
For Whom the Bell Tolls: Social Hierarchy vs Social Integration in the Bell Beaker Culture of Southern France (Third Millennium BC)

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The development of social hierarchy during the European Late Neolithic and Bronze Age is often taken for granted in the literature. The Bell Beaker culture has been given a primary role in this picture as it would correspond to the large-scale diffusion of prestige goods and associated individualistic values. On the basis of the French Midi sequence, this article seeks to demonstrate that the prestige model rests upon a simplistic and abstract perception of the data. Rather than the climax of social competition, the Bell Beaker culture marks the building of new fluid social networks which allowed better circulation of knowledge and people.

Stratified we stand

Few, if any, archaeologists would deny that the Bronze Age marks a crucial stage in the evolution of social organization in past European communities. From Childe (1925) to Harding (2000), these transformations are generally understood as a qualitative jump best expressed by the loose but widespread concept of 'chiefdom'. To put it crudely, the Bronze Age marks the passage from the gentle Neolithic farmer to the grasping 'Protohistoric prince' (after Ruby 1999).

An extensive body of data demonstrates the over-simplified dimension of this last proposition. Neolithic communities did not live in an egalitarian paradise but were from the start embedded in complex strategies of power and competition. For instance, the late stage of the Linearbandkeramik culture in western and central Europe witnesses sharp modifications in the social order, as seen in several facets of the archaeological record, patterns of growing inter-village specialization (e.g. Keeley & Cahen 1989; Lüning 1998), frequent inclusion of prestige items such as long adzes in tombs (Jeunesse 1997), direct evidence of violent conflict (e.g. the mass burial at Herxheim, where some 300 human skulls were thrown into two concentric ditches: Lontcho 1998; see also Cauwe 2001, 101–2). Likewise, during the late sixth and early fifth millennium BC, green jadeite axes were distributed from the

western fringes of the Alps as far as northern Scotland and the Baltic shores of Germany (Cassen & Pétrequin 1997; Pétrequin *et al.* 1997), a large economic network equalled in prehistory only by the circulation of metals during the Bronze Age (e.g. Pare 2000). This short list of examples could of course be easily and almost indefinitely extended for other periods and areas of the European Neolithic. Nevertheless, the end of the Neolithic is recurrently quoted as the climax of these tendencies of social structuration, in what appears to be a prelude to the Bronze Age.

In this perspective, the Beaker cultures — to use the Continental terminology Corded Ware (German *Schnurkeramik*) and Bell Beaker cultures (German *Glockenbecherkultur*, French *culture campaniforme* Fig. 1) — that cover most of Europe during the third millennium BC play a significant role in the literature. Both cultures, at least in northern and central Europe, are characterized by the widespread use of individual burial, generally seen as the most salient expression of a new social order centred on the individual rather than the community. This reading only finds its *raison d'être* in comparison to the preceding periods, during which collective burials were generally favoured:

the implication of the single burial might be that the end of the Neolithic saw the emergence of a kind of person 'just like us': a self-contained, decision-making entity who exists in a state of recipro-



Figure 1. *Distribution of the Bell Beaker phenomenon.*

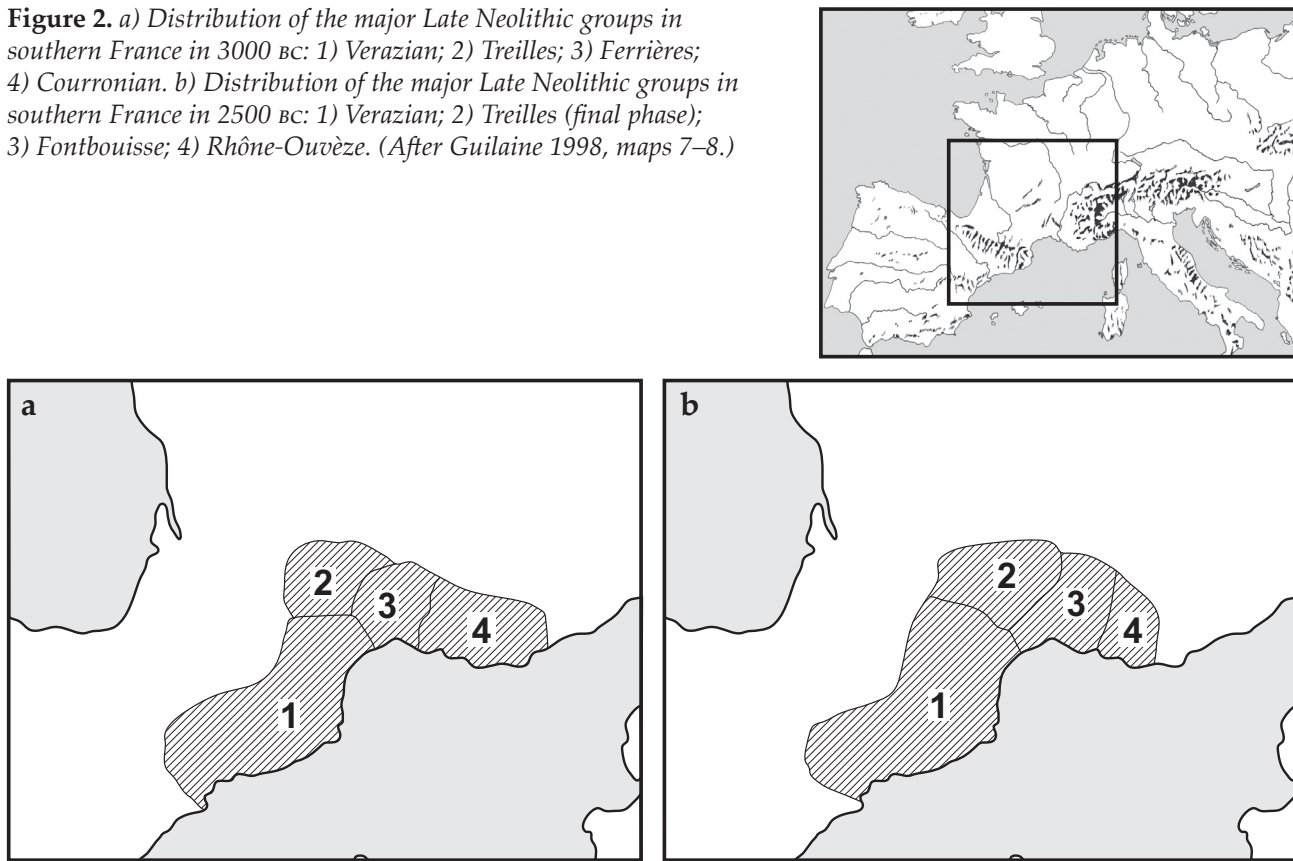
cal independence from his or her contemporaries. Now of course, this is a modern Western notion of individuality, and if we were to view later Neolithic and early Bronze Age mortuary practices in isolation, we might not be tempted to think of any such thing. But simply because corporate burial, which has been connected with a communal focus for society, declined in later Neolithic, it is easy to conclude that the new pattern was concerned with ‘individuality’ (Thomas 1999, 155).

