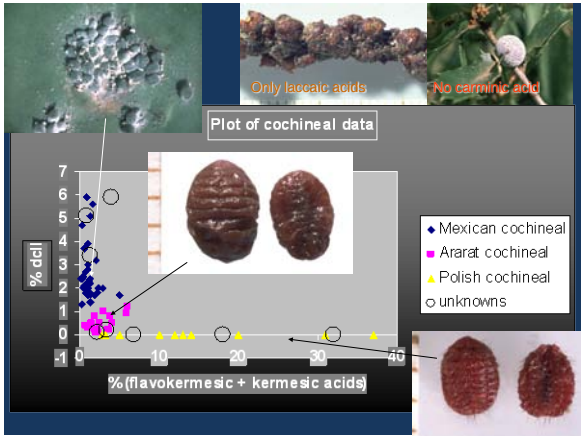
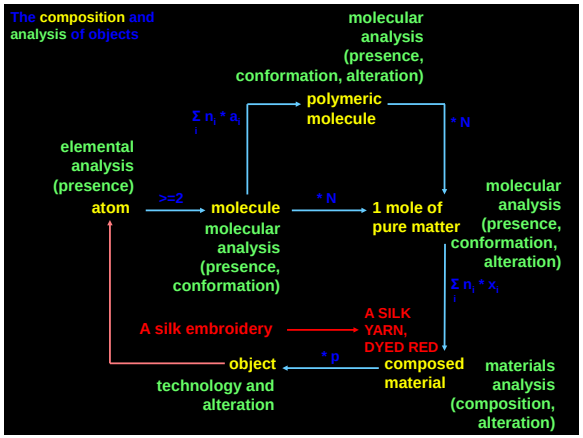
The analysis of organic materials in works of art: an enduring challenge





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The major challenge for analyzing and identifying natural organic materials in art resides mainly in their complex compositions, their low number of atomic species and their complex ageing patterns. Although instrumentation used in non-invasive analytical protocols has greatly improved over the last ten years, the best diagnostic quality of organic analysis is still offered by techniques that involve microsampling and separation of components, prior to their identification. When decisions regarding the analysis of art have to be made in a multidisciplinary environment, then not only the damage resulting from eventual sampling should be discussed, but also the balance of detail of useful information to that damage. Some examples will be given to illustrate the importance of analytical detail; a simple formula to help estimating the balance of information quality to damage will be presented.

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Topics in Museum Conservation

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