



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Quaternary International

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/quaint](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/quaint)

## A personal view of the neolithisation of the Western Mediterranean

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 20 September 2016

Received in revised form

23 May 2017

Accepted 10 June 2017

Available online xxx

#### Keywords:

Mesolithic

Early Neolithic

Mediterranean Sea

Impressed Ware

Cardial Culture

### ABSTRACT

In this paper the author presents his vision on the neolithisation of the Western Mediterranean, based for a great part on long field experience. He first provides a historiographic overview and then discusses more particularly the topic of the emergence of the groups with Impressed Ware originating from the Italo-Adriatic region. During the transfer of the Neolithic package, some of these elements spread as far as the Iberian Peninsula. Distinct pottery markers are highlighted (the « impressed groove » decoration technique or rows of wavy impressions made by vertical stamping with the edge of a seashell), which may contribute to trace the spread of these pioneer groups. The topic of the emergence of the Franco-Iberian Cardial on an autochthonous basis will also be discussed. The author more particularly advances the hypothesis that this culture emerged according to a « model of coalescence by maritime interactions ». Lastly, possible North-African influences are mentioned that are still difficult to be evaluated.

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Throughout my career I have tried to analyse the processes of neolithisation in the Mediterranean from a twofold perspective: a field perspective and a theoretical perspective. First and foremost in the field by carrying out excavations at Pre-ceramic sites on Cyprus (Shillourokambos), at Early Neolithic sites in South-East Italy (Torre Sabea, Apulia; Trasano, Basilicata), in Southern France (Gazel cave, Jean-Cros shelter, Dourgne shelter, Font-Juvénal shelter, Leucate-Corrège, in the Aude department; Pont-de-Roque-Haute, in the Hérault department), in Andorra (Balma Margineda), and in North-East Spain (Cova del Toll, Balma de l'Esplugu) or by taking part in excavation programmes (Sidari on Corfu, Greece). Most of these sites were deliberately investigated because they represent a large variety of ecological contexts: coastal sites (Torre Sabea, Leucate, Pont de Roque-Haute), sites in hilly landscapes (Trasano, Gazel Cave), low mountain ranges (Dourgne shelter, Cova del Toll) or high mountain ranges (Balma Margineda). The fact that I had the opportunity to investigate various cultural and environmental contexts provided me with experience of archaeological practice that is sometimes lacking in those who only develop concepts. This experience guided my reflections and developed my theoretical propositions and even redirected these latter according to increasing new data. Indeed, without a general theory of the processes that characterise the spread of the Neolithic across the Mediterranean and continental Europe, the “regional-based” vision

— although it may be very detailed — loses part of its richness if it is not linked to a more universal concept of the mechanisms involved. This explains why I always aimed to go beyond my field results by incorporating these into a more general theoretical perspective (for example Guilaine, 1976, 2001, 2003 and 2013). As the result of more than fifty years of research this paper presents both a historiographic overview and my current vision on the neolithisation of the Central and Western Mediterranean.

### 1. The historiographic perspective: a brief overview

From the end of the 19th century on European archaeologists (O. Montelius, G. de Mortillet) who became aware of the economic renewal that represented the emergence of the European Neolithic hit on the idea of looking for the roots in the more advanced culture cradles of the Eastern Mediterranean. However, it was V. G. Childe, analysing in more detail the complexity of the process, who first proposed an east-west trending sequence of cultures involved in the spread of farming across the European continent along two axes: the Mediterranean maritime route and the land route following the Danube River (Childe, 1925). Except for the Nile valley, Africa hardly played a role in the mechanism. However, Spanish prehistorians such as P. Bosch-Gimpera looked for the origin of their Neolithic more particularly on the African continent by comparing the lithic industries of the “*Cultura de las Cuevas*” (Cave Culture), the first appearance of farmers on the Iberian Peninsula, with those of the North African Neolithic (the Neolithic of Caspian

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tradition as defined by R. Vaufray) or of Saharan tradition (Bosch-Gimpera, 1932).

In Spain the “Hispano-Mauritanian Neolithic” coined by J. Martínez Santa-Olalla emerged as a result of oriental impulses that had passed by the African route (San Valero Aparisi, 1948). For some time the intellectual impact of the Spanish authors and the quality of the materials recovered from the caves in Mediterranean Spain (Cova de l’Or, Cova de la Sarsa) to some extent influenced L. Bernabò Brea as regards his African route of the Early Neolithic Cardial Culture (Bernabò Brea, 1946). However, shortly afterwards this scholar changed his position and favoured the European coast of the Mediterranean as being the route of diffusion of Impressed and Cardial Wares. As an admirer of Childe he later aimed to specify the characteristics of the Mediterranean spread of the Neolithic by grouping together, within the same family, all the Early Neolithic cultures bearing potteries decorated with impressed designs (Bernabò Brea, 1950, 1956) without taking into account more particularly their morphologic or thematic diversity. The prestige associated with the excavation of the Arene Candide Cave renewed interest in the initial Neolithic, more particularly in France and in Spain where the northern Mediterranean route was therefore acknowledged as being relevant at the expense of the African route (Tarradell, 1958). P. Bosch-Gimpera also agreed with the hypothesis of a “circum-Mediterranean” Neolithic (Bosch-Gimpera, 1965). By contrast with Italy, characterised by potteries with various impressed designs (*Impressa*), France and the Iberian Peninsula witnessed the development of an Early Neolithic dominated by decorative themes preferentially made by Cardium seashell impressions (Cardial Ware).

