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Introductory Remarks on the Environmental Evidence

Part IV of this volume presents two specialist reports on the environmental evidence from the excavations (archaeobotanical and faunal).

As with the collection and study of the artefacts, a key aim of the present project was to use a systematic and quantified approach to both the collection and study of environmental evidence. This included, on the advice of Dr Mark Nesbitt of Kew Gardens, London, the construction of a 'Siraf-type' flotation machine that was set up on the banks of the Godavari and allowed the processing of very large quantities of flotation samples from key trenches and soundings. The advantage of this approach is manifest in the assemblage of more than 8,300 carbonized seeds that form the basis of the archaeobotanical study in Chapter 12. This is the largest archaeobotanical assemblage from any Early Historic or Medieval site that has so far been published from anywhere in India. At the same time, a rigorous programme of sieving of excavated earth was implemented. This resulted in the collection of a good faunal assemblage that provides insights into some very useful historical trends in animal husbandry at the site. Having said this, the general density of animal bone by cubic metre of excavated earth was noted by the excavators, many of whom have excavated in the

Near East and Europe, to be relatively low by global standards. This may be a regional phenomenon related to diet or culture (although not bone survival as the bone that was collected was all in good condition), but because data on density of occurrence are rarely published from sites anywhere in the world, it is impossible to make reliable comparisons.

The results of these collection and study strategies are two chapters that make an outstanding and ground-breaking contribution to our understanding of the development of Paithan and its agricultural economy and also make the most substantial contribution to our understanding of Early Historic and Early Medieval agriculture that has yet been published from anywhere in India. These studies take the first steps in plugging a problematic and gaping hole in our knowledge of the economy of these periods that has been lamented by almost every scholar who has written on the subject.

The results of the two studies presented in Part IV are further discussed and contextualised in the conclusions (Chapter 14).

It should be noted that no systematic environmental sampling was carried out in 1996 or 1997, but a small pilot project of bucket flotation recovered some plant remains in 1997.