PREHISTORY IN THE BALKANS

22.12.2021

7TH CONFERENCE OF THE CENTER FOR PREHISTORIC RESEARCH

7th Conference of the Center for Prehistoric Research

PREHISTORY in the BALKANS

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Conference organizers:

Goce Naumov and Ljubo Fidanoski

Booklet editing:

Goce Naumov

Proofreading:

Andriana Dragović

Poster design:

Goce Naumov and Nikos Chausidis

Website editing and online event updates:

Gjore Milevski and Goce Naumov

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Goce Naumov and Ljubo Fidanoski
09:00 - 09:15

Center for Prehistoric Research
Introduction and opening speech

09:15 - 9:45
Boris Kavur and Martina Blečić Kavur
University of Primorska
So Close, No Matter How Far…

09:45 - 10:15
Mathias Mehofer, Mario Gavranović and Aleksandra Papazovska
University of Vienna / Austrian Academy of Sciences / Archaeological Museum of the Republic of North Macedonia
Bronze and Iron Age Artifacts from North Macedonia – Metal Procurement and Copper Exchange Networks

10:15 - 10:45
Dragoş Gheorghiu
National University of Arts - Bucharest
Skeumorphs as Prestige Items in the Gumelniţa Tradition

10:45 - 11:00
Dragan Milanović
Institute of Archaeology - Belgrade
Innovations in the Spinning Process and Their Correlation with Changes in Economy and Society of the 5th Millennium BC in the Central Balkans and Neighboring Regions

11:00 - 11:30
John Chapman and Bisserka Gaydarska
Durham University
Where was Copper Deposited? In Sites or in the Landscape?

11:30-12:00
Krum Bacvarov, Desislava Takorova, Georgi Katsarov, Nikolina Nikolova and Atanas Tsurev
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Enclosing the Void: the Early Copper Age Enclosures at Stamboliyski and Sredets in Bulgarian Thrace

12:00 - 12:30
Paolo Biagi and Renato Nisbet
Ca' Foscari University of Venice
Prehistoric and Historic Traces of Deforestation in the Pindos Range of Western Macedonia (Greece)

12:30 - 13:00
Douska Urem-Kotsou, Stavros Kotsos, Kyriakos Sgouropoulos, Periklis Chrysafakoglou, Maria Chrysaphi, Despoina Skoulariki
Democritus University of Thrace / Ephorate of Antiquities of Thessaloniki / Ephorate of Antiquities of Xanthe
Tracking the Neolithic Farmers in Aegean Thrace

13:00 - 13:30
Dejan Gjorgjievski
Museum of Kumanovo
Kokino - Twenty Years After

13:30 - 14:00
Niccolo Mazzucco, Juan Jose Ibañez, Fiona Pichon, Patricia Anderson, Kostas Kotsakis, Angeliki Kita, Fotini Adaktylou, Juan F. Gibaja
University of Pisa / Institución Milà y Fontanals / University of Nice / Aristotle University Thessaloniki / Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki / Escuela Española de Historia y Arqueología en Roma
Early Appearance of Threshing Sledges in Greek Neolithic: A Combined Technological, Traceological, and Quantitative Assessment

14:00 - 14:30
Elisabetta Starnini
University of Pisa
Neolithic Anthropomorphic Clay Figurines in S-E Europe: Cultural Roots and Social Agents

14:30 - 15:00
Dori Rauschenberger
Democritus University of Thrace
Recycling Human Remains. Adornment and Flutes from Neolithic Skeletons in Western Macedonia (Greece)

15:00 - 15:30
Maria Gurova
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Balkan Flint in the Balkan Prehistoric Context

15:30 - 16:00
Alejandro Sierra and Siniša Radović
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique / Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts
Impressa Sheep: Exploitation of Caprines During the Early Neolithic in Dalmatia

16:00 - 16:30
Clare Burke
Austrian Archaeological Institute
Neolithic Pottery Craft and Use in Svinjarička Čuka

16:30 - 17:00
Goce Naumov, Aleksandar Mitkoski, Jasmina Gulevska, Hristijan Talevski and Aneta Fidanoska
Center for Prehistoric Research / Museum of Prilep / Institute for Old Slavic Culture / Museum of Bitola / Archaeological Museum of the Republic of North Macedonia
Living High and Low: Early Neolithic Settlements in the Highlands and Flatlands of Pelagonia (3V – Vlaho, Veluška and Vrbjanska)

