

PREHISTORY IN THE BALKANS

13.12.2023

9TH CONFERENCE OF THE CENTER FOR PREHISTORIC RESEARCH



9th Conference of the Center for Prehistoric Research

**PREHISTORY
in the
BALKANS**

13.12.2023

09:00 - 09:15

Goce Naumov and Ljubo Fidanoski
Center for Prehistoric Research

Introduction and promotion of the new edited book published by CPR

09:15 - 09:45

Agathe Reingruber
Free University - Berlin

Time and its perception(s) in archaeological discourses: the case of the Neolithisation process of the Circum-Aegean sphere

09:45 - 10:15

Nikos Efstratiou
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Social Interaction in the Farming Communities of Neolithic Greece: Archaeological Perceptions

10:15 - 10:45

Jana Anvari, Edlira Andoni, Patrick Willett, Amy Holguin, Viktoria Fries and Tobias Krapf
University of Cologne / Institute of Archaeology Tirana / University at Buffalo, Oxford University / Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece

Towards an understanding of the Neolithic landscape of the Korça Plain, Albania

10:45 - 11:15

Nikolina Nikolova
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

The life story of one Early Neolithic ditch from Yabalkovo: digging, maintaining and backfilling processes

11:15 - 11:45

Darko Stojanovski
Austrian Academy of Sciences

Amzabegovo: 50 years later

11:45 - 12:15

Clare Burke
University of York

Peopling Pottery: Neolithic Ceramic Craft and Identity

12:15 - 12:45

Alejandro Sierra, Marie Balasse, Sinisa Radović, David Orton, Denis Fiorillo and Sam Presslee

CNRS / University of Barcelona / Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts / University of York

Early Dalmatian farmers specialized in sheep husbandry

12:45 - 13:15

Tasos Bekiaris

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Unveiling macrolithic technologies: a rare type of polishing stone tool from Middle/Late Neolithic Makri, NE Greece

13:15 - 13:45

Tryfon Giagkoulis and Kostas Kotsakis

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Dispilio, Lake Orestias (Kastoria, Greece): contextualizing and dating the architecture of the Neolithic wetland habitation

13:45 - 14:15

Vesna Vučković, Elena Kanzurova-Stojanova, Pero Sinadinovski and Roberto Risch

Hometown museum-Paraćin / Archaeological Museum of the Republic of Macedonia / University of Barcelona

The dynamics of cereal grinding in the Central Balkans

14:15- 14:45

Krum Bacvarov, Georgi Katsarov and Nikolina Nikolova

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Depositional practices at the upland Neolithic pit site of Kovachevets, northeast Bulgaria

14:45 - 15:15

Maria Gurova

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Harvesting toolkit from Bulgaria: from the Neolithic to the post-Bronze Age

15:15 - 15:45

Selena Vitezović, Vidan Dimić, Danica Mihailović and Dragana Antonović

Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade

Prehistory of the Rudnik mountain and its surroundings: field survey (campaign 2021)

15:45 - 16:15

Goce Naumov

Center for Prehistoric Research

Prehistory of Prespa: recent knowledge on pile-dwellings and wetlands

16:15 - 16:45

Mario Gavranović, Ikbal Cogo, Edin Bujak, Lukas Waltenberger, Irene M. Petschko, Nicole Mittermair and Marina Dević

Austrian Academy of Sciences / City Museum Zenica / University of Sarajevo

Graveyard Kopilo, Zenica: New insights into burial practices during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages in Bosnia

16:45 - 17:30

Discussion and conclusion

ABSTRACTS

Dr. Agathe Reingruber

Free University - Berlin

Time and its perception(s) in archaeological discourses: the case of the Neolithisation process of the Circum-Aegean sphere

The perception of past time and the determination of time spans are among the great challenges of prehistoric analyses. They contribute significantly to the understanding and interpretation of transformations: How fast or how slow did they occur, and how can we determine their duration and explain their rhythmicity? These questions are far from banal, as different perceptions of time lead to sometimes contradicting ways of explaining change.