This particular perception is not, however, without difficulty, as it assumes a strict equivalence between the world of the living and that of the dead. Furthermore, this line of reasoning singles out one specific

practice, individual burial, because of putative social implications, leaving aside the other dimensions of both Corded Ware and Bell Beaker mortuary practices which are worth exploring, especially gender differentiation and cosmological references. Alternatively, individual burial can be considered as a necessary component of a larger system that assigns specific identities to the dead (Vander Linden 2003). Notwithstanding these difficulties, this social perception of both archaeological cultures remains the current mainstream interpretation. As far as the Bell Beaker culture is concerned, the early work of Stephen Shennan remains a cornerstone (Shennan 1976; 1977; 1978; 1986; see also Burgess & Shennan 1976; Clarke 1976). Drawing on Bohemian data, Shennan first showed that Bell Beaker assemblages were not coherent except in funeral contexts, in this case composed of a restricted set of artefacts (bell beaker, arrowheads, stone archer wrist-guards and V-buttons). Then, because of its recurrence, Shennan interpreted this ‘Beaker package’ as the sole ‘true’ Bell Beaker element and interpreted it as a series of prestige goods, the material translation of a Bell Beaker ethos, an ideology based on individualistic and warlike values promoted by the emergent social élites in order to reinforce their new-born power.

Both theoretical and factual objections to this model have been raised. On the one hand, this theory and the adaptations which followed have been criticized on methodological grounds because of the discrepancies between the original ethnographical analogies and their subsequent archaeological uses (Brodie 1994). On the other hand, petrological analyses have consistently shown, throughout Europe, that bell beakers are, except for a few non-diagnostic instances, made of locally available raw materials (e.g. Millán & Arribas 1994; Parker Pearson 1995; Convertini & Quéré 1998), with a similar pattern being recorded for lithics (e.g. Clautre & Mazière 1998; Orozco-Köhler *et al.* 2001). Lastly, if the Beaker package is an archaeological reality in central Europe, it is not

Figure 2. a) Distribution of the major Late Neolithic groups in southern France in 3000 bc: 1) Verazian; 2) Treilles; 3) Ferrières; 4) Courronian. b) Distribution of the major Late Neolithic groups in southern France in 2500 bc: 1) Verazian; 2) Treilles (final phase); 3) Fontbouisse; 4) Rhône-Ouvèze. (After Guilaine 1998, maps 7–8.)



obvious whether or not the same applies for other regions, like France (Salanova 1998) or the British Isles (Brodie 1997; 1998), not to mention areas where collective burial remains the rule (western and southern France: L'Helgouach 2001; Guilaine *et al.* 2001; Italy: Nicolis & Mottes 1998; Iberian Peninsula: Leitao *et al.* 1984; Blasco *et al.* 1994; Rodriguez Casal 2001). Despite these major limitations, the prestige model remains fashionable and subject to numerous theoretical refinements and local adjustments (e.g. Thomas 1996; Garrido Pena 1997; 2000; Tusa 2001). Likewise, recent papers addressing new interpretative themes in Beaker studies generally do not question the broad validity of the social interpretation of this period (see for instance Last 1998, 46; Vandkilde 2001).

The principal failure of these theories is the minimization of the role of the various Late Neolithic substrata in the process of the inception of social hierarchy. Although the need to root Bell Beaker studies in a better understanding of the previous cultural and social situation has been stressed for nearly three decades (Gallay 1976), relatively little attention has been given to this problem. According to the prestige model, the exoticism of the Beaker package seems to have a strong appeal to local Late Neolithic cultures, thus

giving the false impression that they required these goods. The model also implies that local communities were all at a roughly similar stage of social development, a view which is assumed rather than factually argued. Moreover, the way the Beaker package, and the practices it entailed, was appropriated by Late Neolithic local groups has never really been studied. In this sense, the prestige model, which was initially developed as a response to the material variability manifested by the Bell Beaker culture, ultimately leads to the building of another homogeneous perception of this archaeological phenomenon, set in social rather than cultural terms.

Here is not the place to review the entire European evidence regarding the Corded Ware culture or the Bell Beaker culture and its numerous substrata (see Vander Linden 2006). Rather the examination of a specific case study is helpful to investigate the limitations of the current interpretive model and to build an alternative understanding of the Bell Beaker culture. The southern French data provide a good laboratory for such enquiry since the documentation is extensive in both quantitative and qualitative terms, in contrast to many other parts of the Bell Beaker culture where funeral sites constitute the bulk of the data.

