

JADE. Large Alpine axeheads in neolithic Europe, 6th to 4th millennia BC

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From the end of the 6th millennium, the quarrying at Mount Viso in the Italian Alps, located at altitudes between 1500 m and 2400 m, marks the beginning of the production of large axeheads of jades (jadeitite, omphacitite, eclogite). During the 5th and 4th millennia these axes were circulated over the whole of Western Europe. They are found in considerable distances from the raw material source, with a distribution expanding over 3300 km from Ireland in the West to Bulgaria in the East and over more than 2000 km from Denmark in the North to Sicily in the South.

The exchange of Alpine jade seems to be an outstanding phenomenon of a previously unimagined extent among the non-egalitarian societies, where Varna in the East and the Gulf of Morbihan in the West appear to represent two poles of social dynamics shaping Europe during the 5th and the 4th millennia.