In my presentation, I will address two different perspectives relying on examples from the Circum-Aegean region at the transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic:

- the perception of time based on relative chronological appraisals obtained from pottery and stratigraphy and the presumed duration of single levels;
- the perception of time resulting from the interpretation of radiocarbon data, either without or with the help of statistical (Bayesian) models.

In doing so, I will turn to the vexing question of how much weight can be attributed to single radiocarbon dates and which dates must be excluded from the discussion as outliers: A strict evaluation of the results leads to a rather short chronology, while a more tolerant interpretation adds to an extended chronological appraisal.

Nikos Efstratiou

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Social Interaction in the Farming Communities of Neolithic Greece: Archaeological Perceptions

The paper will be a critical comment on the issue of social interaction in prehistory and the way it is manifested archaeologically. It will be argued that social space is a manifold entity made up of fluid and changing social relations and processes, and that dialectics should be rigorously employed in regard to notions of social reality and social interaction. Attention will be drawn to the social analysis that makes a distinction between concepts like social and individual phenomena, and therefore between forms of social interaction.

Jana Anvari, Edlira Andoni, Patrick Willett, Amy Holguin, Viktoria Fries and Tobias Krapf

University of Cologne / Institute of Archaeology Tirana / University at Buffalo/ Oxford University / Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece

Towards an understanding of the Neolithic landscape of the Korça Plain, Albania

This contribution will present preliminary field data and interpretations from the ongoing project “Contextualising the Neolithic of the Korça plain, Albania”. The project researches several Neolithic sites in the Korça plain (6450-3000 BC), some of which were situated on the shore of the now disappeared Lake Maliq. The project focuses both on an understanding of the settlement structure and environmental setting of individual sites through surface collection, geomagnetic survey and sondage excavations, as well as an understanding of the Neolithic cultural and natural landscape of the Korça plain on the basis of on-site and off-site data from an intensive survey in the mountains surrounding the plain. Through a better understanding of this important and yet under-researched microregion, we hope to contribute towards discussions of greater issues in southeast European Neolithic research as well as better heritage protection of the sites, which are threatened by modern constructions.

Nikolina Nikolova

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

The life story of one Early Neolithic ditch from Yabalkovo: digging, maintaining and backfilling processes

This presentation discusses the case study of one ditch from the Early Neolithic settlement of Yabalkovo, situated at the right bank of the Maritsa River in the Upper Thrace valley. The ditch belongs to a triple concentric enclosure system that encircled pits of various shape and size and badly preserved burnt houses. The three ditches have functioned consecutively – the innermost being the earliest one. Throughout the course of the inner ditch ‘life’ it has been the subject to constant maintenance activities such as numerous cleanings, repairs and recuts. As a result, the ditch has evolved through four major phases which are clearly visible as distinct backfills or new cuts. Moreover, various depositional practices have been associated with the use of this and the other two enclosure features. I will argue here that all this indicates the continuous and dynamic life of the particular ditch enclosure.

Darko Stojanovski

Austrian Academy of Sciences

Amzabegovo: 50 years later

Amzabegovo was one of the few well-documented Neolithic sites in the Balkans in the 1970es. Moreover, it was the first site in Macedonia where a combined archaeological, biological, geological, and physical approach was implemented. It became the reference sequence for defining the Neolithic of the Central and Northern Balkans. Fifty years later, the research was renewed with new questions asked and modern techniques introduced. We present here a revised seven-tier periodization structure, based on the excavations since 2019 at trench 1. We confirm the continuous development of the settlement from the time of the first farmers in the second half of the 7th millennium cal BC, until the first smelters in the early 5th millennium cal BC. In this preliminary review, we also present the general trends in architecture and pottery decoration styles in a diachronic perspective.

Clare Burke

University of York

Peopling Pottery: Neolithic Ceramic Craft and Identity

North Macedonia is a critical area for understanding the spread and cultural expression of Neolithic agricultural communities, lying within southern and northern routes of Neolithisation, connecting pioneer zones in the Aegean and Western Anatolia, to the Mediterranean and central Europe. Definition of groups and cultural boundaries has focused on aspects of settlement organization and material culture, particularly pottery styles which have been fundamental for understanding chronological frameworks and possible relations between different areas. However, to date there has not been the opportunity to more fully examine the production and use of these ceramic vessels. This paper discusses the new UKRI funded TECUS project (Technology and Use of Early Neolithic Pottery from North Macedonia) examining how the holistic investigation of pottery production and consumption practices can provide new understandings of identity and cultural groupings. TECUS focuses on pottery style, raw materials, technological practices, and vessel function to produce interdisciplinary data about the development and role of this widely made material culture type. It will explore the impact of agricultural developments and proposed migrations on the choice of raw material resources, and to characterize the spread of technological knowledge and cultural adaptations, especially assessing the evidence for shared cultural norms related to existing archaeological ideas of cultural boundaries.

