

## Introduction: Social dimensions of food

*Philipp W. Stockhammer, Bogdan Athanassov  
and Maria Ivanova*

What shall we eat? This basic question guides our everyday life when buying food, choosing cooking recipes, or sitting in a restaurant in front of the menu. Without any doubt, this question has successfully been resolved since the beginning of human existence, although the availability of food sometimes gave a quick answer to the question.

In this introduction to the volume, we wish to very briefly reflect on approaches within archaeology as well as in Food Studies that have been applied in answering this question, for past and present humankind. We wish to further stimulate the integration of past and present studies on food so that both disciplines – archaeology and Food Studies – can profit from each other. The case studies presented in this volume should service as an inspiration in this respect. Our region of focus, the Balkans, has played a crucial role in the dissemination and translation of food practices from the Mediterranean, the Near East, and the Eurasian Steppes towards Central Europe, and *vice versa*, and is, therefore, essential for a deep historical perspective on Asian and European food practices. However, the available archaeological data has hardly been published in such a way that it could find the interest of the thriving discipline of Food Studies. Moreover, Balkan archaeology could benefit a lot from a novel perspective on food practices in prehistory, as we argue below. In the end, it is our aim to move away from traditional approaches to food, which see the Balkans as either a ‘bridge’ between the Orient and Europe or as a ‘buffer’ consisting of hostile entities lacking inter-regional cooperation (cf. Tringham 2000 for an overview). We want to implement a transcultural archaeology that integrates an archaeology of the senses, practice-oriented approaches, and cutting-edge scientific techniques.

In our view, Food Studies can also benefit from Balkan prehistory. This area offers a unique geographical setting with alternating environments (ranging

from Mediterranean via mountainous to steppe-like environments at rather short distances), heterogeneous research traditions, and cultural milieus, as well as an interesting mosaic of appropriation and rejection of food and related practices guided by the strong identity politics of territorial entities. Therefore, we hope that this volume inspires and entangles both of the above: Food Studies and the prehistoric archaeology of the Balkans.

### **Archaeological approaches to the study of food**

The topic of food has been at the centre of archaeological interest for a long time. In our understanding, it comprises all processes and practices of production and consumption of edible and drinkable substances by human beings. The central role of food-related practices for human development has already been of central importance for Vere Gordon Childe (2003 [1936]) in his definition of the Neolithic Revolution, as he took the change of subsistence strategies as a basis for defining the new epoch.

Due to the notion that human past existence was a permanent struggle for survival, archaeological research has often focused on food from a functionalist perspective. In this line of thought, the consumption of food was generally reduced to the consumption of calories without taking a multisensorial perception of food into consideration. Human caloric requirements could easily be calculated for the present day and were understood as a timeless constant. Moreover, it was assumed that current calorific values of particular types of food are also valid for the past. These reference numbers, therefore, enabled an easy approach to the study of prehistoric food production and consumption. Following these approaches, past subsistence strategies were mostly seen through the lens of the meat output of herding strategies as well as the nutritional value of crops and their suitability to the respective climatic and soil condition. Subsistence strategies were mostly linked to the notion of maximum nutritional output. We would like to call this functionalist line of thought the ‘calorific approach’ to past consumption. It flourished in the Golden Age of processual archaeology (cf. Twiss 2007, 4–5 for an overview) and has remained popular until the present day – probably due to the fact that present-day people in the ‘western hemisphere’ are used to thinking about calorific values and calculating calories in their daily lives – so why not also calculate them for the past? Moreover, modern agrarian strategies are optimised for soil and climatic conditions in order to achieve maximum output – so why should humans have behaved differently in the past? Last but not least, calorific values and requirements have provided relatively safe grounds for further argumentation and comprehensive statistical calculations.

The main challenges encountered in this approach are mostly due to two rather problematic presuppositions: firstly, past humans are reduced to rational decision makers who only thought about calories; secondly, present-day scholars project modern knowledge of soil climatic conditions as well as our concepts of nutrition and nutritional value into the past and suppose their timeless validity.

