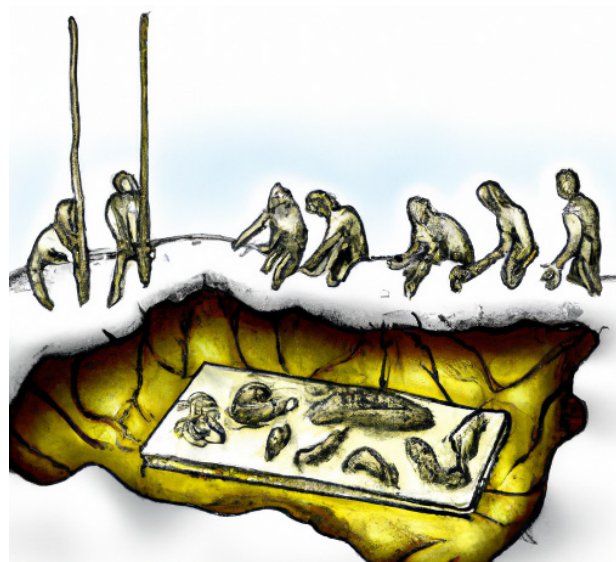


# What the dead tell us – Exploring societal behaviors of early European farmers through funerary practices (5000–4000 BCE).



Friday the 13th of October 2023

«Kuppelraum» of the main building of the University of Bern, Hochschulstrasse 6, 3012 Bern (Switzerland)

Scientific advances and new theoretical approaches of the last three decades led to extraordinary advances in the understanding of funerary practices of the first farming societies of Western-Central Europe. This workshop aims to bring together Early Career and Senior Researchers from the fields of archaeology, anthropology and paleogenetic. The goal is to highlight current research projects and to establish or expand the international network of active researchers in the field focusing on the understanding of various aspects of Neolithic funerary practices.

Contributions to the workshop could therefore focus on:

- The chronology and evolution of burial practices, as well as the emergence of necropolises and megalithic elements in funerary architecture.
- The significance of Neolithic burials in relation to diet, diseases and kinship of individuals.
- Social considerations of the Neolithic society, such as ritual sequences, spatial arrangement, cultural memory, as well as indicators for Neolithic gender or identity expressions.
- How local prehistoric communities reacted to death and examine the relationship between ritualistic actions and material culture.
- Function and social meaning of material culture within graves (including the human remains), as objects of action and means of expression.

# Timetable

Friday, 13.10.2023

- 09.30–10.00 *Arrival & Coffee*  
10.00–10.30 Albert Hafner: Welcome address and introduction

## **Block 1: Social Considerations**

- 10.30–11.00 Keynote John Robb: «What did Neolithic burial do?»  
11.00–11.20 Jess Thompson: The changing role of the ancestors in Neolithic southern Italy (6000–3800 cal BCE)  
11.20–11.40 Laura Colli et al.: «Gender Trouble» in Prehistory: a preliminary analysis to rethink gender identities in funerary records from the Middle Neolithic Northern Italy  
11.40–12.00 Berta Morell et al.: Funerary practices as a means of social and economic interpretation: the Middle Neolithic in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula  
12.00–12.15 Discussion  
12.15–13.15 *Lunch break*

## **Block 2: Case studies on Chamblandes type cist graves**

- 13.15–13.45 Keynote Noah Steuri: Tracking funerary customs within cist graves of first farming societies in the Western Alpine region (4800–3800 BCE)  
13.45–14.05 Anja Furtwängler et al.: Genetic Analysis of Neolithic Stone Cist Burials from the Aosta Valley, Northern Italy: Insight into Ancestry, Kinship, and Cultural Transition  
14.05–14.25 Deborah Rosselet: A renewed vision of Swiss alpine agro-pastoral societies through the analysis of lifestyles and peopling dynamics: a first example  
14.25–14.45 Samuel van Willingen & Aurore Schmitt: Chamblandes and their neighbours: a look to the south  
14.45–15.00 Discussion  
15.00–15.20 *Break*

