

The Roman Villa of Villamagna (Urbisaglia (Macerata), Italy): Pilot Archaeobotany Analysis

Riccardo Carmenati*, Roberto Perna**, Girolamo Fiorentino*

* Laboratory of Archaeobotany and Palaeoecology. Department of Cultural Heritage. University of Salento

** University of Macerata - Macerata Italy

riccardo_carmenati@libero.it, girolamo.fiorentino@unisalento.it, roberto.perna@unimc.it



Fig. 2 – Plateau of Villamagna and archaeological area.



Fig. 3 – Plan of the roman villa of Villamagna.

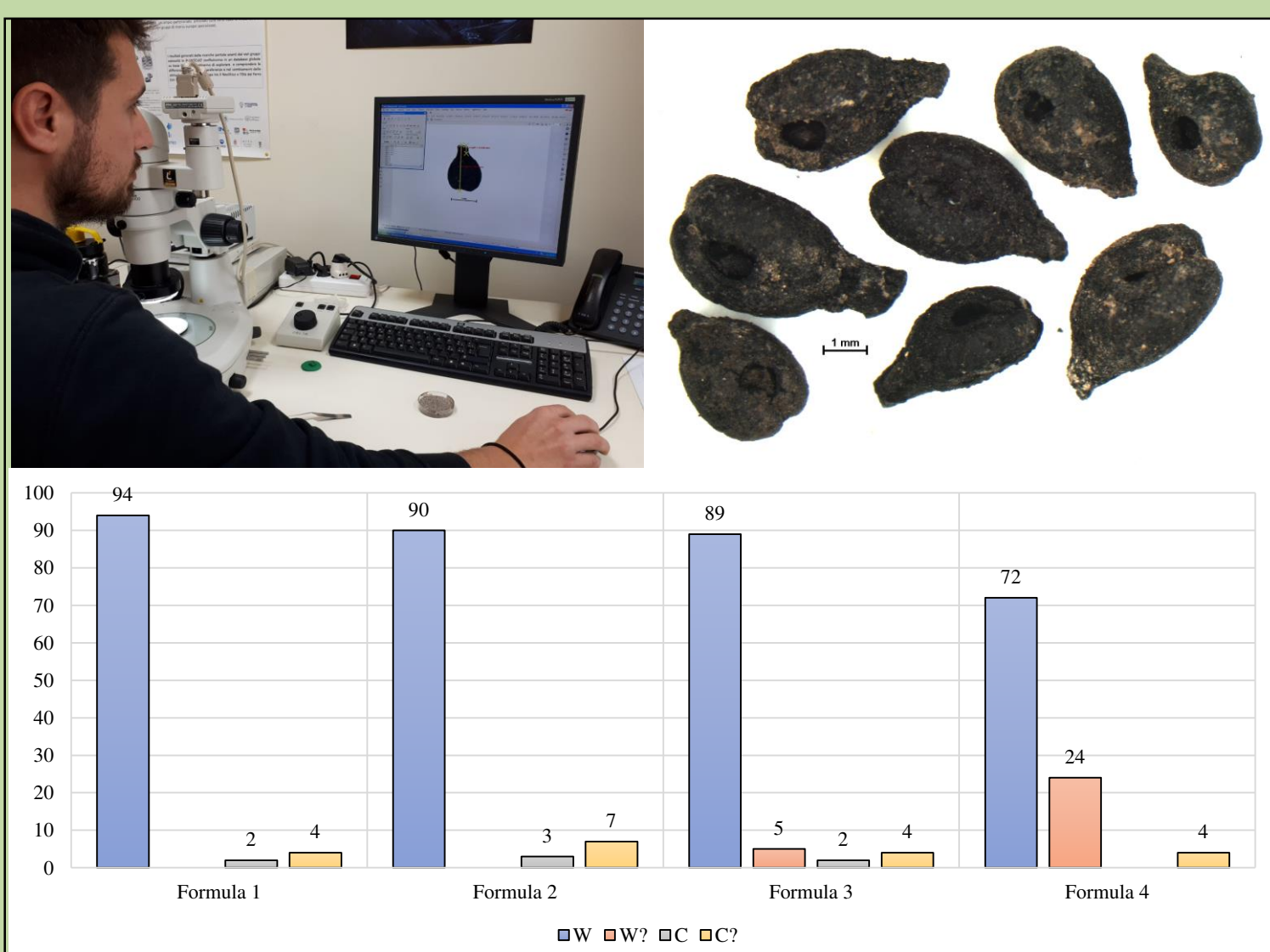


Fig. 4 – Morphometric analysis *Vitis vinifera* – US 176 (tot. 100)

