with the basal boundary. This dung material is more  
342 characteristic of that of larger herbivores such as cattle or horses, the upper part of which, MU16a4,  
343 is characteristic of a stabling crust (Brönnimann *et al.* 2017). A stabling crust forms as a result of  
344 trampled dung and organics from stabling waste becoming cemented by the input of uric acid  
345 (Brönnimann *et al.* 2017), and, as observed in MU16a (Fig. 4d), appears to have the  
346 micromorphological properties of dopplerite, which forms as a result of the decay of organic materials  
347 under wet conditions (Ismail-Meyer *et al.*, 2018.).

348

349 The area is then inundated again with alluvial sediment, MU16a3, and when this has stabilised leaf  
350 litter, MU16a2, accumulated. The microstratigraphic sequence ends with a deposit of discarded  
351 material, MU16a1, which represents the abandonment of the area. This discarded material comprises  
352 brick, daub and burnt bone inclusions, as well as organic components such as leaves, charred cereals,  
353 wood, bark, and charred wood.

## 354 Livestock management and alimentation at Elbląg

355 Two horizons of livestock managements were identified within the sequence in Trench 2 through the  
356 outer ward of the *castrum* at Elbląg, both of which are characterised by the presence of herbivore  
357 dung in thin section (Figs. 3, 4e, 4f, 4g) and corresponding horizons of a range of coprophilous fungal  
358 spores and intestinal parasite eggs, *Trichuris* sp. as identified by extraction (Fig. 6), and possible *Ascaris*  
359 sp. (Fig. 3e) identified in thin-section (Pümpin *et al.* 2017). The earliest microstratigraphic units,  
360 MU26i-26iii, contain trampled ruminant dung from small herbivores such as sheep/goat (Brönnimann  
361 *et al.* 2017) with rare calcareous faecal spherulites. Intestinal parasite eggs, *Trichuris* sp., and  
362 coprophilous fungal spores are less abundant in the lower microstratigraphic units, which may be due  
363 to this area not being used at this point as a livestock stable, but as a yard area where livestock roamed  
364 and trampled around. The trampling of dung by animals may prevent the fungi from growing to  
365 disperse the spores (Morandi 2018). The stabling crust, MU16a4, contained the greatest abundances  
366 of coprophilous (*Sporormiella*-type, *Sordaria*-type, *Sordaria cf. fimicola*) and occasionally coprophilous  
367 fungal spores (*Chaetomium*) and intestinal parasite eggs (*Trichuris* sp.) (Fig. 6).

368

369 Phytolith (Fig. 7) and pollen evidence (Fig. 6) from MU26i in Trench 2 shows early colonisers use a  
370 mixed grain/leaf fodder diet for ruminant livestock, with a move to grain and grass later on for larger  
371 herbivores, which are represented in MU18b; a pattern which is also evident at Karksi. The phytolith

372 assemblage from the trampled lenses of herbivore, caprid pellets at the base of the sequence (MU  
373 26i–iii) comprises arboreal (dicotyledon) and grass (monocotyledon) phytoliths, particularly spherical  
374 (or globular psilate) forms that occur with broad-leafed foliage and the bark of twigs (Delhon *et al.*  
375 2008; Piperno 2006). Monocotyledons can produce up to twenty times more phytoliths than  
376 dicotyledons (shrubs/trees), and so dicotyledon phytoliths are under-represented in the phytolith  
377 record; therefore, a direct comparison between monocotyledons and dicotyledons does not represent  
378 the true ratio of grasses to trees/shrubs (Tsartsidou *et al.* 2007). Consequently, the woody species are  
379 very likely to be much more prolific than indicated in the phytolith record, and could indicate the use  
380 of leaf fodder in addition to grasses (Delhon *et al.* 2008) during the earlier occupation at the castle,  
381 represented in unit 26. Pollen samples from MU20c, 23b, 26i and 26iii contain significantly higher  
382 quantities of *Avena-Triticum* (67–80%), with a smaller component of weed, ruderal, grass or another  
383 herb pollen. Cellular material from cereal husks is visible on the pollen slides along with clumps of  
384 cereal pollen grains.