Competing during the Late Neolithic of southern France

The southern French Mediterranean coastal zone displays impressive ecological diversity, with limestone plateaus (French *causses*), alluvial plains, as in the Rhône valley, and rocky zones on the margins of the Alps and the Pyrenees. This ecological diversity finds its direct counterpart in the cultural geography of the Late Neolithic. After the collapse of the Chassean culture which covered most of contemporary France from 4500 to 3500 BC, we observe a multiplicity of small-scale archaeological cultures, which are primarily defined on the basis of ceramics (Gascó & Guthertz 1986; Vaquer 1990; Guthertz & Jallot 1995; Fig. 2). Demographic pressure has sometimes been invoked to explain this fragmented pattern (Mills 1983; see Hodder 1979), but here we will focus rather on the social outcomes of this phenomenon. If the simplistic equation between pots and people cannot be sustained, several elements suggest that we are faced with a scatter of human communities set in constant social tensions. Related processes are seen in the neighbouring northeast part of the Iberian Peninsula but are not dealt with here (see Martin Còlliga 2001).

With some 300 radiocarbon dates, of which 216 are reliable (Guilaine *et al.* 2001), the absolute chronology of the Late/Final Neolithic in the French Midi is fairly secure. The most important element is the strict contemporaneity of several archaeological cultures; for instance the Saint-Ponian, the Gourgasian groups and the early phases of the Véraza culture all occur between 3400/3300 and 2700/2600 BC, as do the Fraischamp and the Roquemengarde groups. Likewise, the Couronnian and the classical phases of the Véraza culture are synchronic, lasting from 2900 BC to 2600/2500 BC. The Bell Beaker culture in the region does not alter this situation, as it is contemporaneous with the Fontbousse culture, although several Fontbousse stratigraphic layers lie below Bell Beaker levels (for instance Congénies-Grange de Jaulmes and Caissargues-Le Moulin Villard, both in the Gard department: Guilaine *et al.* 2001). The slightly older date of the Fontbousse culture is also reflected by radiocarbon evidence, with the Fontbousse starting around 2600 BC and continuing until 2300 BC (based on 21 reliable dates: Guilaine *et al.* 2001), while the Bell Beaker culture lays between 2500 and 2200 BC (eight reliable dates: Guilaine *et al.* 2001).

Given the large amount of available data, it is not possible here to review extensively the cultural mosaics of the Late Neolithic Midi (see Gascó & Guthertz 1986; Vaquer 1990; 1998a; D'Anna 1995; Guthertz &

Jallot 1995). Thus, as synthetic and biased as the following presentation may appear, its purpose is to offer a reliable sketch of the cultural and social situation prior to the introduction of Bell Beaker traits into the area, as it is the factors that could have led these communities to look elsewhere for any novelty.

Subsistence techniques are closely related to ecological niches and thus display a mixed character. For instance, cereals are important in the diet in the Véraza culture, while stockbreeding varies from one region to another (ovicaprids in calcareous zones, cattle and pigs of approximately equal importance in the plains: Vaquer 1998a, 441–5). Similarly, in the Treilles, Ferrières and Fontbousse groups, agriculture and stockbreeding are the main means of subsistence, with hunting and fishing of secondary importance (Vaquer 1998a, 445–56; Carrère & Forest 2003).

Pottery exhibits, on the one hand, a small morphological repertoire and, on the other hand, an impressive decorative variety with plastic (ribbon, appliqué and other) and incised motifs. Besides the multiplicity of ceramic styles mentioned above, there are several inter-regional discrepancies within single archaeological cultures. For example, the Ferrières group (3200–2800 BC: Vaquer 1998a, 448–52), a particularly dynamic entity centred in eastern Languedoc influencing the whole Midi as well as other regions, can be subdivided into three major focal regions on the basis of respective frequencies of plastic and incised ceramic decoration (on the Ferrières impact on eastern France see Pétrequin 1998a): a first area lies in the Causses, with mainly plastic decoration, a second one in the Ardèche with both plastic or incised motives, and a third, between these two, with a preference for incised decoration (Giligny & Salanova 1997). Likewise, the later Fontbousse group, attested in the Gard, Hérault, Ardèche and eastern Causses (Vaquer 1998a, 452–6), can also be divided in three zones: sites from the Hérault and Causses have yielded ceramics ornamented by specific plastic decorations, the central facies is characterized by rich incised motives, while sites from Ardèche lack plastic elements. Regional diversity seems to have developed since Ferrières times (Giligny & Salanova 1997). Although these typological refinements may appear somewhat overstated in some instances, the general pattern of fragmentation remains obvious. Furthermore, as work on intra-group variation suggests, the circulation of typological traits is, in several cases, very important but always of restricted geographical extent (e.g. Jallot 2003).

The main technological innovation of this period is metallurgy. With regard to extraction, production and use of both copper and gold, the earliest metallur-

gical occurrences belong to the transition between the fourth and third millennium BC (Eluère 1977; Ambert & Carozza 1998; Guilaine & Eluère 1998; Ambert 2001). Copper mines are known in Cabrières and Saint-Véran (Ambert & Carozza 1998; Carozza 2000). Beads, awls, flat axes and daggers are produced. The latter reproduce prototypes from the Remedello culture in the Pô plain (Ambert & Carozza 1998). A general preference for weapons is also discerned in the morphological variability of arrowheads.

