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## Investigating the Neolithic burial practices of the Northeast of Iberian Peninsula

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Almost a century ago Professor Bosch Gimpera published a work about the importance of the Neolithic graves from the Northeast (NE) of Iberia Peninsula. Their abundance, already known by then, led him to consider those remains as part of a new culture at which he called "The Culture of Pits Graves".

There are countless articles, books and news that have been published over the years about Neolithic burial practices. However, many of these publications are restricted to Spain, often only to Catalonia, which considerably biased the knowledge about this period. Until the 1990s, most studies on the Neolithic graves were not beyond a fairly description of the funerary structure, the position of the buried individual and of the associated materials. This situation gradually changed thanks to the deeper interest of many archaeologists into the comprehension of those societies and by the increased specialization of archeology. An example of this new approach is in our currently ongoing research project entitled: "Approach to the Early Neolithic communities of NE Iberia through its burial practices (HAR2011-23149)". The project started in 2012, and is funded by Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad of Spain. It aims to approach the social and economic organization of those Neolithic societies. Because the information is published with uneven detail, the first task was to select from among more than 600 documented burials, those funerary contexts from where it was likely to extract the most information possible. The second task, on which we have the first results, is the chronology. Until 2012 there were less than 30 absolute dates

taken from burials. However, not all samples were of human bones. There was also dating on charcoal or cereal seeds. In collaboration with the Centro Nacional de Aceleradores (CNA) and the Centre de Datation par le RadioCarbone de Lyon, we are now performing a set of about 120 dates. Currently, the first results indicate that the systematic burial practice in NE of Iberia Peninsula started around 5300 Before Present (BP) and last until 4500 BP. Our investigation focus the direct analysis of buried individuals (sex, age, diet by isotope analysis, DNA, funerary taphonomy, dental morphology and physical activity markers), their individual and collective tomb (shape, size, deepness, presence of perishable materials such as wood used for closing the grave), the way each individual was buried and the organization of the collective burials (some even in silos) and the trousseau that each one and group of individuals received. Together, these different data seems to indicate that those societies were complex, with considerable social differences between individuals and even a possible differential access to certain goods such as meat, chert or variscite ornaments (a hydrated aluminium phosphate green mineral, considered even today as a semi-precious stone used for carvings and ornamental).

We are at an early stage of the project. Certainly, the new data will provide relevant information on Neolithic communities that inhabited the NE of Iberia Peninsula. Meanwhile, take a peek to our blog (<http://sepulturasneoliticass.blogspot.com.es/>), where we keep updating our work.

### **Editors**

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