

Millet cultivation in the Belarus and the Baltic States

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The timing of broomcorn millet cultivation in Belarus remains to be established due to the absence of directly dated millet grains from this region. A recent initiative to examine pottery impressions from Belarus using SEM has confirmed the presence of *Panicum miliaceum* impressions in several pottery vessels. Based on pottery typology the majority of vessels belong to the later periods of the Bronze age or the Early Iron age. A few clearly defined millet impressions, however, have been attributed to the Corded-Ware culture pots dated to the end of the 3rd millennium BC. Those pottery shards are currently undergoing an OSL dating procedure to confirm their chronological affiliations.

Millet cultivation in the east Baltics arrived with a slight delay from the territories located to the south or south east, a process identified from similarities in associated material culture and aDNA data of human populations. The earliest millet grains are dated so far to around 1000 BC from sites of eastern Lithuania. Broomcorn millet is found ubiquitously across the south-eastern regions of the Baltic together with barley, spelt/emmer wheats and gold-of-pleasure at sites dated to 800-600 BC. The period of millet introduction to the southeastern Baltics coincides with significant changes in the region, seen in population size increase, intensification of metal production, manifestation of food production, and the formation of fortified/enclosed hilltop settlements. North of the East Baltic region, millet cultivation stops at around 60° N and has never been found in the current territories of Estonia or Finland. Such an abrupt cut-off line of millet cultivation also coincides with the distribution of Baltic and Finno-Ugric speaking populations, raising the question as to whether millet cultivation marks an environmental or cultural divide.