

ARCHEOENTOMOLOGY AND FUNERARY ARCHEOENTOMOLOGY

“...where insects speak about the past”



Archaeoentomology is defined as the study of synanthropic insects and other arthropods recovered during archaeological excavations, with the aim of a better understanding and reconstructing past environmental and climatic conditions and/or cultural practices. Archaeoentomology necessarily deals with anthropic settlements where insects found microhabitats similar to their natural environments and benefit from their facultative or obligate association with humans. This is the distinctive trait in respect to the other, although close, discipline known as paleoentomology that specifically refers to the study of insect remains collected from natural environments free from any kind of anthropic activity.

Funerary archaeoentomology is the application of the principles and techniques used in forensic entomology to human and animal remains, tombs, mummies and other burials of archaeological interest. In an archaeological context, the knowledge of the ecological and biological specificity of the insect species associated with the remains can be especially valuable to reconstruct the funerary practices, to describe the cadaver taphonomy and to understand the hygienic and social conditions of the investigated human populations.

The studies carried out by the FLEA (Forensic Lab for Entomology and Archaeology) aim to:

- List the insects from Italian mummies and other kind of burial of archaeological interest in national and international excavations;
- Spot the extinction or the introduction of new species based on archaeological records;
- Reconstruct past human activities and space usage based on insect evidence;
- Reconstruct funerary practices and other rituals from European, African and South American contexts.

Keywords: Insects, funerary practices, archaeology, biodiversity

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