At least since the 1980s, postmodern thinking has become more and more influential not only in Food Studies. Thus, voices became louder and finally dominant, which emphasized that food and food related practices could obtain a broad range of functions and meanings. This attitude became very prominent in one of the major publications of this period: Jack Goody's book *Cooking, Cuisine and Class. A Study in Comparative Sociology* from 1982. There he defines eating as 'a way of placing oneself in relation to others' (Goody 1982, 37). Food and food related practices were now seen as means of symbolic communication in order to express individual or group identities. Food as a symbolic marker of identity has since then been of major interest within the field of Food Studies, which started being institutionalised in the late 20th century at universities worldwide (cf. Hamada *et al.* 2015). In this line of thought, anthropologists have been trying either to identify and understand the particular food practices of a given group of actors with a joint identity or – in contrast – to relate a certain way of food production or consumption to a particular kind of human identity.

Since the advent of postmodernity, semiotic perspectives on food have also been very popular in prehistoric archaeology (Furholt and Stockhammer 2008) – also with regard to the interpretation of past foodways (Twiss 2007). It has been possible to identify local or regional patterns of food production and consumption, which were then explained as the expression of local or regional identities and as means of creating ethnic groups and related boundaries. This understanding of food as a means of sending messages in a conscious and/or unconscious way may be called the 'semiotic approach' to food in archaeology. For many archaeologists, food seemed to be one of the last stable grounds upon which to identify ethnic groups in the archaeological record. A very prominent example of this approach is found in the discussion about the pork-eating Philistines versus the pork-rejecting Israelite population at the Southern Levant in the Early Iron Age (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2008, 25).

However, archaeological studies on food have mostly not been able to shed light on individual practices of food preparation (e.g. practices of cooking and spicing) or individual diets. This problem has been partially solved by the third, most recent perspective on food in archaeology, which one could call the 'scientific approach' (cf. Stockhammer 2016). This approach has gained more and more momentum since the 1990s, with the rise of scientific analyses that have enabled us to shed a completely new light on past culinary practices. The analyses of stable isotopes in bone material and of organic residues – especially different fats – in vessels have been established for more than a decade now (e.g. Heron and Evershed 1993; Evershed *et al.* 2008; Cramp and Evershed 2015). More recent analytical approaches are focusing on food remains in human dental calculus (Warinner *et al.* 2014; Warinner, Speller and Collins 2014). These studies were able to determine individual practices of consumption far beyond what had previously been conceivable.

Defining three different approaches in archaeology towards food consumption naturally runs the risk of oversimplifying archaeology's broad and dynamic perspective on food. Nevertheless, we are convinced that this rather simplified picture

helps to better understand the potentials and problems of current archaeological approaches to food.

In our view, archaeologists could furthermore profit by integrating insights from the thriving young discipline of Food Studies, which has become established in its own right just in the last decades and is considered to be a nexus between approaches to the study of food from formerly separated fields like anthropology, history, life sciences, and economy.

### **Approaches of the current field of Food Studies**

We have already mentioned that both the calorific approach and the semiotic approach in archaeology went hand in hand with contemporaneous perspectives in cultural and social sciences. However, the very vibrant and successful scientific approach does not find an equivalent in the current field of Food Studies. This discipline is much more related to current discussions in the cultural and social sciences. Moreover, Food Studies are still marked by their heterogeneity with regard to the scientific background of the scholars, the institutional background, and the array of approaches (Hamada *et al.* 2015). Nevertheless, there are two more or less recent approaches that might also be particularly attractive for archaeologists.

The first approach emphasises culinary practices as dynamic processes, while stating that intercultural encounter is at the base of these processes, and could, therefore, be called the ‘transcultural approach’ in Food Studies. A transcultural approach aims to overcome a notion of culturally defined food practices within a territorial frame and emphasises that (food) cultures are invariably constituted by interaction, entanglement, and reconfiguration (e.g. Juneja and Falser 2013; Stockhammer and Forberg 2017). With regard to Food Studies, such a perspective argues against the existence of timeless and stable, national cuisines.

