

MOBILITY PATTERNS IN THE LOMBARD-PERIOD COMMUNITIES OF VICENNE AND MORRIONE (CAMPOCHIARO, ITALY; 7TH C. CE)

*Davide Mameli¹, Federico Lugli², Sara Bernardini^{2,3}, Rita Sorrentino⁴ and
Maria Giovanna Belcastro¹*

¹University of Bologna, Department of Biological, Geological and Environmental Sciences, Bologna, Italy; ²University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Department of Chemical and Geological Sciences, MeGic Lab, Modena, Italy; ³University of Bologna, Department of Cultural Heritage, Ravenna, Italy; ⁴University of Palermo, Department of Biological, Chemical and Pharmaceutical Sciences and Technologies, Palermo, Italy

Background: The cemeteries of Vicenne and Morrione (7th c. CE; Campochiaro, Molise) represent a key Lombard-period funerary complex in southern Italy. Their archaeological record, particularly contextual horse-horseman burials with riding equipment, indicates strong links with Pannonian Avar contexts and suggests a non-local origin of this group. Lombard chronicler Paul the Deacon reports the arrival, in the 7th century, of a group of foreigners from Eastern Europe in this region, likely providing a precise historical reference to this archaeological context.

Objective: This study investigates mobility patterns within these communities and tests whether isotopic evidence supports the hypothesis of a non-local origin of the community.

Materials and methods: Mobility was investigated through strontium isotope (⁸⁷Sr/⁸⁶Sr) analysis of early-forming dental enamel, primarily first molars. The sample comprises 61 individuals (31 Vicenne; 30 Morrione), including 13 horsemen. The local isotopic baseline was established using five modern plant samples collected within 2 km of the sites.

Results: The baseline defines a narrow, low-radiogenic range (0.70804–0.70851), whereas human enamel values range from 0.70822 to 0.72347. Results show that 44% of the individuals fall within or close to the local range. No significant sex-based differences in local/non-local status are observed between the two cemeteries. With one exception, all non-local individuals are adults, while local individuals are predominantly subadults and young adults (20–35 years). All horsemen are non-local, except for one adolescent individual, and display marked isotopic variability.

Conclusions: These results indicate a substantial non-local component, with a considerable number of high-radiogenic strontium values unusual for the region and, in some cases, the Italian peninsula, supporting the archaeological and historical evidence that the group was of foreign origin. The predominance of young individuals among locals supports the numismatic evidence for a short-term use of the cemeteries (~50 years). Future analyses will test different hypotheses concerning the possible origin(s) of this group.

Keywords: Pannonian Avars; Horsemen; Strontium isotopes; Human mobility.