## **Block 3: Case studies throughout Western Europe**

- 15.20–15.50 Keynote Andrea Zeeb-Lanz: A thousand dead without a grave – the exceptional early Neolithic ritual site of Herxheim (Palatinate/Germany)  
15.50–16.10 Marco Milella et al.: As above, so below: deposition, modification, and reutilization of human remains at Marmoles cave (Cueva de los Marmoles: Southern Spain, 4000–1000 cal BCE)  
16.10–16.30 Philippe Curdy et al.: The chronological and cultural sequence of the megalithic site of Saint-Martin-de-Corléans (Aosta, Italy)  
16.30–16.50 Malou Blank: Megalithic graves and Mortuary practices in southwestern Sweden during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age  
16.50–17.10 Moderated final discussions  
17.10–18.30 *Visit of the Laboratory for the Analysis of Radiocarbon with AMS (LARA) of the University of Bern*  
18:30 *Dinner*

10.30–11.00

John Robb, Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge (United Kingdom)

### «What did Neolithic burial do?»

Archaeologists analysing burials often assume a priori that we know what the goals of deathways were, e.g. what social operations they were intended to accomplish (for instance, making a political claim, addressing spiritual concerns, shaping memories, etc.). Indeed, different schools of thought normally begin by proclaiming new master themes for interpreting burials. However, ethnographic studies show that death rituals often accomplish very different social work, and they often combine multiple, conflicting or ambiguous purposes. Thus, the first question archaeologists need to ask about deathways in a particular case such as the European Neolithic is «what did burial do?» Fortunately, once we ask the question, contextual archaeology and taphonomic studies give us ways of answering this question. This discussion is illustrated with examples from the Neolithic, and with discussion of how the purpose of burial changed substantially between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age.

11.00–11.20

Jess Thompson, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge (United Kingdom)

### The changing role of the ancestors in Neolithic southern Italy (6000–3800 cal BCE)

In Italian scholarship, Neolithic burials (and indeed burials more broadly) have traditionally been used as typological tools and starting points for claims about emergent social status. This approach has never been productive, for a number of reasons: grave goods and material culture in Neolithic burials are usually limited or absent; the evidence for social differentiation is lacking within and outside of funerary contexts; and deathways were surprisingly diverse. Underlying typical narratives of prehistoric burials has been the assumption that they represent static symbols of individual or cultural identity. Such a perspective has prevented archaeologists from engaging productively with the variety of ways the dead, and their remains, were handled and deposited. A more promising way to explore difference in funerary practices is by characterising deathways as integrated ritual systems which transform dead persons into new kinds of beings. In this paper, deathways—the range, process, and outcomes of funerary practices—in Neolithic southern Italy (Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria) will be investigated at several scales. The main results of a review of all Neolithic burials from southern Italy reveal widespread changes in the treatment and the role of ancestors, with some common turning points across the region. At the micro-scale, vignettes from single and neighbouring sites show that ancestors were constructed in locally-significant ways.

11.20–11.40

Laura Colli, Giovanna Pizziolo and Pier Paolo Mariani, University of Siena, Department of History and Cultural Heritage (Italy)

### «Gender Trouble» in Prehistory: a preliminary analysis to rethink gender identities in funerary records from the Middle Neolithic Northern Italy

Drawing inspiration from recent theories in gender archaeology, this work, still in progress, is focusing on assessing the variations of gender identities in funerary records from the Square Mouth Pottery Culture of Northern Italy. After collecting all the legacy data available, the information has been organized in a database, then examined through descriptive statistical analysis. This approach aims to discuss the dichotomous and presentist ideas of archaeological literature on the topic, using assemblages of grave goods and other funerary features to attempt to identify plural and changing gender representations.