Further elements reinforce the impression of social violence. Dry-stone wall architecture is well developed in the French Midi during the Late Neolithic. The Fontbouisse culture alone includes around 200 open-air settlements. Structures of ovoid and apsidal shape are generally joined side by side, with no apparent planning. Enclosures are also known and generally located on hill-tops (La Croix Vieille at Montblanc, Hérault: Espérou & Roques 1994; Mourral-Millegrand at Trèbes, Aude: Vaquer 1998b; Vaquer *et al.* 2000). Even if their defensive function cannot be denied in some cases (e.g. Puech-Haut, Paulhan, Hérault: Vignaud & Carozza 2000), this interpretation is sometimes doubtful because of the reduced size of the walls and the sites themselves, which bear no comparison with the contemporaneous 'fortresses' of Zambujal, Leceia or Los Millares in the Iberian Peninsula (e.g. Sangmeister & Schubart 1981; Oosterbeek 1997). It has therefore been suggested that these enclosures were not utilitarian buildings but rather built for ostentation (Gutherz & Jallot 1995). In this last hypothesis, it must however be noted that the choice of the architectural form is significant: war could have been as much a factual reality as an ideological component.

Another characteristic of the Late Neolithic is the simultaneous development of megalithic architecture and collective burial (Chambon 2000; 2003). Other practices are recorded, such as individual burials (e.g. Resplandy cave, attributed to the Saint-Ponian group: Vaquer 1998a, 437–41) and increasing cremations during later phases (for example, the dolmen of San Sébastien, Plan-de-la-Tour, Var; cave of La Baume des Maures, La-Garde-Freinet, Var: Coularou *et al.* 1982; Chambon 2003). The label 'collective burial' actually includes several ways of dealing with the dead and their remains. Whichever archaeological culture is taken into consideration, collective burials are located in diverse places such as settlements (Les Vautes: Colomer & Galant 2003), caves (Trou de Viviers, Narbonne, Aude; Can-Pey cave, Pyrénées-Orientales, with at least 58 individuals: Bahn 1983) and megaliths (with various types of dolmens sometimes inserted in barrows: Duday 1980; Vaquer 1998a, 443–4).

Megalithic architectural traditions present a strictly local character that reinforces the overall variability (Chevalier 1986).

Funerary populations are often substantial (Chambon 2003, 327–30), ranging from a dozen to hundreds of dead in several layers (as at the hypogeum of Roaix, Vaucluse: Bouville 1980). Yet, gathering multiple corpses within a closed tomb does not explain the variety of treatments encountered (including secondary burials, *réductions de corps*, and manipulations and creations of piles of bones). In-depth taphonomic investigations illustrate that collective graves result from several practices, the purpose of which is not merely to gain physical space in tombs. For instance, the final level of the Aven de La Boucle (Corconne, Gard: Duday 1980) has yielded the unburied remains of 26 adults of both sexes and of just four children. Despite the absence of anatomic connections and the presence of arrangements of skull and long bones alongside the sides of the cave, these were primary graves, as indicated by the discovery of the egg of an intestinal parasite (Duday & Hérouin 2000). Similarly, non-manipulated remains do not necessarily correspond to the last dead bodies deposited in the funerary structure. In the hypogeum of Sarriens (Vaucluse), articulated skeletons of more than 80 individuals were surmounted by large quantities of disarticulated human remains (Mahieu 1987). If grave goods tend to be rare, they become common during the Fontbouisse phase, with deposits of pottery, ornaments, weapons or tools (Vaquer 1998a, 455).

A last feature of mortuary practices is the presence of bones with traces of wounds caused by copper and stone weapons (Guilaine & Zammit 2001, 198–201). Wounds are located on almost every part of the skeleton: rib, vertebra, leg, arm, pelvis and head. Although arrowheads are the most common type of weapon observed, others have been used: in the cave burial of Baumes-Chaudes (Lozère), for a total funeral population of between 300 and 400 individuals, there are 17 records of wounds caused by arrowheads, plus a copper dagger stabbed into a thorax (Guilaine & Zammit 2001, 196–7).

Another novelty of the Late Neolithic is anthropomorphic art, present in all the aforementioned cultures (Arnal 1986; D'Anna *et al.* 1995). These are most often stone-engraved representations, with a few instances of paint. These statues are of simple shape, hence the label 'statue-menhir', with engravings depicting men or women with a series of attributes. Statues-menhirs from the Rouergue region, assigned to the Treilles group, are distinguished by the particular care attached to the representation of costumes,

and by the frequent presence of pendant-daggers, of shoulder belts, sometimes of bows and arrows for male figures, and of necklaces and pendants for the females (D'Anna *et al.* 1995; Peeters 2005). Two arguments suggest that statue-menhirs are linked, in one way or another, to the world of the dead. First, statues are sometimes placed in funeral structures (e.g. at Cazarils, Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche, Serre de Bouisset, Saint-Martin-de-Londres and Ferrières-les-Verreries: D'Anna *et al.* 1995). Second, the representation of the human body shares some characteristics of the physical management of bodies in the grave (van Berg & Cauwe 1995). In both cases, the human body consists of a sum of parts which could be re-ordered in almost any way. It is not unusual for the arms not to be inserted at the shoulders but rather above the head, or for the legs to be directly attached to the belt. Similarly, the face is often only depicted by a single trait that, in some cases, can also represent the arms.

One final element of the Late Neolithic of southern France must be considered, the problem of body ornaments. In contrast to previous periods, ornaments play a central role in the definition and display of social identities in this region (Barge 1982), as well as in neighbouring ones, especially eastern France (Maréchal *et al.* 1998; Pétrequin 1998b). The ornaments are characterized by impressive variability, especially in the Vézère and Ferrières cultures, and by a gradual increase in their frequency during the first third of the third millennium BC (Barge 1982, 190–99). Many materials are used, including animal teeth (particularly of deer and bear) and antler (formed into pendants and so-called 'idols'). The variety of beads and buttons should also be noted. The Fontbousse culture marks the climax of these traditions, with no fewer than 50 recognized types (shells, perforated teeth, pendants with 'wings' solely in funeral context, V-perforated buttons, beads, etc.).

