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Geoarchaeological data from a Bronze Age upland site: MZ051S (Val di Sole, Italy)

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The geoarchaeological study of site MZ051S (Val di Sole, Trentino, Italy), carried out by the project ALPES (Alpine Landscapes: Pastoralism and Environment of Val di Sole), is presented here as a case-study for reconstructing human occupation of the uplands in the central-eastern Alps in late Prehistory and understanding the relationships between human and natural dynamics in the past.

The site, located in Val Porè, consists of a large dry-stone enclosure placed on a small, glacial plateau at 2240 m a.s.l. and has been dated to the early and middle Bronze Age.

Between 2015 and 2019, archaeological excavations were carried out and, following an interdisciplinary approach, numerous data were collected in order to reconstruct site history and site formation, including data from palaeobotany, stratigraphy, soil science, and the analysis of cultural assemblages.

Much importance was given to the geomorphological context and the deposit. The geoarchaeological and soil micromorphological study showed the presence of two buried soils, respectively dating to the ancient (2122-1773 and 1878-1693 cal BCE at 2σ) and middle (1750-1430 cal BCE at 2σ) Bronze Age. Both soils were buried by colluvial sediments deriving from slope dynamics. Although limited, the evidence recorded in the deposit, together with the results obtained from the distinct analyses, allow us to hypothesize that these processes could be determined by the human exploitation of the uplands.

It can be argued that human occupation had a significant impact on the landscape since late Prehistory, revealing that the mountain environment is the result of complex interactions between anthropogenic and natural factors.