



Humans and environmental sustainability: Lessons from the past ecosystems of Europe and Northern Africa

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Edited by
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UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF



CEA2018

This e-book includes the 61 long abstracts of oral presentations (41) and posters (20) presented at the three-day CEA2018, the 14th Conference of Environmental Archaeology. The LPP-Laboratory of Palynology and Palaeobotany of Department of Life Science, interdisciplinary biological center of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, organized the meeting in Modena (26-28 February 2018), in the historical and recently restored San Geminiano building. The scientific contributions were presented in 8 talk sessions and one poster session. Multidisciplinary *ABG Archaeo-Bio-Geo* studies on environmental reconstructions and palaeoecological research involving analyses of archaeological survey, human and animal bones, sometimes integrated to isotopic or molecular data, remote sensing and GIS, are reported in this e-book. Botany is the prevalent biological field contributing to environmental reconstructions, with analyses on plant macroremains, non-pollen palynomorphs and pollen, and with studies on flora and vegetation changes. Study areas are mainly centered on European countries, Mediterranean and Northern Africa, including five abstracts on Sahara, while two contributions concern South America.

The 1st Conference, called “The Archaeobotanical work group”, was organized in 2005, and was a working group round-table meeting between experts on environmental studies and archaeologists of the Czech Republic. Then, the meeting became an annual conference with more and more attendants from other countries. In 2017, the 13th CEA took place in Nitra, Slovakia, and was for the first time outside the Czech Republic. In Italy, the CEA2018 has been especially rich of presentations and interdisciplinary approaches, with many countries represented as study areas and participants coming to Modena. Titles and list of co-authors show an unexpectedly rich number of contributions to the Environmental Archaeology by Italian specialists joining colleagues from the Czech Republic, Poland, Norway, Sweden, Greece, Spain, France, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Serbia, Slovakia, Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom, United States of America, and other countries.

The congress was under the patronage of the project SUCCESSO-TERRA (on sustainability and the Bronze age in the Po plain-N Italy) and of the network BRAIN-Botanical Records of Archaeobotany Italian Network (<https://brainplants.unimore.it/>). Basic sponsorships were given by the Botanical Society of Italy, the Italian Institute of Prehistory and Protohistory, the scientific association Society of Naturalists and Mathematicians of Modena, the Superintendence of Bologna, Modena, Reggio Emilia and Ferrara, Civic Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of Modena, with municipality of Modena and the Emilia Romagna Region. Besides the SUCCESSO-TERRA project mentioned above, financial support was provided by Fondazione Anna Maria Catalano ONLUS and CEDAD-Centro di DATazione e Diagnostica. We acknowledge all the projects, institutions and associations, the international scientific committee, the local organization committee and the Centro Interateneo EDUNOVA - Centro E-learning di Ateneo who contributed to the success of the conference.

*Anna Maria Mercuri
February 2018*

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SESSION 8

Environmental sustainability in a changing world: lessons from the past

Beginning of a new farming system (mid-9th century AD): local fire events and vegetation changes in southwestern Tuscany

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Keywords: *soil charcoal analysis, Middle Ages, Human impact, fire-affected vegetation*

Introduction

The ERC Advanced Grant 2014 “Origins of a new Economic Union (7th to 12th centuries): resources, landscapes and political strategies in a Mediterranean region (nEU-Med)”, hosted by the University of Siena, is focusing on understanding the archaeology of resource management and commerce in south-western Tuscany. In re-defining the causes of socio-economic development in this region, destined to become an apogee of European economic development during the Renaissance (15th century AD), the project investigates also the evolution of the plant landscape in order to reconstruct (a) uses, (b) changes and (c) time intervals of forest and agricultural resources. Previous archaeobotanical research suggested that the first post-Roman settlements in the area practiced high quality subsistence agriculture, adapting from the mid-9th century AD to systematic cultivation of surpluses of cereals, olives and chestnuts (Buonincontri et al. 2017; Buonincontri et al. 2015; Di Pasquale et al. 2014). Through archaeobotanical analyses, the ERC nEU-Med Project aims to study when and why these changes occurred and what role agro-forestry production played in the processes leading to Late Medieval economic growth.

Soil charcoal analysis was performed in the Pecora river plain, along a section opened during geoengineering work on the left bank of the river. Soil charcoal analysis represents a unique tool to investigate local fire events and vegetation changes with a highly-detailed spatial resolution (Thinon 1978) and possibly without the human selection characterizing archaeological charcoal (Théry-Parisot et al. 2010). Charcoal identification, combined with radiocarbon dating and the sedimentological and stratigraphical analysis of the section, allowed drawing a detailed snapshot of the changes in the forestry conditions between the 9th and the 13th century AD.

Materials and Methods

The investigations have been mainly carried out in a retention basin on the hydrographic left bank of the Pecora river (Fig. 1). The basin allowed the observation of ca. 3 m of the sequence perpendicular to the river flow direction (Sections NW; Fig. 2). Sedimentological and stratigraphical analysis has allowed the identification of palaeochannels with two different depositional environments suggesting changes of geomorphological conditions and alluvial plain landscapes. The oldest, U 3.1, is typical of a gravel-sand sinuous meandering river and filling of abandoned channels. The U 3.2 sediments are typical of deposition by a gravel-bed braided river.

