

ARCHAEOBOTANY AND THE HISTORY OF THE LOCAL FLORA: THE CASE OF 12TH CENTURY AD ARCHAEOBOTANICAL RECORDS FROM THE BISHOP'S PALACE OF MODENA (EMILIA ROMAGNA, ITALY)

Giovanna BOSI¹, Rossella RINALDI¹, Donato LABATE², Claudio SANTINI³,
Marta BANDINI MAZZANTI¹

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In 2009 archaeological excavations in the bishop's palace of Modena brought to light a canal of the 12th century AD filled with plant material. Seeds and fruits, above all waterlogged except a few charred ones, showed a good state of preservation. The concentration of remains is 52174 seeds or fruits in 60 litres, and the floristic list includes 146 taxa. Archaeobotanical analyses show that the canal was partly naturally, and partly anthropogenically filled up, but it was rarely used for depositing garbage and latrine waste. The canal, rich in wetland plants, was probably close to a kitchen garden and a little orchard, with fruits, vegetables, aromatics/medicinal plants and weeds, as well as ornamental plants, such as for example *Aquilegia vulgaris/atrata* and *Prunella vulgaris*, probably also plants with a religious meaning, according to the archaeological context.

The revision of the *Flora of the Province of Modena* (in press) allows us to compare past and present floras. Among weeds, more than a fifth of taxa found in the archaeobotanical record are today rare or absent, such as *Agrostemma githago*, *Amaranthus graecizans/lividus*, *Ammi majus*, *Anthemis cotula*, *Chenopodium ficifolium*, *Medicago arabica*, *Neslia paniculata*, *Thymelaea passerina* and *Veronica hederifolia*. Of wetland plants, more than a third of taxa are in the same situation: we may mention *Cicuta virosa*, perhaps also grown as a medicinal plant in this context, *Cladium mariscus*, *Eleocharis multicaulis*, *Epilobium tetragonum*, *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, *Oenanthe fistulosa*, *Pedicularis* cf. *palustris*, *Polygonum amphibium*, *P. minus*, *Ranunculus flammula*, *Rhynchospora alba*, *Salix viminalis* and *Scutellaria galericulata*. Several plants which today are missing from the plain, grow in the hills of the Emilia Romagna region. For example, in the medieval settlement of S. Agata Bolognese (BO, 17 m a.s.l., 10th – 11th century AD) we find many carpological records of *Drosera intermedia*, a protected species today, absent from the plain, but still present in the hills. So, archaeobotany is able to supervise the vegetal biodiversity in time, giving evidence of plants which have now disappeared.

¹ University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy, e-mail: giovanna.bosi@unimore.it

² Soprintendenza dei Beni Archeologici Emilia Romagna, Italy, e-mail: donato.labate@beniculturali.it

³ Gruppo di lavoro sulla Flora della Provincia di Modena, Italy, e-mail: claudiosantini_004@fastwebnet.it