17:00 - 17:30
Amalia Sabanov, Ferran Antolín, Goce Naumov and Raül Soteras
University of Belgrade / German Archaeological Institute / Center for Prehistoric Research
First Results of Archaeobotanical Analysis from Vlaho, an Early Neolithic Site in Pelagonia

17:30 - 18:00
Discussion and conclusion

ABSTRACTS

Boris Kavur and Martina Blečić Kavur
University of Primorska

So Close, No Matter How Far…

In the last two decades, archaeology has changed dramatically. We have witnessed a change in the financial performance within the field and at the same time a conceptual turn, or a huge leap back. But was this a major contribution to the "science of" archaeology or a leak towards the "science for" archaeology? And did this process augment the interpretative potential of archaeology, or did it just slow down and reduce the explanatory potential of the latter? Or even worst, did the results expose the conceptual problems behind the forceful conjunction between natural sciences and humanities?

Perhaps the worst situation is in the field of radiometric dating. Becoming cheaper and widely accessible, and even commanded in numerous instances, it became a metaphor for the applications and misapplications of a tool designed to become a part of the solution of archaeological difficulties. Today it functions in the archaeological discourse, assuming that something like that exists, as an axis around which issues in methodology become exposed. It functions as an accelerator to bring out the best and worst in archaeological interpretation - the deeply rooted assumptions about the nature and age of the archaeological record have, combined with a superficial reading of data, a potential to pervert the benefits of absolute dating. The ability to perform the dating (financial and technological) has instead of increasing the interpretative potential decreased the methodological correctness of the latter. Conceptually, the archaeological interpretations become, to be quicker published in high-impact journals, "liberated" of the rhetorical "ballast" of interpretations and more and more focused on the plain reproductions of results of analyses derived from natural sciences. It seems that in this ontological turn to become more exact, archaeology voluntarily disincorporated its own legitimacy and it abnegated its own intellectual tradition.

Mathias Mehofer, Mario Gavranović and Aleksandra Papazovska
University of Vienna / Austrian Academy of Sciences / Archaeological Museum of the Republic of North Macedonia

Bronze and Iron Age Artifacts from North Macedonia – Metal Procurement and Copper Exchange Networks

In this lecture we will discuss new archaeometric data, obtained from chemical and lead isotope analyses (ED-XRF, MC-ICP-MS) of ores, slags and metal artifacts which were found on the western and central Balkans. These analyses are accomplished within the projects "New insights in Bronze Age metal producing societies", supported by Austrian Scientific Foundation (FWF Project Nr. P32095-G25) and "Macedonian Metals" initiated by the Institute for Oriental and European Archeology (OREA) of Austrian Academy of Sciences, the Vienna Institute for Archeological Science (VIAS) and the Archaeological Museum of Republic North Macedonia in Skopje and in cooperation with the Archaeological Museums in Veles and Gevgelija. The Dr. Anton Oelzelt-Newin Foundation of the Austrian Academy of Sciences also supported part of the analyses. Beside metal production, special emphasis was laid on the examination of the exchange systems, which provided copper for the local metal workshops during the 2nd millennium BC. Our analyses revealed that during the Middle and Late Bronze Age copper with a geochemical signature comparable to the South Eastern Alpine mining regions (Trentino) was the dominate metal in the majority of analyzed objects from the regions under study. Furthermore, a previous study revealed the existence of different metallurgical networks for the Late Bronze Age on the one hand and for the Iron Age on the other hand. The additional discussion of the analytical results of finds from Ulanci, Manastir and Fortuna Štip will allow for further insights into the Bronze Age metal procurement in North Macedonia.

Dragoş Gheorghiu
National University of Arts - Bucharest

Skeumorphs as Prestige Items in the Gumelniţa Tradition

Skeuomorphism is frequently encountered in the Chalcolithic traditions of the Balkans, without however clear indications of the value attributed to them. The current work describes a case where the value of a copy of a prestige object could be determined. A comparative analysis of a ceramic vase decorated with gold dust, from a Varna cenotaph with another item from the Sultana site, situated north of the Danube, with a similar decorative pattern made of graphite on a yellow surface, which copied the gold based design of the original, reveals for the skeuomorph the use of a complex burning technology applied in order to achieve a visual result similar to that of the copied item. This skeuomorph could be displayed by hanging on a wall, thus demonstrating that a copy made from another material could be a prestige item similar to the original.

