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1. Introduction

Much of the present state of Mesozoic radiolarian paleontology and biostratigraphy is the result of the past ten years. After a period of active study of Mesozoic radiolarians in Europe at the turn of the century (RÜST 1885, 1898, PARONA 1890, SQUINABOL 1914, etc.) the interest declined and the biostratigraphic usefulness of radiolarians was questioned.

A number of favorable circumstances revitalized the field in the early seventies: The Deep-Sea Drilling Project was coring Cenozoic and Mesozoic sediments in the oceans which furnished well preserved radiolarian assemblages greatly stimulating biostratigraphic work on this group, as it did for other fossil groups. Radiolarian biostratigraphy, first worked out for the Cenozoic (summary in RIEDEL & SANFILIPPO 1978), rapidly was extended to the Cretaceous (FOREMAN 1971, 1973, 1975, 1978; MOORE 1973, RIEDEL & SANFILIPPO 1974, SCHAAF 1981). The use of hydrofluoric acid to extract fossils from siliceous rocks, known for a long time to palynologists (LEJEUNE 1936) was successfully applied to radiolarians (DUMITRICA 1970, PESSAGNO & NEWPORT 1972) and allowed the observation of isolated forms also from highly lithified siliceous limestones and cherts, leading to systematic work and first Late Jurassic–Cretaceous zonations mainly derived from land-based samples from California (PESSAGNO 1971, 1972, 1973, 1976, 1977a, b). Meanwhile, the Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) began to be regularly used by micropaleontologists. It produced accurate illustrations even of internally recrystallized or opaque fossil material, inapropriate for transmitted light microscopy.

Only recently, Mesozoic radiolarian biostratigraphy became revitalized in the European area (see DE WEVER et al. 1979) and resulted in first zonations for Tethyan radio-