Food was one of the first topics to be taken into account by early Globalization Studies, already in the late 1980s. Therefore, the topic played a crucial role in a field of research, which has meanwhile transformed into one of the crucial elements of Transcultural Studies. At first, food cultures seemed to be a hallmark of globalisation. It was assumed that globalisation would lead to a world-wide homogenisation of culinary practices and globalisation has consequently also been called ‘McDonaldization’ (Ritzer 1993). Then it became clear that globalisation leads to ever new heterogeneities and hybrids which result from the transformative dynamics of processes of appropriation triggered by encounters with foreign objects and practices. Again, Food Studies played a major role in this discussion, e.g. when Ayse Çağlar wrote in her article *McDöner* about the invention of the so-called Döner Kebab (Çağlar 1995). She could show that, in contrast to public opinion in Germany, Döner Kebab is not an ancient Turkish dish, but was invented in 1975 by a Turkish snack bar for German customers at the Bahnhof Zoo in Berlin. Çağlar pointed out the fact that even this kind of transcultural dish is immediately appropriated by particular identity groups and furnished with a new

narrative in order to be used for self-identification and othering. Very similar results were already gained by Daniel Miller in his research on Coca Cola on the island of Trinidad, which he published in his most influential article *Coca-Cola: A black sweet drink from Trinidad* (Miller 1998). This interplay between food and globalisation is currently in the focus of several projects investigating the creation of narratives with regard to the origin, authenticity, and purity of food. The British anthropologist Harry West was asked by the association of the Portuguese slow-food industry to clarify, from a scientific perspective, how to best produce authentic Portuguese cheese and red wine (West 2011). West was not able to answer this question, but brought to light highly interesting processes of constructing narratives of authenticity and purity by the producers. Similar appropriations can be observed also in the Balkans, where particular dishes are considered hallmarks of traditional national Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, or Romanian cuisine, even if they originated in Turkey and sometimes even bear their original Turkish name. To sum up: the 'Transcultural Approach' in Food Studies tries to avoid all notions of essentialism and emphasises local, individual culinary practices and their dynamics.

Another prominent and promising line of thought in current Food Studies may be called the 'Material Approach', as it places its focus on the materiality of food. Following the approaches of Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, and similar symmetric perspectives in current social sciences, food is perceived as an independent and powerful actor side by side with human actors (Latour 2007; Bennett 2010). In this line of thought, the focus was placed on human interaction with food beyond functional, nutritional, and semiotic perspectives. In 2013, Emma-Jayne Abbots and Anna Lavis stated in their edited volume *Why We Eat, How We Eat: Contemporary Encounters Between Foods and Bodies*: 'In the act of placing food in the mouth, landscapes, people, objects and imaginings not only juxtapose with and fold into another, but are also reconstituted and reordered' (Abbots and Lavis 2013, 5). Central to the discussion is, therefore, a holistic perception of food, integrating all senses. Smelling, feeling, tasting, and touching food becomes crucial in this approach. Being only a means of survival in the functionalist approaches of the postwar decades, food is considered an experience in contemporary research.

### **Entangling different approaches**

In our view, the archaeologists' contribution to current Food Studies should be twofold: archaeology's first contribution would be the addition of a long-term diachronic perspective to Food Studies, which have been rather dominated by a synchronous perspective. Accordingly, many phenomena are considered to be the outcome of the globalised postmodern world, whereas their deep history is not acknowledged. This is possibly also due to the fact that Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory, which is inspiring many current studies, only thinks synchronously (Latour 2007). Neglecting time as a relevant factor in the context of food and culinary practices, however,

creates a major obstacle – both on the large and the small scale. A broad diachronic perspective is a prerequisite for understanding the genesis of transcultural phenomena and their historic depth. Hybrid food is not only the result of recent globalisation. Intercultural encounters and transcultural entanglement have always existed and exerted a major influence on the creation and transformation of culinary practices. The short diachronic perspective is necessary, as no other material object changes so dynamically through time as does food, while at the same time being so powerful. Its materiality as well as its substance can change very fast – food may become inedible or even poisonous after a few hours – or very slowly, when a desired flavour develops only after a long period of time. Food and time are inseparably interwoven. As we archaeologists are specialists in the diachronic approach, Food Studies could profit enormously from adding a deep historic perspective.

