Materials, Productions, Exchange Network and their Impact on the Societies of Neolithic Europe

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Foreword to the XVII UISPP Congress Proceedings Series Edition

Luiz Oosterbeek
Secretary-General

UISPP has a long history, starting with the old International Association of Anthropology and Archaeology, back in 1865, until the foundation of UISPP itself in Bern, in 1931, and its growing relevance after WWII, from the 1950's. We also became members of the International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences, associate of UNESCO, in 1955.

In its XIVth world congress in 2001, in Liège, UISPP started a reorganization process that was deepened in the congresses of Lisbon (2006) and Florianópolis (2011), leading to its current structure, solidly anchored in more than twenty-five international scientific commissions, each coordinating a major cluster of research within six major chapters: Historiography, methods and theories; Culture, economy and environments; Archaeology of specific environments; Art and culture; Technology and economy; Archaeology and societies.

The XVIIth world congress of 2014, in Burgos, with the strong support of Fundación Atapuerca and other institutions, involved over 1700 papers from almost 60 countries of all continents. The proceedings, edited in this series but also as special issues of specialized scientific journals, will remain as the most important outcome of the congress.

Research faces growing threats all over the planet, due to lack of funding, repressive behavior and other constraints. UISPP moves ahead in this context with a strictly scientific programme, focused on the origins and evolution of humans, without conceding any room to short term agendas that are not root in the interest of knowledge.

In the long run, which is the terrain of knowledge and science, not much will remain from the contextual political constraints, as severe or dramatic as they may be, but the new advances into understanding the human past and its cultural diversity will last, this being a relevant contribution for contemporary and future societies.

This is what UISPP is for, and this is also why we are currently engaged in contributing for the relaunching of Human Sciences in their relations with social and natural sciences, namely collaborating with the International Year of Global Understanding, in 2016, and with the World Conference of the Humanities, in 2017.

The next congress of UISPP, in Paris (2018), will confirm this route.

Foreword

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Scholars who will study the historiography of the European Neolithic, more particularly with regards to the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, will observe a progressive change in the core understanding of this period. For several decades the concept of 'culture' has been privileged and the adopted approach aimed to highlight the most significant markers likely to emphasise the character of a given culture and to stress its specificities, the foundations of its identity. In short, earlier research aimed primarily to highlight the differences between cultures by stressing the most distinctive features of each of them. The tendency was to differentiate, single out, and identify cultural boundaries. However, over the last few years this perspective has been universally challenged. Although regional originality and particularisms are still a focus of study, the research community is now interested in widely diffused markers, in medium-scale or large-scale circulation, and in interactions that make it possible to go beyond the traditional notion of 'archaeological culture'. The networks related to raw materials or finished products are currently leading us to re-think the history of Neolithic populations on a more general and more global scale. The aim is no longer to stress differences, but on the contrary to identify what links cultures together, what reaches beyond regionalism in order to try to uncover the underlying transcultural phenomena. From culturalism, we have moved on to its deconstruction. This is indeed a complete change in perspective. This new approach certainly owes a great deal to all kinds of methods, petrographic, metal, chemical and other analyses, combined with effective tools such as the GIS systems that provide a more accurate picture of the sources, exchanges or relays used by these groups. It is also true that behind the facts observed there are social organisations involving prospectors, extractors, craftsmen, distributors, sponsors, users, and recyclers. We therefore found it appropriate to organise a session on the theme 'Materials, productions, exchange networks and their impact on the societies of Neolithic Europe'.

How is it possible to identify the circulation of materials or of finished objects in Neolithic Europe, as well as the social networks involved? Several approaches exist for the researcher, and the present volume provides some examples.

Let us take the case of the white painted ware in the Early Neolithic of the Balkan Peninsula.

D. Stojanovski shows how several cultural groups exhibited this particular pottery decoration. However, according to D. Stojanovski, it is not very likely that such a technique would have been transmitted by migrants who carried with them the 'Neolithic package'. In this particular case we are instead dealing with a borrowing process adopted (or not) in various ways according to distinct factors: the attractiveness of its visual effect, traditions, needs, environmental context.

