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Habitat and Stone Enclosure of Corsica: What is the Function of the Enclosed Area during the Neolithic and the Bronze Age?

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Abstract –The aim of this study is to apprehend the function of the stone enclosures during the Neolithic and the Bronze Age. Some enclosures well positioned in the Corsican chronology have been chosen to show an evolution of their dimensions, of dry-stone techniques used and of the function of the structures excavated within enclosures. The results prove that during the Neolithic, the whole habitat is inside the enclosure, whereas the enclosure of the Bronze Age is the seat of the economic and/or political activity.

Index Terms –Bronze Age, Dry Masonry, Final Neolithic, Habitat, Middle Neolithic, Stone Enclosure.

I. INTRODUCTION

The habitat is the place of life of the group where its members meet, eat and rest. The community must protect its members and its goods (harvest, cattle...), against animals and the covetousness of other groups. The habitat is thus a portion of the territory, organized, humanized where the group and its goods are in safety. This concept of protection is interesting because it is related to the permanent state of insecurity of humans within nature. By constructing the stone enclosure, the group creates a closed space within its territory. It generates a dualistic interpretation of environment. The role or the significance of this limit depends on what is enclosed.

We will try to apprehend the function of these structures during the Neolithic and the Bronze Age, through the study of some enclosures.

II. METHODOLOGY

The enclosure is a dry-stone structure, it's an unmortared stonework. It encloses a part or the unit of an eminence occupied in prehistoric times. The methodological limits of our research are constituted by the state of conservation of these several millennia aged structures, the density of the vegetation covering the sites, the determination of the date of erection of these structures and the superposition of the occupations on a same site which can restructure an enclosure. The first two elements can deteriorate the vision of the layout enclosure and complicate the comprehension of the work. The last element is the major pitfall of our typological study.

Avoiding these constraints, this present reflection is based on a restricted number of settlements, selected according to certain criteria:

The site is characterized by the presence of a structure

girding an eminence: only the most significant enclosures, having a coherent defensive layout are retained.

The site has been prospected and studied by our care and according to our typology: the typology established in order to describe an enclosure needs reliable and homogeneous data which can only be produced by data-gathering during a fieldwork.

The occupation of the site has been established by an archaeological excavation.

The main occupation of the site is restricted to only one period corresponding either to the Middle Neolithic, or the Final Neolithic, or the Bronze Age: if we want to allot a dating to these so particular structures, we must draw aside all sites which have been occupied over several periods because it would be impossible to attach the stone enclosure to one precise period.

Our study is based on three sites of the Middle Neolithic, A Mutola (Ville-di-Parasu), Carcu (Cateri) and Tesoru (Brando), on three sites of the Final Neolithic, A Fuata (Lumio), Cumpulaghja (Santa Lucia di Tallano) and Marze (Corcia) and finally on six sites of the Bronze Age, Castidetta Pozzone (Sartène), Castiddacciu (Sartène), E Muzelle (Valle di Rostino), Monte Ortu (Lumio), Torracone (Foce Bilzese) and Rusuminu (Castineta). All this settlements are localised on fig. 1.

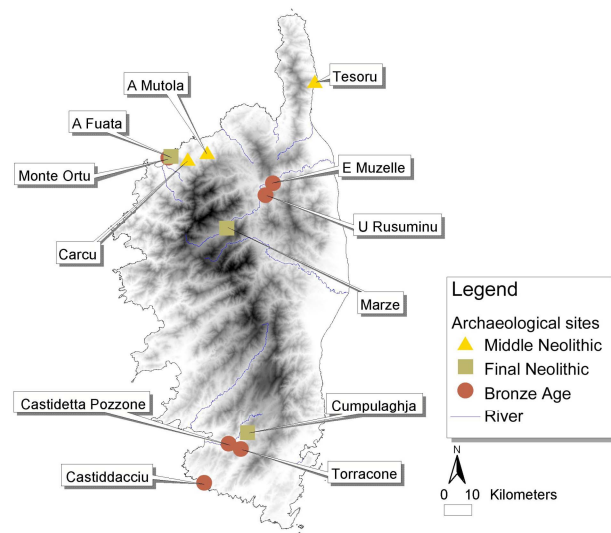


Fig. 1. Localisation of the archaeological sites

III. ANALYSIS

The criteria on which we can base our work are as follows:

Enclosed area, defined and delimited by the dry-stone structure, is characterized by its surface, which can get some indices as for the undertaken activities or reflect its function.

