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Palaeo-environments of the Balkan Lateglacial and their potential – were humans absent from the Garden of Eden?

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Abstract

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The lower part of a sediment core taken from the Ezero lake, next to Tell Ezero, in the Thracian Plain, Bulgaria, covers the period 15500–13500 calBP (Greenland Ice Core Stages G1-1c–1e). The recovery of plant macrofossils as well as pollen grains indicated that, far from a largely treeless grassy steppe vegetation, there were stands of trees and bushes as well as a rich wetland flora. Archaeological, ethnographic and ethnohistoric investigations of over 70 plant taxa showed that 20 taxa had documented use exclusively for food, 14 for exclusively medicinal use and 14 for both uses; moreover, several taxa were utilised or present in coeval sites such as the Franchthi Cave and in southwest Germany. The presumption is that Final Palaeolithic communities in the Thracian Plain would have made good use of such a rich supply of food and medicinal plants. However, there is a variety of reasons – whether taphonomic, research led or pedagogical – for the current absence of any Final Palaeolithic sites in the Thracian Plain. A hypothetical mating network centred on Ezero puts this problem in spatial context.

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