The bedforms were characterised by the presence of very abundant fine to very coarse charcoals. In the U 3.2, 10 soil samples were collected at different levels, ranging from 500 to 2390 ml of volume. The samples were firstly air-dried and weighted, and then they were wet-

sieved through two sieves with 1 and 0.4 mm mesh-size. Charcoal concentration and taxonomical identification were preliminarily performed for charcoal remains greater than 1 mm. Taxonomical identification was carried out with an incident light microscope at magnifications of 100×, 200× and 500× and supported with wood anatomy atlases (Abbate Edlmann et al. 1994; Schweingruber 1990; Vernet et al. 2001) and the reference collection in the Dipartimento di Agraria at the Università degli Studi di Napoli ‘Federico II’.



Figure 1 - Study area of the ERC-ADG nEU-Med Project. Red diamond indicates the retention basin of the Pecora river; white diamonds indicate Medieval archaeological sites; pale blue diamond is Accesa Lake (Late Holocene pollen sequence in Magny et al. 2007).

The presence of abundant charcoals allowed AMS radiocarbon dating in order to assess the chronology of the succession of events (Tab. 1). Samples were collected from U 3.1, the sinuous meandering rivers' sediments, and from U 3.2, the braided rivers' sediments. The preliminary results show that the U 3.1 sediments were left at least until 787-471 BC (Fi3497) whereas the filling of the upper palaeochannel (U 3.2) can be dated between 820-980 AD (Fi3452, from soil sample 2.4) and 1150-1290 AD (Fi3451 from soil sample 2.1).

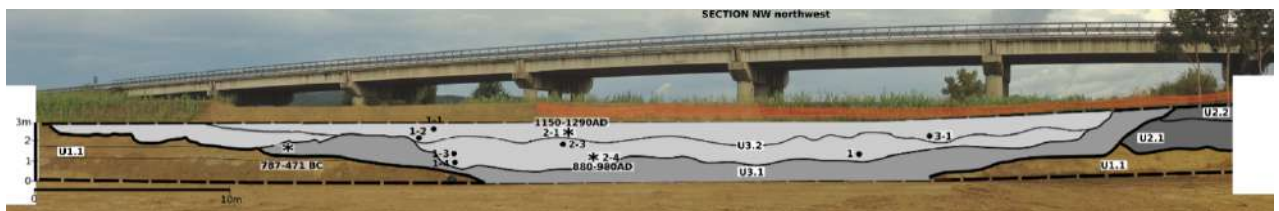


Figure 2 - Northwestern section of the retention basin. Light and dark greys highlight the palaeochannel of the Pecora river. Black circles indicate the soil samples for charcoal analysis; stars indicate soil samples with radiocarbon dating.

Results and Discussion

A total of 13 liters of soil were sampled with ca. 18.4 g of extracted charcoals. To get taxonomical information, 145 charcoal remains were preliminarily analyzed allowing the identification of 22 taxa (Tab. 2). Among the identified taxa, *Ulmus* is the most common (30.3%), followed by *Fraxinus* (12.4%), such as *F. cf. ornus* (3.4%) and *F. cf. angustifolia* (2.8%), *Quercus cf. cerris* (7.6%), *Salix* and *Erica* (4.1%), *Alnus* (2.8%), *Populus/Salix* and *Quercus cf. ilex* (2.1%), *Populus* (< 1%). Unidentifiable charcoals constitute 15.9% of the total.

Table 1 - Radiocarbon and calibrated ages of selected charcoals. Radiocarbon dates have been calibrated by using OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2005) and the Reimer et al. (2004) calibration curve. Samples were dated by AMS at the INFN CHNet in Florence. In bold, the most probable calendar time intervals obtained from the calibration curves.

Sample Id	Lab code		Radiocarbon age	Calibrated age	
				1 Sigma	2 Sigma
2.1	Fi3451	<i>Ulmus</i>	808±50	1185-1270 AD	1050-1290 AD
					1150-1290 AD
2.4	Fi3452	<i>Ulmus</i>	1142±55	780-790 AD	770-1020 AD
				820-980 AD	
	Fi3497	<i>Quercus pubescens</i>	2487±48	695-541 BC	787-471 BC
				766-727 BC	466-430 BC

The percentages of the taxonomical identification of the soil charcoal remains, together with the radiocarbon dating, are presented in Fig. 3. Overall, the most recorded taxa pertained to broad-leaved trees, while Mediterranean sclerophyllous shrubs and trees are scarcely present. In detail, two phases seem to be present, in agreement with the two different time intervals proposed. In the lower samples, dated between the 820-980 AD, the strong presence of trees typical of riparian and mixed flood-forest suggests that fire events occurred mainly along the riverbed and wetlands of Pecora river and its alluvial plain. In the higher samples, trees referable to the thermophilous deciduous forest prevail, suggesting that foothill areas were fire-affected mainly during the mid-12th and the end of the 13th century AD.

