

Photo: N.N. Tasić, P. Dakić

Vinča – Belo Brdo, view from the Danube

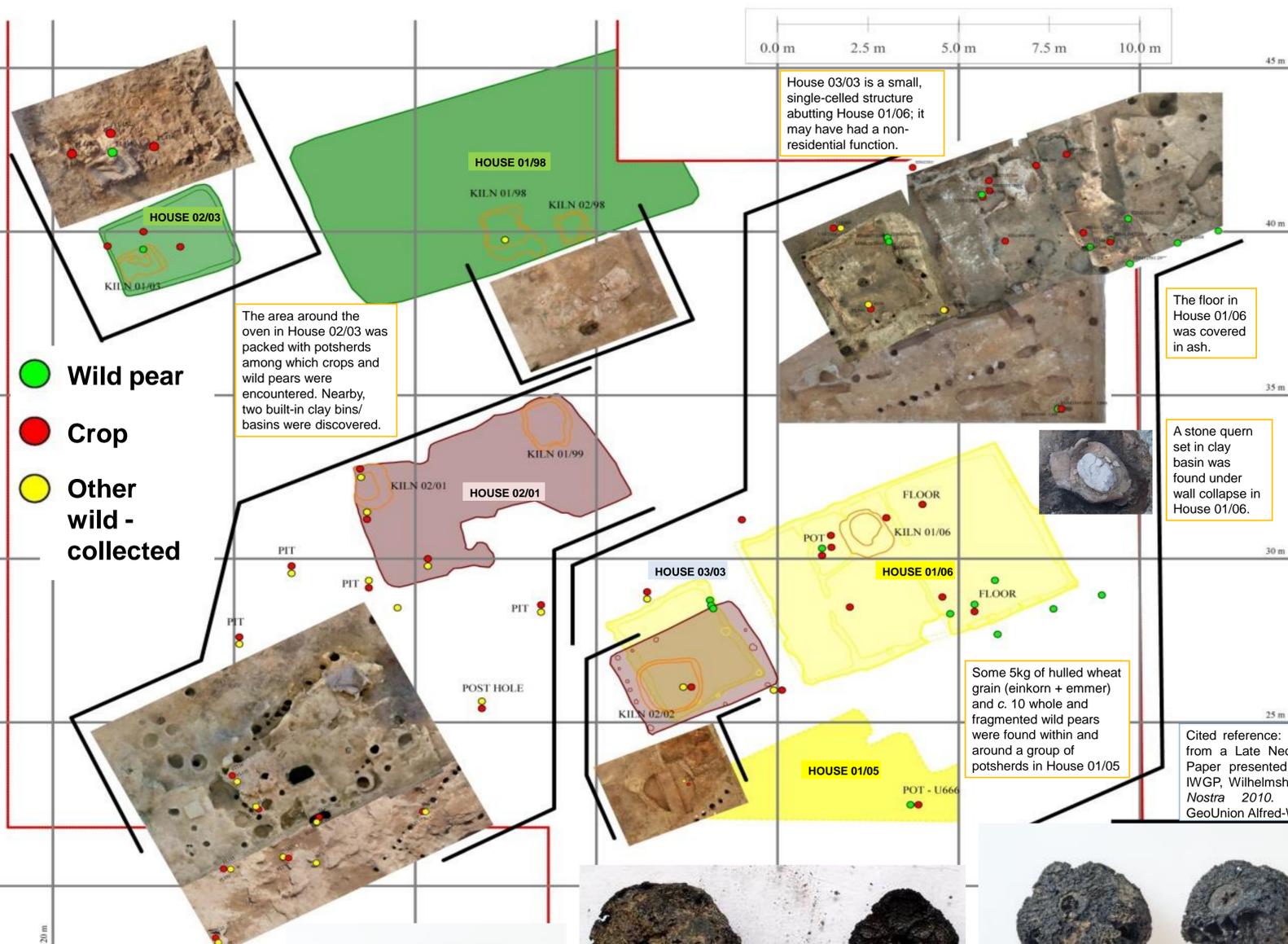
Dragana FILIPOVIC (independent scholar) & Miroslav MARIC (Institute for Balkan Studies, Belgrade)

# FINDS OF WILD PEAR FROM LATE NEOLITHIC VINČA, SERBIA

Vinča – Belo Brdo, the eponym site of the major Neolithic culture of SE Europe, is located on the right bank of the Danube near Belgrade. Its continuous occupation from c. 5600 to 4500 cal BC resulted in the formation of a c. 10m high and at least 10ha sized mound/tell, large part of which was eroded by the Danube few hundred years ago. The site is currently under landslide threat and excavations of the most endangered section are under way (under auspices of the Serbian Ministry of Culture and the ERC-funded *The Times of Their Lives* Project).