However, as early as the 1950s a debate was launched on the proper composition of this Early Neolithic Cardial culture. In agreement with L. Bernabò Brea, J. Arnal considered it to be of Mediterranean origin although cut off from its oriental roots at some point in time (Arnal et al., 1960). M. Escalon de Fonton, the excavator of the Châteauneuf-les-Martigues shelter, rather favoured an autochthonous explanation: he assumed that the “Cardial people” were indigenous people, descendants of the Mesolithic Castelnovian predecessors who had borrowed distinct foreign techniques (agriculture, pottery) (Escalon de Fonton, 1956, 1971).

This debate resumed at the peak of the “autochthonist” movement, which started in the 1960s/1970s, with the development of radiocarbon dating and the remote age of some of these samples sometimes predating those of the Early Neolithic horizons in the East. The idea of an indigenous substratum taking an active part in the processes of neolithisation can be found in the texts written by D. Theocharis in Greece (Theocharis, 1973), A. Benač in the former Yugoslavia (Benač, 1978), B. Bagolini in Northern Italy (Bagolini, 1980), M. Escalon de Fonton in France (Escalon de Fonton, 1971) and J. Fortea in Spain (Fortea, 1973).

The progress achieved in the excavations in the Near East, the increasing accuracy of radiocarbon dating and the emergence of an east-west gradient of the Early Neolithic dates (Clark, 1965), the analyses of the fauna and the carporemaines rapidly showed that there is no evidence of any autochthonous domestication in Europe and that the “Fertile Crescent” had no serious competitor as regards the emergence of the European Neolithic. This general observation, however, could not provide any evidence of the reciprocal part attributed to the migrants of oriental origin and the role of the indigenous populations within the emergence of the new economic system.

## 2. Regionalisation: a kaleidoscope pattern

One of the ambitions that dominated research during the second half of the 20th century was the definition of various regional

aspects of the Early Neolithic in space and their precise cultural evolution over time. The analysis of the stratigraphic record of caves or shelters as well as the refined analysis of open-air sites made it possible to draw a complex picture. In this quest pottery remains the best guide because of its morphological and decorative codes and first and foremost because of its rapid development. For a long time it was acknowledged that two large areas co-existed: the sphere of the Impressed Wares of the Italo-Adriatic style (Western Greece, Dalmatia, Southern Italy, Sicily) and the sphere with dominant Cardium-impressed Wares (Tyrrhenian Cardial, Franco-Iberian Cardial) (Guilaine, 1976). Far from being restricted to a standardised culture, the Early Neolithic of the Central Mediterranean is a real kaleidoscope and, beyond distinct common basic denominators, it exhibits strong ceramic and lithic variability. This explains why the “cultural groups” defined to date are only helpful operational means. They are indeed destined to be modified as the analysis of their identity characteristics is continuously refined. Southern Italy is a good example of this complexity. A stage with “archaic” Impressed Ware (with more or less organised decoration) is followed by a stage during which potteries with more strongly organised decoration (Guadone) appear alongside a common “*Impressa*” basis. During another stage distinct facies favour “*a tremolo*” decoration (*graffita larga*) and incised decoration appears for the first time (see Trasano, Matera) whereas others prefer painted designs (Lagnano di Piede, Masseria-La Quercia). All this demonstrates the importance of regional variability. Three stages were identified at Rendina (Cipolloni Sampò, 1977–1982) and another three at Trasano (Guilaine and Cremonesi, 1996; Radi et al., 2000) that do not necessarily match each other. On Sicily and in Calabria an early *Impressa* horizon (to which can be assigned the Kronio style or the basic horizon of the San Michele di Saracena cave) was followed by an original culture (Stentinello) characterised by engraved or stamped designs. This culture had a rather long duration and took part in the colonisation of several islands (Malta: Ghar Dalam; Aeolian Islands: Castello di Lipari). A Cardial facies characterised the Tyrrhenian area (Latium, Tuscany, Sardinia, Corsica) and included potteries with geometric decoration or with alternating shell-impressed bands (Filiestru cave, Sardinia; Basi, Corsica; Settecanelle cave, Latium) (Trump, 1983; Bailloud, 1969; Uccelli Gnesutta, 1999). In Liguria a horizon with Impressed Ware characterised by impressed groove decoration preferentially arranged in a herringbone pattern was dominant during a distinct period of time; this original production spread as far as Languedoc (Pont de Roque-Haute, Peiro-Seignado, Portiragnes, Hérault department) and the Valencian country (El Barranquet) (Guilaine et al., 2007; Bernabéu Aubán et al., 2009). Subsequently the “Franco-Iberian Cardial” was the principal vector for the spread of farming from Provence to Portugal. It exhibits a distinct number of strong clusters (Provence, Catalonia, Valencian country), each marked by proper characteristics. Later on, it was progressively replaced by the “Franco-Iberian Epicardial”, which encompassed an area of distribution ranging from the Alps to Andalusia and which also exhibited a great regional variability as regards its pottery productions (Bernabéu Aubán et al., 2011). In Portugal a Cardial Ware group (Cabranosa, Santarém) is followed by a very typical Early Neolithic (bag-shaped vessels, raised lug handles, decoration with impressed herringbone patterns) known from several sites (Lapa do Fumo, São Pedro de Canaferim). In Morocco an original Cardial facies developed including more particularly African shapes (vessels with everted neck and a conical base), associated with and then progressively replaced by vessels featuring fluted decoration (Morocco: El Khil; Algeria: caves of the Oran region (Camps-Fabrer, 1966; El Idrissi, 2001)).

This brief overview evidences the great variety of pottery productions that existed throughout the Early Neolithic from Southern

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