Metric data of the enclosure (its average height and width, its perimeter) allow to quantify the volume of stones used for its erection. This volume gives us an idea of the labour needed for this work.

Lastly, the excavated structures found within enclosed areas, can reveal what the function or the role of those stone enclosures is.

A. Surface of the Enclosed Areas

At the sight of fig. 2., the Middle Neolithic (in light blue) and the Final Neolithic sites (in dark blue) form two homogeneous sets, whereas the surface sites of the Bronze Age (in green) are more disparate; surfaces enclosures of the sites of Monte Ortu and of E Muzelle sites look like the Final Neolithic sites. It is interesting to note that Monte Ortu was initially occupied during the Neolithic which is attested too at E Muzelle.

The average surfaces (3800 m² for the Middle Neolithic, 7000 m² for the Final Neolithic and 2590 m² for the Bronze Age) emphasize a process. Enclosed sites of medium sizes during the Middle Neolithic have been replaced by Final Neolithic sites twice more roomy and finally, by Bronze Age sites with reduced spaces, particularly during the Middle and Final Bronze Age which are precisely the occupations of Castiddacciu, Castidetta-Pozzone and Torracone.

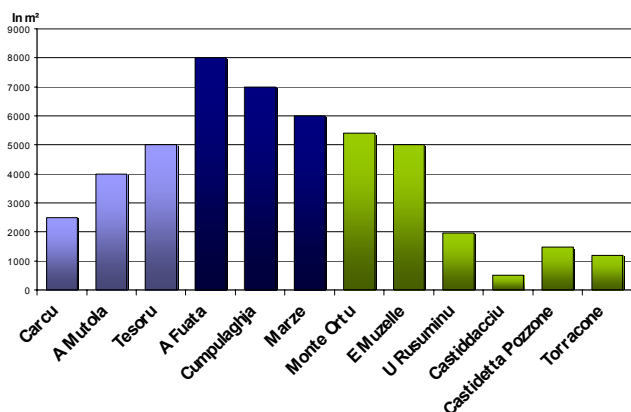


Fig. 2. Surface of the enclosed areas

The fact that the communities of the end of the Neolithic were looking for bigger space could be the reflection of the increasing population at this period. The group, that was better controlling agriculture and breeding, thrives; the number of family increases; the habitat made of terraces accommodating the dwellings is thus roomier.

During the Bronze Age, the reverse occurs; the enclosed surfaces are very small, which can be explained by two causes:

The size of the group is reduced; it doesn't need a vast

space. If there was a hierarchy for the settlements during this period, these small sites could perhaps constitute a certain category like a checkpoint or an observation post, situated in the margin of the territory.

The role of the enclosure has changed; it is not intended to enclose the entire habitat any more but only a part, which concentrates the power and/or the richness.

The variation of the enclosed surface seems to demonstrate an evolution of the role of the enclosure between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age.

B. Volume of the Stone Enclosures

The volume of the enclosure can show us the labour force which is necessary for the construction of this structure. Fig. 3. proves that the Bronze Age sites have enclosures with an important average volume. For certain sites, the work provided to set up the enclosures of the Bronze Age is almost twice more important than for those of the Neolithic. As a consequence, the necessary labour force during the Bronze Age will have to be larger and/or to be mobilized longer than during the Neolithic.

