

The Archaeology of Food and Social Diversity

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Abstract This article reviews current archaeological research on the interactions between food and intrasocietal diversity. Today's archaeology of food and diversity is theoretically diverse but generally views food as biologically necessary and cognitively prominent material culture that plays an active role in constructing and negotiating social distinctions. Areal foci in the literature include Europe, Southwest Asia, Mesoamerica, the U.S. Southwest, and the Andes; thematic emphases include economic, status, ethnic, gender, and religious distinctions. Methodological issues that must be considered when assessing the social implications of food remains include not only the contexts and characters of specific samples but also the integration of multiple data sets that may all differ with respect to their taphonomic histories and the aspects of food behavior they reflect.

Keywords Food · Economics · Politics · Ideology

Introduction

The past few decades have seen a dramatic broadening in the approaches through which archaeologists study and discuss food. Thirty years ago the archaeological literature was dominated by discussions of “diet” and “subsistence”: studies investigating how past humans acquired or produced the nutrients that underpinned their cultural survival. Today, terms such as “foodways” and “cuisine” are widespread, as archaeologists increasingly explore how politics, ideologies, economies, and more were entwined with past production, preparation, consumption, and discard practices.

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