Archaeology's second contribution refers to the role of objects used to produce and consume food. Even if the materiality of food plays an important role in current approaches within Food Studies, the respective objects used to consume food have not been taken into consideration enough. Although a network approach is often explicitly taken as a basis for further reflections, objects used for the production and consumption of food – like knives, cups, plates, or bowls – are not included in these analyses, even though Norbert Elias has already argued for their prominent role in what he called the process of civilization (Elias 1939). However, these silent objects exert a major influence on how food is consumed, what can be consumed, and how the social act of eating and drinking is performed. These kinds of objects are most prominent in the archaeological record and in our research. They are sophisticatedly analysed with regard to their possible functions and connected practices. If you really want to shed light on culinary practices in all their dimensions, these important mediators between food and mankind must be integrated into the analysis. We archaeologists are specialists for the material side of human existence and, therefore, we have the particular competence to make a major contribution to Food Studies.

Not only do Food Studies stand to learn a lot from archaeology, but we archaeologists could also profit from discussing our archaeological evidence with input from Food Studies.

First of all, Food Studies present a rich number of case studies which are valuable as a reminder, or as a good model, of how oversimplified interpretations are to be avoided. They show us that, in most cases, 'rational' thinking plays a much less important role in the process of decision making about what to produce and consume than is regularly assumed by archaeologists. Climatic conditions, soil, nutrition, or output are often less important than food taboos, individual taste, and shifting ideas in society about what is consumable and what is not. However, these important factors are much more difficult to take into consideration than are climatic conditions, soil quality, and calorific value, which can be calculated much more easily from a modern-day perspective.

Secondly, Food Studies show us just how dynamic culinary practices are, and – at the same time – how easily (in this case: culinary) practices are traditionalised and



essentialised by societies. Shifts in local culinary practices may, thus, inform us about processes of essentialising local culinary practices. We may think of sudden and sharp decreases in the consumption of certain foods or the standardisation of food production and consumption.

Still, at this moment, Food Studies are quite far from supplying us with methodological approaches that can easily be transferred to the archaeological record. Nevertheless, they are eye-opening – for the interpretation of the record and for the necessity of further, interdisciplinary cooperation.

We archaeologists have to consider the various aspects of food contrary to the shifting research paradigms of cultural anthropology. Functionalist and symbolic as well as scientific, transcultural, and actor-oriented approaches have to be integrated without falling back into simplistic or essentialist interpretations. We have to remember our strength, namely the diachronic perspective – in connection with the unique conjunction of large scale and small scale contextual analyses. No other field has such a wide range of methods available in order to approach the immediate materiality of food and its related objects. This is particularly due to the fact that archaeology most intensively integrates analytical methods from both the humanities and a broad range of scientific disciplines.

## **The volume**

The chapters in this book offer a wealth of perspectives on the prehistory of food, employing novel approaches to traditional fields of archaeological research such as architecture, lithic and pottery studies, palaeobotanical and faunal analysis, and physical anthropology. A number of contributions exploit a recent change of perspective in zooarchaeological research from reconstructing herd management to exploring the cultural and ritual dimensions of the human-animal relationship. In their chapter, Bartosiewicz and Bonsall draw attention to the obvious but often neglected fact that over ninety percent of archaeozoologists' work revolves around the identification, analysis, and interpretation of leftovers of meat consumed under various circumstances, i.e. around 'dead stock' rather than livestock. Several other chapters closely follow these lines of thought. Drawing on ethnographic insights, Russell examines how food taboos aimed at animals can be inferred from prehistoric faunal assemblages, emphasising the essential importance of paying close attention to body part representation and minor taxa. Two further chapters use depositional context as a starting point to explore the ritual dimensions of meat consumption. Greenfield and Jongsma-Greenfield interpret a concentration of animal bones in a pit with unusual location, deposit type, and nature of contents, as the result of a feasting episode associated with the foundation of a ritual structure. A different ritual scenario is reflected in the pit deposits presented by Bacvarov and Gorczyk, where the nature of meat food refuse shows how people employed repetitive conspicuous deposition to extend the social value of food beyond consumption.

