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Chronology of the Neolithic Necropolis at Camí de Can Grau (NE-Iberian Peninsula). Funerary pattern changes and long-distance raw material exchanges

Chronologie de la nécropole néolithique de Camí de Can Grau (Nord-Est de la péninsule Ibérique). Changements dans les pratiques funéraires et échanges de matières premières sur de longues distances

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ABSTRACT

Camí de Can Grau is one of the most important Neolithic necropolises of the “Pit Burials” horizon (North-East of the Iberian Peninsula. Late fifth–early fourth millennia cal BC), because of its large number of graves. However, the number of buried individuals and the type of grave goods of the site have some peculiarities suggesting that could be one of the last manifestations of this horizon. For proving that, a radiocarbon dating programme and some statistical analysis were carried out so as to determine its chronology. The results are discussed regarding the duration of the necropolis, the degree of contemporaneity between graves and grave goods and the number of buried individuals. Moreover, chronological relationships with other similar contexts of the same horizon and located in other regions are presented. This study goes beyond a purely local research, as it proposes a method for addressing the chronology of funerary contexts.

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Camí de Can Grau est l'une des nécropoles néolithiques les plus importantes de l'horizon des « Sépulcres de Fossa » (Nord-Est de la péninsule Ibérique, fin du V^e–début du IV^e millénaire cal BC), en raison du nombre élevé de sépultures qui la composent. Cependant, le nombre d'individus enterrés et le type des mobiliers d'accompagnement présentent certaines particularités, qui suggèrent qu'il pourrait s'agir de l'une des dernières manifestations de cet horizon. Pour le démontrer, un programme de datations radiocarbone et d'analyses statistiques a été mis en place afin de déterminer la chronologie du site. Les résultats sont discutés en ce qui concerne la durée d'occupation de la nécropole, le degré de contemporanéité entre les tombes et les mobiliers d'accompagnement et le nombre d'individus inhumés. De plus, des relations chronologiques avec d'autres contextes similaires du même horizon, situés dans d'autres régions, sont présentées. Cette étude va au-delà d'une recherche purement locale, car elle propose une méthode pour aborder la chronologie des contextes funéraires.

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1. Introduction and objectives

Camí de Can Grau (La Roca del Vallès, Spain) is one of the best-preserved Neolithic necropolises in the North-East of the Iberian Peninsula. The characteristics of the graves, the form of burial, the type of grave goods and the dates obtained in the late 1990s confirmed that this site belonged to the so-called “Pit Burials” horizon (Muñoz, 1965; Pou and Martí, in press; Ripoll and Llongueras, 1963). This name refers to a particular period in the Neolithic in northeastern Iberia characterised above all by a very large and well-studied funerary record, with over 600 burials currently documented. However, even though it is one of the best-known Neolithic horizon in western Europe, little information was available about its chronology because of the small number of radiocarbon determinations that had been performed.

In order to address this deficiency, one of the main lines of research in the framework of the R+D project “Aproximación a las primeras comunidades neolíticas del NE peninsular a través de sus prácticas funerarias” (in English: “Approach to the first Neolithic communities in the North-East of the Iberian Peninsula through their funerary practices”) has been to initiate a radiocarbon dating programme, which has now obtained as many as 131 dates (additional to the 37 dates that had been obtained and published in the past). This programme has included not only the necropolises with the largest number of burials, but also small cemeteries and even some isolated burials that were interesting because of their type of construction, their grave goods or their geographical location. The results of this research project are providing information about the duration of this funerary practice and about the likelihood of inter-site and intra-site contemporaneity of the burials.

The main objectives of the present study are to determine the overall duration of the use of Camí de Can Grau necropolis, the chronology of the graves and the possible degrees of contemporaneity between them. At the same time, the internal variability of the chronological dates will also be studied in terms of the type of funerary structure, the presence of individual or collective graves (simultaneous or not), their spatial distribution and the presence of

grave goods made from raw materials from other regions or which required a large investment in labour to be obtained or manufactured.

Additionally, by comparing the results with data from other Neolithic burials of the same horizon in the North-East of the Iberian Peninsula, the original hypothesis, that the necropolis of Camí de Can Grau is one of the most recent sites in the “Pit Burials”, will be tested. In this sense, it is known that a few centuries later, this model of normally individual burials in graves disappeared and was replaced by the use of caves, large pits and the construction of dolmens and artificial hypogea in which numerous individuals were buried. It thus seems plausible that the last manifestations of the “Pit Burials” horizon started to break the funerary norm that had existed until then (Gibaja, 2003; Martín et al., 2010; Mestres, 1992; Molist et al., 2003; Miró, 1994; Oms et al., 2016; Roig et al., 2010; Ten, 1980).

Finally, the fact that similar funerary practices have been documented in the South of France and Switzerland during the so-called *Chasséen* Culture (Duday et al., 2000; Moinat and Chambon, 2007; Tarrús, 2002) poses the question of whether this funerary phenomenon had existed simultaneously on both sides of the Pyrenees. This will also be addressed.

The aims of this paper, the methodology used and the processing of the chronometric data can act as a point of reference for other similar case studies of funerary sites, whether they belong to the Neolithic or any other archaeological period.

2. Camí de Can Grau and Neolithic funerary sites between the mid-fifth and mid-fourth millennia cal BC

As remarked above, burials in this period generally consist of pits dug in the ground or in cists (stone boxes) in which a single individual (less frequently, two or more individuals), either an adult or a child, was placed. These individuals were usually accompanied by grave goods: flint cores and chipped tools (especially blades and bladelets, geometric microliths and arrow-heads), polished stone axes and adzes, tools made from bones, ceramic recipients,

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