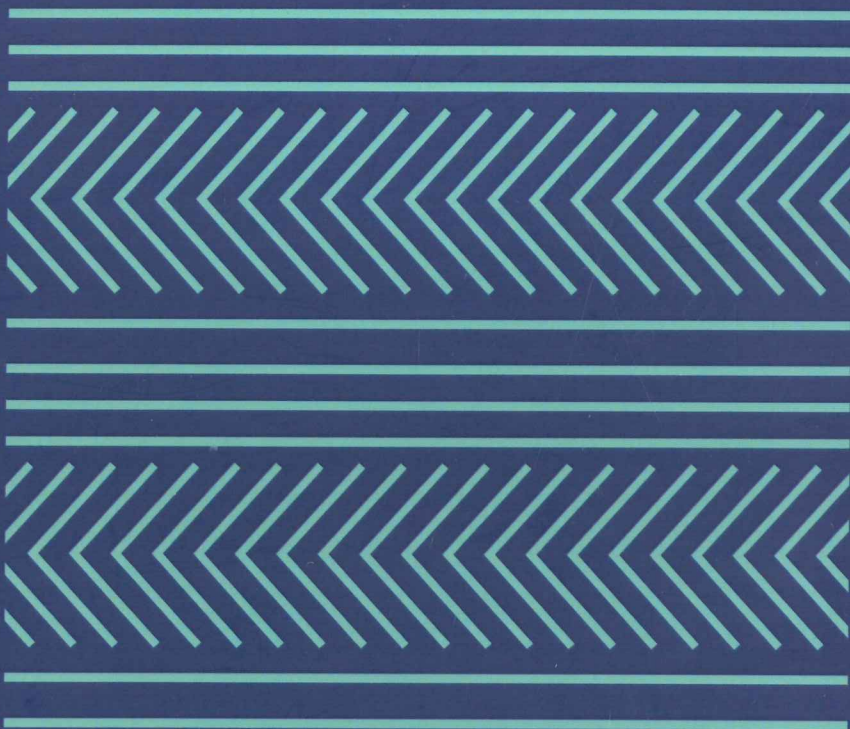


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The first Italian farmers: the role of stone ornaments in tradition, innovation and cultural change

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When the first farmers landed on the eastern coasts of the Italian peninsula (VI mill. BC. Cal) they brought with them a system of knowledge and technologies that quickly spread along both coasts. The kind of interaction they had with the local hunter-gatherer communities, especially in the central-south of the Italian peninsula, remains a widely debated issue. Elements in the symbolic culture of these first settlers, such as the use of columbella rustica or the exclusive use of hard animal matter ornaments in some sites, suggest that they adopted some local traditional features. However, especially in the central-south of the peninsula, the attestations of Castelnuovian sites are too scarce, and we cannot exclude that certain elements were already part of the traditional heritage of the newcomers. Concurrently, in some of the oldest Neolithic groups is well observable the importance of shaped lithic ornaments and the development of types that will become more and more standardized in the successive Neolithic phases. These productions, bearing witness to an increasingly high technological know-how, use lithic raw materials of different nature the supply of which often occurs in the areas close to the site (Favella in Basilicata), although evidence of long-distance exchanges are also available (Colle Santo Stefano in Abruzzo). These productions reflect the values system of the new incomers, in which the ornamental product has become one of the symbols of a growing cultural identity that, originated outside, developed in the Italian territory as part of a wider system that embraces the whole Mediterranean. Techno-functional analysis and raw material sourcing will be used in our study to understand the symbolic material culture, in order to clarify its importance and significance for the first Neolithic communities in Italy.