Dragan Milanović
Institute of Archaeology – Belgrade

Innovations in the Spinning Process and Their Correlation with Changes in Economy and Society of the 5th Millennium BCE in the Central Balkans and Neighboring Regions

Recent research on archaeological sites of Bubanj and Velika Humska Čuka near Niš (Southeast Serbia) have indicated an appearance of the new type of small and light ceramic „short conical“ spindle whorls in early Eneolithic contexts (cc.4400-4250 cal BC). This phenomenon has been recently connected with a heightened significance of spinning and spinning techniques, and has been directly connected to spinning of short animal fibers such as goat hairs and sheep wool, emergence of mobile pastoralism, climate changes and migration of populations to Balkans at the end of 5th and first half of the 4th millennia BC.

New archeozoological data that came from the two aforementioned eponymous sites (Bubanj – Hum group) have confirmed that the changes have been followed with significant increase in ovicaprine herding. Recent research of Vinča (5400-4500 cal BC) and Bubanj-Salcuta-Krivodol settlements (4500-3800 cal BC) have shown that significant changes were made in settlement placing choices, settlement sizes, complexity, longevity and in their mutual correlation. All of the above show that acceptance of the new weaving and spinning technologies was one of the key elements of a whole subset of structural changes in economy and social organization of the communities in the Balkan peninsula and neighboring regions in the second half of the 5th millennia BCE.

John Chapman and Bisserka Gaydarska
Durham University

Where was Copper Deposited? In Sites or in the Landscape?

A variable proportion of finds from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic of 'Old Europe' has come from places outside settlements, cemeteries, production sites, ritual sites or caves. Such finds tend to be described as 'chance finds', 'stray finds' or 'hoards'. The frequent, modernist cause invoked for these finds is that they were either 'hidden' in times of mortal danger, represented a 'gift to the gods' or were simply 'lost'. We believe that we have overlooked an entire class of sites - 'landscape deposition sites', whose defining feature was the transformation of a place by the deposition of a significant object or group of objects to create a qualitatively different place. The creation of such 'landscape deposit' sites varied in time and space throughout Old Europe but all sites were affected by this new dimension of the extended cultural domain.

In this presentation, we use data collected from relevant *Prähistorische Bronzefunde* volumes for all regions of Old Europe to explore the variable relationships between landscape deposit sites and the coeval finds made in special deposits in settlement and cemeteries in the 5th and 4th millennia BC.

Krum Bacvarov, Desislava Takorova, Georgi Katsarov, Nikolina Nikolova and Atanas Tsurev

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Enclosing the Void: the Early Copper Age Enclosures at Stamboliyski and Sredets in Bulgarian Thrace

This presentation will overview the results of the recent excavations at two roughly contemporaneous and similar sites in Bulgarian Thrace that date to the early 5th millennium cal. BC. Their major features fit well in the trajectory of prehistoric social evolution but hitherto represented a gap in our knowledge of the advent of the Copper Age. Both chronologically and typologically, the sites of Stamboliyski and Sredets are closely comparable to the Central European rondels (also called 'circular ditched enclosures' in English and 'Kreisgrabenanlagen' in German): complexes of one or more enclosure ditches, usually featuring V-shaped cross-section and one or more palisades within the enclosure. In contrast to the Southeast European Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlement enclosures, the inner areas of the rondels seem to have been more or less 'empty'. However, it is not yet clear whether both enclosed sites in Thrace sprang from the local 6th millennium BC tradition that was mostly connected to settlement sites or manifest the new fifth millennium phenomenon that has until now been thought to be restricted to Central Europe.

