



NeoNet Atlantic. Radiocarbon Dates for the Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic Transition in the Southern European Atlantic Coast

DATA PAPER

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ABSTRACT

NeoNet Atlantic dataset complements the NeoNet Mediterranean dataset by providing new curated radiocarbon dates for the study of the pioneer farming front (i.e. Neolithisation, ca. 7500 to 3500 cal BC) in the Southern European Atlantic Coast river basin (Portugal, Western Spain, Southwestern France). The complete dataset is formed by the `id00164_doc_elencoc14.tsv` file, a data frame with tab-separated values, and a related dataframe: `id00164_doc_thesaurus.tsv`. The dataset contains 1,143 radiocarbon dates from 254 archaeological sites and 817 different archaeological contexts (stratigraphic units, structures, negative features, hearths, etc.) informed by 233 bibliographical references. As for the NeoNet Mediterranean dataset, particular attention has been paid to homogenisation of the laboratory code, the archaeological context, and the references, in order to facilitate further data extractions. Indeed, the dataset is linked to an open source R Shiny interactive web app (NeoNet app), a series of functions hosted on GitHub, and a getter function (R package `c14bazAAr`, R function `get_c14data("neonetatl")`).

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(1) OVERVIEW

Throughout history, Europe has experienced a pronounced division between the Atlantic and Mediterranean regions, marked by substantial climatic and environmental differences. These disparities have played a pivotal role in shaping distinct demographic, historical, and cultural dynamics since prehistoric times [1, 2]. The Neolithisation process, which happened in Europe between the seventh and fourth millennia cal BC, is no exception to this regional dichotomy. It is widely recognized that the transition from a nomadic or semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer-fishing lifestyle to a settled, agricultural one did not unfold uniformly across Europe, resulting in unique trajectories for the Atlantic and Mediterranean regions [3, 4]. On the Atlantic coasts, hunter-gatherer-fishermen persisted until later periods, maintaining a mixed economy of marine and terrestrial resources, while the onset of farming was delayed in this area [5, 6]. The role of local forager communities in the diffusion and adoption of domesticated plants and animals has been a subject of extensive discussion [7, 8]. Today, most scholars agree that on the Southern European Atlantic coast a mosaic of Neolithisation scenarios occurred, with a certain cultural and genetic integration between Mesolithic and Neolithic populations after the initial arrival of exogenous farming groups from the western Mediterranean basin [9, 10, 11, 12, 13]. The slower pace of the Neolithisation process, the adaptability and resilience of local hunter-gatherer communities, and the different climatic and environmental conditions made the Meso-Neolithic transition more apparent, archaeologically speaking, in this area compared to the Mediterranean shores [14]. Despite the noteworthy implications of these regional disparities, instances of direct comparisons between the Mediterranean and Atlantic domains have been infrequent, albeit with a few exceptions [15, 16]. Notably, both regions have conventionally been explored through divergent lenses, with one emphasizing cultural diffusion while the other emphasizing demic expansion through migration [17, 18, 19, 20].

With this paper, we aim to provide the first integrated dataset of both Atlantic and Mediterranean radiocarbon data. The integration of Atlantic (NeoNet Atl) and Mediterranean (NeoNet, or NeoNet Med) ^{14}C datasets represents a crucial step towards a more comprehensive and unified understanding of the Neolithisation process in Southern Europe, encompassing its environmental and cultural diversity. The contrasting Neolithisation timelines and dynamics between the Atlantic and Mediterranean regions not only hold profound implications for comprehending the spread and adoption of farming in that area, but also serve as a foundational basis for understanding the successive socio-cultural developments in their respective areas.

The NeoNet Atl dataset complements and expands upon the NeoNet Med dataset [21], developed as part of a thematic research network. The project follows a collaborative approach, bringing together scholars from different institutions across the Mediterranean and Atlantic areas to share data and common practices in the publication, selection, and interpretation of radiocarbon dates. Our chosen approach involves compiling all published radiocarbon dates, avoiding biases and data filtering, and integrating all collected information into a user-friendly, open-access tool for exploring radiocarbon dates, the NeoNet app.