# Abstracts

## Block 1: Social Considerations

11.40–12.00

Berta Morell<sup>1</sup>, Juan F. Gibaja<sup>1</sup>, Gerard Remolins<sup>2</sup>, Alba Mascians<sup>3</sup>, Maria Fontanals-Coll<sup>4</sup>, Marta Díaz-Zorita Bonilla<sup>5</sup>, Millán Mozota<sup>3</sup>, F. Javier Santos<sup>6</sup>, Izaro Quevedo-Semperena<sup>7</sup>, Araceli Martín<sup>3</sup>, Xavier Oms<sup>8</sup>, Mònica Oliva<sup>9</sup>, Míriam Cubas<sup>10</sup>, Claudia Lopes<sup>11</sup>, Diego López-Onaindia<sup>12</sup>, Stéphanie Duboscq<sup>3</sup>, Patricia Martí<sup>13</sup> and M. Eulàlia Subirà<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> RegiraRocs S.L. (Spain)

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<sup>4</sup> University of York (United Kingdom)

<sup>5</sup> University of Tübingen (Germany)

<sup>6</sup> National Accelerator Center – University of Sevilla (Spain)

<sup>7</sup> University of Valladolid (Spain)

<sup>8</sup> University of Barcelona (Spain)

<sup>9</sup> Department of Culture, Catalan Public Administration (Spain)

<sup>10</sup> University of Alcalá de Henares (Spain)

<sup>11</sup> Complutense University of Madrid (Spain)

<sup>12</sup> University of Bordeaux (France)

<sup>13</sup> Catalan Institute of Human Paleoecology and Social Evolution (IPHES) (Spain)

<sup>14</sup> Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain)

### Funerary practices as a means of social and economic interpretation: the Middle Neolithic in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula

Between the late fifth and early fourth-millennium cal. BC, the Neolithic communities in the North Eastern Iberian Peninsula began burying part of their population in individual (occasionally double) pits or stone boxes. The archaeological record of this period is characterized by its richness regarding funerary contexts and its scarcity of habitat contexts, which have been practically undocumented. The significance attributed to the presence of these burials, approximately 650 have been documented until now, has resulted in the conventional labelling of this period as the «Sepulcres de Fossa» horizon, reflecting the paramount importance placed on these funerary structures.

A striking characteristic of these funerary contexts is the presence of non-local raw materials deposited as grave goods, such as honey flint from south-eastern France, jadeite, amphibolite, eclogite, and nephrite axes from the Alps and the Pyrenees, «square mouth» pottery vessels (with the earliest known examples found in northern Italy), and even obsidian from Sardinia attesting to the wide-reaching networks established by these communities during this period.

The existence of comparable funerary practices in other regions of Europe during the same timeframe provides additional insight into the broader cultural phenomenon at play. For instance, the «Chasséen» horizon in France, the Bocca Quadrta Culture in Italy and the «Cortaillod» horizon in Switzerland share significant similarities with the funerary practices observed in the North Eastern Iberian Peninsula. These parallels suggest the presence of extensive and interconnected cultural and social networks operating on a larger scale.

The present communication aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the diverse outcomes yielded through an in-depth analysis of this funerary phenomenon. The research was conducted as part of a collaborative project involving a team of specialists from various fields. Employing a multi-proxy approach, the investigation encompassed anthropological studies, characterization of grave goods, use-wear analysis of stone tools, isotopic and radiocarbon analysis, DNA analysis, and organic residue analysis, among other analytical methods. This multidisciplinary approach allowed for a holistic understanding of the social and cultural organization of these communities.

13.15–13.45

Noah Steuri, Institute of Archaeological Sciences, Prehistoric Archaeology, University of Bern (Switzerland)

**Tracking funerary customs within cist graves of first farming societies in the Western Alpine region (4800–3800 BCE)**

Neolithic cist graves – known under the term Chamblandes type in the Western Alpine region – were formed of lateral stone slabs or, more rarely, wooden planks and could contain both individual and collective burials. Due to the sparsity of characteristic grave goods, insights into the chronology and evolution of burial practices depend on extensive series of precise radiocarbon dates. As part of my PhD project, 128 bone samples from necropolises in Italy, France, and Switzerland were evaluated. These double the number of modern radiocarbon dates available for this burial practice and represent the first absolute dates for some major sites and entire Alpine valleys. For the first time, it is now possible to comprehensively trace the evolution of the Western Alpine cist graves between 4800 to 3800 BC. In connection with the extensive assessment of grave architecture, the treatment of human remains, as well as frequency and types of grave goods within sites, this allows to propose a model of two distinct funerary customs within Western Alpine Neolithic cist graves.