Paolo Biagi and Renato Nisbet
Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Prehistoric and Historic Traces of Deforestation in the Pindos Range of Western Macedonia (Greece)

The surveys carried out during the last twenty years along the slopes of Mts. Gurguliu and Bogdani (Samarina, Western Macedonia) led to the discovery of hundreds of high-altitude traces of frequentation ranging from the Middle Palaeolithic to the Ottoman period. The scope of this paper is to present and discuss a series of radiocarbon dates obtained from charcoal samples collected from natural, pit-like features recorded from the upland that

extends north-west of the small Vlah city of Samarina in the Pindos range, at ca 1550 m. of altitude. Around 250 such features have been mapped in the area, covered by the oldest moraine of the region on a surface of ca 1 km^2. Twenty of these features were systematically sampled and radiocarbon dated at Groningen radiocarbon laboratory, by one single, identified charcoal specimen. The results show that the deforestation of the upland began to take place most probably around the end of the Late Neolithic period, and continued with interruptions, which are clearly visible in the calibration curve, until at least the 17th century AD probably with intervals of more intense activity. However, we know from the available literature, that the deforestation of the area, whose scope was to open pastures for grazing flocks, continued until the end of the Ottoman rule over the area. The scope of this paper is to focus on this aspect of the exploitation of the natural resources of the Pindos range, which so far has never been investigated in detail.

Douska Urem-Kotsou, Stavros Kotsos, Kyriakos Sgouropoulos, Periklis Chrysafakoglou, Maria Chrysaphi, Despoina Skoulariki
Democritus University of Thrace / Ephorate of Antiquities of Thessaloniki / Ephorate of Antiquities of Xanthe

Tracking the Neolithic Farmers in Aegean Thrace

Some 27 Neolithic settlements were recorded in the Aegean Thrace thus far, of which only few have been investigated and these by limited trench excavations providing very fragmentary evidence for their intra-site organisation and other aspects of life. The exception to this is Makri near Alexandroupoli, which has been excavated almost in its whole extend revealing rich data for the organization of the settlement and the duration of its habitation. Makri is also the only settlement which gives evidence for the presence of Neolithic farmers in the Aegean Thrace from at least the second half of the 7th millennium. In order to improve the knowledge about the Neolithic settlers of Aegean Thrace, a project was carried out in the last 2 years focusing on the Neolithic settlements in the Prefectures of Rodope and Xanthe with the aim to investigate their intra-site organization and duration

of inhabitation, along with palaeoenvironment and possible changes in the settlements' area that may have affected the habitation. To this end archaeological surface survey, geophysical survey, and geological investigations were undertaken on 8 settlements. Here we present the results of archaeological surface survey of the settlements with particular focus on Diomidia, which appears to stand out from the rest in its exceptionally large size.

Dejan Gjorgjievski
Museum of Kumanovo

Kokino - Twenty Years After

Kokino is probably one of the most mysterious archaeological sites in Macedonia. Although it is almost completely excavated and published, this site still offers more questions than answers. Bearing in mind that Kokino is also known as a place for observing the movement of celestial bodies, here, we will concentrate exclusively on its identification as a peak sanctuary. The majority of the theories speak that the rituals performed on the peak of Kokino were dedicated to fertility, through votive offerings for Great Mother Goddess/Earth, and celebration of the “divine marriage” of Earth and her son - The Sun.

However, few archaeological contexts point that, maybe, we should consider another cult – the one dedicated to dead and their journey in the afterlife. Therefore, we will try to compare our findings from Kokino with the ones from another Bronze Age shrine – Pelince, as well as with a few newly discovered necropolises in the region. We will point that most of the contexts can be correlated with the god(s) of the underground, which was deeply connected with the soil fertility, too.

Niccolo Mazzucco, Juan Jose Ibañez, Fiona Pichon, Patricia Anderson, Kostas Kotsakis, Angeliki Kita, Fotini Adaktylou, Juan F. Gibaja
University of Pisa / Institución Milà y Fontanals / University of Nice / Aristotle University Thessaloniki / Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki / Escuela Española de Historia y Arqueología en Roma

Early Appearance of Threshing Sledges in Greek Neolithic: A Combined Technological, Traceological, and Quantitative Assessment

Threshing boards represent an important innovation in agricultural techniques. It allows processing huge amount of cereals and it has been often associated to an increased agricultural production. Their use is attested during the Late Neolithic/Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age both in South-western Asia and Europe. In the Mediterranean area, their use lasted until few decades ago. Recently, as part of project focused on the analysis of the early agricultural tools of Neolithic Greece, a few elements bearing macro- and microscopic use-wear traces similar to ethnographic and archaeological threshing sledges have been identified from a number of Early and Middle Neolithic sites. In this communication, we present the result of their study, including raw-material, technological, and traceological analysis. In order to provide a stronger assessment of the nature of the observed use-wear traces a quantitative comparison with ethnographic and experimental use-wear traces is carried out by integrating confocal microscopy. Despite the low number of recorded artifacts, obtained results suggest that threshing boards were in use since early phases of the Neolithic in Greece.