385

386 The range of phytolith morphologies from wetland species, field grasses and weeds, and cereal grasses  
387 within stratigraphic units 16a and 18b, which contained the dung layers, suggest that horses (or  
388 possibly cattle) were both put out to pasture in an area close to water, and also fed on grain, as  
389 indicated by the presence of multi-cell dendritic forms from cereal husks (Fig. 4f, 4g). Pollen samples  
390 within MU16a1, 16a2, 16a4, 18b and 20b (Fig. 6) show a high degree of uniformity in the pollen  
391 sequence with large quantities of Poaceae pollen (up to c. 60%) and significant quantities of *Avena-*  
392 *Triticum* (up to 27.6%). There are large quantities of pollen of weed taxa strongly associated with  
393 arable fields within the dung layers, MU16a4 and 18b, particularly *Centaurea cyanus* (cornflower) (up  
394 to 29.2%), along with *Agrostemma githago*, *Scleranthus*-type (knawels) and *Spergula*-type (corn  
395 spurrey). Pollen of Ranunculaceae undifferentiated and *Anthemis* type (chamomiles) also occur in  
396 large quantities.

397

398 In the samples containing waterlogged plant macroremains, a range of diaspores from different type  
399 of plant communities were preserved (Pluskowski *et al.* 2019a). Although they were not numerous,  
400 they still provide evidence for the range of habitats within the immediate vicinity of the castle, which  
401 included meadows and pastures, which could be used as a place of pasturage; wild grass seeds were  
402 identified in thin section embedded within the *in situ* dung (MU16a4) (Fig. 4h).

403

404 The charred plant macroremains from context 17, the uppermost context, dated to the 2nd quarter  
405 of 14<sup>th</sup> century, are more interesting. The assemblage in it is interpreted as the remnants of fodder,

406 most likely for horses, which was stored in some kind of sack or wooden chest outside the building  
407 and subsequently burnt. The sample included a significant quantity of charred oats (*Avena sativa*) with  
408 a small admixture of barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and rye (*Secale cereale*). The grains were not dehusked  
409 and appear not to be separated from weeds, which include segetal weeds such as field cockle  
410 (*Agrostemma githago*), false cleavers (*Galium spurium*) or sheep's sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*). Currently  
411 in Poland oats are still the most popular feed for horses. In medieval Poland oats were viewed as  
412 fodder for horses or as a component of a food made for hunting dogs. Historical and archaeobotanical  
413 data indicate that oats are present in the human diet, but are not the main element (Demińska *et*  
414 *al.* 1999; Karg, 2007; Lityńska-Zajac, Wasylkova, 2005).

## 415 Discussion

416 The results of these analyses (integrated and summarised in supplementary tables 1 and 3) show that  
417 at Karksi, livestock were stabled in the area that was to become the High Castle, prior to and during  
418 the removal of vegetation probably for its construction as evidenced by a reduction in tree pollen in  
419 the pollen record. The clearance of vegetation provided leaf fodder for the animals. Microstratigraphic  
420 analysis shows that a spring was dammed to create a small pond to create a watering hole for  
421 livestock, and that contained fish possibly used as a food source by occupiers during the construction  
422 of the castle. The presence of herbivores is attested by the occurrence of coprophilous fungal spores  
423 within the sediment that accumulated at the base of the pond. These microfossils are established  
424 indicators of local herbivore activity (van Geel *et al.* 2003), as the spores are released close to the  
425 ground and readily incorporated into the sediments. At Elbląg, the microstratigraphy shows that the  
426 area of the outer bailey, the earliest outer ward of the *castrum*, regularly flooded leaving behind  
427 deposits of alluvial sediment that interspersed deposits of occupation materials. The  
428 micromorphology results suggest that flooding episodes that are documented in the sediments below  
429 the early *castra* (Nitychoruk *et al.* 2016) continued during the occupation of the outer bailey.

