Most detailed study to date of gut contents of Tollund Man

July 22 2021, by Bob Yirka

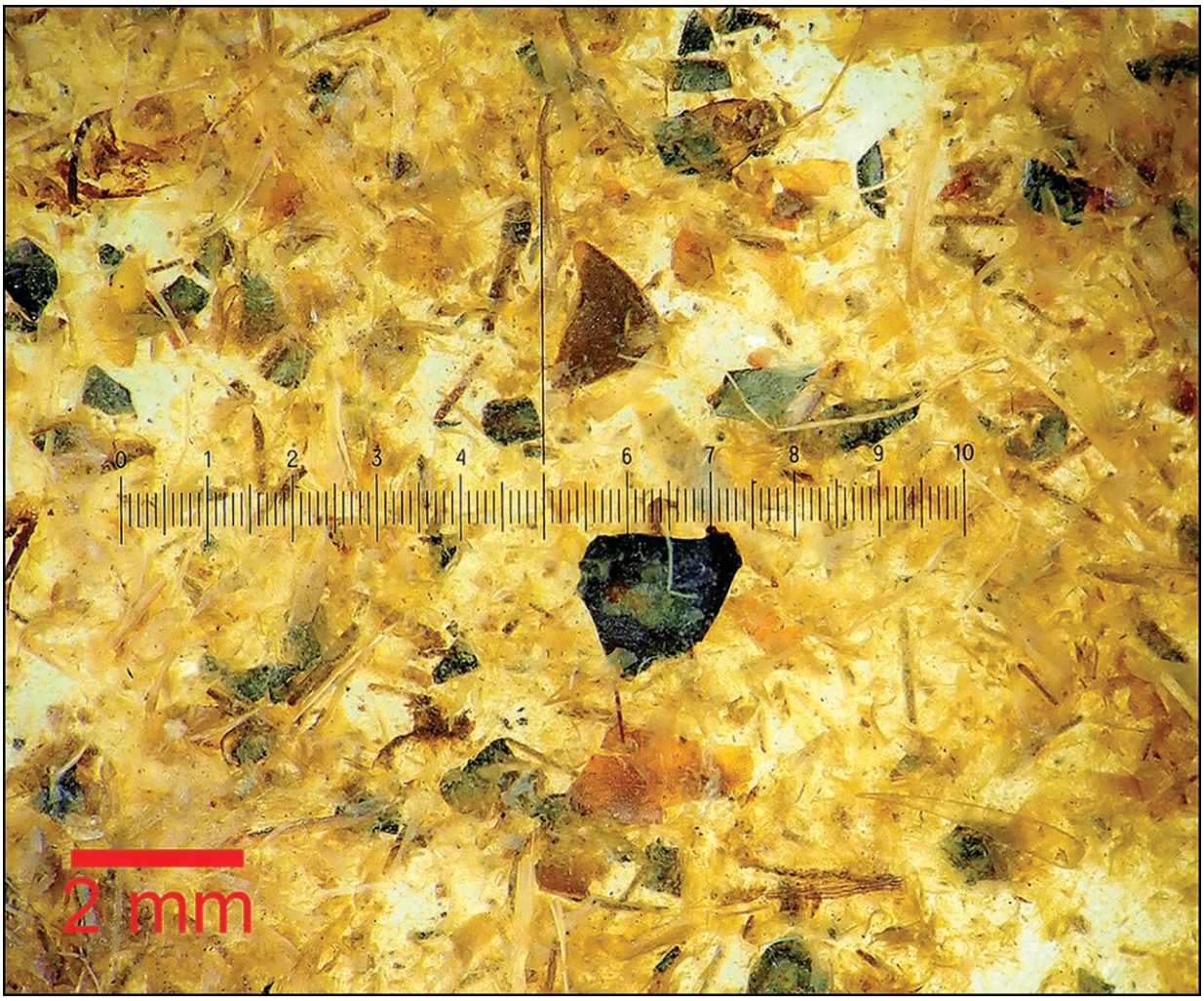
Credit: *Antiquity* (2021). DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2021.98

A team of researchers from Denmark's Museum Silkeborg, the National Museum of Denmark, Moesgaard Museum and Aarhus University, has

conducted the most detailed study to date of Tollund Man's stomach and intestinal contents. In their paper published in the journal *Antiquity*, the group describes their in-depth study of the famous "bog body."

In 1950 a mummified corpse was found in a bog on the Jutland peninsula in what is now Denmark. Initially, officials on the scene thought they were investigating a recent murder because the mummy was so well preserved. Subsequent testing showed the mummy to have lived during the 4th century BC during a time known as the Pre-Roman Iron Age—he was dated to 2,400 years ago. Researchers at the time noted that the mummy, which came to be known as Tollund Man, had eaten a porridge of sorts before being hanged to death. In this new effort, the researchers have taken a closer look at the contents of Tollund Man's stomach and intestines.