The comparison of our data with pollen analysis in the region shows an interesting conformity of the fire signal and forest clearance. In particular, the pollen sequence of Accesa Lake shows a decrease of wild arboreal pollen from ca 850-950 AD whereas pollen of cultivated trees spread, such as olive and chestnut (Magny et al. 2007). Therefore, the mid-9th century AD seems to be a crucial period for the beginning of agro-forestry activities, creating the opening of woodland and the cultivation of new areas for producing surpluses of crops and fruit trees (Di Pasquale et al. 2014; Buonincontri et al. 2015; Buonincontri et al. 2017).

Table 2 - List of charcoal remains recovered. For each taxon the number of charcoal specimens in the soil samples are given. Identified taxa are grouped according to their ecological significance.

Sample ID	Riparian forest					Mixed flood-plain forest		Thermophylous deciduous forest					Broadleaved evergreen forest			Others					Total			
	<i>Alnus</i>	<i>Populus</i>	<i>Salix</i>	<i>Populus/Salix</i>	<i>Vitis vinifera</i>	<i>Fraxinus cf. oxycarpa</i>	<i>Ulmus</i>	<i>Quercus cerris</i>	<i>Q. pubescens</i>	<i>Quercus deciduous type</i>	<i>Crataegus</i>	<i>Euonymus</i>	<i>F. cf. ornus</i>	<i>Sorbus cf. aucuparia</i>	<i>Q. ilex</i>	<i>Cistus</i>	<i>Erica</i>	<i>Prunus</i>	<i>Fraxinus</i>	<i>Quercus</i>		Malloideae	Monocotyledon	Undetermined
1.1								2											1				1	4
2.1							3	5											6	4	4		11	33
3.1				2		3		4	1			2		2		6			6	1			3	30
1.2																							1	1
2.3	4	1				1	9					3	1					1	4					24
4				6	1									1										8
1							31						1						2		1		5	40
2.4							1													1				2
1.4																						1	2	3

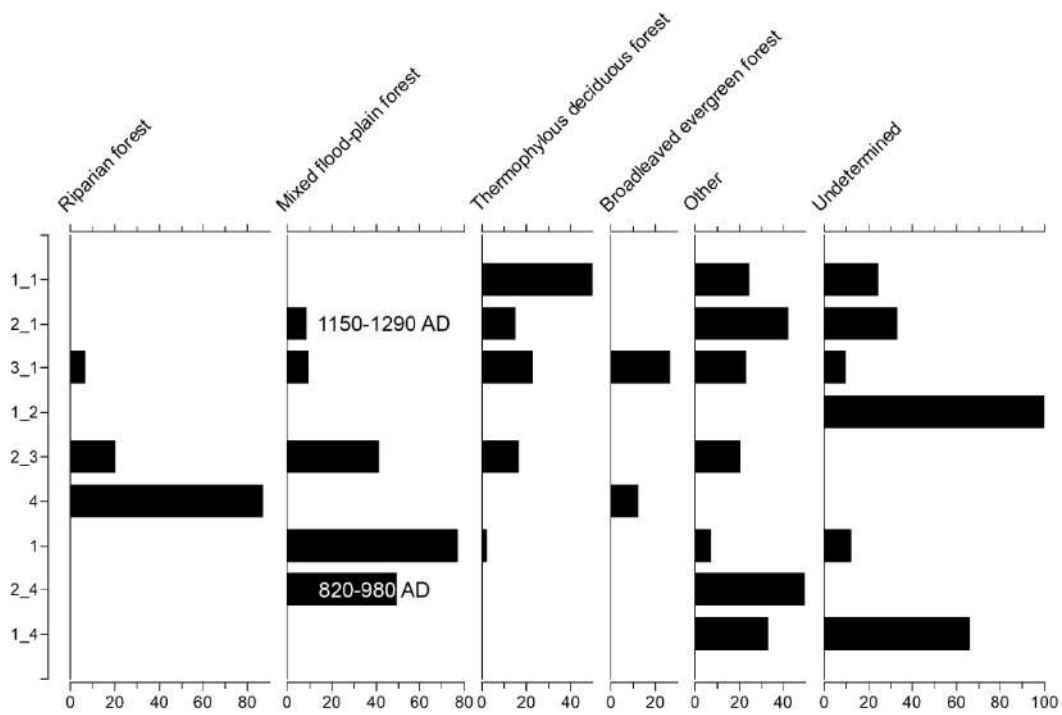


Figure 3 - Percentage bars of the ecological groups calculated over the sum total of charcoal remains in each soil samples. The ecological groups are in agreement with Tab. 2. The most probable AMS radiocarbon dates are presented.

Conclusions

Assuming that the charcoal record is the result of fire-affected forest vegetation, we can argue that the period between the mid-9th and the end of the 13th century AD is characterized by fire activities in the Pecora river basin. At least in the first centuries, according to several palaeoenvironmental data sources, fires were used mainly for clearing and reclaiming woodland for a new farming system characterized by the cultivation of cereals, olive and chestnut groves, that would stabilize in the following centuries. The fire events along the Pecora river are probably the first steps to the beginning of the modern agroforestry landscapes in Tuscany.

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