

Environmental Archaeology

The Journal of Human Palaeoecology

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The Journal of Human Palaeoecology

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The *Newsletter* of the Association, produced four times a year, carries lists of recent publications, news about conferences, short notes and the business of the Association. It is edited by Wendy Carruthers (Sawmills House, Castellau, Pontyclun, Llantrisant, Mid Glamorgan CF72 8LQ, U.K., tel. & fax: 01443 223462, email: wendy.carruthers@virgin.net) and Vanessa Straker (Department of Geography, University Road, Bristol BS8 1SS, U.K., fax: 0117 928 7878, email: v.straker@bristol.ac.uk), to whom copy should be sent (preferably on 3.5-inch floppy disk in IBM-PC format as *WordPerfect*, *Word* or ASCII files; short items in typescript or neat manuscript may be sent to Wendy).

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Review:

Karali, L. 1988. Λεξικό Αρχαιολογικών – Περιβαλλοντικών Όρων, Ελληνικά Γραμμάτια, Αθήνα, (Dictionary of Archaeological – Environmental Terms). Athens: Ellinika Grammata. ISBN 960–344–426–x. 199pp. £7.00 (paperback).

This is definitely not a bilingual dictionary but instead a dictionary of English terms translated into Greek with a very brief list (14 pp.) of Greek terms translated into English. The author, L. Karali, claims (p. 52) to have benefited from help from various students, five of whom are mentioned by name. Anastasia Tsaliki, who has written notices for the first and second editions (Tsaliki 1994; this volume), is one of them.

The book starts with an introduction (5 pp.) and “an introduction to the history of archaeology” (35 pp.). These are followed by the dictionary itself (115 pp.), a list of Greek terms translated into English (13 pp.), a selected bibliography (7 pp.) and an appendix (6 pp.) which includes fossils, plants, animals and a haphazardly selected list of *Homo* spp..

The problems with the first part (“an introduction to the history of archaeology”) are obvious and one can only ask oneself why such a well-researched theme is being tackled in a dictionary. However, the problems present in that section are long and tedious for English readers who have no access to the Greek. I refer fluent Greek readers, for more details, to two published reviews in Greek (Hamilakis 1994; Sarpaki 1996).

One of the basic problems in the dictionary is not its length but the choice of terms, which should have been more carefully selected. Terms such as *adult*, *adaptation*, *desert*, *dog*, *earth*, *earthworms*, *gully*, *hermaphrodite*, *protein*, *quartz*, *sample*, *tissue*, *worms* are among those included which could easily have been found in other language dictionaries.

All the terms from the geosciences and the biological sciences should have been excluded as there are dictionaries in Greek which were compiled by the relevant specialists. Terms such as *geomorphology*, *horst* and *hydrogeology* could be consulted elsewhere (Dermitzakis and Theodorou 1985; Christodoulou 1991). The biological and ecological terms could have been excluded and the reader directed to the relevant dictionaries. This

would have allowed space for other useful terms such as *chopper*, *burin*, *mesolithic*, *obsidian*, *hydration*, *trace-element analysis*, *nematode*, *bioarchaeological remains*, *bioarchaeology*, *feral*, *charring*, *silicification*, *froth flotation*, *uranium series dating* and so forth.

One could probably excuse these omissions, although the dictionary claims to be an improved second edition, but basic scientific mistakes are harder to excuse. The inclusion of dinosaurs (p. 86–7), trilobites (p. 161) and the fact that archaeozoology is not clearly differentiated from palaeozoology (p. 131) makes it difficult for the young researcher or student (for whom, we are told, the book is intended) to differentiate between archaeological and palaeontological sciences. The simple question is: why are dinosaurs included in an archaeological dictionary? This, by itself, reduces its credibility. Nowhere is it made clear that palaeontology (p.130, 131) refers to periods of time before the appearance of humans. How could terms such as flotation machine (p.100) and wet-sieving (p.165) not be explained and differentiated. Even the diagram of a flotation machine (p.100) is totally inaccurate. These are basic methods for the retrieval of data for environmental archaeology. Can one take seriously the translation of crop-mark, which is defined as indications from ‘plants of an area, such as cereals’ (p. 80). Wouldn’t legumes produce the same effects? What about the term *habitat*, which is translated κατοικία (‘habitation’), obviously, a misunderstanding of the meaning. This term is also referred to as ‘the natural environment of a site’, which implies that the site is anthropogenic! How can one excuse the definition of *eolithic* as προ-παλαιολιθική περίοδο (‘Pre-palaeolithic period’) (p. 93)? Where is there a Pre-Palaeolithic period? This is obviously a mistake made by a student which makes me feel that much of the work was researched by students and, worse still, that it was not edited even in this second edition.

