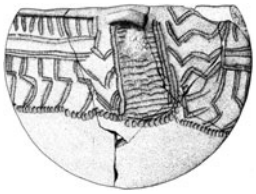
Book reviews

CLAIRE MANEN, THOMAS PERRIN & JEAN GUILAINE (ed.). *La transition néolithique en Méditerranée*. 464 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations, and tables. 2014. Arles: Errance; 978-2-87772-574-3 paperback €59.



This edited volume collates 25 chapters on the Neolithic transition across the Mediterranean basin. Around half of the papers are in French and half in English, and each is provided with a bilingual abstract. The volume is divided into three sections, with seven chapters on 'The Near-East change', eight on 'The diffusion by Cyprus, Eagean [sic] and Adriatic' (it seems to me that Cyprus should have been included in the first section, given the nature of the island's Neolithic transition), and ten chapters on 'The Western Mediterranean Neolithization'. Some of the papers have a thematic scope (e.g. botanical remains, DNA, zooarchaeology), but most focus on specific excavations, along with abundant—if perhaps old, in some cases—data from rescue excavations. There is a slight geographical imbalance, with four chapters dedicated to Syria but only one apiece to the evidence from Anatolia, the Adriatic and Africa, the latter exposing a significant gap given the increasing role that this continent plays in recent accounts of the Neolithic in the western Mediterranean (e.g. Chapter 22 by Manen). This imbalance and the relative over-representation of French authors are no doubt the result of the original conference format that gave rise to the book. These issues notwithstanding, this volume is a useful synthesis. The abundant and excellent colour illustrations, including charts, maps, photographs and drawings, are a particular asset.

It is impossible to review each chapter here; rather, I will make some general comments on the achievements of the authors and highlight some of questions raised. The editors provide no collective opening or closing summary of their views on the Neolithic transition or, indeed, whether or not the papers meet their original goals. There are, however, a few hints: the volume's structure, reflecting a geo-chronological approach to the emergence and expansion of the Neolithic; a brief, page-and-a-half introductory overview by Jean Guilaine; and the subtitle of the original conference, '*ou comment des chasseurs devinrent agriculteurs*' ['or how the hunters became farmers']. It turns out that this subtitle is potentially misleading and this may explain its omission from the book's title. The chapters in the first section present a richly nuanced panorama of dynamic and connected Mesolithic social formations spread across large areas of the Near East, Anatolia and Cyprus, where multiple and independent processes of plant and animal domestication occurred in gradual and complex ways. The chapters on the Aegean coast and mainland Greece also present recent research that shows an active population of Mesolithic seafarers who engaged in social networks spanning the Aegean islands, Anatolia, the Levantine coast and Cyprus, and the probable existence of a "centre of neolithization, comparable to the one on Cyprus" (Sampson, Chapter 12, p. 194). But beyond this point, with the notable exception of the work of Mulazzani in Tunisia (Chapter 25), there are no more hunter-gatherers to be found in this volume. Indeed, the remaining chapters suggest only an irrelevant Mesolithic presence, if not a complete absence (including Crete; Efstratiou, Chapter 11).

The key issue that the authors address is, in my view, most clearly formulated in relation to the Iberian Peninsula but still relevant to the other regions as well: "data do not support long-term transitional stages from foraging to farming nor local processes through piecemeal introduction of pottery and domesticates transforming the Mesolithic economic and subsistence system" (Fernández-López de Pablo, Chapter 21, p. 399). Bernabeu and Martí (Chapter 23, p. 425) continue: "if the expansion of the Neolithic followed a process of cultural diffusion, some degree of overlap between the Mesolithic and the earliest Neolithic features is to be expected at the same sites. Furthermore, such an overlap presumably would have enough chronological depth to be archaeologically visible. This would show the progressive acceptance of the various key elements". Since these expectations are not met, the authors assume colonisation to be a fact and hence an explanation for the Neolithic. And even when the authors feel that they have to give space to hunter-gatherers in their accounts of the Neolithic

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(e.g. Forenbaher & Miracle, Chapter 14), their only effective explanation is based on immigrant colonists, with indigenous foragers in marginal areas accepting the Neolithic way of life in a piecemeal fashion.