All these elements confirm the general pattern suggested by the traditional classification of archaeological cultures: the southern French Neolithic is crisscrossed by a series of communities that constantly compete against each other through various means. The first argument surely is the frequency of evidence of violence on human bones. Although the number of recorded instances of violence is fairly low in comparison to the large-scale funerary samples, it remains higher than for any other local Neolithic culture, especially the Bell Beaker phase (see below). Second, the multiplicity and variety of weapons, as well as their success in the new metallurgical repertoire, confirms that violence played an active role in strategies of social competition that characterized the Late Neolithic. The same holds for the development

of defensive architecture, whether or not these were effective and/or ostentatious buildings. In any case, they contributed to the social character of the group, as surely did megalithic tombs. Indeed, the rise of megalithic architecture and parallel development of collective burials should not be seen in terms of an egalitarian ethos but rather as a deliberate expression of social identity through reference to the dead. Lastly, it is noteworthy that identity display is not confined to communal strategies. Body ornaments are indeed characterized not only by impressive inter-group variability but also by great intra-group variability, suggesting that social competition also occurred at the level of the individual.

From this perspective, we may reconsider the multiplication of ceramic traditions. The small-scale distribution of pottery traditions tells us something about the structure of the societies under consideration here. According to Hodder, this pattern not only reflects the restricted movements of pots, but more fundamentally reflects the competition between groups struggling for available resources (Hodder 1979). Although his emphasis on the driving role of economic pressure could be minimized because of the variety of subsistence techniques encountered, this reading is worth exploring. The dispersal of ceramic styles might actually be related to many kinds of behaviour, some of them quite mundane (for instance Vander Linden 2001), while their persistence is first of all a function of horizontal and vertical modalities of knowledge transmission (Gosselain 2000; 2002; Shennan 2000). For instance, it is interesting that Ferrières typological traits are transferred northwards to the Jura indicating, with other evidence, patterns of human mobility (Pétrequin 1996; 1998a; Pétrequin *et al.* 1998). At the same time, despite their evident impact on the creation of the Fontbousse culture (e.g. the problem of the recently-defined style of Les Vautes: Jallot 2003), their distribution is relatively confined in the Midi. The contrast between the distribution of the Ferrières tradition outside and inside the Midi and the limited distribution of ceramic styles in the Late Neolithic of southern France indicate the restricted diffusion of pots, forms, decorative motifs and required know-how. This situation can hardly be understood without reference to the people eventually responsible for the setting of these differences, that is potters. From this perspective, restricted distribution of typological traits is likely to mirror the poor circulation of craftsmen, possibly as part of (among other things) post-marital residence rules. This tentative proposition fits well with other evidence, reviewed here for the role of competition in the social life of these communities.

New pots, new societies?

Although the Bell Beaker culture has been known for more than a century in southern France, the last two decades have witnessed an impressive increase in the available evidence, especially in southeastern France thanks to major rescue projects (e.g. Lemerrier 1998; 2000; 2004). This improvement is seen particularly in settlement archaeology, with some 270 sites listed in Provence and a strong presence all along the Mediterranean coast (up-to-date gazetteer available in Guilaine *et al.* 2001; Languedoc: Mills 1983; Gard: Bazile 1969; Roger 1995; Provence: Lemerrier 2001). On the other hand, in southwestern France, finds are limited to V-buttons (Bahn 1983) and potsherds in megaliths (e.g. the dolmens of Finelles, of Gare, of Bruniquel, of La Veyrie and of Durelle, Tarn-et-Garonne: Guichard 1972). This absence of sites is particularly evident in the Grands Causses and is likely to be connected to the access to rich sources of copper implements which would have allowed the Treilles communities to remain on the margins of the Bell Beaker network (Costantini 1984; see below). Likewise, the Bell Beaker culture is almost absent from the Gard, Ardèche and Hérault departments, which are the nuclear zone of the Fontbousse culture (Guilaine *et al.* 2001). The eastern Pyrénées are also marked by a deficit in Bell Beaker sites (only ten domestic settlements and ten funeral sites are known: Claustre & Mazière 1998).

Numerous arguments prove the co-existence of the Bell Beaker culture with local cultures, especially the Fontbousse, Véraza, Couronnian and Rhône-Ouvèze groups (Guilaine *et al.* 2001). Some sites have yielded Bell Beaker items in other cultural contexts (e.g. the individual grave of Forcalquier-La Fare set in a Couronnian settlement: Müller & Lemerrier 1994; the site of Donzère-Grotte de la Chauve-Souris, Drôme: Vital 2001). Likewise, Late Neolithic non-Bell Beaker artefacts are also sometimes found at Bell Beaker sites (such as the discovery of two Fontbousse vases in the Bell Beaker settlement of Saint-Côme-et-Maruéjols-Bois Sacré: Roudil *et al.* 1969).

The subsistence economy does not undergo any dramatic change, with local adaptation to ecological niches featuring strongly: cereal agriculture is variously associated with stockbreeding (ovicaprids, bovids and pigs). For Lemerrier, the preferred location of domestic Bell Beaker sites in the alluvial plains of Provence could be related to a greater dependency on agriculture than is traditionally acknowledged (Lemerrier 2000). Faunal assemblages are often dominated by ovicaprids (goats and sheep), suggesting a pastoral way of life, e.g. at the site of Grotte Murée

(Courtin 1974, 288–90). However, the faunal record from Saint-Côme-et-Maruéjols (Gard: Poulain 1974) was dominated by bovids, with a low percentage of immature individuals. Horse bones are fairly frequent (La Balance, Avignon, Vaucluse; Les Calades, Orgon, Bouches-du-Rhône; Saint-Côme-et-Maruéjols, Gard: Poulain 1974; Vaquer 1998a, 464).

