**Introduction**

Pollen in the Poaceae is monoporate (having one pore) and annulate (bearing an annulus, or thickened ring around the pore) (Fig. 1a). Under standard light microscopy, the exine (outer surface) of the pollen grain appears psilate (smooth) or nearly so; at Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) magnifications, the exine may appear psilate, or spinulose (spined) or scabrate (elements of any shape less than 1µm in any direction) sculpturing may be evident (Christensen et al., 1972; Zavada, 1983; Chaturvedi et al., 1998; Dórea et al., 2017, 2018). The pollen wall bears a thick footlayer (blue and purple bands in Fig 1b, c), and is tectate-columellate (Fig 1b,c) (Zavada, 1983). The single pore is generally operculate (having a sexine ectexine structure (Fig 1d right) covering part of the aperture, and which is isolated from the rest of the sexine (Fig. 1d).

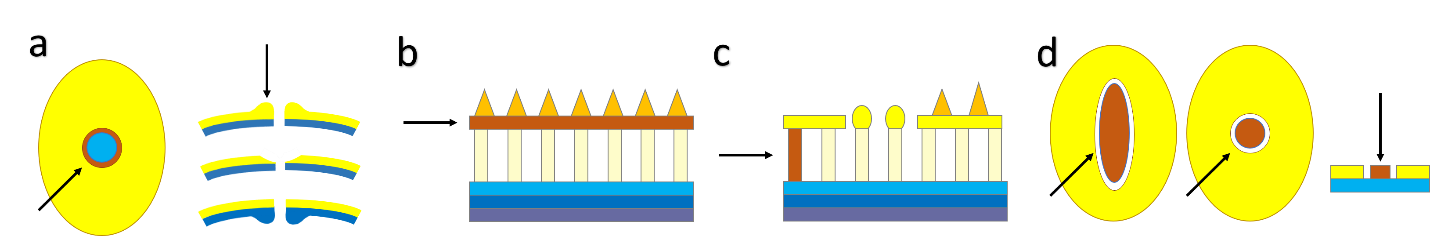


Figure 1: Key structures in a Poaceae pollen grain. In each of the following figures, dark orange highlights the structure being defined. a: Annulus, b: Tectum, c: Columellum, d: Operculum. Sexine shown in yellow in all but b. Cross-section in a right, b, c, and d far right. Polar view in a left and d left and center. Redrawn from Punt et al. (2007)

Microchannels are often noted in studies of grass pollen micromorphology (Fig 2) (Christensen et al., 1972; Christensen and Horner, 1974) or visible in Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM) plates without being mentioned by the authors (c.f., Liu et al., 2004).

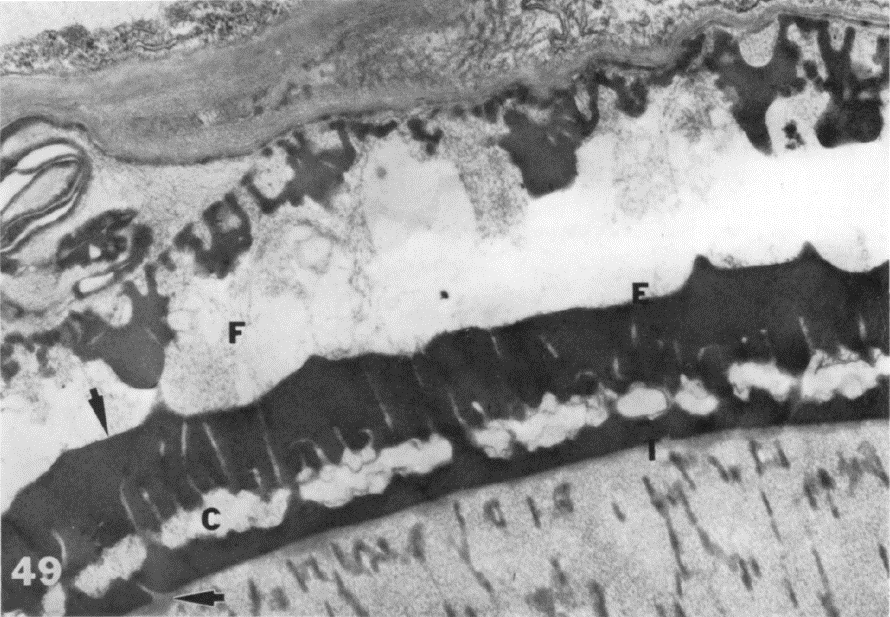


Figure 2: TEM image of mature grass pollen grain against anther wall. Microchannels are visible running perpendicular to exine axis (E) and above cavea (C). Image from Christensen and Horner (1974). Used with author permission.

Microchannels are sometimes listed as a ubiquitous pollen characteristic in the Poaceae (Zavada, 1983; Linder and Ferguson, 1985), and while this appears likely, the claim demands explicit testing. We therefore propose to survey pollen exine structure across the twelve subfamilies of the Poaceae and compare it to the exines in pollen from their close relatives in the Graminid clade: Ecdeiocoleaceae, Joinvilleaceae, and Flagellariaceae using TEM micrographs. Cyperaceae are excluded from this study, even though they also evolved peripheral pollen, as the unique pollen structures in this group are not known or suspected to include microchannels (see Halbritter et al., (2010)).

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