Alejandro Sierra, Marie Balasse, Sinisa Radović, David Orton, Denis Fiorillo and Sam Presslee

CNRS / University of Barcelona / Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts / University of York

Early Dalmatian farmers specialized in sheep husbandry

The rapid spread of farming in the central and western Mediterranean was closely tied to the emergence of Impressa Ware, originating in the southern Adriatic and extending westward across the region. Early Dalmatian farmers associated with the Impressa culture developed an agropastoral system based on cereal agriculture and caprine husbandry, but the functioning of this system remains relatively unexplored. This study employs an integrated approach, combining archaeozoology, palaeoproteomics, and stable isotopes to investigate the farming practices of these early Dalmatian farmers at Tinj-Podlivade and Crno Vrilo. The findings reveal that sheep dominated the herds at both sites, with a focus on milk and meat exploitation. Additionally, sheep reproduction was concentrated in early winter, distinguishing it from later sites in the western Mediterranean where reproduction occurred in autumn. These similarities suggest a shared animal economy, possibly linked to the mobility of early farming societies across the Mediterranean. The study sheds light on the nuanced aspects of agropastoral practices among the early Dalmatian farmers connected to the Impressa Ware.

Tasos Bekiaris

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Unveiling macrolithic technologies: a rare type of polishing stone tool from Middle/Late Neolithic Makri, NE Greece

Over the last decades, macrolithic artifacts (also known as ground stones) have begun to attract global academic interest. However, not all categories included in the diverse repertoire of macrolithics have received equal treatment. This presentation will focus on such a group of macrolithic artifacts that remain -more or less- entrapped within the margins of archaeological research: the polishing pebbles.

By analyzing the polishing implements from Neolithic Makri (Middle-Late Neolithic, c. 5800-5200 cal BC), a tell-site, in the region of Thrace, NE Greece, I will attempt to shed light on these neglected prehistoric tool-kits, discuss their technological attributes, highlight preferences in the selection of their raw materials, and investigate their possible uses and contexts of deposition. Emphasis will be placed upon a rare group of polishing implements that are characterized by the development of an acute edge on one or both of their ends,

that is the outcome of a specific mode of handling and using. Such implements are rarely encountered in other macrolithic assemblages from Neolithic Greece, but dominate the assemblage in Makri. Based on the results of use-wear analysis and exploratory experiments, it will be argued that these tools may represent standardized, and maybe specialized types of polishers, that are associated with specific crafts, such as the burnishing of pottery. Finally, I will attempt to place the material under study within its broader Balkan Neolithic context, by making comparisons with other published polishing assemblages.

Tryfon Giagkoulis and Kostas Kotsakis

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Dispilio, Lake Orestias (Kastoria, Greece): contextualizing and dating the architecture of the Neolithic wetland habitation

The Neolithic lake settlement Dispilio in Lake Kastoria is the only wetland habitation in Greece that has been systematically investigated since the 1990s' by the Department of Archaeology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Until recently, the outcome of this long-lasting project was a series of 14C dates that established the general chronological framework of the habitation (mid-6th to the late-3rd mil BCE), together with several preliminary studies and publications of the rich archaeological materials unearthed. However, the interpretation of concrete concentrations of artifacts, bioarchaeological remains and building materials and - above all - their absolute dating, were missing.

The participation since 2019 of AUTH in the ERC-funded Project 'EXPLORing the dynamics and causes of prehistoric land use change in the cradle of European farming' provides the framework for developing a state-of-the-art multidisciplinary approach to crucial research objectives, aiming for an overall perception of Dispilio characteristics.