The expansion of the initial Neonet dataset (NeoNet Med) into the Atlantic area (NeoNet Atl) not only introduces new dates but also standardizes prior radiocarbon compilations such as Pardo-Gordó et al. (2018) [22] and Perrin (2019) [14]. This standardization involves homogenizing information from archaeological layers, dated materials, etc. Additionally, the dataset undergoes language localization from Spanish and French to English, and its format transforms from XLSX to TSV with proper encoding. These changes aim to enhance data reusability, facilitated through geographic mapping using the interactive NeoNet application, R functions for data management and analysis, and a GitHub repository for public access. Furthermore, the modularity of the NeoNet dataset, organized into river basins, ensures its incremental growth. These comprehensive steps, implemented across various NeoNet datasets, play a crucial role for those engaged in prehistoric research in the region.

CONTEXT

Spatial coverage

River basins are widely acknowledged as significant units in physical geography, encompassing key notions such as catchment areas, thalwegs and shorter paths, natural boundaries and ridgelines.

The area covered by the dataset is the Atlantic River basins of southern Europe (Figure 1). It comprises the southern, central and northern regions of Portugal, northwestern and northern Spain (including Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria, Southern Basque Country, and some portions of Castile and León), and the southwestern, western and northwestern portion of France (Northern Basque Country, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Pays de la Loire, Centre-Val de Loire, Brittany, and portions of Languedoc-Roussillon-Midi-Pyrénées, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes).

The NeoNet Atl minimum bounding box of the region of interest is:

Northern boundary: +48.7°N
Southern boundary: +36.3°N
Eastern boundary: +4.2°E
Western boundary: -9.4°E