Elisabetta Starnini
University of Pisa

Neolithic Anthropomorphic Clay Figurines in S-E Europe: Cultural Roots and Social Agents

Anthropomorphic figurines are one of the most debated expressions of prehistoric symbolic activity. Apart from a couple of famous African precursors, the Makapansgat portrait, a 3-million-year-old pebble with a pattern of lines on the surface that look like a face, that was picked up by *Australopithecus africanus*, and the 400ky old African Acheulian "proto-figurine" from Tan-Tan, humans began to represent themselves only during the Upper Palaeolithic, carving stone, ivory, and bone, and only occasionally using clay. Fired clay anthropomorphic figurines are indeed one of the most intriguing components of the "Neolithic package" of the European first farmers.

Whilst in the last decades many interesting interpretative hypothesis and ideas have been suggested regarding the essential meaning and function of the anthropomorphic figurines, the careful observation of the way human body representations were shaped, constructed, used and discarded, may help us infer the ultimate significance of prehistoric statuettes and discover particular ways of making things in the reproduction of cultures. Finally, ethnographic comparisons may suggest essential considerations in understanding people in the past and their ways of life. The presentation discusses some Early Neolithic figurine assemblages from S-E Europe and their possible cultural roots.

Dori Rauschenberger
Democritus University of Thrace

Recycling Human Remains. Adornment and Flutes from Neolithic Skeletons in Western Macedonia (Greece)

Excavations in Western Macedonia at Dispilio, Toumba Kremasits Koiladas (TKK), and Kleitos Kozani have yielded several rare Late Neolithic specimens of bodies transformed into objects – human femora-flutes and teeth-ornaments – which, along with the region's variety of burial practices, reflect temporal and regional differentiation in practices regarding the disposal and use of the human body, indicating specific and complex cosmologic understandings within the region. The transformation of body into object reflects notions of personhood, identity, and collective memory, with such objects carrying symbolic meanings transmitted to and understood by the living community in which the items were made and used. The body-objects likely served as "tokens of memory," either with the selected body part representative of the whole of the individual from which it was selected, or representative of a collective identity of the deceased. The femora-flutes point to the ritual practice of music in the region and its relation to the dead, and the teeth-ornaments reflect the specific use of adornment in relation to representation of identity.

Maria Gurova
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Balkan Flint in the Balkan Prehistoric Context

Bulgaria is a country with many flint outcrops that were exploited in prehistory. Provenance studies, raw material transfers across Bulgaria and other forms of prehistoric cultural messaging are among the research being undertaken on prehistoric raw materials. The focus of an innovative analytical approach (initiated in 2011), combining micropetrography and LA-ICP-MS analyses of raw material samples and prehistoric

artifacts is the so-called Balkan flint (BF), a very important RM among the Early Neolithic flint assemblages in Bulgaria. There are series of diagnostic formal tools (toolkits) made of BF which were a distinctive feature of the Karanovo I–II cultural *koiné*. BF has a broad distribution across the Balkans during Neolithisation and was the focus of one of two major lithic exchange networks operating in Southeast Europe (the other being Melian obsidian from the Aegean). Balkan flint has been recognized visually among EN assemblages from the Balkans by many scholars, but none of the associated questions has been resolved.

Alejandro Sierra and Siniša Radović
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique / Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts

Impressa Sheep: Exploitation of Caprines during the Early Neolithic in Dalmatia

Dalmatia is important as the first step for one of the two streams of Neolithisation in Europe. This area marks the beginning of the expansion of farming along the Mediterranean coast, linked to Impressa pottery. This trend has been characterised by the domination of caprines (especially sheep). This work is part of the *Impressa sheep* project. The project will try to characterise the production and management strategy of the caprines herd from an approach based on multiple analysis of teeth (archaeozoology, Stable Isotopes Analysis, microwear and ZooMS), which will provide detailed individual information on domestic herds, from birth to death. Data on the mortality profiles and biometry of the Tinj and Crno Vrilo sites are presented, putting them in context within the Adriatic during the Early Neolithic. The results show similar patterns of caprine exploitation at both sites.

