



The site of San Michele di Valestra: new evidence of Apennines exploitation during the Bronze Age (XV–XII cent. BC, Northern Italy)

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The nature and extent of Bronze Age human exploitation of the northern Apennine is poorly known, in particular in correspondence to the disappearance of the neighbouring Terramare culture in the Po Plain (N Italy) around 1150 BC. The principal reason for this knowledge gap is the scarcity of archaeological excavations in the area during the last decades. The archaeological sequence of San Michele di Valestra was re-investigated in the frame of the SUCCESSO-TERRA Project (PRIN-20158KBLNB), following a multidisciplinary study combining tools from different disciplines ranging from geoarchaeology, to archaeology, and palaeoenvironmental science, as well as palaeoclimatic studies on speleothems recovered in nearby caves. The excavation uncovered a stratigraphic sequence marking different phases of settlement. Successive frequentation levels sometimes marked by archaeological negative structures (postholes) are found, as well as a stone pavement composed by decimetric sandstone slabs towards the bottom of the stratigraphy. Archaeological and archaeozoological materials retrieved from the sequence testify a continuity in frequentation of the site from the beginning of the Recent Bronze Age up to the end of the Final Bronze Age, indicating uninterrupted activity of the site through and beyond the Terramare crisis. The site of San Michele di Valestra is probably the longest and best-preserved sequence for the Bronze Age in the Apennines, and offers the opportunity to understand the subsistence strategies in this environment. The evidence found shows how the climate event accompanying the Terramare crisis had little influence on Apennine settlements. Adaptations to the peculiarities of the mountain environment were a key factor in the higher resilience of these settlements, and a responsible strategy in the exploitation of the natural resources probably allowed their survival. The palaeobotanical analysis of the sequence and the palaeoclimatic studies on speleothems will explain the main climatic changes affecting the area and possibly shed light on the kind of response adopted by human groups to a changing environment.