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Alto Patronato del
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Patrocinio della
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per l'UNESCO

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ARCHAEOPALYNOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN SICILY (AT TAORMINA, PIAZZA ARMERINA AND MOZIA)

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Recently, the Bio-archaeological Laboratory of the CRPR, conscious of the importance of archaeopalynology to improve the scientific knowledge on the Sicilian archaeological sites, has set up a steady collaboration with the Laboratory of Palynology and Palaeobotany of Modena and Reggio Emilia Universities. Three sites of different age and location are currently under investigation for pollen. Some preliminary information on the natural and cultural landscape of the involved areas and times has been obtained so far. Moreover, actions for Education and Popularization have begun by means of archaeo-vegetational drawings, panels with pollen diagram and photos, etc. The first study concerns the Ancient Theatre of Taormina (1). Two cores sampled inside the theatre were analyzed for pollen. Based on pollen spectra, two reconstructions of the landscape (in the Greek period and in a subsequent period) were drawn by R. Merlo. Moreover, a list of plants for the design of a “*virtual archaeobotanical garden*”, and suggestions for the green architecture were inferred from pollen assemblages: rose and acanthus (*Rosa*, *Acanthus*) for flowerbeds; hawthorn, box, myrtle (*Crataegus*, *Buxus*, *Myrtus*) for hedges; and a number of other trees/shrubs which were evidence of their growing to have edible fruits (chestnut tree, walnut tree, olive tree, plum tree, grapevine - *Castanea*, *Juglans*, *Olea*, *Prunus*, *Vitis*), or their use for decoration or their presence in the natural woody cover (cypress/juniper, holly oak, pine, poplar, plane (*Cupressus* / *Juniperus*, *Quercus ilex*, *Pinus*, *Populus*, *Platanus*). The second study concerns the Medieval settlement of Piazza Armerina (2,3). Pollen indicated a cultural hilly landscape of the Mediterranean area, near a river. During the I phase (X–XI century), a quite thick forest cover characterized both the natural and the cultural landscape. In the II phase, there was a notable deforestation and pastures spread. The third study concerns the submerged road of Mozia. It connected the Phoenician colony island to the necropolis located in the near coast, and also probably led to land devoted to fields and pastures. Seven cores were sampled (by F. Benassi) about one meter under the water level, near the point where the road joins the island. Pollen analysis, in progress (4), are showing some changes in the local floristic/vegetation pattern, suggesting that in the past the road was sometimes less submerged than today, and sometimes more, and that the human impact in the surroundings of the roads varied