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Alison Crowther , Michael Haslam , Nikki Oakden , Dale Walde , Julio Mercader



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Documenting Contamination in Ancient Starch Laboratories

Alison Crowther^{a,b}*, Michael Haslam^a, Nikki Oakden^c, Dale Walde^c, and Julio Mercader^c

^a Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, University of Oxford, Dyson Perrins Building, Oxford, OX1 3QY, United Kingdom

^b School of Social Science, Michie Building, The University of Queensland, St Lucia, 4072, Australia

^c Department of Archaeology, 2500 University Drive, NW. Calgary, T2N 1N4, Alberta, Canada

* Corresponding author

Email: alison.crowther@rlaha.ox.ac.uk

Phone: +44 01865 275134

Abstract

Ancient starch analysis is an important methodology for establishing ancient ecology, plant use, diet, and tool function; particularly in the deep past when other proxies may not survive. Establishing the authenticity of ancient starch is therefore a major concern for researchers. Despite decades of archaeological application, there are currently no empirically-tested procedures for systematically assessing and reducing intra-laboratory contamination. At the Universities of Oxford and Calgary, we have tested laboratory consumables, airborne contaminants, and decontamination techniques (oxidisation, boiling, autoclaving, torching) to establish contamination sources, types and quantities, as well as the most effective methods of

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