At Vinča, plant macro-fossils (wood, seed, chaff, fruit, nut) are in most cases charred; mineralised seeds also occur. They have been extracted from the soil using flotation machine set up by the Danube. Silicified light cereal chaff and fragments of straw are abundant in the house rubble (i.e. collapsed wattle-and-daub walls and, most likely, reed-thatched or 'reed-and-daub' roofs based on the impressions of reed stalks in daub).

Most frequent + abundant taxa at Vinča are (in descending order):  
**Crops:** emmer, einkorn, naked wheat, naked barley; bitter vetch, lentil, pea; flax/linseed.  
**Wild-collected:** wild pear, Cornelian cherry, bladder cherry, elderberry, blackberry, sloe berry, water chestnut.



- Wild pear
- Crop
- Other wild-collected



House 03/03 is a small, single-celled structure abutting House 01/06; it may have had a non-residential function.

The area around the oven in House 02/03 was packed with potsherds among which crops and wild pears were encountered. Nearby, two built-in clay bins/basins were discovered.

The floor in House 01/06 was covered in ash.

A stone quern set in clay basin was found under wall collapse in House 01/06.

Some 5kg of hulled wheat grain (einkorn + emmer) and c. 10 whole and fragmented wild pears were found within and around a group of potsherds in House 01/05

Cited reference: Borojević, K. 2010 Plant remains from a Late Neolithic building at the Vinča site. Paper presented at the 15th Conference of the IWGP, Wilhelmshaven, Germany. Abstract in *Terra Nostra* 2010. Wilhelmshaven: Schriften der GeoUnion Alfred-Wegener-Stiftung.

Several burnt buildings have been uncovered in recent excavations, offering a high-resolution insight into internal house structure and indoor activities (see plan). Mass finds of crops discovered in destruction layers/house rubble (House 01/06 - Borojević 2010; House 01/05 - Filipović, unpublished) and on floor of some of these (House 01/06 - Filipović, unpublished) provide details on the spectrum of cultivated and collected plants/plant parts, and of their indoor storage and use. In the four burnt buildings presented here, 'caches' of whole charred wild pear fruit were encountered; in three buildings, they are found within or adjacent to large concentrations of crops (wheat grain, or wheat grain + bitter vetch seed). Only few remains of other wild-collected taxa were present, and only in two of these buildings (sloe berry in House 01/06 - Borojević 2010, and bladder cherry and elderberry in House 03/03 - Filipović, unpublished).

**In contrast, wild pears are entirely absent from unburnt buildings and outdoor areas and pits, whereas other wild-collected taxa are relatively frequent in these secondary/mixed contexts (especially in rubbish pits), along with sparse crop remains (e.g. House 02/01 and the surrounding outdoor space). Furthermore, wild pears are, in all cases, found: a) next to preserved house walls or within wall collapse; or b) in close proximity to ovens and large ceramic pots likely used as storage or food preparation containers. Based on the overall appearance of the charred fruit, and excellent preservation of the soft tissue, it is likely that they were dried prior to charring. They were probably strung and hung on walls, or kept on 'shelves' above ovens, where they were dried for (long-term) storage.**

**CONCLUSIONS:** The presence of wild pears inside buildings, their spatial association with stored crop products (i.e. the main plant food), and the virtual absence of other wild-gathered taxa from the *in situ* burnt/primary contexts in which the pears were found perhaps show that these fruit have been preferred and a regular wild food source at Vinča, at least in the final phases of the settlement to which the excavated structures belong. The apparently great importance of wild pear relative to other collected plants could indicate investment of energy and time into locating, protecting and maintaining the tree stands in the surrounding landscape in order to secure the yields.

Photo: I.R. Cartwright, D. Vukić, D. Filipović