Clare Burke
Austrian Archaeological Institute

Neolithic Pottery Craft and Use in Svinjarička Čuka

The Neolithic site of Svinjarička Čuka is located on an elevated terrace near the Svinjarička River in Lebane, Serbia. The excavations have uncovered a wide range of prehistoric archaeology dating from the Iron age, Bronze Age and Neolithic, in particular an abundance of Starčevo type material culture including figurines, labrets, cult tables and of course pottery containers. The Neolithic pottery types are consistent with Starčevo II-III and find comparisons in terms of shape and surface treatment from across SE Europe such as Grivac, Galabnik, and Blagotin. This paper will discuss the Starčevo pottery types currently recorded at the site in relation to their typological, fabric and technological features, as well as a brief comment on their potential use, placing the assemblage within current understandings of Starčevo pottery making and consumption.

Goce Naumov, Aleksandar Mitkoski, Jasmina Gulevska, Hristijan Talevski and Aneta Fidanoska
Center for Prehistoric Research / Museum of Prilep / Institute for Old Slavic Culture / Museum of Bitola / Archaeological Museum of the Republic of North Macedonia

Living High and Low: Early Neolithic Settlements in the Highlands and Flatlands of Pelagonia (3V – Vlaho, Veluška and Vrbjanska)

The archaeological research in Pelagonia has been mainly focused on the Neolithic tells in the flatlands and substantial knowledge is obtained as result to the multidisciplinary studies in the last decade. But although this large valley is consisted of mountains that surround the flatlands the inhabitation on their slopes was not thoroughly explored. Therefore an intensive prospection and test excavation has been performed in 2020 and 2021 in order to have an initial insight into the chronology and societies of the Neolithic settlements established in the highlands of Pelagonia. Besides detection of several sites in

this area the test excavation was executed on the Early Neolithic settlement Vlaho positioned on the Northwestern slopes of the Nidje mountain. Although being on a higher altitude than the sites in the flatlands the excavation results from Vlaho indicate similar architecture and material culture as that common for the tells disposed around the wetlands, as well as the evident communication and social relationship between these distant settlements. In order to emphasize the similarities and differences among the tells and highland villages also the recent fieldwork research on the Early Neolithic sites Vrbjanska Čuka and Veluška Tumba will be presented. Consequently this presentation will demonstrate the landscape diversity of Pelagonia, as well as the intensive communication between the first farming communities in this region that was established on common economic, social and symbolic components, but that also enhanced a variety of local features and practices.

Amalia Sabanov, Ferran Antolín, Goce Naumov and Raül Soteras
University of Belgrade / German Archaeological Institute / Center for Prehistoric Research

First Results of Archaeobotanical Analysis from Vlaho, an Early Neolithic site in Pelagonia

The Pelagonia valley in North Macedonia has been inhabited in the Early Neolithic and numerous tell sites in the plain testify the continuous occupation. Apart from the plains, the inhabitants of this region settled in the hills on the edge of the valley as well. However, these kinds of settlements were investigated in a lower degree and they remain far more elusive to the scientific community. One such site is Vlaho, which has been excavated in test trenches in 2021. As a part of this test study several archaeobotanical samples were analyzed, and here we bring the results of this preliminary investigation. The number of the plant remains and the average density (number of remains per liter of sediment) are significant and imply good preservation conditions. So far, we can say that Vlaho was inhabited by farmers who relied on similar crops as the people who inhabited the lowlands in the valley. These were different cereal crops – naked and hulled barley (*Hordeum*

vulgare), emmer (*Triticum dicoccon*) and einkorn (*Triticum monococcum*), and pulses like lentils (*Lens culinaris*) and peas (*Pisum sativum*). Remains of wild plants which could have been gathered for consumption also occurred, and these are mostly cornelian-cherry (*Cornus mas*), blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*) and fat-hen (Chenopodium album).