Prior research has shown that Tollund Man was approximately 40 years old when he was killed for unknown reasons and that he was buried in the bog, which preserved his body for more than 2,000 years. In his gut contents, the researchers found evidence of a porridge made up mostly of barley. It also contained flax and seeds and a small amount of fish. The meal had been cooked in a clay pot and was slightly burned before it was served. The researchers note that the porridge was so well preserved that they could build a recipe from it if they so desired.



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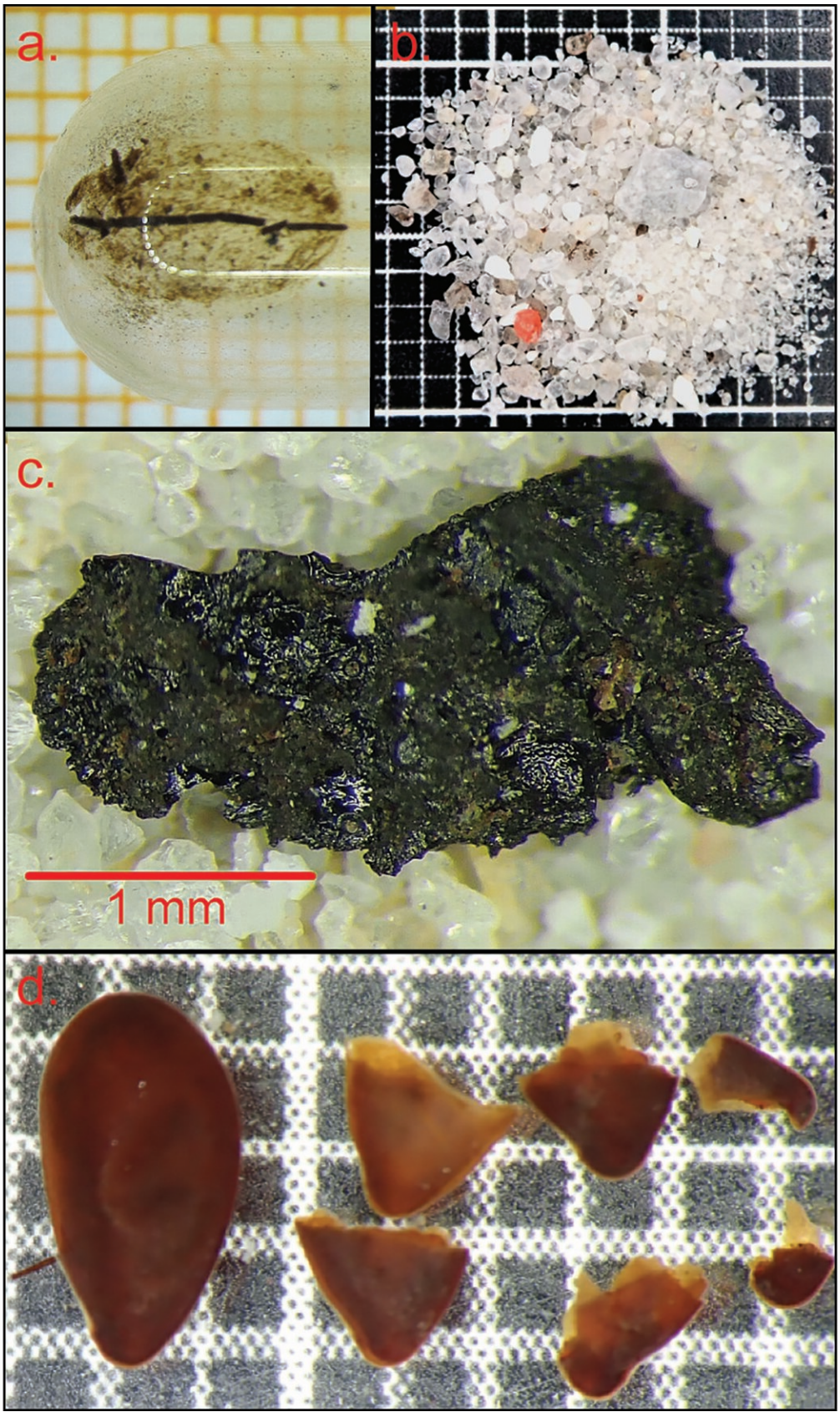
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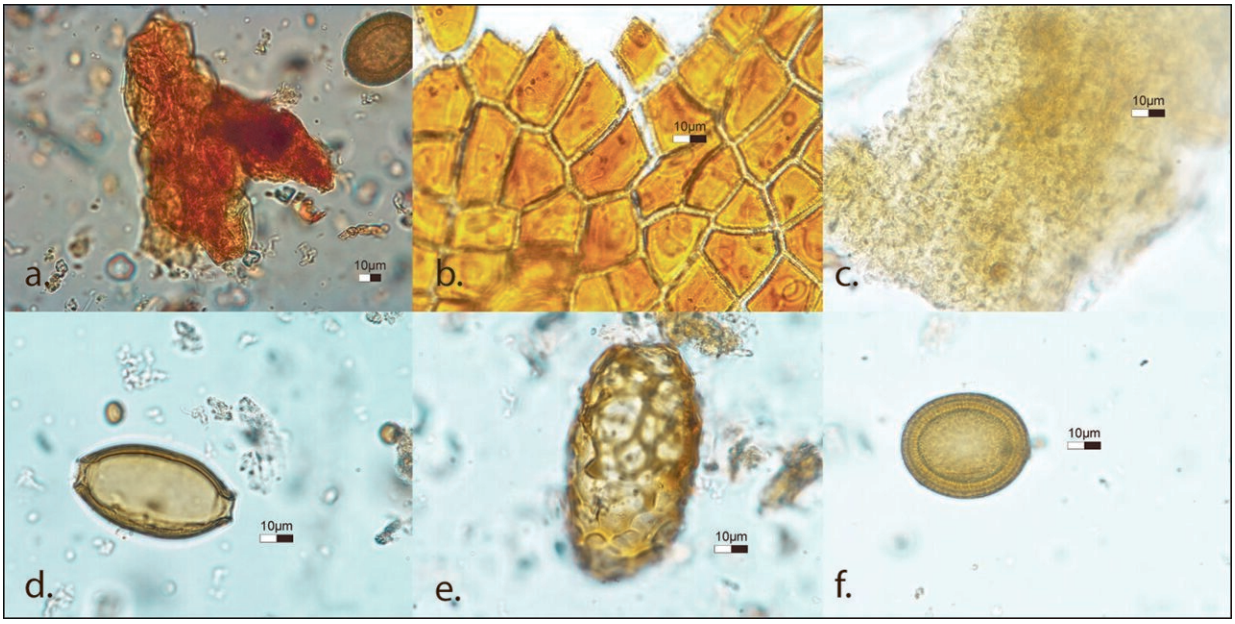
They also found that Tollund Man had been infested with tapeworms along with other intestinal worms and their eggs. They suggest he likely picked up such parasites by consuming raw or undercooked meat or perhaps from drinking water from a well that was not entirely clean. They also suggest that Tollund Man might have been the victim of a human sacrifice ritual—or he might simply have been caught doing something his peers viewed as punishable by hanging.



