



## Book Reviews

### **SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF FOOD IN THE PREHISTORIC BALKANS BY MARIA IVANOVA, BOGDAN ATHANASSOV, VANYA PETROVA, DESISLAVA TAKOROVA AND PHILIPP W. STOCKHAMMER**

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Prehistoric archaeology is predominantly focused on distinct material culture and architecture and consequently food was never anchored as central sphere of interest. Whenever considered in larger volumes, the studies on food were commonly placed among the end chapters. If the archaeological journals are also considered, and in the Balkans in particular, the papers associated with the research on food remains are regularly included in the last pages. Such papers largely place emphasis on the description of samples and methods applied, statistics and general overview of the determined taxonomy, and rarely concern the social component that food could have among the past societies. Now for the first time, at least in terms of Balkan archaeology, there is a publication that grasps the latest knowledge on organic remains of consumption and principally asserts the importance and engagement of food in the prehistory of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and Anatolia.

*Social Dimensions of Food in the Prehistoric Balkans* co-edited by Maria Ivanova, Bogdan Athanassov, Vanya Petrova, Desislava Tokorova and Philip W. Stockhammer takes a giant step towards new archaeological approach in the region and puts forward the significance of food in social practices of prehistoric communities. In spite of a volume that could primarily address the principles of processual archaeology and integrate knowledge based on data from graphs and diagrams, this publication goes further and emphasizes theory in an attempt to explain food in social context. Consequently, and most likely not by chance, most of the authors, at least of the chapters on the Neolithic settlements, are principal investigators of the sites or specialists in pottery, tools, social patterns and rituals, that intend to explain the food behind the statistics and charts.

Such thematic perspective and selection of authors is due to a conference in 2015 at the Heidelberg Academy of Science that initiated the incarnation of presented papers in this outstanding publication. The editors themselves suggest a more theoretical approach to food in prehistory and thus address to sociologists, anthropologists and archaeologists in the introductory section of this volume. Accordingly to such suggestions, the majority of authors in this edited book are referring to social implications of food that come out from the specialists'

studies, such as those of archaeozoologists, archaeobotanists, physical anthropologists, biologists or chemists. Therefore the volume aims to consider the culinary practices as dynamic processes and to assert the human interaction with food beyond functional actions, thus even highlighting the nutritional, performative and semiotic features of household or public consumption.

There are 19 chapters in the volume on the social dimensions of food dealing with research methodology, regional overview of plant food, meat and salt consumption, devices used for cooking or processing of ingredients, social status related to food and chronological observation of culinary practices in various stages of prehistory. Most of the papers are focused on data from particular countries in the Balkans, while few give broader regional and diachronic perspective thus this volume brings together more detailed case-study based research and a wider theoretical outline.

Maria Ivanova's paper is one of those that give broader regional overview of items used for grinding in the Neolithic of Southeast Europe. She studies the morphology of grinding tools along with the processing of cereals and observes their relationship with the modification of crops and its alteration in the process of Neolithization from Near East to Balkans. Consequently the grinding slabs and few mortars unearthed from the Early Neolithic sites in Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia are compared with those in Hungary in order to indicate the differences in production of milling tools, efficiency and the amount of consumed flour. Another paper that has a broader overview is the work of Łásłó Bartosiewicz and Clive Bonsall that reconsiders the methods of archaeozoology by giving the historic perspective of this discipline, but also asserting some of its critical points. They propose research more oriented towards meat consumption rather than on products as suggested by the data obtained from primary evidence ie, animal remains. Nerissa Russell's paper again provides a broader interregional perspective of Anatolia and Balkans, and regards the taboos associated with the manipulation, engagement, consummation and killing of animals and the social interaction with their remains. Her work is based on the study of animals in Çatalhöyük and Opovo concerning both faunal remains and images depicting animals. Consequently the symbolic notion, identity issues or ritual practices with bones or antler are highlighted as the core of the taboos related to animals in the Neolithic Anatolia and Balkans.

The volume has a number of chapters based on research in particular countries of the Balkans. The group of papers related to data from the Neolithic sites in Greece starts with the one by Kostas Kotsakis that concerns theoretical overview of the social implications of diet among the first farmers. The pit dwellings of the Early Neolithic sites are mainly considered as different social units than adobe houses that indicate diverse food management and interaction. Neolithic

sites in Greece are also observed in the paper of Dushka Urem Kotsou that deals with pottery and information coming from food residues preserved on them. She observes technological features and culinary engagement of ceramic vessels and how they are related with various cooking practices and concerns the dissimilarities in different settlement stages or even synchronically among neighboring villages. Last of the papers in this group is written by Valasia Isaakidou and Paul Halstead and considers the foodways of the community inhabiting Late Neolithic site of Makriyalos. They propose several scenarios of meat consumption based on faunal and human data and argue that most likely cattle was consumed in public events significant for the community inhabiting this large settlement.