Bell Beaker copper items are rare and mostly derived from Late Neolithic prototypes (such as beads, awls and flat axes: Vaquer 1998a, 460; Ambert & Carozza 1998; Ambert 2001; Guilaine *et al.* 2001). Yet the practice of metallurgy is attested in Bell Beaker contexts (for instance in the discovery of copper slag on the site of Travers des Fourches: Vaquer 1998a, 464), and some restricted types are peculiar to this culture, especially Palmela points. These are distributed throughout the southern Bell Beaker area, from the Iberian Peninsula to southern and western France (for instance cave of Saint-Vérédème, Sanilhac, Gard: Vignerot 1981; Beyneix & Humbert 1996; Briard & Roussot-Laroque 2002).

Continuity is also obvious in the settlement pattern. Open-air (e.g. Saint-Côme et Maruéjols, Gard: Roudil *et al.* 1969; 1974; La Balance, Avignon: Courtin 1974, 258–66), cave (Donzère-Grotte de la Chauve-Souris, Drôme: Vital 2001), stone-built (e.g. Les Calades, Orgon, Bouches-du-Rhône: Barge 1986) and fortified settlements are featured. Both reused (Le Mourral, Trèbes, Aude: Vaquer 1998b; Vaquer *et al.* 2000) and new fortified sites are known (Ornaisons Médor, Aude: Guilaine *et al.* 1989a,b; Le Camp de Laure, Le Rove, Bouches-du-Rhône: Vaquer 1998a, 464).

Pottery has often been emphasized in the interpretations put forward. Since Guilaine's seminal study (Guilaine 1967) on the basis of ceramic typology, the French Midi Bell Beaker culture has been subdivided in three or four successive phases, drawing on van der Waals and Glasbergen's classification of the Dutch material (van der Waals & Glasbergen 1955). The first phase thus encompasses maritime and All-Over-Ornamented (hereafter AOO) bell beakers, common throughout the Bell Beaker culture, while later phases correspond to local pottery styles, which are believed to be the result of the assimilation of Bell Beaker technological and ornamental traditions by local potters. Not only would the typological difference express chronological sequencing but also specific social processes (D'Anna 1995; Lemerrier 2004). Drawing on the prestige model, the appearance of maritime beakers is seen as the introduction of prestige items of a still novel nature into the networks of inter-group social competition characteristic of the

former Late Neolithic. This seems to be confirmed by their overwhelming presence in funerary contexts, assumed implicitly to be the most likely locus of social distinction. However, the chronological value of this typological framework is far from established. The six available dates clearly associated with putative early material are distributed haphazardly in comparison to the other dates (Guilaine *et al.* 2001). It must however be noted that these difficulties are largely related to the numerous wiggles of the ^{14}C calibration curve for the third millennium BC (Voruz 1995; Raetzl-Fabian 2001), as well as to the large standard deviations of several dates. Furthermore, many sites have yielded maritime beaker sherds in association with local styles, suggesting that, if maritime beakers are on average older, they remained in use throughout the sequence (for complete review of this evidence in France, see Roussot-Laroque 1990 and Salanova 1998; 2000).

As regards local styles, French archaeologists generally distinguish between the Pyrenean style in the west and the Provençal in the east (e.g. Guilaine 1976; 1984). The validity of this typological difference is dubious as it rests only upon the frequencies of incised and comb-impressed triangles respectively (Giligny & Salanova 1997). In fact, compared with that of the Late Neolithic, southern French Bell Beaker pottery is fairly homogeneous. In the Pyrénées and Languedoc-Roussillon, impression remains the preferred decorative technique: incision, modelling and perforation are also known (Salanova 2000, 111–15, 125–7). This pattern of stylistic homogeneity is more evident when considered from the perspective of the design of decorative patterns. While maritime and AOO styles use a fairly simple geometry, exclusively based on translation and symmetry, Pyrenean and Provençal sites use a larger range of geometrical transformations, including rotations and reflections, and avoid symmetries between decorative registers (Giligny & Salanova 1997). This ceramic homogeneity can also be observed in the morphological repertoire of coarse wares, which presents only a few analogies with earlier cultures and with the central European Begleitkeramik (Gallay 1979; 1986; Besse 1996a,b; 2003).

At first sight, Bell Beaker mortuary practices mirror those of the Late Neolithic and contradict the impression of spatial homogeneity which results from the analysis of the material culture. Individual burials are rare, with fewer than ten examples in the entire Midi (e.g. La Haillade in Bartrès, Hautes-Pyrénées; the mound of the Gendarme in Plan d'Aups, Var: Vaquer 1998a, 464–5). Of particular interest is the site of La Fare (Forcalquier, Alpes-de-Haute-Provence: Müller & Lemerrier 1994), which has yielded an in-

dividual burial in a pit set in a domestic Couronnian settlement. An adult male was buried on his left side, head towards the north facing east, according to the classic Bell Beaker funerary rules of central Europe (e.g. Strahm 1995). The grave goods consisted of three vessels, including a beaker, and a copper dagger.