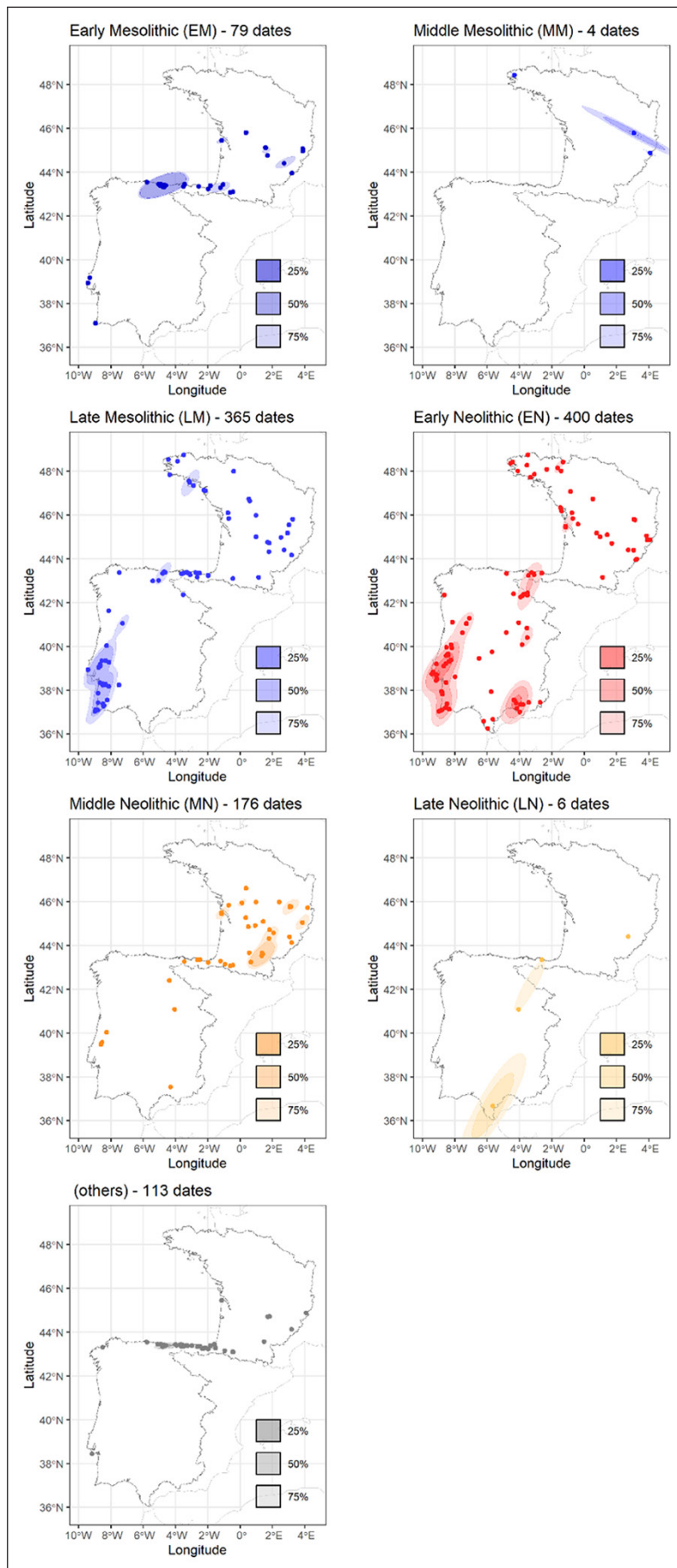


Figure 1 Region of interest of NeoNet Atl: river basins in the Southern European Atlantic Coast with number of dates filtered by periods (1,143 studied radiocarbon dates). The period ‘others’ gathers radiocarbon dates attributed to uncertain periods: UM (Undefined Mesolithic), LMEN (Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic), EMN (Early Neolithic/Middle Neolithic), UN (Undefined Neolithic), N/A (not available).

Temporal coverage

The temporal coverage starts at 10,000 BP and stops at 5000 BP (ca. 7500–3500 cal BC, [Figure 2](#)).

(2) METHODS

The creation of the NeoNet dataset was enabled by a collaborative synthesis of published radiocarbon dates between Western Spain, Portugal and Southwestern France. Each author has taken charge of a part of the whole dataset: Portugal (ACB, AC), Western Spain (MC, JFG, FXO), and South-Western France (ELR). The dataset has focused on information with a high reuse potential (conventional naming, URLs, etc.). The data structure has been devised to be reused in NoSQL databases where columns “SiteName” and “LabCode” could be used as unique keys. Additional data on cultural traits and/or other contextual information can therefore be added in a second step.

STEPS

The desk-based research work followed several steps: search for data resources, data gathering, data enhancement, and dataset publishing. The search for radiocarbon data resources relied on the authors’

personal archives and their scientific monitoring. Data integration consisted of gathering radiocarbon information from various publications (site monographs, radiocarbon inventories, online databases, etc.). These data were collected automatically (R computer scripts) or manually, and stored in a single dataset (data frame). This dataset was cleaned up (quality control), and the verified records were recast to form the current public NeoNet Atl dataset.

QUALITY CONTROL

The quality control consisted of collecting and aligning the various radiocarbon publications. These sources were matched against each other using scripting routines to enhance relevant information, modify and summarize the sources’ datasets. In particular, this method has succeeded in filling in gaps in particular fields (e.g., Source A provides good information on the stratigraphic context, but Source B provides good information on the type of material sampled) and to clarify information where it may be missing (e.g., the URL of a bibliographic reference). Other scripting routines have been used for the standardization of column names and values according to current standards, and duplicate suppression. In the case of duplicates with conflicting information, the source publication has been taken as reference.

