

A STROLL THROUGH THE PARK: EVALUATING THE USEFULNESS OF
PHYTOLITH AND STARCH REMAINS FOUND ON MEDIEVAL SHERDS FROM
WICKEN, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

Survey artifacts are used by a variety of archaeologists studying any number of interesting topics. The focus of this masters thesis is to test the usefulness of plant remains found on artifacts recovered during archaeological survey and to study food consumption and production patterns in medieval England. Specifically plant remains in the form of silica bodies known as phytoliths and starch grains were used to determine the level of environmental contamination on survey and excavated artifacts from the medieval period in the parishes of Wicken, Northamptonshire, and Wyton, Cambridgeshire, England. In addition, a comparative collection of phytolith and starch grains found in medieval foods and weeds was created.

The results of this study indicate that survey artifacts have undergone some degree of contamination. However, the results are inconclusive because the origins of the residues on the artifacts cannot be determined with absolute certainty and therefore could still be useful for future archaeological investigations. The historical records for Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire do not always match the microfossil record found on the artifacts from villages. The end result illustrates that although the historical record can be used to interpret overall food production patterns in a region, subtle variations still exist as seen with archaeological plant residues.