

Millets in Bulgaria – diachronic overview of their role in the subsistence and critical review of the archaeological finds

Elena Marinova¹, Ivanka Hristova² and Delphine Fremondeau³

1 Laboratory for Archaeobotany, State Office for Cultural Heritage Baden-Württemberg, Fischersteig 9, 78343, Gaienhofen-Hemmenhofen, Germany

2 Environmental Archaeology Lab., Department of Historical, Philosophical & Religious Studies, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

3 Department of Biology, University of Leuven, C. Deberiotstraat 32, 3000, Leuven, Belgium

The archaeobotanical evidence on arrival of millet (*Panicum milliaceum*) in Eastern Balkans and especially Bulgaria is still controversial. Single finds of panicoid grains determined as millet are known from several Neolithic (5800-4900 BC), Chalcolithic (4900-4200 BC) and Early Bronze Age (2950-2750 BC) sites on the modern territory of Bulgaria. Few of the dated supposedly Neolithic millet grain concentrations have shown much younger age. However wild millets (mostly *Setaria* spp. including the relatively big-grained *S. pumila*) are common and frequent find and even concentrations of *Setaria* are known from Late Neolithic and Early Bronze contexts in Black Sea coastal sites. This indicates certain importance of the Panicoideae-representatives in the subsistence of the considered region even before securely confirmed arrival of the cultivated millet and was used in the past as prove cultural connections with the northern Pontic area especially for the sites in the NE of Bulgaria. The finds of bigger amounts and concentration of common millet become frequent in the Late Bronze Age (1600-1100 BC) and Early Iron Age (1100 – 650 BC). This is also the period from which stable isotope evidence is available indicating variable foddering approaches and possible inclusion of millet in these practices, although alternative explanations are still possible. Millet was common element of the Iron Age economy with slight decrease during the Roman period and gaining importance again in the end of Late Antiquity about 6th century AD. In this paper we will make critical overview of the available archaeobotanical and further bioarchaeological evidence on millets in the region from the beginnings of the agriculture throughout the different periods and will further discuss the possible ways of their use and the changes in their significance for the subsistence in the territory of modern Bulgaria.