Archaeobotanical research in Classe (Ravenna - Italy)
Rosella Rinaldi1, Giovanna Bosi2, Carmelo Triolo1, Marta Bandini Mazzanti1, Marco Marchesini1, Chiara Guarnieri2

1 Laboratory of Palaeontology and Paleobotany - Dipartimento di Scienze della Vita, Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Modena, Italy
2 Laboratorio di Palinologia e Archeobotanica – C.A.A. Giorgio Nizzoli - San Giovanni in Persiceto, Bologna, Italy
3 Soprintendenza Archeologia Emilia Romagna, Bologna, Italy

The archaeobotanical research carried out in ancient ports can provide key information on the plant landscape of the area, and also on climate, the food customs and the commercial traffic. In Italy, in the last fifteen years, archaeobotanical studies were conducted in some of the most important ports of the Roman period, located along the Tyrrhenian coast such as Rome, Pisa, Naples.

The site of Classe is the most important port of the Adriatic between the 1st and 7th century AD. It represents the first study of port contexts in this part of the Mediterranean. The archaeological surveys discovered a well connected to a horizontal duct containing a large quantity of archaeological material dating from the 2nd to 7th century AD.

There is a significant amount of organic remains preserved by waterlogging in the sediments of the duct. The research on this water structure has revealed a rather rich carpological list (176 taxa), considering the exceptionality of the site of Classe. The site shows a high plant biodiversity, perhaps evidence of the simultaneous presence of different habitats.

The more data obtained are those related to the relationships between plants and man.

There are several evidences of fruit trees/shrubs, especially olives, and peach, melon, mulberry and the earliest remains of the jujube tree for the Northern Italy. Moreover, condiments and vegetables are represented by, e.g., coriander, rue and bottle gourd.

Among crops useful for the craft, there are madder, hemp and flax, although for the latter plant the possible use as food may be also hypothesised.

Of interest are the records of cypress, that are known to have been probably introduced in the Etruscan period, and then spread by the Romans.

Concerning wooden elements, about 300 records belonging to 27 taxa represent almost all manufactured goods. They prevalently were made by elm (e.g. for tools), boxwood (e.g. for spindle whorls), oak and fir (e.g. for tabulas corasai)