

## Book Review

Katheryn C. Twiss, *The Archaeology of Food: Identity, Politics, and Ideology in the Prehistoric and Historic Past*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. xiii + 247. \$30.99 (paperback).

People are enthralled by remarkable archaeological finds. Egyptomania gripped the modern world in the 1920s after Howard Carter uncovered Tutankhamun's tomb. Pompeii draws tourists because it offers a tantalizing slice of still life from the Roman Principate. More humble finds can illuminate just as much of human history, however, through the grubby process of searching through pottery shards and middens. Katheryn Twiss, in *The Archaeology of Food*, describes how archaeologists determine the foods that people in various cultures ate and then elaborates on the roles that food played within those cultures.

Twiss begins her first chapter by explaining how food and foodways utilize all five senses. More importantly, they are all part of social experiences. Feasts are not necessarily religious but they do require symbolism and ceremony that are not part of everyday life. At the same time, feasts are related to daily life in some fashion through symbolism. Moreover, all foods are dependent on time in some fashion. Seasonal crops and special feasts gave humans incentive to create calendars. Meals from the lavish to the mundane require generally understood preparation times. Twiss also uses the first chapter as an opportunity to differentiate between food and alcohol. Although agriculture and brewing are intertwined, alcohol is different from food because it significantly alters the imbiber's state of consciousness, much like certain mushrooms or leaves such as betel or coca. For those readers wishing to gain insight on the archaeology of alcohol, Twiss offers a selection of helpful works such as P.E. McGovern's *Uncorking the Past* and Frederick Smith's *The Archaeology of Alcohol and Drinking*.

Twiss continues by describing the two strands of research that apply to food and foodways: adaptive and socially oriented. Adaptive research relies on human behavioral ecology and focuses on costs and benefits, such as the time and energy it takes to extract food versus the nutritional value of those food items. In this way, archaeologists can

illustrate how populations adapted to their environments through gathering food. Socially oriented archaeologists contend that certain foods, particularly those that are rare or difficult to extract, are desirable precisely because expenses involved (13). Those archaeologists also investigate how cultural factors influence the roles that food plays in human societies.

In her second chapter, Twiss provides a valuable overview of the archaeological methods used for examining food, including botanical and faunal remains. The sheer amount of chemistry involved with isotopes, proteins, and lithics can become disorienting to readers who are not familiar with archaeology, but Twiss organizes the items in a manner that anyone can follow.

The third chapter, Food and Economics, examines food as it relates to labor and as a commodity. Markets in early city-states began only when people traded in staple crops and many early civilizations paid laborers in grain. Herding, hunting, fishing, horticulture, and agriculture all required different types of labor, each with its own social connotations and stratification. In addition, they all affected the environment in different ways and impacted long-term stability. Societies' attempts to address or incorporate that stability determined how they developed, while food distribution allowed both individuals and society, as a whole, to survive. Who provided surplus food and who distributed it played a major role in the emergence of social classes.

Twiss continues with the next two chapters by deconstructing feasts into theater for social obligations. Hosts were given the opportunity to expend surplus food and convert it into intangible assets. Guests reciprocated the host's hospitality and economic sacrifice with acts of service or labor. As civilizations developed, feasts took on a political dimension as they emphasized social classes and imperial prestige. Furthermore, Twiss examines the roles that militaries had in influencing what kind of food was produced domestically, what kinds of foods were sent back to the metropole as spoils of war, and both the offensive and defensive factors associated with pillaging. This presents a pertinent segue for any interested readers to also peruse Anastacia Marx de Salcedo's *Combat-Ready Kitchen: How the U.S. Military Shapes the Way You Eat* (New York: Current, 2015).

Twiss continues with imperial expansion which highlights how food fits in with ethnicity, race, and gender. Colonizers tended to stick with foods they were already familiar with. That pattern can be seen in the pickled meats that Romans spread through their empire, the ubiquitous presence of fish and chip shops throughout Britain's old Commonwealth, and the American knack for finding burger joints wherever they travel internationally. Immigrants of lower socioeconomic status, however, were often compelled to change their foodways to incorporate local opportunities and ingredients. Food also became a means of self-identity and self-preservation, as enslaved Blacks in the Antebellum Era grew their own food so they would not be dependent on stingy masters. Later, in the Jim Crow era, Black families

throughout the United States ordered their food via mail catalog so they could avoid racist shopkeepers and customers. For readers interested in further examination, this book would be an excellent companion to Michael Twitty's *The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South* (New York: Amistad Press, 2017). Twiss also makes a convincing argument that gender affects food by determining what kind of food is served, where, with whom, and even in the vessels used to store and distribute it (140-142). In fact, the rise of baking and of systematically refining grain into flour might have edged women towards the domestic sphere, a long process that would turn food preparation into 'women's work' even with the advent of modern kitchen appliances.

Food then becomes inextricably tied to ritual and religion. It can be used as a literal offering or as a symbol or allegory of sacrifice. Whether staples or delicacies, food immerses itself in creation myths, abstentions, and other conspicuous displays of piety. Religion can also co-opt foodways in order to maintain a social status quo, as Twiss contends when describing how Semitic peoples castigated pigs as unclean animals when those animals actually held the promise of self-sufficiency for many families.

*The Archaeology of Food* concludes with an examination of the impact that all foodways have on the environment. Even foragers can influence the local ecosystem through diffusion. Culture shapes how people eat, and how people eat alters the environment. Twiss' final chapter is an excellent springboard into the impact of modern foodways impacting the world today, such as overfishing, an insatiable desire for ingredients found in traditional medicines, and the role of climate change in disrupting ecosystems.

I would highly recommend this book for any upper-division history or anthropology class or graduate seminar that involves foodways or food production. There is also a suitable place for Twiss' work in some agriculture classes, particularly those focused on environmental science and global food security. Much of *The Archaeology of Food* is versatile enough that it can be utilized in many scenarios.

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