

Review of:

Baking, Bourbon, and Black Drink: Foodways Archaeology in The American Southeast

Edited by Tanya M. Peres and Aaron Deter-Wolf, Alabama: University of Alabama Press. 2018. Pp vii +237, introduction, bibliography, index, figures, tables.

Reviewed by: Kathleen Fleming

Baking, Bourbon, and Black Drink: Foodways Archaeology in the American Southeast, edited by Tanya M. Peres and Aaron Deter-Wolf, is a well-organized volume that takes the reader on a historical journey through the foodways of the southeastern United States. Over the nine chapters, the contributors examine different aspects of past foodways, such as the ways that people gathered, prepared, and consumed their food. The book also offers insights into how foodways were used to mark political and social status, as well as the issues surrounding food security. Overall, the book's content demonstrates the importance of understanding the past of a culture in order to offer insights into its present.

While the archeological focus may be unfamiliar to many folklorists, two chapters in particular may be useful. The first is "Archaeology of the Whiskey Foodway in Kentucky," by Nicolas Laracuate. As the chapter title suggests, Laracuate explores how people prepared whiskey, but does so in a way that is easy to understand for non-archaeologists. For example, Laracuate discusses how the rise of industrial whiskey distilleries affected creating the drink at home. Particularly intriguing for folklorists, Laracuate includes some of the legends that surround the industry, such as how the drink "blind tigers" got its name, or how the Jameson distillery was created. The inclusion of these legends shows the important role that stories play in understanding local foodways.

Another chapter that may prove interesting for folklorists is "Detangling Histories of Hominy: A Historical Anthropological Approach," by Rachel Briggs. Briggs shows how food relates to many areas of daily life. She also ably demonstrates how the history and beliefs of a group of people will affect their willingness and ability to adopt new foods and ways of cooking into their foodways, and how food can be used as a way of examining relationships between people. For example, Briggs notes that during an outbreak of pellagra during the twentieth century, primarily Euro-American males were affected. However, of the few cases reported in African Americans, the majority were women. When protein was scarce, African American women did without due to the common folk belief that men needed more protein than women. Briggs' findings highlight how different social and ethnic groups prepare and consume the same staple food in different ways. Gender and ethnicity played a significant role in how these different groups prepared and consumed food. This chapter underscores the importance of exploring foodways adaptations which can provide insight into the ways that diets have changed over time as well as how gender and ethnicity shape values, traditions, and food practices.

Other chapters in the collection are informative but may prove less accessible for those without some familiarity with archeological inquiry. For example, in the first chapter of

this collection, “Social Substance: Integrating Analyses of Ceramic, Plant, and Animal Remains from Feltus,” Megan C. Kassabaum explores evidence for feasting ceremonies from the Feltus site in Mississippi, coming to the conclusion that this site was indeed an important gathering spot during the Woodland period. Kassabaum’s findings demonstrate that understanding how space was used in the past can provide insight into how its importance changed over time. Similarly, the chapters “Splitting the Bones: Marrow Extraction and Mississippian Period Foodways,” by Tanya M. Peres, “Turkey Foodways: The Intersection of Cultural, Social, and Economic Practices in the Mississippian Period Southeast,” by Tanya M. Peres and Kelly Ledford, and “The Prehistory and History of Black Drink” by Thomas Emerson, offer insights into the archaeology of Mississippi foodways.

In the remaining chapters, *Digest* readers may find useful insights into how the foodways of the American southeast have evolved over time. In “Prehistoric Foodways from the Dust Cave Site,” Stephen Carmody, Kandace Hollenback, and Elic Weitzel show that during the Pleistocene period in Dust Cave, Alabama, the diet shifted from an animal-based diet to a more plant-based one in order to adapt to changes that were brought on by climate change. In “Cooking Connects Them: Earth Ovens as Prehistoric Places during the Woodland Period,” Lauren Walls and Scott Keith review how earth ovens were used during the Woodland period in Tennessee and Georgia, and argue that examining the use or abandonment of these ovens over the centuries can offer insight into the social structures of the people at the time. These findings add to the strength of the collection as a whole because they demonstrate how foodways in the American southeast have evolved over time. Finally, Neil Wallis and Thomas Pluckhahn focus on the remains of ceramic vessels from the Middle to Late Woodland period in Florida and South Georgia in their chapter “Culinary and Social Requirements of Middle and Late Woodland Swift Creek Pottery.” Overall, these chapters show that, while staple foods may stay the same, the way they are prepared will continue to evolve over time.

Taken altogether, the chapters underscore the fact that studying how foodways have evolved in the past may offer some indication of how they will change in the future. For folklorists with an interest in archeology and historical foodways, this well-written and well-organized volume may prove useful.