The last comments of Tsaliki’s review, “Greek and foreign authorities have appreciated ..” (the book) and “..this project, which may help many people to enter the world of environmental archaeology with more confidence” (1996, 88), are questionable. On the one hand, non-Greek archaeologists would hardly need such a dictionary. The lack, so far, of serious reviews in foreign periodicals prove this. On the other hand, there are two uncomplementary Greek reviews (one published and one in press). The only somewhat accepting note appeared in the Greek periodical *Αρχαιολογία* (Anonymous 1994:103) and was written by someone who preferred to remain anonymous. Nevertheless, even this review claims that it contains *ατέλειες* (‘imperfections’) and *γλωσσικά λάθη* (‘language mistakes’) though it does not elaborate.

The entries lack references at the end of the explanations, except for a few cases, so that the interested student cannot trace references for more explanation and detail. Worse still, it uses dictionaries such as Bahn’s (1992) for many entries such as *behavioural archaeology*, *blow-out*, *carrying capacity*, *catastrophe theory*, *central place theory*, *off-site archaeology*, *terracotta* and so forth. The only apparent *raison d’être* for the figures is to break the monotony of the text, for they are totally

uninformative. One has only to glance at the figure under obsidian (p. 128), or shell (p. 148), or wing (p. 166), or even under vertebrae (p.164) to understand the validity of the previous statement. As for the appendix, it is blatantly useless. The choice of entries is puzzling and does not follow a logical scheme. In the physical anthropology section, why is only *Homo erectus* mentioned? The list of fossils, plants, and animals is done without any common sense. Important genera and species are missed out while unimportant ones are referred to. A typical example is the mention of *Eucalyptus*, which is an Australian plant. There are mistakes in the common names of, for example, *Scomber scombrus*, given as κολιός whereas the right Greek name is σκουμπρί.

In conclusion, I believe that the dictionary could lead students and young scientists to make terrible mistakes. The dynamic role and contribution that environmental archaeology can make are lost; instead we are presented with a *pot pourri* of mistakes and a stagnant theoretical approach. It is not a book that can be recommended, especially not for students.

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ANAYA SARPAKI

Institute of Mediterranean Studies, Crete

Holden, T. G. with contributions by Walker, B., Carter, S., Dalland, M. and McMullen, J. 1998. **The Archaeology of Scottish Thatch** (Technical Advice Note 13). Edinburgh: Historic Scotland. ISBN 1–900168–49–9. 85pp. £10 (paperback).

Books on modern thatching are not scarce but those dealing with aspects relevant to the past are. Recently,

investigations and surveys of ancient thatch along with the condition of old thatched buildings in England, Scotland and Ireland have been commissioned by English Heritage, Historic Scotland and the Department of Environment in Northern Ireland. Only one of these investigations, that in Scotland, has so far been published and is the object of this review. Others are underway (Letts in press; Letts *et al.* forthcoming; Letts in prep.).

This volume is part of a series of Technical Notes (see also Walker *et al.* 1996) and concentrates on the archaeology of thatch in Scotland, specifically the use of archaeological recording and analytical techniques in the investigation of existing thatch roofs as demonstrated by the detailed study of seven cottages from around Scotland (mainland and island).

The book falls into two parts. In the first five chapters, a fairly general approach is adopted and in the second part (of equal length), the sixth chapter consists of the detailed study of the seven cases. The general background first examines the potential of the study of old thatches including background information on the construction material (selection, sources, preparation and longevity) and on agricultural history (the economy, land-use patterns and archaeological relevance). The next chapter (Chapter 3) details construction techniques and material with special reference to those aspects not fully covered by Walker (1996) including a section on the use of turf. The next chapter is methodological and describes the techniques used in the field and laboratory before discussing dating of the material.

The second part of the book includes the detailed studies of thatches from both dwellings and outhouses which were in various states of repair or abandonment. These 'worked examples' are very thorough; each gives a botanical analysis, most with a full list of plants found mixed with the main component of the roof and thin section analyses of compacted layers of daub, clay or turf.

The roofs of the cottages and the block samples are well illustrated in each case study. Micrographs of thin sections are also included which are of excellent quality and well labelled, if a little pale. The excellent cut-away diagrams show the various layers of the roofs and their relationship to the rest of the house, though those on p.10 are a little puzzling as all eight illustrate different thatching styles on round houses which must surely be in the minority in Scotland. The diagram of cereal components from Hillman (1981), which is included here, has perhaps been overused by archaeobotanists in teaching and publications. Use of more original or less known illustrations would introduce readers to other sources and bring a fresh perspective on the subject matter.

The book is strongly marked by the imprint of an archaeobotanist, but this is not a criticism; it is high time that thatch should be reclaimed by botanists and this is in fact happening as shown by the works cited above. The author wants to project himself as an archaeologist excavating a roof as one excavates a site. One of these excavation methods is the lifting of whole blocks of thatch, analogous to taking pollen cores or

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