

Breeding and alimentation in the roman cisalpina: a first balance between archaeology and zoo-archaeology from high ground and valley floor villages

Abstract

The report aims to offer a preliminary framework of knowledge on zoo-archaeological topics in the North-Eastern Italy during the Roman age, through a comparative data analysis from high ground and valley floor villages. The purpose is also connecting archaeological and zoo-archaeological data with other kind of source, if possible. The faunistic data show the prevalence of ovine and pigs, related to environmental vocation and also political, economical and cultural influences in the complex relation among production, distribution and consumption.

Keywords: North east Italy (cisalpina), roman age, zoo-archaeology, breeding, diet

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Introduction

This paper intends to offer an evaluation of the animal resource and the food habits in high ground and valley floor villages in the North-Eastern Italy during the Roman age (1st-6th c AD), connecting zoo-archaeological and archaeological data from some edited archaeological contexts, often separated and not updated (for a more extensive framework of knowledge).^{1,2} In fact it is necessary to insert the preliminary zoo-archaeological data in a more and ample complex historical and archaeological context. Besides, it is possible highlight the informative potentiality of this kind of research and the necessity to connect the zoo-archaeological remains and the other resources for a geographical and chronological area of interest that only recently has known this approach.

Case presentation

The sheep (*Ovis aries*) breeding is prevalent in the high ground villages such as Monte Sorantri di Raveo (890 m), in the region called Carnia, in I-II c AD (Figure 1). Sheep were used for meat and fat, as it is evident from individuals killed between two and four years old. 63% of the bones belong to sheep respect to a minor percentage of goats (*Capra hircus*). The kind of remains indicates a primary butchery (mandibles, jaws, skulls, teeth) and consumption (ribs and vertebrae) that happened in the site. Probably, the so-called containers Auerberg were produced and used for this resource, because the archaeometrical analysis reveals that fat could be inside used to waterproof the vase in the production phase, or to avoid the freezing in the high sites. More probable the fat was contained in the vase. The big size of the animals, comparable with roman ones from Aquileia, for example, could indicate a specialization of the ovine breeding in high ground settlements, connected to the seasonal movements of herds from the Friulian region plains to the mountain areas of Carnia: Monte Sorantri probably represents an alpine pasture post in the summer.

A prevalence of sheep for wool and meat purpose is also evident in the close settlements of Colle Mazèit di Verzegnis (400 m) and on Monte Castellir di Elleri, near Trieste (215m). The same is evident

at Castelraimondo village (400 m), where zoo-archaeological data for I-II c AD reveal an interest for sheep breeding, for meat and cheese products. This activity was conforming to the hilly site. Probably also pig (*Sus scrofa*) was bred in wild way and butchered in the site, considering the presence of all the skeleton As regards to plain settlements, a similar management of domestic animals, with a prevalence of sheep used for meat, is evident in the S Candido village (1250m), where there are also bovine remains, killed in adult age, probably used as work-force; in the valley floor village of Bressanone-Stufles (560m) (Dominick e Senoner), from I to V c AD, cows (*Bos taurus*) and pigs are only secondary resources. Cow is very big, similar to Altino and Aquileia ones and we can argue it represents a roman race, but there are also bone remains from small size ones, probable local race of the Late Antiquity. The site of Stufles Senoner seems a summer grazing-ground, but several elements suggest that limited transhumance took place at Stufles. Mackinnon² supposed that the pattern about adult sheep and goat's predominance was connected to short-distance transhumance where ewes might have greater prominence than to long-distance operations that emphasize raising wethers and rams for wool.²

Instead at Volano (Trento), cows were very important, both as food and work resource in farming. Considering these data, it is possible to argue that sheep breeding was the principal resource of high ground and valley floor villages, thanks to many uncultivated and different areas, appropriate to pastoral breeding. The prevalence of cows is associated with a big rural connotation of the settlements at inferior quota, such as at Volano. Another interesting aspect to consider is the absence of wild remains, perhaps due to a limited access to hunting by population. A major balance between bovines and sheep is evident in the roman settlements of Egna (Bolzano I-III c AD), associated with the mansio Endidae dell'Itinerarium Antonini along the Claudia Augusta Altinate via, between Trento and Bolzano. Bones were collected in a kitchen and in a well, probably food remains. It is interesting that pig bones are almost absent, suggesting local tradition in the diet. The influence of environment and local traditions shows its force also analyzing the data from minor settlements in the

plain, called Calvatone (CR), the ancient *vicus Bedriacum*. If in the settlements datable to Augustean and Tiberian age sheep is prevalent, used for wool and meat, with pigs, after and until V-VI c AD. We can

observe a different trend with the prevalence of pigs and sheep used for meat production, with a breeding near the house.

