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# RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK AT AOSTA (587 M S.L.M.) IN THE ALPINE REGION OF THE VALLE D'AOSTA - NORTH-WESTERN ITALY.

David Wicks<sup>\*†1</sup> and Alessandra Armirotti<sup>‡2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Akhet srl – Loc. Closellinaz, 44A - 11010 Roisan (Aoste), Italie

<sup>2</sup>Patrimonio Archeologico, Soprintendenza per i Beni e le Attività Culturali della Regione Autonoma  
Valle d'Aosta – Piazza Roncas, 12 11100 Aosta, Italie

## Résumé

Archaeological discoveries have cast new light upon the prehistoric and protohistoric development of agriculture in the mountainous region of the Aosta Valley, with recent work concentrating in particular on the lowland zone around the actual city of Aosta. These discoveries complement recently-illustrated data for prehistoric agricultural expansion into the mountainous hinterlands, with settlement activity in the uplands even beyond 2000 m s.l.m., and cereal pollen stratified in the peat of an ancient alpine lake at Mont Fallère, 10 km to the NW of Aosta, including important testimony of a potential peak in cereal production during the III millennium BC.

This contribution focuses in particular on the preliminary results of the large-scale and ongoing excavations at the Hospital site, at the base of the hillside to the north of the roman city of *Augusta Praetoria*, where archeologists supported by paleo-environmental studies and radiometric analysis, have revealed a continuous sequence of well-stratified field-systems and associated irrigation schemes, testimony to the gradual evolution of a rural landscape on the eastern plain of Aosta during the IV-I millennia BC; a sequence clearly parallel to that of the well-known megalithic site of Saint-Martin-de-Corléans situated on the western plain of Aosta with its evidence of very early agriculture parting in the second half of the V millennium BC.

The development of the agricultural landscape on the eastern plain was notably interrupted during the Early Iron Age, when monumental structures, including a stone circle of diameter m 135 and a major tumulus, were imposed upon the existing field-system. However the transient nature of power in this 'marginal' transalpine context is notably illustrated with momentarily important symbols rapidly losing their cultural significance with a return to the more important work of agricultural production.

Studying a successive Middle Iron Age field-system of the Hospital site in relation to recent landscape archeological data deriving from a nearby deeply-stratified rescue excavation (Via Roma) and the extensive trenching for the urban central-heating project, has allowed not only the hypothetical extension of a landscape agricultural scheme across the eastern plain, but also the creation of a 'model' irrigation system, presumably applicable to other alpine

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\*Intervenant

†Auteur correspondant: davidwicks@akhet.it

‡Auteur correspondant: a.armirotti@regione.vda.it

contests, illustrating how the Iron Age indigenous population not only distributed the all-important water resource but plausibly also made fertile a previously sterile terrain with artificial deposition of silts.

**Mots-Clés:** Aosta Valley, field system, irrigation system, Prehistory, Iron Age