
This book is part of a collaborative project beginning with the initiation of the Ancient Starch Research Group (ASRG) at the Australian Museum in August 1998. The book is intended as a gateway to starch analysis in archaeology. This text is divided into 11 chapters. It starts with a general introduction on starch and archaeology. The biology of starch is treated succinctly. How starch can become an archaeological material, and how it behaves as such, is discussed in the starch pathways and taphonomy chapters. Starch analysis is discussed in chapters on reference collections and description, classification, and identification. How we can find and recover starch in sediments and on artifacts is treated in chapters 8 and 9. The interpretive value of modified starch is covered in chapter 10. The text ends with a prospective chapter under the heading of looking ahead.

Within chapters, we find further individual and collaborative contributions set as boxes that represent self-contained discussions of relevant topics, examples of applications discussed in the text, the results of experiments addressing specific research problems, and recommended protocols adopted by various members of the group that are tried and tested, but like any new form of analysis, might be improved upon. The references (pp. 225–243) are exhaustive, useful, and recent. Unfortunately the starch grains of Late Neolithic noodles from China (Houyuan et al. 2005) were published when the book was in press.

The authors of the book are 27 experts from a variety of disciplines: archaeobotany, ethnography, food-processing technologies, paleodiet. They come principally from Australia (14), USA (4), United Kingdom (2) and Argentina (2).

The book includes numerous boxes, tables, figures and black and white images. Up to 64 black and white plates are arranged in 16 pages, printed in glossy paper, inserted between pages 128 and 129. They are useful for a better understanding of the topics covered.

The editing is accurate. This book furnishes a methodological and conceptual framework to researchers, scholars, students, and professors interested in starch and starch plant sources. We enjoyed reading it and strongly recommend it as a tool, however a cheaper paperback edition would reach a wider audience.

Literature Cited

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This book provides archaeological perspectives on human environmental adaptation. Chapter 1 provides theoretical underpinnings and summarizes each subsequent chapter. Before reading Chapters...