

Isotopic evidence from southern and central Europe

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The application of stable isotope analysis to the study of food practices in Italian prehistory has revealed an interesting complexity. This is particularly true for the northern regions of the Peninsula, where the use of “alternative” grains (i.e., millets) has been assessed isotopically through the measurement of stable carbon and nitrogen isotope ratios of Bronze Age human and animal bone collagen. In particular, evidence from several Early, Middle, and Late Bronze Age sites from western Veneto and Friuli has allowed us to understand mode and tempo of the spread of new crops in Italy, which appears to be a hotspot for the study of farming economies in Southern Europe. The result of a discontinuous spread of new species in northeastern Italy at a very specific moment of the Bronze Age is further confirmed by growing isotopic evidence, with similar scenarios occurring in other areas of the Mediterranean. The data presented might call for a reconsideration of food production and consumption among Bronze Age groups of southern Europe.