



# INTO THE WOODS

Overlapping perspectives on the history of ancient forests

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# OAKSCAPE PROJECT: ARCHAEO-PALAEOBOTANICAL RESEARCH FOR A HISTORY OF OAK FOREST IN THE “PARCO NATURALE COSTA OTRANTO-LEUCA E BOSCO DI TRICASE” (SOUTHERN ITALY)

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Anna Maria Grasso<sup>(1)</sup>, Olivia Pignatelli<sup>(2)</sup>, Eligio Vacca<sup>(3)</sup>, Francesco Minonne<sup>(4)</sup>,  
Milena Primavera<sup>(1)</sup>, Girolamo Fiorentino<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Università del Salento, Italy

<sup>(2)</sup> Dendrodata, Verona, Italy

<sup>(3)</sup> Università degli Studi di Bari, Italy

<sup>(4)</sup> Parco naturale regionale Costa Otranto - Santa Maria di Leuca e Bosco di Tricase, Italy  
E-mail of the corresponding author: xgrassoannamaria@gmail.com

The easternmost region of Italy, Apulia, has a high diversity of oaks, with up to 15 species and a series of hybrids and ecotypes. Both the ecological and species richness can be explained as a consequence of its geographical position and its role as a glacial refugium, even if other causes related to human actions can't be ruled out (migrations, colonizations, land use strategy etc.). At this regard paradigmatic is the case of the Valonia oak (*Quercus ithaburensis* subsp. *macrolepis* (Kotschy) Hedge & Yalt.), an East-Mediterranean deciduous oak, that has his westernmost presence in southern Italy at the “Parco regionale naturale Otranto- Santa Maria di Leuca e Bosco di Tricase”. One of the main issues concerning the presence of Valonia oak is to establish whether this species is indigenous or not, and if so, when and why it was introduced in southern Apulia (Salento). During the last twenty years, the archaeobotanical investigations carried out by the Laboratory of Archaeobotany and Palaeoecology of the Salento University, have recovered many *Quercus* charcoal remains from regional archaeological sites, allowing to sketch a “history” of oak forests in Apulia during the millennial (from prehistory to medieval period). From wood anatomical structure point of view, however, the taxonomical identification of *Quercus* genus can't lead beyond the three distinct reference groups (deciduous, semi-deciduous, evergreen) so it's not possible to clearly reconstruct the composition of oak forests in terms of species richness. This contribution will present the preliminary results of OAKscape project. Bringing together different disciplines and methods (Anthracology, Dendrochronology, Palinology, Image analysis and Multivariate Statistic analysis) the OAKscape Project aims to define a new challenging approach able to provide new insight the history of oak forests in southern Apulia during the millennia in terms of species richness, changes in composition (and related causes) and possible introduction of new species.