One of the project's most prominent tasks was the systematic sampling of Dispilio's well-preserved wooden vertical posts and their dendrochronological analysis, a pioneering work for Greek wetland archaeology. Approximately 800 samples have been analyzed by the experts' team at Bern University, resulting in oak and juniper dendro mean curves that build the chronology of the waterlogged layers from the 57th to the 53rd centuries BC. The spatial distribution of these dated dendro-groups combined with stratified material concentrations facilitates the recognition of buildings' plans and allows the discussion of certain aspects of Dispilio architecture and its diachronic development.

Vesna Vučković, Elena Kanzurova-Stojanova, Pero Sinadinovski and Roberto Risch

Hometown museum-Paraćin / Archaeological Museum of the Republic of Macedonia / University of Barcelona

The dynamics of cereal grinding in the Central Balkans

Grinding equipment comprises two main components the passive, larger, and lower part is commonly referred to as a grinding slab, while the upper and active part is identified as a grinder or handstone. The interdependence of these paired tools is frequently associated with substance goods processing, underscoring their pivotal role in everyday life after the domestication of cereals, which require long processing procedures before they are ready for human consumption.

The intensive study of grinding equipment over the last two decades has revealed the significance of these tool types in prehistoric societies. The research has established a correlation between their geology, size, shape, and spatial organization of grinding tools in settlements, offering direct insights into the intensity and scale of cereal production within a community. Consequently, the grinding equipment has been recognized as a source of surplus production and a factor influencing the socio-economic organization of a settlement.

The objective of our study is to apply these associations of elements to unveil the technological, economic, and social aspects of grinding within two Middle Neolithic communities: Tumba Madžari and Ogragje, situated in the Skopje Valley—one of the most fertile areas in the Balkans, where cereal cultivation began around c. 6100 cal BCE.

Krum Bacvarov, Georgi Katsarov and Nikolina Nikolova

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Depositional practices at the upland Neolithic pit site of Kovachevets, northeast Bulgaria

The site of Kovachevets is situated at the highest part of the dominating Popovo Heights, NE Bulgaria, and surface scatters suggest that it covers a total area of ca. 3 acres. It's an off-settlement pit site, the first of this prehistoric site type to be identified north of the Balkan Range. Over 120 pits were excavated there that date back to the Late Neolithic (ca. 5300–5000 cal BC). Their structured deposits consist mostly of burnt structural debris (including badly fragmented house inventory, faunal and plant remains) and certain specially selected items: ceramic pots, grindstones, horn cores and antlers, ceramic figurines, tools of ground and chipped stone, antler, and bone. Some of the pits were also topped by burnt house ruins. A specific feature of the site is the clustering of a large number of pits in limited areas. The biggest of these pit clusters consists of 35 noncontemporary, overlapping cuts covering ca. 125 m². One of the pits in the eastern periphery of the site contains few materials dating back to the Early Copper Age (4800–4700 cal BC).

Maria Gurova

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Harvesting toolkit from Bulgaria: from the Neolithic to the post-Bronze Age

Use-wear studies have identified a long-lasting system of agricultural practices (harvesting) from the very beginning of the Early Neolithic in Bulgaria. For almost two millennia during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic (6th and 5th millennia BC) the archaeological evidence suggests the use of sickle inserts based on blade segments and tools on blades inserted obliquely in a curved handle – the well-known Karanovo type of sickle.

Post-Chalcolithic times are marked by a shift in the harvesting toolkit. This paper presents agricultural toolkits from three recently discovered and excavated sites in north Bulgaria: Oreshets near Belogradchik, Rasovo near Montana, and Chavdartsi in Lovech district. The sites are dated to the LBA (Oreshets), EIA (Rasovo) and both BA and EIA (Chavdartsi). No structures or features associated with the flint artefacts were identified, but the assemblages exhibit most (if not all) of the characteristics the BA and post-BA agricultural repertoire. This repertoire includes varieties of denticulates (mainly blades) which from the beginning of the BA became diagnostic finds and mark a drastic shift from the preceding style of sickle.