Several chapters are dedicated to the prominent role of commensality in social life. Kotsakis draws attention to the social context of food consumption, arguing that the replacement of pit dwellings by solid aboveground houses observed at neolithic sites reflects a major shift from public food-sharing to hospitality inside the house – a change with far-reaching social consequences. In her chapter, Bajčev employs use-alteration analysis to pottery in order to test and reject the assumption that painted ware was a luxury intended for display and serving; in fact, painted vessels were used in various activities involved in food processing, including storage and preparation. Urem-Kotsou further elaborates on pottery as a source of information on food practices, using the morphology and style of ceramic vessels to infer gradual changes in cooking and consumption in the course of the Neolithic period in northern Greece, while Isaakidou and Halstead integrate the ceramic data with several further lines of macroscopic, microscopic, and isotopic evidence to reveal a wealth of complex commensal practices at different social scales.

A prominent symbolic and social medium, food indisputably also has a major ecological dimension. The chapter by Krauss, De Cupere, and Marinova brings the environmental aspect into the discussion of prehistoric foodways, arguing on the basis of new archaeological, zooarchaeological, and archaeobotanical data from Romanian Banat for environmental adjustments in subsistence practices with the dispersal of farmers, crops, and livestock across the Balkans. In a similar vein, Ivanova explores how grinding tool morphology may reflect changes in the exploitation of cereals, and considers the possibility of using grinding tool assemblages to infer adjustments made to farming practices across environmental zones in the Balkans. Lithic tools are also central to the chapter of Gurova, whose long-term approach makes clear how changes in the shapes and uses of agricultural tools correlate with continuities and shifts in food practices.

A number of contributions deal with the employment of food in the negotiation of social status and wealth. For example, Nikolov interprets salt trade as central to the so called ‘Varna phenomenon’ of exceptionally rich burials. The relationship between salt production and wealth is central also in Harding’s chapter, which deals with the various scales of salt production and use: from a household-level produced commodity, as was usually the case in Bronze Age Europe, to a source for the accumulation of wealth and prestige, as seen in the Hallstatt Early Iron Age burials in the Austrian Alps. Harding’s reference to written and ethnographic sources gives a glimpse of various symbolic connotations of salt, which unfortunately remain invisible in the archaeological record. The links between food and social status in the Bronze Age are the topic of the chapter by Nicodemus, observing that a considerable change in the animal husbandry practiced in the tell site of Pecica in the 19th century BC coincided with population growth, differentiation between on- and off-tell households, the appearance of public architecture, and with feasting deposits. The author sees these processes as an indication of the creation of regional hierarchies and political and economic centralisation.



The dynamism of culinary practices has a central place in Gleser and Marinova's chapter, who approach the study of continuity and innovations in the Eastern Balkan Copper and Early Bronze Ages through the prism of faunal and botanical evidence. New bioarchaeological evidence is also presented in the review of Popov and colleagues on the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and Early Iron Age (EIA) settlement Kush Kaya in the Rhodope mountains. The mountains of the Rhodope, which, on a geographical map, appear as a barrier between the Mediterranean and the Balkan inland, unravel as a quite fruitful space for the transcultural study of food choices. Further novel research is presented in the chapter from Nikov and colleagues, offering the first archaeobotanical and archaeozoological study of a metal-mining site in southeast Europe. Mediterranean plants such as figs and melon in Ada Tepe show that food and gold might have been traded over the same exchange networks. A quite intriguing avenue of investigation is related to the question of innovation – in both metallurgy and food practices. While, in Ada Tepe, only a minor amount of the consumed fauna consisted of wild animals, the LBA fortified settlement of Bresto in the Western Rhodope mountains yielded high numbers of red deer bones. Gorczyk, Athanassov, and Stockhammer reject the possibility that increased hunting was related to the practice of resource buffering in difficult times and prefer to see hunting and the joint processing of hunted meat as a communal activity by which the inhabitants of Bresto maintained social solidarity at a time when the pull toward hierarchisation was strong. Finally, Rosenstock and Scheibner's study of human prehistoric adult body height highlights different trends in the Aegean and Balkans during the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Copper, and Bronze Ages. Insofar as human height is not only influenced by food (especially protein content), but also by other processes such as the migration of genes, the authors' discussion takes into consideration a plethora of processes, such as population dispersal from the Near East in the Neolithic or migration of people from the Pontic steppes in the Bronze Age.

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