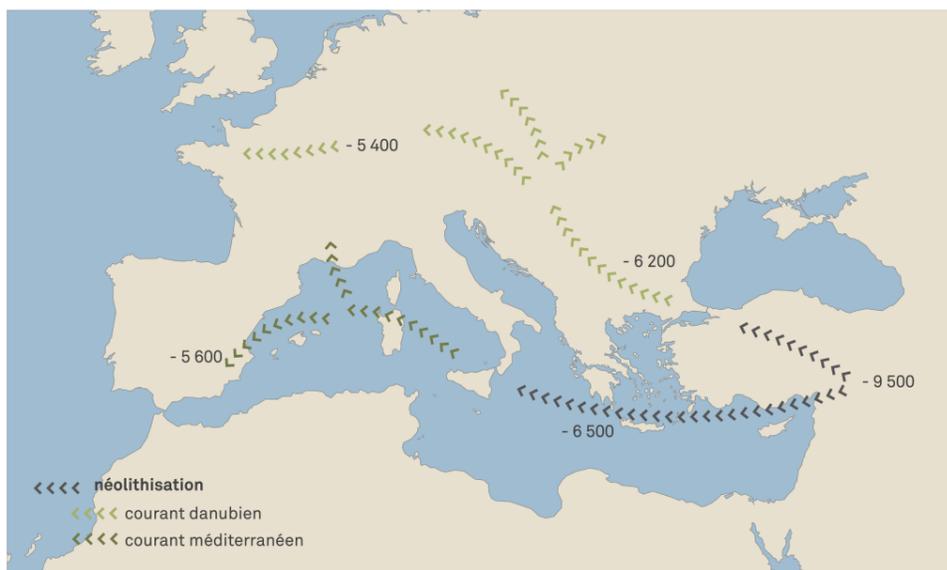




The Neolithic – the final period of prehistory (5400 BC to 2200 BC)

The earliest traces of human settlement in the Alsace region date from around 600,000 BC. Very little is known about the earliest periods of prehistory in the region, i.e. the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods, probably because there are very few caves and because perishable finds do not tend to survive at open air sites.



Moving over land following the course of the River Danube, Neolithic population groups reached the Alsatian Plain around 5400 BC. At the same time, a separate wave of colonisation crossed the Mediterranean Sea and reached what is today the South of France.

More is known about the **Neolithic period**. Over the course of this seminal phase, people gradually adopted a sedentary lifestyle with an economy based on farming and animal husbandry. They also developed techniques such as pottery making and the grinding and polishing of stone tools.

The phenomenon of “Neolithisation” first occurred around 12,000 BC in the Middle East, accompanied by a considerable population growth which gradually led to the new lifestyle spreading throughout Europe. These earliest societies of farmers and cattle breeders settled in regions which were already occupied by groups of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers.

In the Early Neolithic period, **the region around Colmar** was on the border between two cultural groups that had originated from the Danube region and the so-called “Bandkeramik Culture”, called after its characteristic pottery decorated with linear designs. Although the archaeological finds are largely homogenous, there are distinct differences between the northern and southern areas of the Alsace in respect of the pottery decorations and the funerary rites. Thanks to numerous archaeological finds from several hundred sites, archaeologists have been able to define various cultural groups which succeeded each other up to the Final Neolithic. The distinction between north and south Alsace remains tangible throughout all phases of the Neolithic period, both in terms of the material culture and the customs.

Societies and their environment

The relationship between humans and their environment underwent essential changes in the Neolithic period. The grouping of individuals into communities gradually led to the formation of local élites, attested to by the richly furnished burials in the region.

These communities began to shape their surroundings. Initially, the settlement activities and the farming of the fertile valleys and hillsides had little impact on the natural environment. Towards the end of this phase, however, intensified clearing of forested areas began to have a bigger impact on the landscape.