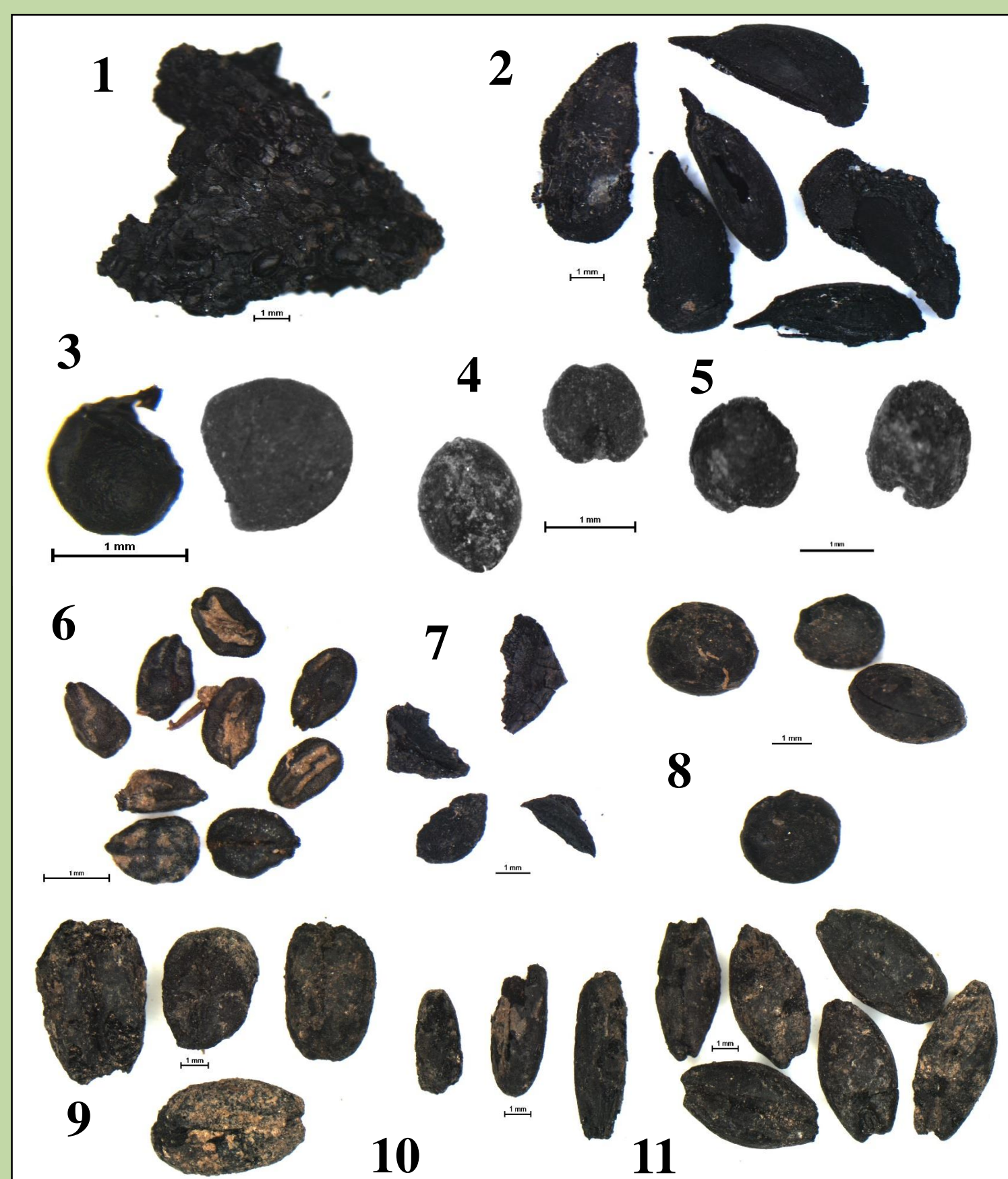


Fig. 5 – Some of seed/fruit remains examined: 1. Sicon of *Ficus carica*; 2. Pomoideae; 3. *Ficus carica*; 4. *Setaria italica*; 5. *Panicum miliaceum*; 6. *Sherardia arvensis*; 7. cfr. *Citrus* sp.; 8. *Lens culinaris*; 9. *Triticum aestivum/durum*; 10. *Avena* sp.; 11. *Hordeum vulgare* hulled.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to investigate the archaeobotanical assemblage in Villamagna's archaeological area (Urbisaglia (MC), Italy) (Fig. 1). The importance of the villa is due to the long span of its occupation (from the 1st to the 15th century AD), and to the presence of areas for processing of grape and olive products (wine and oil). The work we present offers a unique opportunity to study the archaeobotanical assemblage from villa-farms dated to the Roman period in the Marche region, where the corpus of data is very scarce.



Fig. 1 – Site of Villamagna (Urbisaglia (MC), Italy).

THE STUDY AREA

The roman villa of Villamagna is situated about 1,5 km northeast of the roman colony of *Pollentia-Urbs Salvia*. It extends over a large plateau at the top of a hill (Fig. 2) and to the west flows the river Fiastra, not far from the cistercian abbey of *Chiaravalle di Fiastra*. During the Roman period, the villa, inhabited by important *gens* of the nearby colony, was enclosed by a wall and articulated in different areas that constituted the components of the *pars massaricia* and *dominica* (Fig. 3). The stratigraphic excavation (2007, 2010, 2017, 2018) conducted by the University of Macerata in collaboration with the Superintendency was deepened in particular in the *pars urbana* (Fig. 3.2) and *fructuaria* (Fig. 3.1).

METHODS AND MATERIAL

Sediment samples were collected from a room of *pars dominica* and the warehouses and to cover a broad chronological range (1st - 15th century AD). The soil samples were floated and the carpological remains were sorted from the rest of the remains and identified under the stereomicroscope. The specimens were classified in 4 categories: 1. Cereals; 2. Edible legumes; 3. Fruit trees; 4. Other plants. Morphometric analysis were also carried out on grape seeds using the formulas of Mangafa and Kotsakis (Fig. 4).

RESULTS