430  
431 The coprolite remains from both Karksi and Elbląg show that small ruminants such as sheep and goats  
432 were kept in the areas of the early *castra* under construction and later to form important areas such  
433 as the High Castle (Karksi) and the outer ward (Elbląg). In Teutonic Order castles, the High Castle  
434 housed the Order's functional and communal rooms, and one or more Outer Bailey's (or outer wards),  
435 which were usually delineated by defensive walls and moats, contained a number of service buildings  
436 and stables, and in the larger castles chapels and administrative spaces (Pluskowski *et al.* 2019b). The  
437 evidence at both sites indicates that ruminants were fed both leaf fodder and grain. Micromorphology  
438 has been instrumental in identifying trampled sediment and *in situ* deposits of stabling waste. At

439 Karksi, dung fragments from sheep or goat were trampled in the midden. Coprophilous fungal spores  
440 at the top of the midden (MU12b) indicate that livestock were roaming in the area. The  
441 zooarchaeological evidence from medieval Livonian assemblages (Maltby *et al.* in press) indicates that  
442 the incoming colonists adopted the indigenous livestock husbandry culture, and as a result the  
443 absence of any regional diachronic variation is not so surprising. The provisioning of meat to castles  
444 and towns was reliant on existing pastoral systems in the countryside, run by indigenous communities,  
445 with the only significant change consisting of the reorientation of higher purchasing power  
446 communities from strongholds to castles and towns. As attested by documentary sources, raiding was  
447 prevalent at this time (Goldschmidt 1979), which may have resulted in the control of resources at the  
448 Karksi site by the earliest colonists, with some caprines, as shown by the data presented here, kept in  
449 the area that was to become the High Castle. Fish stocks, attested by the presence of fish scales, were  
450 potentially retained on site by the creation of a small pond, despite there being a river in the valley  
451 bottom.

452

453 The occupation material in the earliest outer ward of the *castrum* at Elbląg is characterised by  
454 trampled sediment containing coprolites from small ruminants such as sheep or goats. The next phase  
455 of occupation is also characterised by the presence of livestock, but of larger herbivores such as cattle  
456 or horses, which is attested by depositions of *in situ* dung layers (MU16a4 and 18b) containing  
457 intestinal parasite eggs and the highest concentrations of coprophilous fungal spores within the  
458 profile. This could reflect a general trend evident in the zooarchaeological data from Prussia  
459 (Makowiecki *et al.* in press), which shows a general change over the course of the medieval period in  
460 animal husbandry practices with the arrival of the Teutonic Order to larger herbivores such as cattle  
461 kept in preference to pigs. However, these *in situ* dung (stabling) layers (MU16a4 and 18b) could also  
462 have been deposited by horses as horseshoes were recovered from mid-13<sup>th</sup> century contexts during  
463 the excavation of the outer ward at Elbląg (Fonferek in press), and documentary sources indicate that  
464 stud horses were more often stabled in the outer baileys of castles to ensure their safety (Ekdahl  
465 1998). There are similarities between the formation of the *in situ* stabling layers (MU16a4 and 18b) at  
466 Elbląg and a 13<sup>th</sup> century horse stable within a Moravian medieval bailey, Veselí nad Moravou, Czech  
467 Republic (Dejmal *et al.* 2014), as in both cases the location of the stable is close to water as evident by  
468 flooding depositing alluvium.

469

470 The uppermost context, 17 in the outer ward at Elbląg, dated to the second quarter of 14<sup>th</sup> century  
471 included a significant quantity of charred oats with a small admixture of barley and rye, and is  
472 interpreted as the remnants of fodder, most likely for horses, which adds further support that stud or



473 warhorses were stabled in this area. Warhorses were stabled in the outer bailey of Cesis castle,  
474 Livonia, during the later phase of the Teutonic Order's rule, c. AD 1480-1503 (Pluskowski *et al.*  
475 submitted). Stable isotope analysis (O and H) of bone collagen and trace element analysis (Ba and Mg)  
476 of bone phosphate show that the horses consumed local water and consumed high Mg, Ba food,  
477 possibly grain and fed differently to other horses (Pluskowski *et al.* submitted). At Veselí nad Moravou,  
478 Czech Republic, horses were fed meadow grasses as well as woody vegetation, millet, oat, and less  
479 commonly hemp, wheat and rye (Dejmal *et al.* 2014), which is similar to the mixed grain and pasture  
480 evidence, probably hay from MU16a4 and 18b at Elbląg.

