



## Historic and Prehistoric Epidemics

Guest Editor:

### **Dr. Antoinette van der Kuyl**

Laboratory of Experimental  
Virology, Department of Medical  
Microbiology and Infection  
Prevention, Amsterdam UMC,  
University of Amsterdam,  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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### **Message from the Guest Editor**

Although historical accounts are highly descriptive and can often be used to retrace epidemics, knowledge of the actual pathogens involved is a recent advance. The relatively new fields of ancient DNA and paleovirology have paved the way for actual research into the epidemics of the past. Ancient DNA can be taken by extracting genomic material, which can contain the responsible microbes, from buried victims or stored tissue remains; paleovirological techniques work by "digging" for viral fossils from the ever-growing number of genome assemblies. Such endogenous viral elements can be used to reconstruct the prehistoric spread of these viruses. The molecular knowledge of historic and prehistoric epidemics may help us understand the past and the present, and prepare us for the future.