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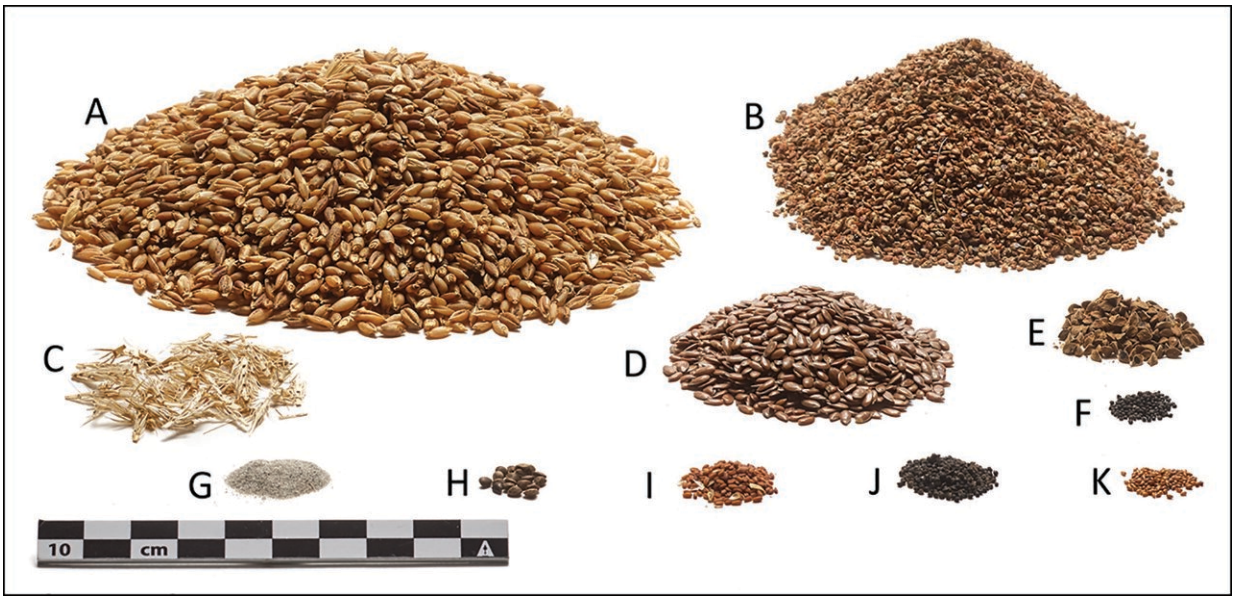

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More information: Nina H. Nielsen et al, The last meal of Tollund Man: new analyses of his gut content, *Antiquity* (2021). DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2021.98

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