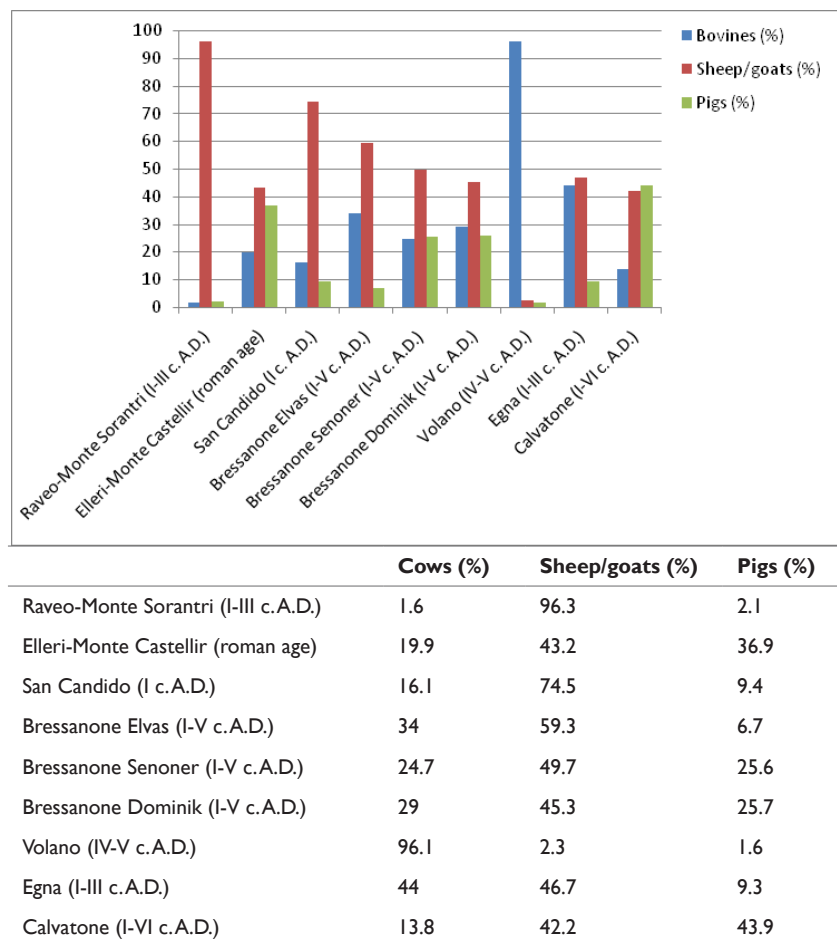


Figure 1 Percentages of animals used in the diet.

Discussion

The faunistic data show the prevalence of ovine and pigs in Roman Cisalpina and in the sites here considered (Table 1),³⁻¹⁴ connected with environmental vocation and also with political, economical and cultural influences in the complex relation among production-distribution- consumption.¹ The zoo-archaeological trend of enhanced sheep production in Northern Italy accords with Columella's comments about the importance of this region for wool production and therefore the northern Italian sheep were improved to produce

better-quality wool than most southern Italian breeds.² According to zoo-archaeological data, Invillino-Ibligo seems to be a summer grazing ground for caprines: dental data here show a predominance of deaths in the 7-12 month category, while sex data report slightly more females than males. Some studies on pig measurements from Alpine sites suggest that attention was paid to feeding and raising pigs such as at Stufles and Invillino-Ibligo settlements; besides it is possible to argue an annual breeding and culling schedule, with summer births and early winter culls.

Table 1 Contexts analyzed in this paper with number of bone remains (NISP) and percentages

Site	Province	Context	Cronology	Nisp	% Cow	% Sheep/goat	% Pig	Bibliography
Friuli-venezia giulia								
Castelraimondo	UD	high ground village	I-II cAD	n.d				Petrucci 3-5
Verzegnis-Mazèit	UD	high ground village	Roman age	n.d				Petrucci 3-5
Raveo-Monte Sorantri	UD	high ground village	I-III cAD	575	1,6	96,3	2,1	6
Elleri-Monte Castellir	TS	high ground village	Roman age	236	19,9	43,2	36,9	3,4,7
Trentino alto adige								
Volano	TN	valley floor village	IV-V c AD	308	96,1	2,3	1,6	8

Table Continued...

Site	Province	Context	Cronology	Nisp	% Cow	% Sheep/goat	% Pig	Bibliography
Egna	BZ	valley floor village	I-III c AD	1015	44	46,7	9,3	9
S. Candido-Innichen	BZ	high ground village	I c AD	721	16,1	74,5	9,4	Riedel 10
Bressanone-Elvas Kreuzwiese	BZ	valley floor village	I-V c AD	923	34	59,3	6,7	Boschin, et al. 11
Bressanone-Stufles Senoner	BZ	valley floor village	I-V c AD	1506	24,7	49,7	25,6	12,13
Bressanone- Stufles Dominik	BZ	valley floor village	I-V c AD	1128	29	45,3	25,7	12,13
Lombardia								
Calvatone/Bedriacum	CR	Plane village	I-VI c AD	419	13,8	42,2	43,9	14

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Conflict of interest

Author declares there is no conflict in publishing the article.

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