During the BA sickle inserts and blades were increasingly shaped through truncation and sometimes also through backing, both of which aided the accommodation of the implements in grooved handles and handheld tool manipulation. As an innovation, the emergence of which is difficult to fix chronologically, there appear large, curved blades (ca 20 cm) used for harvesting. To illustrate the supra-regional shift in harvesting equipment during the 3rd millennium BC, Levantine sickle production systems are briefly presented.

Selena Vitezović, Vidan Dimić, Danica Mihailović and Dragana Antonović
Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade

Prehistory of the Rudnik mountain and its surroundings: field survey (campaign 2021)

The area of the Rudnik (rudnik=mine) in central Serbia is the second major volcanic area in central Serbia, exploited today for variety of raw materials, which were also exploited by numerous past communities. Historical and archaeological record showed intensive activities especially during medieval and pre-modern times, regarding exploitation of various ores, such as silver and lead.

The riches of the Rudnik mountain were exploited in prehistory as well. On the slopes of the Prljuša mountain, a copper mine was discovered in 1980's. It was briefly excavated in 1980's, and systematic researches were initiated in 2011 by Institute of Archaeology and are still ongoing. Excavations revealed abundant evidence for malachite ore exploitation during the Bronze Age, and yielded numerous portable finds (in particular, stone hammer-axes), as well as the information that enabled the reconstruction of the ore extraction process. However, very little information is available regarding communities that exploited this mine, and also there is limited evidence for exploitation of other mineral resources in the area. This is why the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade initiated systematic field reconnaissance with the main scope to search for sources of raw materials exploited in prehistory and associated settlements.

Here will be presented the preliminary results of the 2021 field survey campaign, which included the areas of the municipalities of Kragujevac and Knić. Particularly interesting are results regarding three modern quarries and their adjacent areas – Ramaća, Rogojevac and Vučkovića. In the vicinity of Rogojevac and Vučkovića, traces of prehistoric inhabitation were found, while Ramaća, although noted previously in archaeological literature, did not yield any archaeological traces during this field survey campaign, and future plans include its revisiting.

Goce Naumov

Center for Prehistoric Research

Prehistory of Prespa: recent knowledge on pile-dwellings and wetlands

The last decade witnesses a remarkable breakthrough of wetland archaeology in the Balkans. There is intensive research of pile-dwellings and tells in regard to their lacustrine and wetland environment and particularly with the involvement of more detailed chronological sequences and multidisciplinary methods. This research is merely applied in the lake regions of Ohrid, Kastoria and Amideon, and in the marshy valleys of Pelagonia and Korça, and brought more thorough perspective of the prehistoric landscape and its inhabitants. Hence, the Lake Prespa is not involved in same scale although it was an attractive environment for the prehistoric communities that established several pile-dwellings and dryland settlements. Therefore, this paper will summarize the past research in Prespa region and will highlight the current survey project of the Center for Prehistoric Research with particular focus on the excavations of the site of Prekop at Asamati village.

Mario Gavranović, Ikbal Cogo, Edin Bujak, Lukas Waltenberger, Irene M. Petschko, Nicole Mittermair and Marina Dević

Austrian Academy of Sciences / City Museum Zenica / University of Sarajevo

Graveyard Kopilo, Zenica: New insights into burial practices during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages in Bosnia

The cooperation between the Austrian Archaeological Institute (Austrian Academy of Sciences) and City Museum Zenica in the frame of the project “Visualizing the unknown Balkans” resulted in the discovery and subsequent archaeological investigations of the first documented graveyard of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age in central Bosnia at the site Kopilo. The excavations conducted in 2021 and 2022 brought to light the cemetery located on the terrace below the previously investigated hilltop settlement and provided new insights into the mortuary practices of the local prehistoric population. In total, we unearthed 46 graves, with 51 individuals of all age groups. Most of the graves were placed in stone constructions that included several inhumation burials. We also found clear evidence of grave reopening and reuse, multiple burials and graves containing only selected body parts. The spectrum of metal and pottery finds consists of local, regional and forms of supra-regional distribution, indicating well-established communication networks of the community that used the cemetery. Particularly interesting are metal finds (pendants) that correspond to the repertoire of so-called “Macedonian bronzes”, pointing at long-distance relationships between the Bronze and Iron Age communities in the Balkans.