There are two chapters based on research data from the Neolithic sites in Serbia. Olga Bajčev provides a novel perspective of painted pottery that previously was mainly used as chronological and cultural marker. Her work on material from Starčevo-Grad gives entirely different understanding of these luxurious items as they could be involved also in cooking or storing and not only as a tableware. This is indicated by numerous traces of alterations such as scratches, chips and abrasions associated with covering, fermentation, scratching and stirring. The second paper by Haskel J. Greenfield and Tina L. Jongsma-Greenfield is also focused on material from Serbia. They discuss feasting as an event practiced among the Early Neolithic communities in Blagotin and propose as one of the earliest in the Central Balkans. Besides the archaeological data they assert that archaeozoological analysis is necessary for such research and in case of Blagotin gives clear evidence for the preference of domestic animals, caprines and young individuals in public consumption of meat.

Two chapters deal with sustenance on Neolithic and Bronze Age sites in Romania. The first one, by Raiko Krauss, Bea De Cupere and Elena Marinova, provides a detailed overview of nutrition at the Early Neolithic site of Bucova Pusta as evidenced by the archaeozoological and archaeobotanical research. The data indicate that due to environmental and cultural factors, the diet of first farming communities in the Carpathian Basin differs from the one in the Balkans and beside the consumption of crops and domesticated animals, mussels, fish and marshland plants were preferred. The paper by Amy Nicodemus deals with the specialization of food practices and production of enhanced animals (ie, meat) and transport devices within the restructured Bronze Age community inhabiting the site of Pecica Șantul Mare in the Carpathian Basin. She suggests that feasting was a significant event that enabled the higher social groups to negotiate the imbalances and highlight the hierarchy in society.

The majority of the chapters in the volume concern research undertaken in Bulgaria that is mainly focused in late prehistory. One of the papers that deal with the final stages of the Neolithic is written by Krum Bačvarov and John Gorczyk and has the rites associated with

animals as its focal point. They indicate the pit field as major ritual reference at Sarnevo in Upper Thrace where means of deposition and manipulation of depositional items evidence the specialization and affirmation of symbolic relationship. Besides the material culture the authors put emphasis on animal remains in a particular pit (Feature 66) that were consumed in the settlement and deposited in the exterior pit field with further employment of antler as signpost for the increased significance of deer at the very end of Neolithic. The food practices of Chalcolithic and Bronze Age Bulgaria are explored in the work of Ralf Gleser and Elena Marinova where they use the archaeobotanic data from Drama region to test the transformation and permanence of diet in different prehistoric eras. They propose that some plant food was consumed in both Chalcolithic and Bronze Age of the region, but also some disappeared (free threshing wheat) and new was introduced (oil crop) due to social changes and novel settlement patterns on particular sites, such as Merdžumekja that is a case study in their research.

Three papers concerned with the transitional period between Bronze and Iron Age of Bulgaria highlighting the processing of food, cooking and hunting. The data comes out of studies on three different sites (Kush Kaya, Ada Tepe and Bresto) that give information on how the food was provided, prepared and consumed. The research results indicate that besides einkorn and barley, millet becomes a major consumed crop in the region used for various foods, as well as the oil crops whose use is simultaneously increased. New baking techniques are also proposed as possible, but also a preference of older animals for consumption and some fruits of Mediterranean origin that suggest contact and trade between distant regions. As well as herding, hunting, with an emphasis on red deer, was also undertaken, which helped established social groups.

Apart from papers based on archaeozoological and archaeobotanic research there are two chapters that consider salt in prehistoric Balkans. They are rather short and compressed overviews of already thoroughly elaborated research of salt production and contribute in the volume with social emphasis of different food resource. The first one is written by Vasil Nikolov and has the Provadia-Solnitsata site as core for the social changes that appear with the introduction of salt as new resource and established this site as regional center for its distribution. The author asserts the transformation of salt making from Neolithic to Chalcolithic and the impact it had in long-distance trade, but also on prestigious economy and creation of social groups with higher status in Varna region. Anthony Harding provides a broader regional and temporal perspective of salt production. He puts forward the employment of salt in the diet, its nutritional features and manufacture, as well as the effect it had in economy and social processes, by referring to historical and ethnographic resources.

The penultimate chapter provides a thorough insight into the stable isotope and anthropometric research in the prehistoric Anatolia and Balkans and the potential it has in the better understanding of nutrition in the past. Written by Eva Rosenstock and Alisa Scheibner the paper opens new gates of scientific study of Neolithization process with integration of stature and diet as indicators for bodily changes people had in prehistory. They assert that the stature of Neolithic population in the Aegean increased as result a mixture of local Mesolithic people with immigrants from the Near East, while the individuals in the Balkans do not witness such modifications in the Neolithic, but later in Chalcolithic and Bronze Age. This work raises new questions and necessity for the enhancement of samples for anthropometric and stable isotope research that will significantly contribute in detecting the modifications caused by the migration, nutrition and sedentary life of diverse populations.

The last chapter of this exceptional volume indicates the potential of food studies in prehistory and what could be one of the most exciting directions of the archaeology in the future. Most of the papers in the *Social Dimensions of Food* demonstrate that further research on diet could provide much better comprehension of natural and social environment in prehistory as they were inevitably bound together. The authors emphasize the richness of data that brings in front the daily life and rituals of the past societies and especially of their inhabitants in particular. Therefore this volume is opening wider the gates into the unknown world of the first agriculturists, herders and metallurgists and hopefully will inspire many to bring food studies into their research. Consequently such research in other Balkan countries not considered in this edited book will be also concerned in the future publications and will provide more detailed insight into social and symbolic practices associated with consumption.

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