



Prehistoric Pottery: Social Organisation in the Upper Rhone Valley during the Final Neolithic, the Bell Beaker Culture and the Early Bronze Age

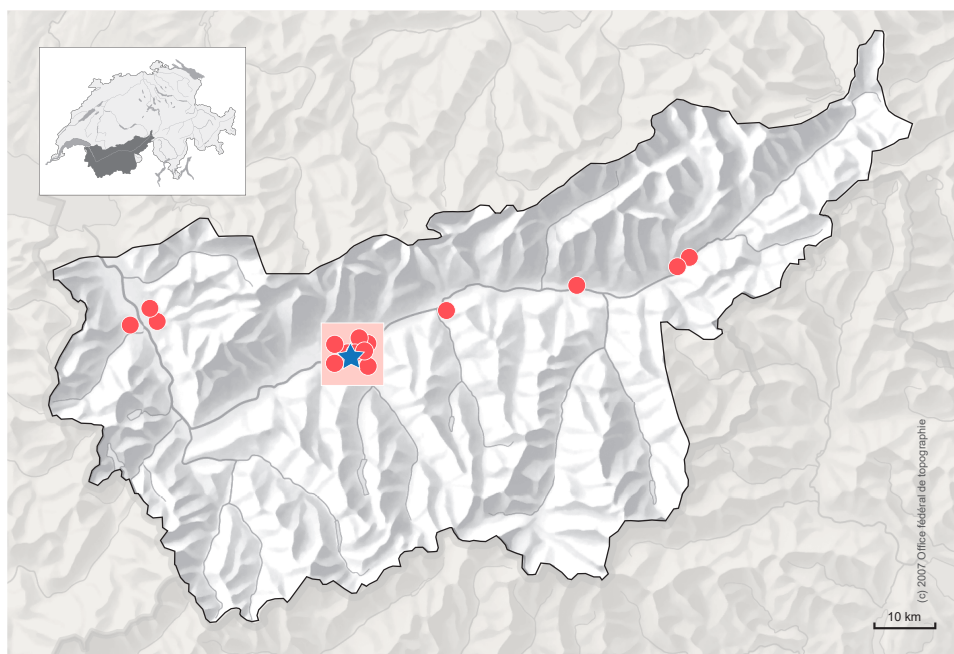
Under the direction of **Prof. Marie Besse** (University of Geneva, Switzerland).

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In Western Europe, the Final Neolithic represents a key stage between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age. This period is marked by distinct technological achievements (metallurgy, wheel, chariot and wagon, animal drawn ard-plough, horse domestication in Eastern Europe, etc), long-distance exchange networks, and social inequalities. The period is furthermore characterised by a gradual transition from a large number of regionally distributed cultural groups to the complex Bell Beaker culture whose geographical expansion encompassed the whole of Europe and North Africa prior to the early Bronze Age. Whilst on a European scale the Bell Beaker phenomenon is profoundly marked by the changes in material culture, in particular in the ceramic culture, at the regional level very diverse reactions can be observed (importation, acculturation, rejection).

The aim of this four-year project (2017-2021) is to assess the economic and social functioning of Neolithic and Bronze Age communities in the Upper Rhone valley by shedding light on the relationship between the Petit-Chasseur cemetery and the settlements in the surrounding region through the study of ceramics. For this purpose, 15 settlements will be studied. The necropolis of the Petit-Chasseur in Sion is of particular interest as it contains several occupations from the Final Neolithic to the early Bronze Age and is representative of the long-term perspective.



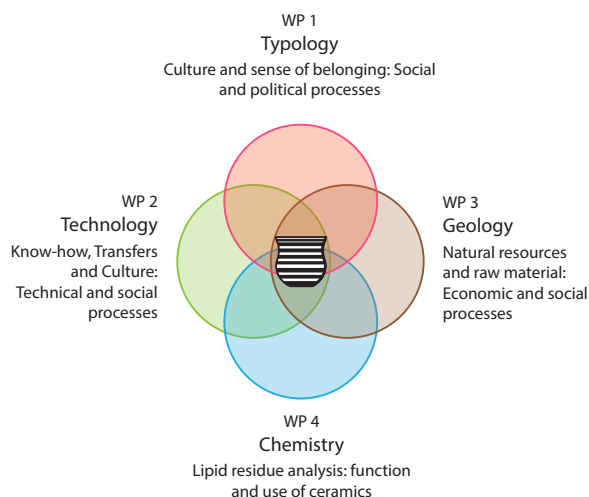
Map of the sites within the Upper Rhone valley. The blue star represents the Petit-Chasseur site, the red dots the settlements (after Moinat et al. 2007, fig.1.2.)

This project is articulated around four **Work Packages (WP)**.