Otherwise, mortuary practices are dominated by the re-use of megaliths and, concomitantly, by collective burials. As in the Late Neolithic, graves are found in caves (for Pyrénées-Orientales see Claustre & Mazière 1998), hypogea (Courtin 1974, 266–8; Vaquer 1998a, 464–5) and dolmens, the latter sometimes being built during the Bell Beaker phase (e.g. Gour de l'Estang, Chandolas, Ardèche: Cauvin 1965). Likewise, complex procedures of body treatment are recorded in graves (e.g. Villedubert, Aude: Duday 1980), making it difficult to distinguish several inhumation phases. The more systematic inclusion of grave goods is the sole element that points to a partial discontinuity (Chambon 2003). Although grave goods occur in the Fontbousse culture, Bell Beaker funerary customs differ greatly in the placing of standardized items, primarily the bell beaker itself (often of maritime type), copper daggers, Palmela points and body ornaments, leading to a superficial blurring of the heterogeneity of the other mortuary practices.

While ornaments played a crucial role in marking clear-cut personal and group identities during the Late Neolithic, the Bell Beaker culture marks a radical shift in body ornament procedures and techniques of self-presentation. In contrast to the impressive variety of beads, animal teeth and other materials previously favoured, people now use a more restricted range of ornaments, of which the V-perforated button, made of bone, stone, calcareous or amber, is the best known (Courtin 1974, 279–85; Barge 1982, 170–75; Gardin 1998). Although some other types are recognized, such as perforated shells (Barge 1982, 190–99), there is an overall decrease in types of ornaments. This process anticipates the Early Bronze Age, which is characterized by the exclusive use of pins.

Social prestige or social integration?

The Late Neolithic–Bell Beaker sequence has comprehensively been characterized as a perfect case-study of the prestige model:

Throughout the evolution of the Late Neolithic, there is no obvious break, but the progressive appearance (...) of non-functional items for which the notion of prestige items must be evoked: multiplication of ornament types, arrowheads, long flint blades, long polished flint daggers, decorated ceramics and the

contemporary presence of different groups (...), first metal objects. This 'prestige' is also indicated in other domains (...): the development of anthropomorphic art, megalithic tombs and enclosures. The introduction of Bell Beaker ceramics and associated objects represents the continuity of this process but cannot be considered as its outcome. The Bell Beaker culture probably did not spread by itself in Provence but corresponded, in a way, to a demand (D'Anna 1995, 280, Vander Linden's translation).

If this interpretation of the Late Neolithic of the French Midi rests upon a solid body of evidence, the same is far from true for the prestige reading of the Bell Beaker culture. If continuities observed in the fields of subsistence techniques or settlement patterns fit this general schema well, several elements nevertheless suggest that the Bell Beaker culture represents more than continuity and has an historical trajectory of its own.

Direct and indirect evidence of inter-group conflicts speaks for itself for the Late Neolithic; this evidence includes the development of strong individual and communal identity markers (ornaments, collective megalithic tombs) as well as actual traces of violence. It is however somewhat paradoxical for the prestige perspective that the atmosphere of conflict does not reach its climax during the following Bell Beaker culture. To the contrary, several elements simply disappear, the most obvious example being wounds on skeletons (Guilaine & Zammit 2001). Likewise, diversity in body ornaments and weapons is replaced by homogeneity, the marking of identity, in particular of warrior status, now passing through communally shared codes rather than individually distinctive ostentatious behaviour.

Another failure of the prestige model lies in the lack of a viable explanation for the subsequent development of local Bell Beaker groups that present a clear identity, not only with respect to contemporary European Bell Beaker regions but primarily with respect to the remaining groups of the Late Neolithic tradition. This geographic and cultural coexistence could suggest that prestige items were not taken up everywhere, but the underlying reasons for these supposed varied strategies have never been clearly stated. Only for the Grands Causses has it been suggested that the availability of copper minerals allowed local populations to remain outside of the Bell Beaker network, here considered as a group of emergent ranked polities (Costantini 1984). However, given the scarcity of copper finds in the southern French Bell Beaker culture, it is tempting to consider that the situation was the reverse, with Bell beaker communities being excluded from copper circulation (which would hardly

be a new process, as the same restriction occurred for the groups located in the Paris Basin a few centuries before: Mille & Bouquet 2004).

Furthermore, according to those who promote the prestige model (e.g. Lemerrier 1998; 2004), after an initial phase characterized by the introduction of maritime bell beakers, the Bell Beaker culture would simply have become an archaeological culture in itself, with its own characteristic pottery decoration and morphology. Cycles of social emulation, eventually leading to the wider democratization and dissemination of the Bell Beaker material culture, come to mind as a possibility but, once more, the actual mechanisms of this hypothetical process remain obscure, to say the least.

Anne-Marie and Pierre Pétrequin have proposed a different scenario on the basis of eastern French material. They particularly stress the renewed integrative capacities of the Bell Beaker culture:

The progressive disappearance of limits, the partial neutralization of boundaries during Late Neolithic II is an important phenomenon in which the circulation of prestige goods must have played a primary role. But, the Bell Beaker expansion, around 2400, seems even more spectacular, because it erases in less than a century any trace of the North–South boundary that had been established around 5000 BC, and that, by 2400, had almost never ceased to be respected; for this reason also, the Bell Beaker expansion appears to be something other than mere competition played out between elites (Pétrequin & Pétrequin 1988, 262, Vander Linden's translation).

As we have seen, the ambience of social competition does not reach its climax with the Bell Beaker culture in the Midi, suggesting that an interpretation must be sought elsewhere, for instance in the ideas put forward by the Pétrequins, by trying to go one step further in the characterization of this capacity to tear down cultural differences.