481

482 The multi-proxy analysis of earliest deposits at Elbląg shows that, in relation to the foddering regimes  
483 of smaller ruminants (caprines), they consumed a mixed diet comprising leaf fodder and grain, possibly  
484 at a time before more extensive cultivation which could provide sufficient grain for livestock. It is  
485 possible that grain fodder is being supplemented with leaf fodder as a result of grain shortage and,  
486 perhaps additionally, that this is a seasonal pattern and represents winter livestock alimentation with  
487 ruminant enclosed in the outer bailey during the winter months. Isotopic data of sheep/goat remains  
488 from the Kulmerland (Prussia) shows that  $\delta^{15}\text{N}$  increased in value from the early to late medieval  
489 period due to manuring during agricultural intensification (Müldner *et al.* in press).

490

491 At Karksi, micromorphological analysis of the earliest deposits that begin the infilling of the small pond  
492 suggests the use of leaf fodder, with pollen evidence suggesting the dumping of cereal processing  
493 waste, including rye, along with the leaf fodder. In later midden deposits, millet was consumed by  
494 sheep/goats, which raises the question was millet cultivated or imported (animal) feed?  
495 Archaeobotanical studies and research on the history of farming have concluded that until 16<sup>th</sup> century  
496 it was only imported to the Baltic (Dąbrowski 1962; Latałowa *et al.* 2007). In Livonia, during the  
497 Hanseatic period, millet was the staple of secondary important, as well as lentils or buckwheat. Millet  
498 was consumed by the urban middle classes and was presumably imported from the southern Baltics  
499 region (Sillaso and Hiie 2007). Pollen evidence from the commandery (the area controlled by the  
500 castle) of the *Vogt* (or Advocate) of Karkus shows oat or wheat from the mid-thirteenth century, rye  
501 from the early fourteenth century, and buckwheat during the fifteenth century in the hinterland  
502 around Karksi castle (Brown in press). Cereal pollen (from the pond sediment at Karksi, which includes  
503 rye, possibly represents small scale production in a largely wooded environment. Charred barley and  
504 wheat cereal grains were recovered from the later midden dating to the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century.

505

506

## 507 Conclusions

508 The results represent an important study of deposits from medieval castles, particularly from the  
509 period of active Crusading that are rarely revealed through excavation and in the past have rarely been  
510 subjected to an integrated environmental investigation. The integrated results have allowed the  
511 potential of these proxies to be powerfully exploited to show new perspectives on the function and  
512 development of these castle complexes and their relationships with castle hinterland. In particular,  
513 the integration of micromorphology and on-site NPPs has been instrumental in identifying stabling  
514 deposits. Where plant macroremains were too fragmentary to survive recovery for analysis, they  
515 survived in micromorphology thin-section, such as the remains of millet embedded within the  
516 herbivore coprolite at Karksi, and micromorphology provided a micro-contextual approach to  
517 understanding the depositional pathways of plant macrofossils and microfossils. The research has  
518 produced further information concerning the diachronicity of the range of livestock that the colonising  
519 Teutonic Knights kept, whereabouts within the castles they were stabled, and livestock alimentation.  
520 While no similar integrated geoarchaeological studies have been undertaken on other Teutonic Order  
521 castles in the eastern Baltic, pollen evidence from across Livonia suggests that agricultural  
522 intensification was most apparent around the key urban centres and castles where their establishment  
523 involved new concentration of people and animals (e.g. Stivrins *et al.* 2016; Banerjea *et al.*, 2017;  
524 Brown *et al.*, 2017). By comparison, rural areas show a measure of continuity in land-use from the  
525 preceding late Iron Age, with little evidence for intensification until the 14<sup>th</sup> century; castles and urban  
526 centres therefore play an important role in understanding changing patterns of food procurement and  
527 land-use associated with the early years of the Crusades.