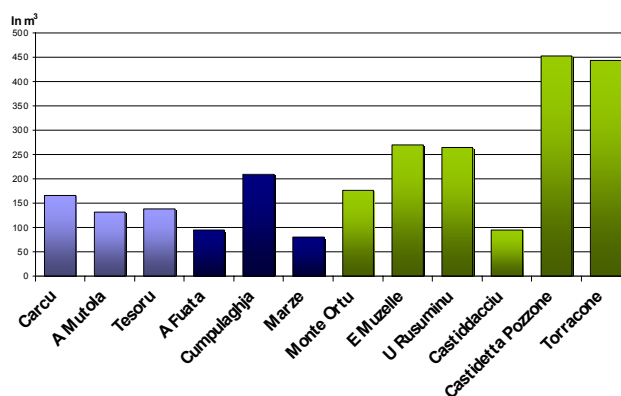


Fig. 3. Volume of the stone enclosures

C. Cross Data of Volume and Surface of the Stone Enclosures

Fig. 4. allows us to appreciate the difference between the Neolithic sites and the Bronze Age ones. During the Neolithic, the enclosure with low volume delimits a vast surface whereas during the Bronze Age, the imposing structure encloses a small surface. It seems to be different for Monte Ortu because of the very defensive character of the rocky outcrop occupied by this settlement. Nevertheless, such difference between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age shows an obvious change about the role of stone enclosures and the function of enclosed areas. As opposed to the period of Neolithic, the Bronze Age enclosure does not seem any more to be able to contain in its entirety the habitat of the group that took part in its erection. This observation confirms the previously formulated assumption: only a part of the Bronze Age habitat can be protected by the stone enclosure. It would be the seat of the power and/or used for the goods storage of the community.

The large volume of the Bronze Age enclosures proves a strong investment of the group but also an improvement of

dry masonry techniques.

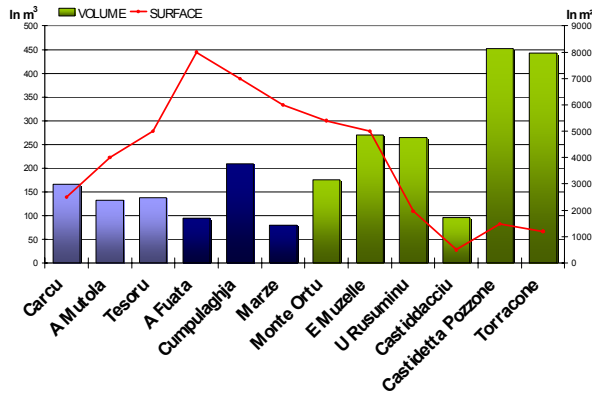


Fig. 4. Volume and surface of the stone enclosures

D. Technological Developments

Indeed, whereas enclosures of the Neolithic are constructed with rough stones resulting from natural erosion, juxtaposed on only one row and superimposed on few courses, the Bronze Age walls are assembled with regular modules, superimposed on a significant number of courses. These walls are composed of two revetments of stones, the inside and the outside surfaces, ensuring a better stability to build higher structures.

E. Average Height of the Stone Enclosures

The average heights of the enclosures, shown in fig. 5., prove that the enclosures of the Bronze Age are appreciably higher than those of the Neolithic. It demonstrates an undeniable defensive character.

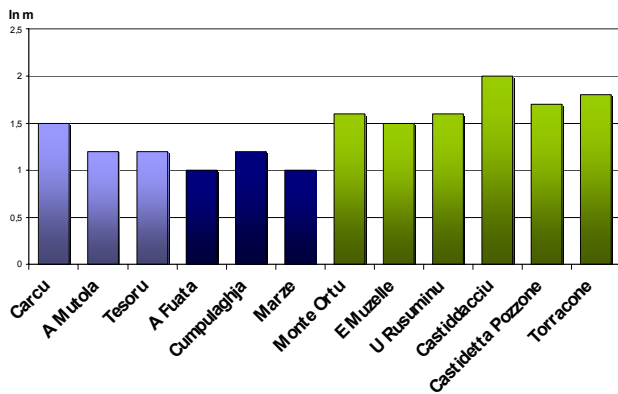


Fig. 5. Average height of stone enclosures

F. Cross Data of Surface and Perimeter of Stone Enclosures

By crossing the data of enclosed surface and perimeter of enclosure as it is shown in fig. 6., we can realize the extent of the defense set up by the group. The longer the perimeter of the structures is, the higher the surface of the site covered by the enclosure will be and the better the defense of the site will be. Short perimeters corresponding to settlements on naturally defensive eminences which don't require a very

important fortification like at Tesoru, Marze and Castiddacciu, are noticeable. On the other hand, sites of Rusuminu, Castiddacciu, Castidetta Pozzone and Torracone are characterized by an important extent of the enclosure on a small surface. It reveals a defensive concern during the Bronze Age and more particularly during the Middle and the Final Bronze Age.

