

*Progress in Old World Palaeoethnobotany. A Retrospective View on the Occasion of 20 years of the International Work Group for Palaeoethnobotany*; edited by Willem van Zeist, Krystyna Wasylikowa, and Karl-Ernst Behre. P. 350. Rotterdam, 1991 (A. A. Balkema, \$60.00 cloth).—Written twenty years after the founding of the International Work Group for Palaeoethnobotany, the papers in this volume attempt to review progress in the field during that time. The work is eminently successful, consisting of fifteen lengthy papers divided between thematic subjects and regional surveys. With the exception of Naomi Miller, the authors are Europeans; four papers are in German; the remainder are in English.

The six thematic papers deal with methods of identifying plant remains (Korber-Grohne), factors that result in preservation of such remains (Willerding), sampling methods (M. Jones), the place of numerical analysis in interpretation (G. Jones), ecological interpretation (Behre and Jacomet), and economic uses of plants (van Zeist). These papers comprise a text book introduction to the practice of palaeoethnobotany, the “analysis and interpretation of archaeobotanical remains to provide information on the interaction of human populations and plants” (p vii). Palaeoethnobotany is concerned with the ways humans used plants and with the effects of humans on vegetation rather than with traditional interests in identification, phylogeny, and geographic distributions.

The regional reviews focus on the Near East and Europe where research in palaeoethnobotany has been particularly intensive, and they omit entirely any consideration of the Americas or Asia. Each review is organized chronologically, beginning with archaeological remains dating back to the late Pleistocene and taking the sequence up to near modern times. For a student of the economic adaptations of prehistoric and early historic peoples, these reviews are indispensable points of departure without parallel in the literature. Each contribution includes maps of locales, charts of finds, and extensive bibliographies. The regions covered are: Near East (Miller), Southeast Europe (Kroll), Central Europe south of the Danube (Kuster), Germany north of the Danube (Knorzer), East-Central Europe (Wasylikowa and others), South and Southwest Europe (Hopf), West continental Europe (Bakels), the British Isles (Grieg), and the Nordic countries (Jensen).

Some interesting variability in palaeoethnobotanical research among the regions is evident in the papers. For example, although we generally think of palaeoethnobotany as a relatively new field, as early as 1895 plant remains had been identified from 26 sites in northern Italy. By contrast, the European part of the USSR is still a blank, and the activity in France has been belated and relatively insignificant as compared with surrounding countries. The British Isles and the countries of northern Europe have contributed the most active and innovative palaeoethnobotanists; and in these countries, rather than a preoccupation with the early history of agriculture which permeates some regions, there is a thriving industry in the analysis of Medieval and post-Medieval plant remains. Such regional variability reflects both the training received by palaeoeth-

nobotanists and the realities of local archaeology and geography, where history and preservation play determining roles in the way the science is pursued.

This book is unlike any other work. The thematic chapters cover much the same ground as Hastorf and Popper in *Current Palaeoethnobotany* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), but there is no other place where one can get a similar series of regional reviews. For the general student of palaeoethnobotany as well as for the specialist in any of the regions, this is a fundamental work which will serve as the point of departure for another generation of research.

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