

DNA Neolithic pigs in Europe

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Ancient DNA, pig domestication, and the spread of the Neolithic into Europe

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[6 pp, 611 kb]

Summary

"The Neolithic Revolution began 11,000 years ago in the Near East and preceded a westward migration into Europe of distinctive cultural groups and their agricultural economies, including domesticated animals and plants. Despite decades of research, no consensus has emerged about the extent of admixture between the indigenous and exotic populations or the degree to which the appearance of specific components of the "Neolithic cultural package" in Europe reflects truly independent development. Here, through the use of mitochondrial DNA from 323 modern and 221 ancient pig specimens sampled across western Eurasia, we demonstrate that domestic pigs of Near Eastern ancestry were definitely introduced into Europe during the Neolithic (potentially along two separate routes), reaching the Paris Basin by at least the early 4th millennium B.C. Local European wild boar were also domesticated by this time, possibly as a direct consequence of the introduction of Near Eastern domestic pigs. Once domesticated, European pigs rapidly replaced the introduced domestic pigs of Near Eastern origin throughout Europe. Domestic pigs formed a key component of the Neolithic Revolution, and this detailed genetic record of their origins reveals a complex set of interactions and processes during the spread of early farmers into Europe. "

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