2.950 seed/fruit remains were examined. The largest number of remains come from layers dated to the Roman Imperial period (Fig. 6), and they are mostly grape seeds (n=2248). The most attested cereal is barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), while *Triticum* sp. and *Avena* sp. are present in relative small portion. Minor cereals, *Panicum miliaceum* and *Setaria italica* are not present in the following century. Edible legumes represent the least attested category and are completely absent in the phases following the Roman-period (Fig. 6), the most attested specie is *Lens culinaris*. Nine different fruit crops were identified. The sample of the "Other plants" include wild species indicating environments with precise characteristics: ruderal environments, pastures, wasteland, trampled soils and infesting fields.

CONCLUSIONS

The Roman villa of Villamagna is part of the typical dynamics of the rustic villas of the Roman Imperial Age. Viticulture seems to be the predominant activity in the Roman period, while olive orchards are attested for most of the villa time-span. The presence of a water source has been hypothesized for the presence of plants that grow in humid and rich freshwater environments. For the four tanks identified in the production area, it is conceivable to use the production of fermented beverage. The hypothesis arises from the discovery of a jug in the major tank in which several tree fruits and minor cereals have been found. The grape seeds, with the indices used, are almost all belonging to the wild subspecies, perhaps a local variety.

REFERENCES

- R. Carmenati, *La villa romana di Villamagna (Urbisaglia – MC): prime ricerche archeobotaniche*, Unpublished thesis, 2017/2018, University of Salento
- M. Mangafa, K. Kotsakis, *A New Method for the identification of Wild and Cultivated Charred Grape Seeds* in *Journal of Archaeological Science* 23, pp. 409–418
- G. Paci, R. Perna, *Una villa romana nel territorio di Pollentia-Urbs Salvia: note preliminari sulle indagini archeologiche condotte presso Villamagna (Urbisaglia-MC)* in "FOLD&R FastiOnLine documents & research" 371, 2016, pp. 1-14 – www.fastionline.org/docs/FOLDER-it-2016-371.pdf
- D. Van Limbergen, *A note on olives and olive oil from Picenum (Marche, Northern Abruzzo). An obscured food product within the economy of central adriatic Italy in roman times?*, *Picus XXXVI*, 2016, pp. 171-182