A first manifestation of this process lies in funerary practices. In contrast to individual burial which did not fit the tastes of the local communities, there is plenty of evidence for a new preference for grave goods. This surely does not change the entire pattern, still dominated by collective burials and megalithic tombs but the introduction of standardized artefacts, such as bell beakers, mostly of maritime types, Palmela points and copper daggers in funeral contexts during the Bell Beaker culture is a phenomenon of major importance. Given the central role of funerary practices in the definition of various group identities during the Late Neolithic, this new practice is of particular interest. Dealing with the dead is now partly envisaged in the same way, through a widely shared code that necessitates the deposition of a particular kind of

ceramics and weapons in the tomb (a practice present under different variants in every Bell Beaker region: Vander Linden 2004; 2006). Likewise, body ornaments do not exhibit the exuberant formal diversity of the Late Neolithic. Whether or not this variability marked a series of social identities not displayed anymore (or in other ways), the proliferation of the V-button throughout the Bell Beaker French Midi, and later the ubiquitous success of pins during the Bronze Age, also points to the existence of a code shared by all the communities involved.

In the same vein, the homogeneity of the Bell Beaker decoration, evident in both fine and coarse ware, contrasts with the multiplicity of Late Neolithic ceramic traditions. The typological distinction between Pyrenean and Provençal styles only identifies preferred tools; the types of decoration roughly remain the same throughout the French Midi. As suggested by Salanova on the basis of different methodological grounds for other regions of France (Salanova 2000, 179), this homogeneity surely indicates that modalities of knowledge transmission are much open and fluid, and this surely reflects physical movements of craftsmen. As for funerary practices, the difference with the preceding Late Neolithic is striking.

Thus, in complete contrast to the expectations of the prestige model, all the elements involved in earlier competition, if not simply abandoned, were at least involved in a re-organization of society on new foundations. Interestingly enough, subsistence techniques still present marked diversity, directly related to the ecology, suggesting that the observed changes must be set in strictly social and/or cultural terms.

These can be best discerned in the figure of the warrior. Late Neolithic people reproduced warlike values through ostentatious behaviour (ornaments, weapons, defensive architecture) that seems to echo a violent climate, as evidenced by the high frequency of wounds on human bones. However, during Bell Beaker times, we see not only a disappearance of these physical traces, but a fundamentally new perception and construction of the warrior image, through the sharing of precise coded items, of which the copper dagger and the Palmela point are the most obvious examples. From the Neolithic warrior to the Bell Beaker hero, one has passed from a factual reality to an ethos.

The introduction of this ethos is the key element for understanding the nature of the Bell Beaker culture in southern France (as well as in other regions: Vander Linden 2004; 2006). Parallel to its introduction, the boundaries that previously structured the social geography of the French Midi seem to partially fade, in favour of more open networks in which knowl-

edge and individuals circulate relatively easily. The detailed structure of these networks and their extent throughout the entire Bell Beaker domain needs further characterization, but roughly similar processes can be shown to occur in other regions and to involve several facets of social life (Vander Linden 2005; 2006). For instance, although Price and his collaborators have demonstrated unmistakably the existence of human mobility in the central European Bell Beaker culture (Price *et al.* 1998; 2004), the importance of migrating people for the understanding of the Bell Beaker culture should not be overestimated; a growing number of studies suggests that small-scale movements of human groups were common throughout the entire Neolithic (e.g. Pétrequin 1993; 1996; Pétrequin *et al.* 1998; Shennan 2000; Scarre 2001). Increased mobility appears as a supplementary expression of the changing pattern rather than its cause.

Stephen Shennan was thus right in pointing out the existence of a Bell Beaker ethos. He, however, was wrong in reducing it to a mere tool used by the élites to impose their coercive power. In contrast to the individualistic values conveyed by his model, the cultural and social processes exemplified by the Bell Beaker culture are synonymous with enhanced interaction as well as better inter-individual and community contacts, as reflected by the archaeological record in the large-scale distribution of specific artefacts and practices. The image of the warrior and associated artefacts evidently played a significant role in these processes as they were at the core of the new values shared by these communities. The Bell Beaker culture cannot therefore be equated with any evolutionary narrative that identifies the end of the third millennium as the dawn of European complex societies or, at least, of societies in the process of becoming so. Although extended social integration and the development of hierarchy are not mutually exclusive as such (see for instance case studies in Yoffee 2005), in the present example, no clues for social ranking during the Bell Beaker period have been observed, and interpretations based on the traditional prestige model appear to be flawed. Changes are thus more fundamental than a hypothetical climax of social competition. Of course, the extent of the changes is directly connected to the cultural substrata on which the Bell Beaker culture lies; change is thus dramatic in southern France because of the difference between the Bell Beaker culture and the social life of the former local communities.

It might not be very original to insist once more on the fact that European prehistory, or human history in its entirety, is not a series of steps of an ineluctable logical progression. As stated by the

Belgian sociologist Claude Javeau: 'One had to be an absolute prisoner of the *logos*, like Hegel, to discover Reason in history' (Javeau 2001, 72, Vander Linden's translation). This being said, evolutionary thought still shapes much of our archaeological reasoning (Stahl 1999) because of its attractive aesthetic simplicity and our failure to build alternative satisfactory narratives (but see contributions in McIntosh 1999). Thus, it is not very surprising that the identification of the Bell Beaker culture as the next stage of an ever-growing social hierarchization, a prelude to the Bronze Age, still prevails. But, as this case study suggests, if the Bell Beaker culture indeed corresponds to a crucial period in European prehistory, it is not because it fits a given evolutionary category, but rather because of its historical uniqueness. In comparison to the previous Late Neolithic, the Bell Beaker culture marks a complete break in the management of social relationships: it is now characterized by fluidity and extended integrative capacities. Although the last formulation remains explicitly vague, its implications are obvious: rather than comparing archaeological cultures and periods according to abstract scales of power or hierarchy, there is much to gain by considering the concrete means of social integration, the way people live together and, sometimes, manage to get control of other people. A true social archaeology can only be reached in this way.

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Author biography

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