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# Neolithic colonisation of mountain environments and the expansion of pastoral economy in the Alps: new data from Cadore (Dolomites, Veneto region, Italy)

Francesco Carrer<sup>\*†1</sup>, Fabio Cavulli<sup>2</sup>, Federica Fontana<sup>3</sup>, and Davide Visentin<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>McCord Centre for Landscape, School of History Classics Archaeology, Newcastle University –  
Royaume-Uni

<sup>2</sup>Laboratorio “B.Bagolini”, Dipartimento di Lettere e Filosofia, Università degli Studi di Trento – Italie

<sup>3</sup>Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Sezione Scienze preistoriche e antropologiche, Università degli Studi di Ferrara – Italie

## Résumé

The spread of farming economy in Europe contributed to modifying human-environment interaction in mountain areas. The high-altitudes (around 2000 m s.l.m.) in the Alpine regions, seasonally and intensively re-occupied by the last Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers starting from the end of the Last Glacial Maximum, seem to be abandoned during the first phases of the Neolithic, and progressively re-colonised at the end of the same period. However, archaeological and palaeoecological data are often difficult to interpret, and it is not clear when and how the pastoral occupation of the upland pastures began. An intensive survey carried out between 2011 and 2015 in Cadore (Dolomites, Veneto region, Italy), and a revision of the data already known for the same area, have provided the necessary information to tackle these issues. The study area yielded a remarkable number of Mesolithic find-spots, enabling a reliable reconstruction of the last hunter-gatherers' settlement patterns. The analysis of the few major sites associated to prehistoric pastoral economy, along with new archaeological findings of the survey project, have shed new light on the Neolithic and post-Neolithic occupation of the high mountains. This paper will present a reconstruction of the transition between hunter-gatherers and pastoralists in the uplands of Cadore, and it will investigate the implications of this reconstruction for a wider understanding of prehistoric pastoralism in the Alpine region. Particular attention will be paid to research biases and difficulties in data interpretation, which limit our understanding of the socio-economical phenomena occurred in the high mountains during the Early and Mid-Holocene. This paper will provide new insights on the complex processes that led to the formation of Alpine pastoralism, which becomes established since the Bronze Age in the investigated valley as well as in many neighbouring areas.

**Mots-Clés:** Alps, Cadore, pastoralism, Neolithic

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\*Intervenant

†Auteur correspondant: Francesco.Carrer@newcastle.ac.uk