

ACORN GATHERERS: FRUIT STORAGE AND PROCESSING IN SOUTHEASTERN ITALY DURING THE BRONZE AGE

Milena PRIMAVERA¹, Girolamo FIORENTINO¹

Key words: Acorn, Southeastern Italy, Bronze Age, Gatherers

The analysis of archaeobotanical assemblages recovered in recent and past archaeological excavations carried out on several sites located in southeastern Italy (Apani, Torre Guaceto (BR); Rocavecchia, Melendugno (LE); Piazza Palmieri, Monopoli (BA); Scoglio del Tonno (TA)), have revealed the importance of acorn gathering and use among Bronze Age societies.

A number of documentary sources (ancient literature, ethnographical observation, etc...) describe the use of acorns as food, both in human and animal diet, even if their occurrence does not necessarily mean evidence of use as food; in fact different purposes have also been reported (tanning agent, medical function and so on). On the other hand, charred acorns recovered in Bronze Age sites and examined in this study were strongly related to domestic fireplaces (accumulated adjacent to griddles and mixed with other edible plants such as cereal grains and legumes), suggesting an important role in protohistoric economies.

In order to address the role of oak fruit gathering and to investigate the processing methods, we present our first results carried out using biometric analysis and experimental procedures.

Data collected through morphometric studies, aimed at identifying the specific taxonomy of the cotyledons, are compared with modern analogues, on the basis of the areal distribution of the species; while experimental protocol reproduces the main cooking methods on the basis of ethnographical data: 1. Boiling – “*Sardinia Method*”; 2. Roasting; 3. Pounded into flour “*Californian Indians’ method*”.

Preliminary results are discussed and addressed to decode the archaeological, archaeobotanical and taphonomical evidence connected to the method of gathering and processing acorns in Bronze Age agrarian societies.

¹ Laboratory of Archaeobotany and Palaeoecology, University of Salento, Via D. Birago 64, 73100 Lecce, Italy, e-mail: milena.primavera@ateneo.unile.it