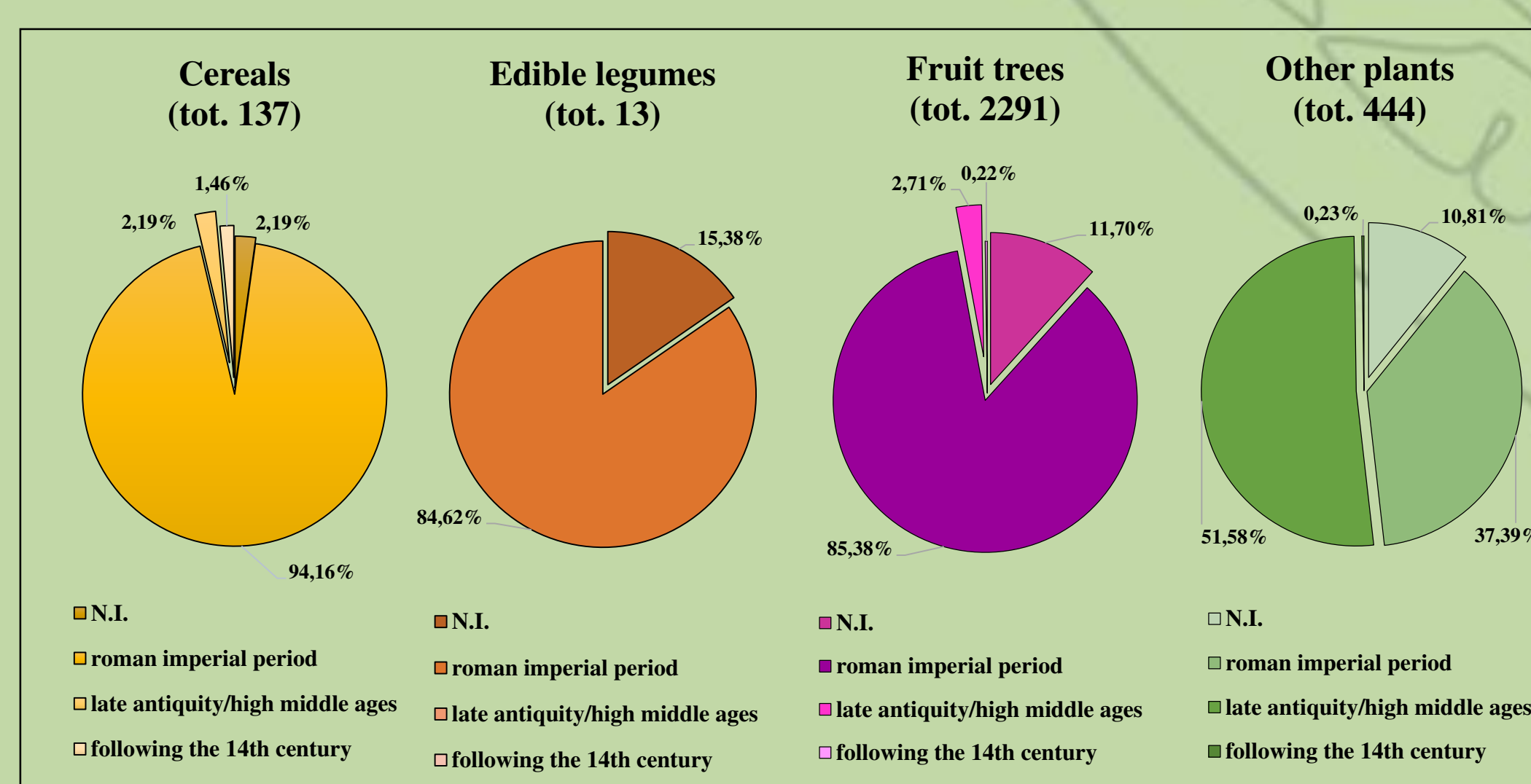


Fig. 6 – Subdivision of the macrocategories of carpological remains for chronologic phases.