
Vegetation changes and land use in Calabria (Italy) during Prehistory

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Résumé

In Calabria (southern Italy), the mild climate, the availability of rich and diverse resources, the presence of shielded environments and landing coastal stretches have favored settlement continuity over the last millennia. In order to shed light on the impact that pre-historic communities exerted on this territory, pollen analysis was undertaken on a sediment core drilled on the Poro highplain, located at the top of the Tropea Promontory, an area rich in archeological evidence dated from the Late Neolithic up to the Iron Age. The coring intercepted a peat deposit whose base (2,40 m) and the top (1,20 m) were ¹⁴C dated to the second half of the 5th and the late 2nd millennium cal BC respectively. During the Late Neolithic and Eneolithic (Calcolithic) periods, high amounts of micro-charcoals, recorded in concomitance to decreasing arboreal percentages, attest to the use of anthropogenic fires to open the landscape for agricultural practices (cereals) and animal husbandry, which is also testified by the high percentages of fungal spores, indicative of pasturage.

In the Early and Middle Bronze Ages, a decrease in the fire setting practice and sheep farming is coupled with the recovery of the forest cover and an increase in the marsh plants. These vegetation changes could indicate an abandonment of the area even if some cereal crops were still present. In the EBA, a peak of *Trifolium* cfr *patens* opens up interesting hypothesis on the occurrence of forage crops. Between the Middle and Recent Bronze Age, pollen data seem to indicate a re-colonization of the area, whereas between the Final Bronze Age and the Iron Age a clear abandonment of the area is indicated by the rapid recovery of the Alder forest on the wet soils surrounding the marsh. The last Iron Age level shows a possible re-colonization.

The reconstructed history of vegetation changes and their connection to land use by pre-historic communities on the Tropea Promontory shows some coherence but also some discrepancies with the archaeological evidence. Improving the chronological framework of the pollen record with new ¹⁴C dating is necessary to evaluate the consistency of such divergences.

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The archaeological data from the same area confirm an intense presence of settlements during the Late Neolithic and Eneolithic periods, and also in the Early and Recent Bronze Age, and a phase of abandonment in the Middle Bronze Age. Final Bronze Age and Early Iron Age settlements are present on the Poro highplain, but at a distance of some kilometers from the site of the core.

Mots-Clés: palinology, microcharcoals, deforestation, human impact, late Holocene