I have doubts, however. The Neolithic archaeological record in the western Mediterranean should fit those preconceptions if it were a mirror of life and the adoption of new material culture and practices were to be quickly reflected in it. But we can also hypothesise that these elements were structurally scarce with the effect of "their virtual invisibility in the archaeological record" (Cruz Berrocal 2012: 145). While relatively sudden changes in the Levant tend to be interpreted as a feature of the archaeological record—for example, Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen (Chapter 4, pp. 67–68) argue that the sudden appearance of pottery make it "likely that ceramics represent an addition to and replacement of [. . .] basketry"—in the western Mediterranean everything pertaining to the Neolithic is currently interpreted as the result of the actions of maritime colonists. But the 'strangeness' of these maritime pioneers is made clear in the chapters: their place of origin is impossible to determine (e.g. for the Cardial 'peoples' in the Iberian Peninsula, Perrin & Binder, Chapter 16). These colonists also had no preference for any environmental setting, although they liked to inhabit caves; they colonised coastal areas gradually but moved suddenly inland, deep into the interiors of Corsica, Sardinia and the Iberian Peninsula, for example. Indeed, they skipped available areas like Catalonia only to settle in the south of the Iberian Peninsula, or even on the Atlantic coast; they arrived in new lands and started to produce new styles of pottery (e.g. Adriatic Impressed Ware) or to create rock art following patterns that show both extensive and intensive knowledge of the seasonal resources and territory of the entire Mediterranean Iberian coast (Cruz Berrocal 2005). Upon their arrival in the Iberian Peninsula, they set up extensive networks of exchange, apparently reproducing Mesolithic networks (e.g. the blade and trapeze complex, Perrin & Binder, Chapter 16); and, finally, they continued to use elements of Mesolithic traditions (e.g. *Columbella rustica*; Grifoni Cremonesi & Radi, Chapter 15) and had virtually identical lithic industries to Mesolithic peoples (e.g. in northern Italy, Chapter 16), but no acknowledged interaction with them. To my mind, these are problematic aspects of the colonisation model that should not be downplayed in favour of what seems to me like an all-encompassing ethnographic analogy: pioneer colonisation. Having replaced the 'wave of advance' hypothesis and its explicatory mechanisms by this formal analogy, we are now lacking a plausible explanatory model to understand why all those pioneers should (or did) set off to colonise vast areas of the Mediterranean. This book provides a starting point from which to problematise these questions.

References

Cruz Berrocal, M. 2005. *Paisaje y arte rupestre. Patrones de localización de la pintura levantina* (British Archaeological Reports international series 1409). Oxford: Archaeopress.

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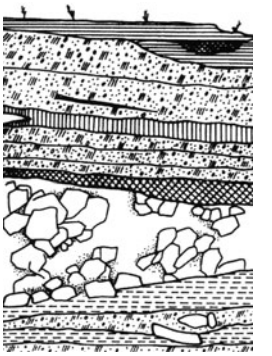
Nikos Efstratiou, Alexandra Karetsou & Maria Ntinou (ed.). *The Neolithic settlement of Knossos in Crete: new evidence for the early occupation of Crete and the Aegean Islands* (Prehistory Monographs 42). xxiv+217 pages, 84 b&w illustrations and 1 colour illustration, 45 tables, 2013. Philadelphia (PA): INSTAP Academic; 978-1-931534-72-7 hardback £55.



This volume chronicles a rescue excavation undertaken in 1997 in the Central Court of the Minoan Palace at Knossos. Over just 5 weeks, a single 3 × 2m trench was dug down to bedrock at a depth of 8m (the trench was reduced to 1.5 × 1.5m below 4.5m depth). That such a significant and high-quality volume stems from such a small excavation bears testimony to the seriousness and commitment with which Nikos Efstratiou and his team approached this work and their realisation of its importance for our understanding of Neolithic Knossos and the Neolithic in the Aegean more widely.

Knossos is most famous as the site of the largest and most impressive of the Minoan palaces. Its Neolithic occupation, dating back to 7000 BC, is much less well known, not least because of the

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