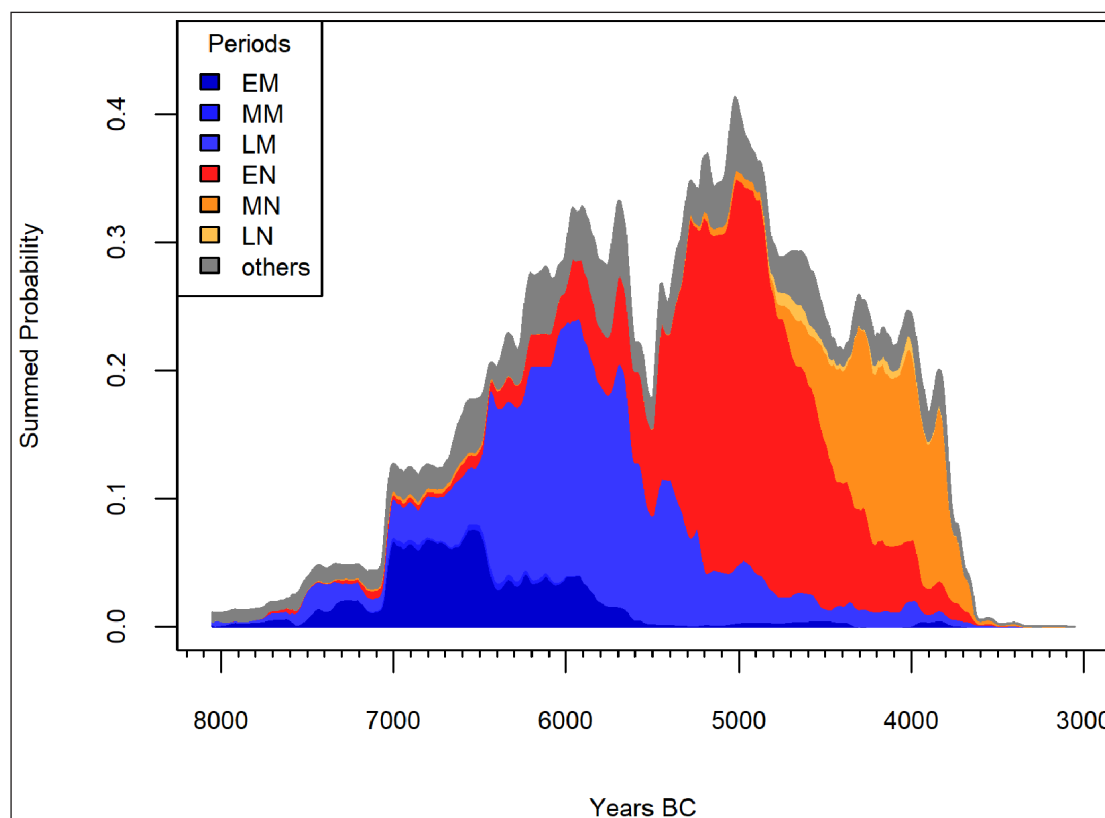


Figure 2 Summed probability densities of the NeoNet Atl dataset with 1,143 studied radiocarbon dates attributed to different periods: EM (Early Mesolithic, 79 dates), MM (Middle Mesolithic, 4 dates), LM (Late Mesolithic, 365 dates), EN (Early Neolithic, 400 dates), MN (Middle Neolithic, 176 dates), LN (Late Neolithic, 6 dates). The period ‘others’ gathers 113 radiocarbon dates attributed to uncertain periods: UM (Undefined Mesolithic), LMEN (Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic), EMN (Early Neolithic/Middle Neolithic), UN (Undefined Neolithic), N/A (not available).

CONSTRAINTS

The dataset structure has been voluntarily reduced to radiocarbon core fields in order to reduce non available (n/a) data. All fields and all cells have been checked. When no values were available (n/a), we fill the cells with this value. When there is an archaeological observation with a negative result (e.g. undetermined), we add not determined (n/d). Currently, the n/a and n/d values represent 1% of the whole dataset and are largely concentrated in the “PhaseCode” (8%), and the “Material Species” (7%) fields.

(3) DATASET DESCRIPTION

The NeoNet Atl dataset is available on the University of Pisa repository. Files are listed with the code: id00164_doc.

OBJECT NAME

The dataset consists of the `elencoc14.tsv` file listing all the radiocarbon dates; the file `thesaurus.tsv` for equivalences between material (“Material” and “MaterialSpecies”) and material life duration; the file `reference.bib` for bibliographical references.

RADIOCARBON DATASET (`elencoc14.tsv`)

The NeoNet Atl dataset reuses entirely the NeoNet Med layout to register the main information about radiocarbon dates [2]. The file is a dataframe with tab-separated values (.tsv).

