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Research Project

Contributions to the development of the Bronze Age Plant Economy in the surroundings of the Alps: An archaeobotanical case study of two Early Bronze Age sites in Northern Italy (Lake Garda region)

Third-party funded project

Project title Contributions to the development of the Bronze Age Plant Economy in the surroundings of the Alps: An archaeobotanical case study of two Early Bronze Age sites in Northern Italy (Lake Garda region)

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During the Bronze Age human communities became more and more complex in their social organization and subsistence economy. A crucial role was played by the production of metal objects which intensified exchange of goods and established new trade routes. Farming and animal husbandry were still the stronghold of Bronze Age economy, they underwent some innovations such as the introduction of new cultivars (e.g. spelt and millet), the intensification of pulse cultivation and the diffusion of rotation systems.

This apparent Bronze Age mobility needs be researched in detail. There are already a couple of research projects, being carried out on this important topic at the moment (see for instance the EU project "Forging identities: The Mobility of Culture in Bronze Age Europe" (www.arkaeologi.dk/forgingidentities/), or the SNF-Professorship (PP00P1_123336/1) of Francesco Menotti at IPAS Basel University). The hereby proposed project will not only complement the above-mentioned research, but it will, most importantly, contribute to the reconstruction of the development of plant economy during the Bronze Age, within and in the surroundings of the Alps. In order to produce a complete outline we need more representative archaeobotanical information from the southern side of the Alps, where at the moment only few archaeobotanical data are available. In order to fill this existing palaeoeconomical and palaeoecological research gap we have to investigate some well preserved key sites south of the Alps. We therefore propose to carry out an archaeobotanical study of two Bronze Age sites from the Lake Garda region (Northern Italy): Lavagnone and Lucone D. We have selected these two waterlogged sites because they are currently being excavated; hence it is possible to envisage a multidisciplinary strategy of sampling and cross comparing archaeobotanical data with sites inside and north of the Alps. Preliminary work has already been done, allowing us to see the immense potential of the material. Plant macrofossil remains will be analyzed along stratigraphic and spatial transects, focusing on crop and weed assemblages collected from all the archaeological layers. The palaeoenvironmental reconstruction will consider additional samples, studied either for pollen and macroremains, allowing depicting the natural vegetation growing in the lakes and in the surrounding area. In addition dung remains (particularly goat and sheep coprolites) will be analysed for plant macroremains and pollen; these investigations (partly carried out within the SNF projects 105312-110406/1 and K-13K0-117897, both carried out at IPAS, Basel University) will add important information about animal husbandry regimes and their influence on the landscape.

The main goals of the present project are to shed light on the emergence of a more diversified plant production during the Early Bronze Age, particularly on the introduction of regular cultivation of spelt wheat

and millets, the intensification of pulse cultivation and the distribution of a “new glume wheat” appearing during the Bronze Age. Besides we intend to trace the origin of these practises, probably along major long-distance trade-routes. Finally, we would like to add information for detecting the probable trade routes across the Alps. The investigation of some key sites south of the Alps is crucial to understand the spread of Bronze Age plant (and other types of) economy into the Alpine valleys and finally to regions North of the Alps.

Keywords Bronze Age, Early Bronze Age, Northern Italy, Archaeobotany, plant husbandry, agricultural practieces, environment,

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