It is a known fact that obsidian is a perfect marker of exchange relationships across the Mediterranean basin throughout the Neolithic. T. Quero however points to differences with regards to these transfers, based on two examples in Italy. The first site, in Northern Sicily, near the lava flow of Lipari, is a place of obsidian redistribution throughout the Neolithic. This material is abundantly used, although the characteristics of production change over time: over-exploited nuclei generating mainly a flake industry during the Stentinello, rise of blade production by pressure during the Diana stage. At the

second site, in Northern Italy, far away from the sources of supply, the imported material is rare and has only exotic value.

D. Gheorghiu develops an original example stemming from the Chalcolithic period in South-East Europe. Here the elites display wealth by using valorised objects of allochthonous origin. The wealthy dead of the Varna cemetery, for example, are distinguished by an authentic 'package' of objects revealing a real ideology of prestige. This model, conveying both concepts of ideas and technical transfers, will be exported again towards peripheral cultures such as the Tripolje culture. When groups that settled at the margins were not able to acquire pieces from the source, they replace these original pieces with similar creations (skeuomorphs) that make it possible, through its productions, to maintain a hierarchic social model.

T. Orozco Köhler and L. Bernabeu Aubán provide some examples of circulation networks during the Neolithic on the Iberian Peninsula. They first emphasise the progress achieved with regard to the identification of sources of supply: flint mines of de Casa Montero (Madrid), open-air exploitations of Andalusian obsidian at Pico Centero (Huelva). Several axes of circulation are mentioned: shale bracelets in the south, amphibolite axes around Valencia, Sardinian obsidian brought to Catalonia. The authors highlight the variations affecting these networks in space and time. They also emphasise their possible superimposition. They demonstrate that these circulations were not restricted to the dissemination of objects but involved displacements of individuals within a context governed by social motivations (alliances, relationships between individuals).

The establishment of an agro-pastoral economy in the Alto Ribatejo, in the Centro region of Portugal, was studied by N. J. Almeida, C. Ferreira, S. Garcês, A. Cruz, P. Rosina, and L. Oosterbeek. The archaeological data demonstrates a great variety of situations in the distribution of the sites, depending on space and time. It is thought that this research can be improved by applying new methods likely to better reflect the reality of settlements throughout the Neolithic. After reviewing the evolution of the environmental setting under the effect of human pressure (opening of the landscape, fauna), the authors point to the impact of coastal arrivals, vehicles of the neolithisation dynamic, but also, in parallel, to the role of more continental areas which have their own specificity in the emergence of cultural productions.

M. P. Prieto Martinez and O. Lantes Suárez look at the example of pottery as an element which makes it possible to assess the existence of circulation networks in Galicia from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age. Based on the typology and on archaeometric analyses, these authors attempt to estimate the distance that separates sites of discovery from the elaboration space of the ceramics. This method proposes an alternative for the simple local/non-local alternative. The authors propose five models for this grid (ranging between 0 and more than 200 km), with the district scale (between 7 and 50 km) being the most frequent. This approach also provides a more appropriate picture of the true mobility of the groups (for example possible settlement instability during the Middle Neolithic).

An alternative way of analysing mobility is based on the technical analysis of the ornaments. The example cited by S. Viola, M. A. Bernabò Brea, D. Delcaro, F. Gonzato, C. Longhi, G. Gaj, R. Macellari, L. Salzani, A. Serges, I. Tirabassi, and M. Besse, refers to the stone ornaments of the Alpine Chalcolithic. The operational sequence of manufacturing, distinct technical details, and even use wear are all specific markers of an object during its displacements. These remains are also identifiers of the definition of territories and of cultural groups.

By giving preference to various aspects of raw material or finished product analyses, it is obvious how current research makes it possible to draw a more accurate and a more complex picture of the Neolithic circulation networks, as well as simultaneously producing a more balanced one of the distances covered at the time. The examples cited in this volume confirm that the first agricultural communities, through the establishment of networks of varying and sometimes contrasting scales, were authentic 'exchange-based societies'.