ABSTRACT

Archaeobotanical investigations of six medieval sites in Northern France (Picardy) have provided charred and mineralised plant remains (seeds and fruit). Despite some taphonomical constraints of the different preservation of these plant assemblages, archaeobotanical analysis revealed valuable information on the diet, the agriculture and the horticultural production of the medieval population in Northern France between 10th and 12th century AD. The archaeobotanical results were influenced by the different types of features from which macroremains were retrieved and by the reliability of the samples. The main crop plants were rye and rye. The pulses, pea and common vetch are the major common crops with field bean. Fruits are very abundant and attest a widespread fructiculture. The number of recorded remains from the ‘wild forest fruits’ raises the question of their probable cultivation or of their exploitation in forest. The Vineyard seems very well implanted in the region. Recurring macroremains of fig question about the imported status of Mediterranean fruits or the local tree cultivation. The social context of four archaeological sites is high. The potential of archaeobotanical data helping to identify social differences by defining archaeobotanical indicators of social level is discussed from the food practices and the diet. Finally, the mineralization process is approached and its induction by practices of purification within cesspits / rubbish pits is suggested.

THE EXPLOITATION OF PLANTS (10th-12th century AD)

Crops
- 4 cereals, naked wheat and rye first, followed by barley and oats, spelt is not present at all.
- several species of pulses have been found, but only pea, common vetch and field bean are the most frequent and abundant.
- culture of flax and hemp is probable.

Fruit
- a booming widespread fructiculture is attested between the 10th and 12th century.
- the exploitation of vineyard in the studied area is attested.
- several species of pulses have been found, but only pea, common vetch and field bean are the most frequent and abundant.
- the cultivation of wild forest fruits (Prunus spinosa, Corylus avellana, Fragaria vesca, Sambucus nigra, Rubus idaeus and Rubus fruticosus).

PULSES AND SPICES & CONDIMENTS (kitchen herbs, vegetables, oil plants...)
- 211 taxa identified to the species
- 71 taxa of cultivated and/or gathered plants
- 140 taxa of wild plants
- 5 categories of economic plants: cereals, pulses, spices and condiments, oil or textile plants, cultivated and/or wild fruits

DIET AND ARCHAEOBOTANICAL INDICATORS OF A HIGH SOCIAL LEVEL

- The presence of certain expensive or exotic plants.
- The large spectrum of the available food resources.
- The food preparation.
- How the plant is consumed: raw, cooked, roasted, boiled, food quality.
- The combination of vegetable food with meat and drink.

For our study, those indicators can’t be applied all together because of a bad and a differential pre-separation. No exotic species has been found. For the ‘direct indicators’ only the large spectrum of the available food plants can be applied. For the ‘indirect indicators’, nowadays it is not possible to detect the preservation of the food and its quality only through the analysis of seeds and fruit. Only the combination of vegetable food with meat and drink could be informative.

Nevertheless, the preservation of plant remains like the mineralization could be a great indicator of several practices such as the purification of cesspits, which could be itself another new indicator of the social level.

FRUIT AND CEREALS ARE DOMINANT (presented with occurrence indices)

55.6 % of remains are carbonized and 44.4 % are mineralized. The type of the preservation depends on the type of structure.

CORPUS OF THE STUDY
- 6 archaeological sites
- 104 structures studied / 120 samples
- 1616 litres of archaeological sediment
- 113765 remains
(90872 seeds & fruit included)
- 34% of the material fragmented

REPRESENTATIVITY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL STRUCTURES

The representativity of categories of plants and their quantity depend on the type of structure.

PRESERVATION OF THE PLANT REMAINS
55.6 % of remains are carbonized and 44.4 % are mineralized. The type of the preservation depends on the type of structure.