13.45–14.05

Anja Furtwängler<sup>1</sup>, Noah Steuri<sup>2</sup>, Marco Milella<sup>3</sup>, Francesca Martinet<sup>4</sup>, Luca Raiteri<sup>4</sup>, Alissa Mittnik<sup>1</sup>, Sandra Lösch<sup>3</sup>, Johannes Krause<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Archaeogenetics, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig (Germany)

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Archaeological Sciences, Prehistoric Archaeology, University of Bern (Switzerland)

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Forensic Medicine, Department of Physical Anthropology, University of Bern (Switzerland)

<sup>4</sup> Regione autonoma Valle d'Aosta, Dipartimento Soprintendenza per i beni e le attività culturali, Aosta (Italy)

**Genetic Analysis of Neolithic Stone Cist Burials from the Aosta Valley, Northern Italy: Insights into Ancestry, Kinship, and Cultural Transition**

The Neolithic period witnessed significant demographic and cultural changes across Europe, including the introduction of agriculture and the establishment of settled communities. In this study, we present the genetic analysis of individuals from Neolithic stone cist burials discovered in Northern Italy, shedding light on the genetic makeup, ancestry components, and kinship patterns of early farming populations in the region. Applying admixture dating, ancestry component modeling, and genetic kinship analysis to a small sample size of 10 individuals, we reveal the typical genetic makeup of early farming populations. Surprisingly, our analysis also revealed instances of first-degree relatives within this limited sample, indicating the existence of tightly-knit familial relationships within the context of Neolithic stone cist graves from this area. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the genetic composition and social dynamics of Neolithic populations in the south-western Alps.

14.05–14.25

Deborah Rosset, Archaeology of Africa & Anthropology Laboratory, University of Geneva (Switzerland)

**A renewed vision of Swiss alpine agro-pastoral societies through the analysis of lifestyles and peopling dynamics: a first example**

Our project concerns the study of neolithic societies across the Swiss Alps using an interdisciplinary approach by combining isotope geochemistry, dental nonmetrics, aDNA analysis and palaeopathology to understand the evolution of diets, subsistence practices and mobility of these human groups. We present here some of the results on stable isotopes combined with new <sup>14</sup>C analysis on the necropolis of Barmaz (Valais). Associated with the previous researches, our data allow us to offer new hypotheses concerning the events and links that united certain individuals

14.25–14.45

Samuel van Willigen, InSitu-Archéologie, Sion (Switzerland)

Aurore Schmitt, Archéologie des Sociétés Méditerranéennes, Montpellier (France)

**Chamblandes and their neighbours: a look to the south**

Despite numerous recent discoveries, Neolithic burial practices in Mediterranean southern France and northern Italy receive little attention in major supra-regional syntheses. In these regions themselves, the grave rites and grave forms of the 5th millennium BC are often described as «diverse» or «polymorphic». A closer look, however, shows that this diversity actually reflects a complex situation that is not due to random chance.

15.20–15.50

Andrea Zeeb-Lanz, Generaldirektion Kulturelles Erbe Rheinland-Pfalz, Direktion Landesarchäologie, Speyer (Germany)

**A thousand dead without a grave – the exceptional early Neolithic ritual site of Herxheim (Palatinate/Germany)**

The Linear pottery site of Herxheim is counted among the most important and most enigmatic prehistoric localities of Europe. In the ditches around a settlement the skeletal remains of hundreds of individuals were found, the bones smashed beyond recognition, the skulls shaped to bowl-like artefacts. Lots of artefacts are associated with the bones, most of them intentionally destroyed. All the evidence hints to highly ritualised ceremonies which lack any tradition in the wide spread Linear pottery culture so far.