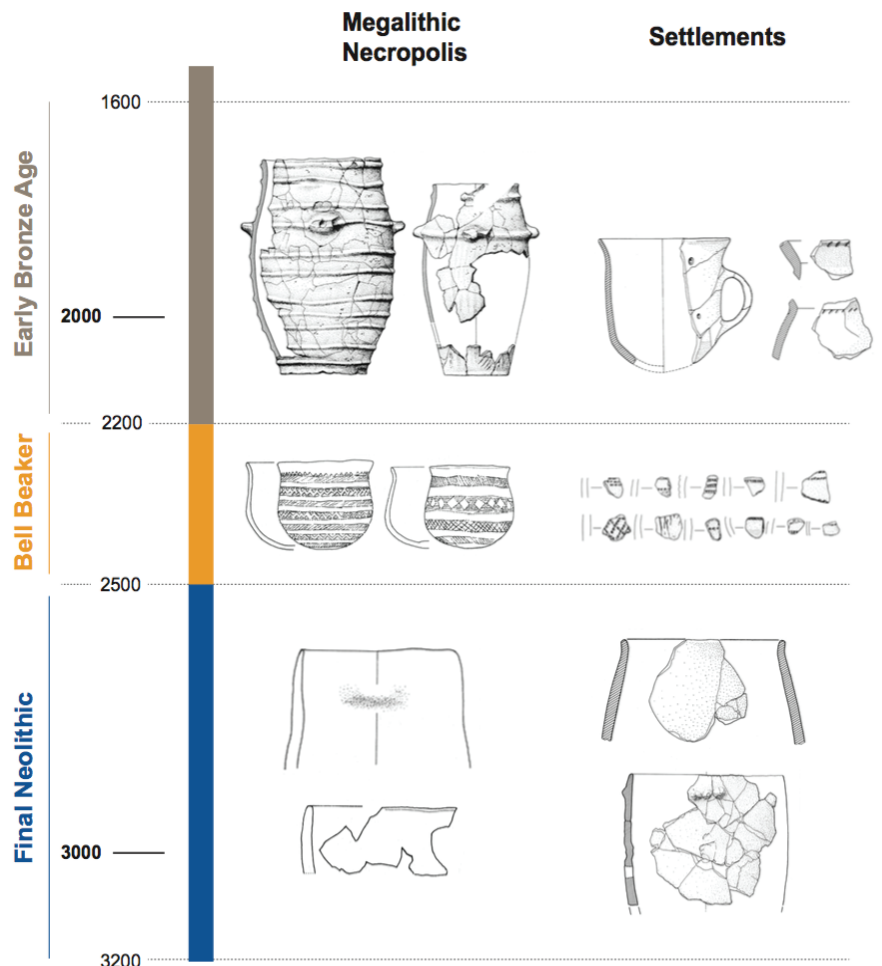
WP1 focuses on **typology** and cultural affiliation, and establishes the chrono - typological identity of the material studied through the observation of ceramic types, shapes, and decorations (Prof. Marie Besse, Martine Piguet).

WP2 relates to **technology** and skills, and will aim to determine the stages of the operational sequence of pottery manufacturing used to make the material studied. It will identify pottery traditions in the cemeteries and settlements studied, and compare them in time and space in order to determine whether or not they represent several social groups of producers (Dr Vincent Ard, Prof. Marie Besse, Julie Debard, Eve Derenne, Martine Piguet).

WP3 deals with the question of the procurement of **raw materials** and fabrication. Identifying raw materials used in the process of pottery manufacturing allows researchers to discuss the selection of different clays and tempers, the location of the sourcing areas, and the preparation of diverse 'mixtures' and 'recipes' used in the production process (Claudine Abegg, Prof. Marie Besse, Delia Carloni, Martine Piguet, Dr Mario Sartori, Prof. Branimir Šegvić).



Schematic of the WP interactions within the project.



Final Neolithic, Bell Beaker culture, and early Bronze Age potteries stemming from the Petit-Chasseur cemetery and from settlement sites (after Baudais 1995, Baudais and Schmidt 1995, David-El Biali 1990, Gallay 1989, Gallay and Chaix 1984, Meyer et al. 2012).

WP4 consists of testing the feasibility of undertaking **chemical analyses** of lipid residues on the ceramics in order to identify their function. Conservation treatment applied to Petit-Chasseur ceramics may effectively impinge their suitability for further chemical analyses, however some tests will be carried out on more recent series to address this issue (Dr Martine Regert and master student).

Focusing on a region and studying the relationships that existed between cemeteries and settlements, between a possible assembly centre and domestic occupations, as well as between the long and short term for three distinct periods (Final Neolithic, Bell Beaker, early Bronze Age) based on the pottery remains according to four complementary approaches (WP1-4) is a fully innovative concept. This research will be a landmark study in terms of its methodology and data, and will hopefully shed some light on the proto-history of the Upper Rhone valley.



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