

Middle Holocene Landscape evolution and settlements in the north-western coast of Sardinia: preliminary study of the Sant'Imbenia site

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In Sardinia, the evolution of the coastal landscape was important for the development of prehistoric and historical settlements and for intercultural exchanges with the civilizations in the Mediterranean area. In particular, the sea level changes and the relative coastline evolution have directly influenced the choice of strategic landing places and control of the territory. This paper reports on the preliminary results of a multidisciplinary, geoarchaeological and archaeological study aimed at the palaeoenvironmental reconstruction of the Sant' Imbenia Nuragic site (Middle Bronze Age-Iron Age), in the north-west coast of Sardinia. The site lies closed to the shoreline in the middle of the Porto Conte bay between the promontories of Capo Caccia at west and Punta Giglio at east. For centuries, the Porto Conte bay represented a safe landing place. The morphological context of the bay is characterised by a deep *ria* dominated by high limestone cliffs, interrupted locally by small bays and narrow inlets. The Sant'Imbenia site, characterized by a nuraghe and a village, was an important seaport for the routes in the Mediterranean basin, and a meeting point of different cultures: the Near East, the Aegean world, the Etruscan Culture, and the Phoenician colonies in North Africa, Sicily and Spain. The stratigraphic, sedimentological, paleontological and micromorphological studies of three drilling cores and AMS radiocarbon dating, show an evolution of the landscape due to the regression of the coastline during the Holocene, as a result of the last eustatic marine transgression. From late Bronze to late Punic Age, the area closed to the Sant'Imbenia site was characterized by transitional coastal environment with wetlands represented by brackish lagoon than evolved into marshland. This environment is supported by the presence in the sediments of brackish and freshwater malacofauna. The archaeological excavations revealed an evolution of the settlement structures from the Middle Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, and a new "urban" development, occurred during the second half of the 9th century BC. Was this settlement urban evolution linked to the natural landscape change, or was it associated with intercultural exchanges between different cultures? This multidisciplinary study, still in progress, will give an answer to this question.