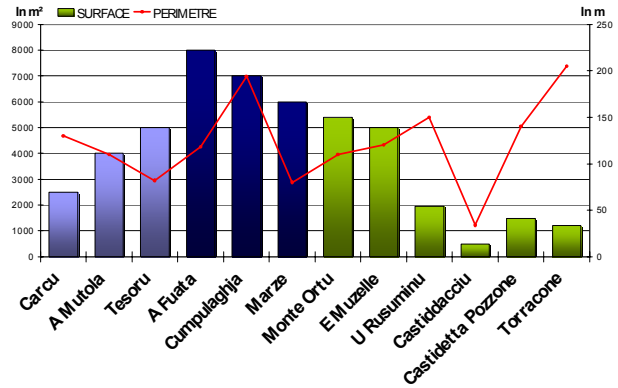


Fig. 6. Perimeter and surface of the stone enclosures

G. Excavated Structures within Stone Enclosures

The choice made for the studied sites rests on the archaeological excavations which were undertaken there; they allow to finely define the occupations of a site but also the presence and the function of the exhumed structures.

Thus, structures which are related to an habitat have been found inside six enclosures as it is shown in table 1.

Table I
Excavated structures and exploitable terraces inside stone enclosures

| SITE | STRUCTURE | EXPLOITABLE TERRACES |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Carcu | The foundation of an oval-shaped hut | Ten terraces |
| A Mutola | A paving | Fifteen terraces |
| Tesoru | An habitation under rock shelter | Seven terraces |
| A Fuata | A rectangular hut | Thirteen terraces |
| Cumpulaghja | X | Ten terraces |
| Marze | The foundation of a circular habitation | Nine terraces |
| Monte Ortu | Two huts | Nine terraces |
| E Muzelle | X | Three terraces |
| U Rusuminu | Two circular monuments Rectangular huts | Two terraces |
| Castiddacciu | An oval-shaped hut | Two terraces |
| Castidetta-Pozzone | One circular monument Three rectangular structures | Three terraces |
| Torracone | One circular monument | Three terraces |

The foundation of an oval-shaped hut exhumed by M.C. Weiss at Carcu [1], a habitation under rock shelter studied by M.C. Weiss at Tesoru [2], a rectangular hut excavated by P. Neuville on the site of A Fuata [3], the base of a structure formed by big stones revealed by L. Acquaviva at Marze [4], the dwellings of Monte Ortu analyzed by M.C. Weiss [5], a paving discovered by S. Goedert at Mutola [6], tend to prove the role of habitat of the enclosed zone of these sites; fact correlated by their establishment on one of the many terraces of these vast sites. In the same way, the terraces and their retaining walls organizing the site of Cumpulaghja [7] leave few doubts as for the function of habitat of this settlement.

Four stone enclosures of the Bronze Age are characterized by the exiguity of their surface as we previously proved and by the presence of particular structures which are not dwellings. Indeed, circular structures which were defined like "torre", monuments used for the transformation and the storage of food products have been discovered on the sites of Torracone [8], Castidetta – Pozzone [9] and Rusuminu [10]. As for the site of Castiddacciu [11], an oval-shaped hut was excavated by P. Nebbia and J.C. Ottaviani. If the material exhumed (hearth, ceramics, equipment of milling) could evoke that being in a structure of habitat, the single character of this structure on the small surface offered by this site seems to confer it a particular statute.

IV. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we have proved a change of the characteristics of stone enclosures between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age: the enclosed surface decreases, the volume of the enclosure increases, the walls are higher, the defense is much more developed, proportionally to the surface and the structures inside the enclosure don't have the same function than during the Neolithic.

The concerns of the neolithic communities and of the Bronze Age ones seem to be different, as shows the study of stone enclosures. When the first village communities appear during the Middle Neolithic, the collective organization of a space is a new contribution for the group in order to live there and to thrive there. Therefore, a structure in dry-stone encloses the totality of the habitat.

A few millennia later, the main concern is the safeguard of goods ensuring the primacy of the elite at the head of the Bronze Age community. The enclosure then protects more particularly the economic or political center of the communities.

The research undertaken on the site of Cucuruzzu (Lévie) has shown this phenomenon. Indeed, the establishment of a vast habitat circumscribed by an enclosing wall seems to correspond with the oldest phase of occupation. During the Middle Bronze Age, on the rock mass which dominates the site, a "torra" has been built. This structure is the seat of flour-milling activity which was then dismantled. It is during the Final Bronze Age that the monumental complex of Cucuruzzu was set up, true center of production, which enables to develop the activities previously undertaken in the "torra" but on a greater scale.

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