Each radiocarbon date has a:

- unique site name (“SiteName”);
- cultural period associated with the radiocarbon date (“Period”). Periods abbreviations are defined as following: EM (Early Mesolithic), MM (Middle Mesolithic), LM (Late Mesolithic), UM (Undefined Mesolithic), LMEN (Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic), EN (Early Neolithic), MN (Middle Neolithic), EMN (Early/Middle Neolithic), LN (Late Neolithic), UN (Undefined Neolithic).
- stratigraphical or structural context of sample provenience (“PhaseCode”);
- unique identifier based on the standard laboratory identifiers (“LabCode”) in respect to the conventional naming of laboratory codes and sample notation;
- conventional radiocarbon age (“C14Age”);
- standard deviation associated error (“C14SD”);
- type of material on which the date has been measured (“Material”);
- specification of this material (“MaterialSpecies”);
- calculated time rank in cal BC *terminus post quem* (“tpq”) and *terminus ante quem* (“taq”);
- bibliographical references with a short title (“bib”);

- DOI or a BibTeX key referring to an entry in `reference.bib` (“bib_url”);
- site coordinates in decimal degrees (“Longitude”, “Latitude”);
- country where site is located (“Country”)

MATERIAL LIFE (`thesaurus.tsv`)

Material life durations are stored in the `thesaurus.tsv` file. This file is the same as the one used for the NeoNet Med [15]. The two fields show the material type (“material.type”) and the material life duration (“life.duration”). This thesaurus is used to differentiate short- from long-life samples. In our dataset, to described dated samples, we have used the largest and most inclusive grouping: wood charcoal, plant seed, animal bone, human bone, shell, organic.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (`reference.bib`)

Bibliographical references (n = 233) of each radiocarbon date are stored in the `reference.bib` file. It is a BibTeX file format. If only a BibTeX key is given, and no DOI, this file results from the join between the “bib_url” field of the C14 spreadsheet and the `reference.bib`. If the DOI exists, the full bibliographical reference is given.

DATATYPE

Secondary data

FORMAT NAMES AND VERSIONS

TSV UTF-8, BibTex

CREATION DATES

Records created from March 2022 to September 2023 as part of the NeoNet work group.

DATASET CREATORS

NM and TH designed the research; ACB, AFC, MC, JFG, FXO and ELR collected raw data: Portugal (ACB, AFC), Western Spain (MC, JFG), and South-Western France (ELR). NM was primarily responsible for the data collation. TH created the web app and analysed data; TH and NM wrote the paper. TH, ACB, AC, MC, JFG, FXO, ELR and NM reviewed the paper.

LANGUAGE

English

LICENSE

CC BY 4.0

REPOSITORY LOCATION

Data is available at the [Digital Library](https://digital.library.unipi.org/10.13131/unipi/z332-ye56) of Unipi: www.doi.org/10.13131/unipi/z332-ye56

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(4) REUSE POTENTIAL

Dividing the area of interest into river basins enables a nested multiscalar analysis, with hierarchical decomposition, and a potential reuse of data at different levels: from river drainage to ocean basins.

Regarding the spread of farming in the Southern European Atlantic Coast region, the NeoNet dataset completes radiocarbon datasets such as BDA [23],

Euroevol [24], Piberia [22] and IDEArq [25]. Neonet Atl and Med dataset have been linked to the C14bazAAR repository through the `get_c14data("neonet")` and `get_c14data("neonetatl")` R function [26]. The NeoNet dataset is also embedded in the NeoNet app (<http://shinyserver.cfs.unipi.it:3838/C14/>) hosted by the University of Pisa (Figure 3).

This interactive web app facilitates the selection of dates by providing selection tools for spatial information, chronology, and date accuracy. The map interface facilitates the multi-scalar study of the mobile border between the last hunter-gatherers and early farmers. Two buttons enable downloading selected dates and

