

BOOK REVIEW

The Palaeoethnobotany of Franchthi Cave. Julie M. Hansen. Excavations at Franchthi Cave, Greece, Fascicle 7, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press. 1991. Pp. 278. \$75.00 (paperbound) ISBN 0-253-31979-X.

This book is the seventh fascicle in a series of final reports on the excavations of Franchthi Cave, Greece. The history of the cave spans a period of nearly 25,000 years and the book provides important insights regarding the prehistory of the general Mediterranean region. A major research problem of the Franchthi excavations pertains to early agricultural origins in the Aegean Basin. The excavations sought to describe domestication in the record and carefully analyze the associated stratigraphic contexts. The report, based on the author's 1980 dissertation, is an extremely important work as it details nearly 100,000 botanical specimens. As such it represents the largest fully reported collection of its type yet reported in the Old World.

The introductory chapters summarize the site and its environmental context as well as the methodology used. A water sieve technique from which light and heavy fraction remains are recovered (see Diament 1979) floated 100% of four trenches within the cave. Biostratigraphic zonation was based on the number and/or the variety of plant remains represented. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the plant remains including quantity and zonal distribution, measurements, description, habit and habitat and discussion of historically known uses. Of particular utility are nutritional data presented for most seeds and fruits. The chapter contains excellent illustrations of carbonized remains and maps of their present regional distributions. Chapters 4 through 10 describe the seven zones identified at Franchthi. The remains from each zone are placed within cultural and chronological context. The distribution of remains within each trench is the basis for interpreting the botanical assemblages of each zone. Discussion includes possible environmental changes, human-plant interactions, seasonality, the availability of nutritional resources and occupational intensities.

Zone I dates to the late Pleistocene between 30,000 and 17,000 B.P. (all dates reported as uncalibrated radiocarbon dates B.P.). The zone is characterized by a predominance of Boraginaceae nutlets which are believed to have accumulated slowly over long periods of time and not to represent intentional human activity. Associated faunal remains suggest a cold, dry, steppic environ. Following a hiatus seen in all trenches between 17,000 and 13,000, Zone II dates to c. 10,500 B.P. with warmer and wetter conditions indicated by increased arboreal species such as almond, pistachio and pear. These species, along with the replacement of steppe ass by red deer and wild cattle, suggest a parkland-woodland environment. Zone III dates between 9,500 and 9,000 B.P.; the transition from Paleolithic to lower Mesolithic. A woodland environment is suggested by abundant evidence of pistachio, almond, pear and oats with the common presence of lentils, wild barley and a variety of legumes throughout the zone. Animal resources are broadened to include coastal, marsh and inland species. The botanical evidence suggests spring, summer and autumn occupations of the cave.

Though no radiocarbon dates exist for Zone IV, the zone includes the Lower

and part of the Upper Mesolithic habitation at Franchthi Cave. A relative paucity of botanical remains is notable in context with an increase in fish bones, particularly tuna. Botanical evidence suggests spring through autumn use and a shift from long-term use of the cave to a pattern of short term visits. Zone V extends from 9,000 to 8,000 B.P. and corresponds to the latter part of the Upper and Final Mesolithic. This zone contains little evidence of plant remains which the author interprets as possibly representing lesser occupational use of the cave. Zone VI dates between 8,000 and 7,000 B.P. and represents the earliest Neolithic sequence at Franchthi Cave. The occupation is characterized by the appearance of domesticated species of barley, wheat and lentils and the disappearance of wild varieties of oats, barley and lentils within a relatively dry open woodland environment. Zone 7 dates between 7,000 and 5200 B.P. spanning the Middle through the Final Neolithic. The zone is characterized by a marked increase in the domesticates, in particular emmer wheat, barley and lentils as well as the first appearance of einkorn wheat and the reappearance of several wild species, including pistachio and almond.

The final two chapters summarize the botanical remains from Franchthi and of the Eastern Mediterranean region. Chapter 11 provides a useful discussion of the variable presence of botanical remains within the cultural chronology while Chapter 12 attempts to review the palaeoethnobotany of the Eastern Mediterranean providing discussion of distribution of botanical remains, time depth and theories of agricultural origins in the Near East. Both are well crafted summaries providing a broad and useful context for the Franchthi report. The modest conclusion of the report is that the data from Franchthi strongly support the hypothesis of diffusion from the Near East. The remaining section of the book includes four appendices detailing the remains from each trench and an excellent series of plates.

This is a very good volume. It is clear and well written and nicely illustrated. The volume contains an impressive data set which will prove extremely useful for palaeoethnobotanists and archaeologists. One shortcoming is the rather limited conclusion regarding the human-plant interactions at Franchthi Cave. The data suggest a highly variable set of strategies which in all likelihood provide more general insights regarding domestication and agriculture than are offered in the volume.

LITERATURE CITED

- DIAMANT, S. 1979. A short history of sieving at Franchthi Cave, Greece. *Journal of Field Archaeology* 6:203-217.

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