15.50–16.10

Marco Milella<sup>1</sup>, Juan Carlos Vera Rodríguez<sup>2</sup>, M. José Martínez Fernández<sup>2</sup>, M. Dolores Bretones García<sup>3</sup>, Sylvia A. Jiménez Brobeil<sup>4</sup>, Julia Brünig<sup>5</sup>, Inmaculada López Flores<sup>6</sup>, Juan Antonio Cámara Serrano<sup>7</sup>, Rafael M. Martínez Sánchez<sup>8</sup>, Zita Laffranchi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Physical Anthropology, Institute of Forensic Medicine, University of Bern (Switzerland)

<sup>2</sup> Departamento de Historia, Geografía y Antropología, Centro de Investigación en Patrimonio Histórico, Cultural y Natural, Facultad de Humanidades, Universidad de Huelva (Spain)

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Legal Medicine, Toxicology and Physical Anthropology, University of Granada (Spain)

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**As above, so below: deposition, modification, and reutilization of human remains at Marmoles cave (Cueva de los Marmoles: Southern Spain, 4000–1000 cal BCE)**

The deposition and manipulation of human remains in natural caves are well known for the Neolithic of Southern Iberia. The cultural meaning of these practices is however still largely unclear. Cueva de los Marmoles (CM, Priego-Córdoba) is one of the most important cave contexts from Southern Spain, which returned a large number of commingled skeletal remains suggesting its funerary use from the Neolithic to the Late Bronze Age. Here we discuss CM from a chronological and cultural perspective based on new radiocarbon, anthropological, and taphonomic analyses. These include the estimation of the minimum number of individuals, the exploration of fragmentation patterns characterizing different skeletal regions, and the macroscopic and microscopic analysis of modifications to the remains of possible anthropic origin. Radiocarbon data point at a funerary use of CM between the 5th–2nd millennium cal. BCE. MNI estimates reveal the presence of at least 12 individuals (seven adults and five nonadults). The low representation of elements from hands and feet suggests that individuals were placed in the cave while partially decomposed. Anthropic traces on the remains (fresh fractures, modification of marrow canal, scraping marks) hint at their intentional fragmentation, cleaning from residual soft tissues, and in some cases reutilization. These practices are well-exemplified by the recovery of one «skull cup» and of two long bones used as tools. These data align with those from other cave contexts from the same geographic region, suggesting the presence, especially during the Neolithic period, of shared ideologies centered on the human body.

16.10–16.30

Philippe Curdy<sup>1</sup>, Angela Maria Ferroni<sup>2</sup>, Francesca Martinet<sup>3</sup>, Giovanna Pizziolo<sup>4</sup>, Raffaella Poggiani Keller<sup>5</sup>, Luca Raiteri<sup>3</sup>, Lucia Sarti<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Soprintendenza Beni e attività culturali Val d'Aosta (Italy)

<sup>4</sup> Università degli studi di Siena (Italy)

<sup>5</sup> Former Soprintendente, Sopr. Archeologica della Lombardia (Italy)

**The chronological and cultural sequence of the megalithic site of Saint-Martin-de-Corléans (Aosta, Italy)**

The contribution presents the results of the multidisciplinary studies carried out on the megalithic area of Saint-Martin-de-Corléans, excavated between 1970 and 1990 by Franco Mezzena. A phase of probably ritual ploughing is observed around the middle of the 5th millennium BC; from 3'000 BC onward, the occupants build some alignments of erected stones/anthropomorphic steles and several collective tombs, where complex rituals have been observed. The megalithic cemetery provides new and important information about the funerary practice between 3'000 and 1'600 BC in the Alps and the surrounding areas.

16.30–16.50

Malou Blank, Department of historical studies, University of Gothenburg (Sweden)

**Megalithic graves and Mortuary practices in southwestern Sweden during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age**

In this presentation, two themes are going to be addressed: the use-time of megalithic graves, and mortuary practices within these graves. The study area is southwestern Sweden, focusing on Falbygden. Falbygden has one of northern Europe's largest concentrations of passage graves, along with many gallery graves. The clear spatial structure of the geology and the well-preserved human and animal bone material make it an unusually fruitful study area for investigations combining bioarchaeological and archaeological methods to understand prehistoric economy and society.