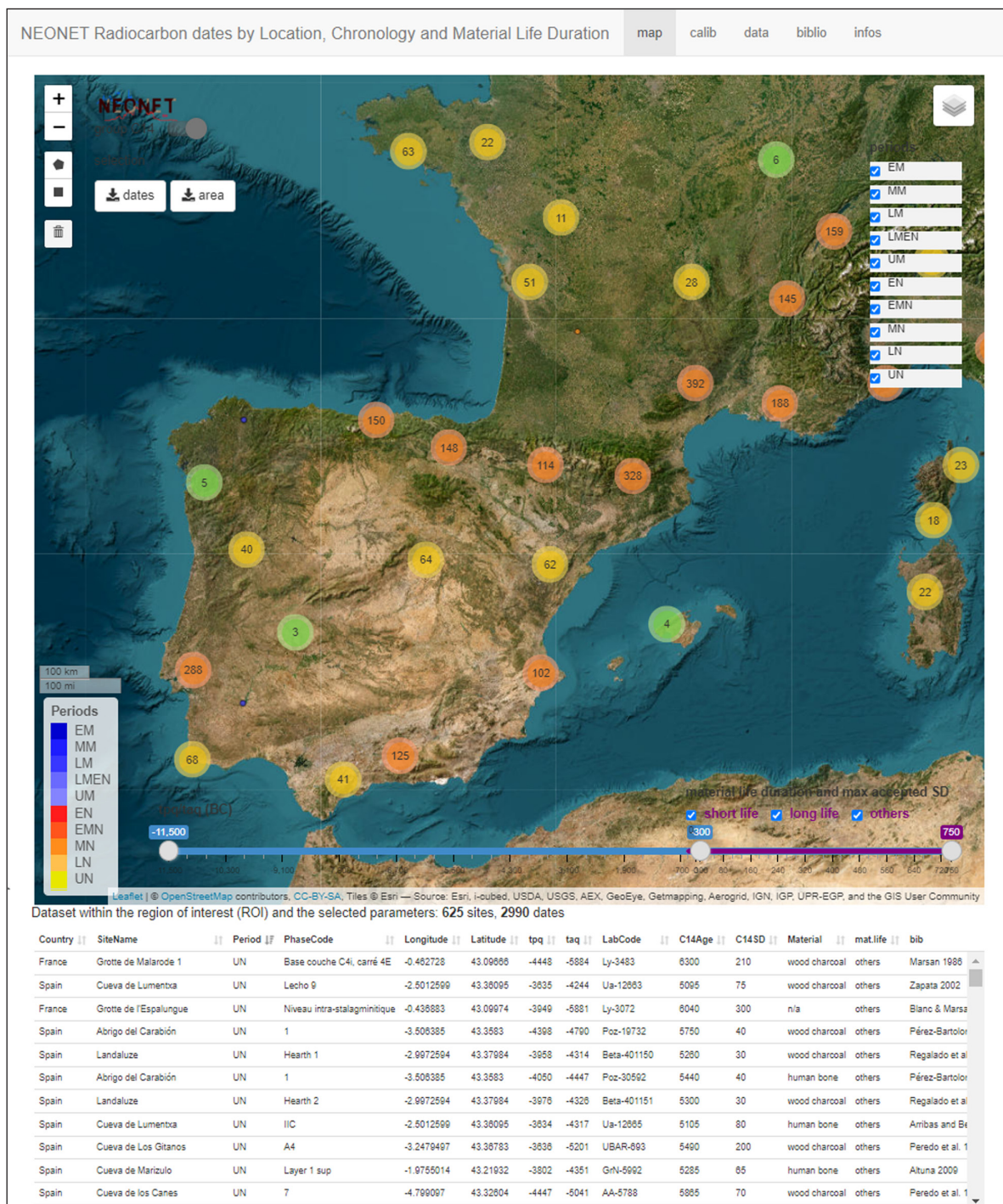


Figure 3 Screen capture of the NeoNet application (R Shiny) showing the NeoNeonet Atl dataset and part of NeoNet Med. When the spatial window is extended to the entire dataset, it shows 3849 radiocarbon dates from 803 sites.

selection area (rectangle, polygon) as GeoJSON files. The development version of the app, and connected functions, is stored on GitHub (<https://github.com/zoometh/neonet>) and enable contributions (<https://github.com/zoometh/neonet/blob/master/.github/CONTRIBUTING.md>). Finally, a web tutorial has also been created for the app and the dataset (<https://zoometh.github.io/neonet/>).

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COMPETING INTERESTS


The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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