Archaeobotany : a vital tool in the investigation of lake-dwellings

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Conclusions The archaeobotanical investigation of over 100 Neolithic and Bronze Age lake dwelling layers has brought us a far reaching understanding of the economy, but also the environment of these periods in central Europe. However – as already mentioned in the introduction – there are still some gaps to fill. First of all there is a need to investigate some other areas from which we hardly know anything up to now, such as the regions south of the Alps. A uniform methodology has to be used; a proposal was made by Hosch and Jacomet, 2001 where an outline of the research history, concerning sampling strategies, is also given. In general, we should know more about intra-site variation, and also about the relations between sites of the same age in a region. Multidisciplinary investigations give insights on many daily activities only in a very restricted number of sites; an example is Arbon-Bleiche 3 at Lake Constance (Jacomet, Leuzinger and Schibler, in prep.). Therefore, there is a need to analyse more regularly other remains than just seeds or cereal chaff so as to obtain a more complete picture of the economy of the lake dwellings. This concerns above all on-site pollen analyses (see, for example, Hadorn, 1994), animal and human dung (see publications of Akeret et al.), crusts in ceramic vessels (including micromorphology and chemistry) and also wood. Small pieces of subfossil wood (including twigs) and charcoal allow a reconstruction of the preferences for fire wood (for example Dufraisse, 2002), and the areas from which firewood was gathered. The use of twigs can give hints on animal fodder (for example, Favre and Jacomet, 1998) or also to handcrafts like basketry. With the help of systematic dendroarchaeological analyses of the wooden piles it is possible to reconstruct the kind of woodland management, but this has been done systematically practically only for the German side of the Lake Constance region (for example, Billamboz, 2001). So, even after 150 years of research we are relatively far away from a representative knowledge of the daily life of our Neolithic and Bronze Age ancestors.