528

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728

729 [Figure captions](#)

730 **Figure 1.** Map showing the location of Karksi, in present day Estonia, and Elbląg, in present day Poland.

731 **Figure 2.** a) Plan of Karksi castle with the locations of excavation Trenches 1, 2 and 3- sample in this  
732 research come from Trench 1; b) Photograph of the profile from Trench 1; c) Section drawing from  
733 Trench 1, showing the location of monolith samples 241 and 242, and the red box highlights the area  
734 of interest at the base of the sloping edge; d) scans of micromorphology slides prepared from  
735 monolith 241, and the related microstratigraphic units (10a= levelling surface, 12a= leaf litter,  
736 12b=trampled discard deposits, 13a=compacted accumulation of leaf fodder, 13b=trampled leaf  
737 fodder, 13c=aqueous accumulation, 14a=accumulation, 14b=redeposited sediment).

738 **Figure 3** a) photograph of trench 2, from excavations in 2013 at the Archaeology and History Museum,  
739 Elbląg- the red line shows the profile that was selected for sampling in photograph b; b) the profile in



740 Trench 2, Elbląg that was selected for environmental sampling; c) location of monoliths 1 (blue), 2  
741 (green), 3 (yellow) and 4 (orange), and the white box shows the area in photograph d where samples  
742 were collected for analysis of phytoliths and plant macroremains; d) the major stratigraphic units that  
743 were identified during excavation and locations of the samples that were collected for analysis of the  
744 plant macroremains; e) scans of micromorphology slides prepared from scans of micromorphology  
745 slides prepared from monoliths 1-4, and the related microstratigraphic units (16a1=Discard/  
746 abandonment debris, 16a2=Decayed leaf litter, 16a3= Alluvium, 16a4= *In situ* stabling crust, 18b= *In*  
747 *situ* oxidised dung, 20b= Constructional/ levelling wood, 20c= Decayed constructional/ levelling wood,  
748 23a= Alluvium, 23b= Reworked occupation surface, 25=Alluvium, 26i= Mixed: trampled dung and  
749 alluvium, 26ii= Mixed: trampled dung and alluvium, 26iii= Mixed: trampled dung and alluvium).

750 **Figure 4.** Micromorphology photomicrographs from Karksi: a) Cross-section of a birch leaf, MU12a, b)  
751 Fish scales, MU13a, c) Millet fragments embedded within a caprine coprolite, MU12b; and Elbląg: d)  
752 stabling crust, MU16a4, e) Intestinal parasite ova, *Ascaris* sp., MU16a4, f and g) dendritic multi-cell  
753 phytolith formations within dung, MU18b, h) cross-section of a wild grass seed, MU16a4.

754 **Figure 5.** Karksi: summary pollen and NPPs diagram showing the abundance of key pollen types, dung  
755 spores and aquatic microfossils (values expressed as microfossil no./cm<sup>3</sup>). Dots mark presence where  
756 abundance was low.

757 **Figure 6.** Elbląg: summary pollen and NPPs diagram showing the abundance of key pollen types dung  
758 spores, aquatic microfossils and eggs of intestinal parasites (values expressed as microfossil no./cm<sup>3</sup>).  
759 Dots mark presence where abundance was low.

760 **Figure 7.** Elbląg: diagram showing abundance monocotyledon and dicotyledon phytolith  
761 forms.

762

### 763 [Supplementary tables](#)

764 **Sup 1.** Integrated plant macroremains, palynology and micromorphology datasets from Karksi,  
765 Estonia.

766 **Sup. 2.** Micromorphology sediment descriptions, Karksi, Estonia

767 **Sup 3.** Integrated plant macroremains, palynology and micromorphology datasets from Elbląg, Poland.

768 **Sup. 4.** Micromorphology sediment descriptions, Elbląg, Poland.

769