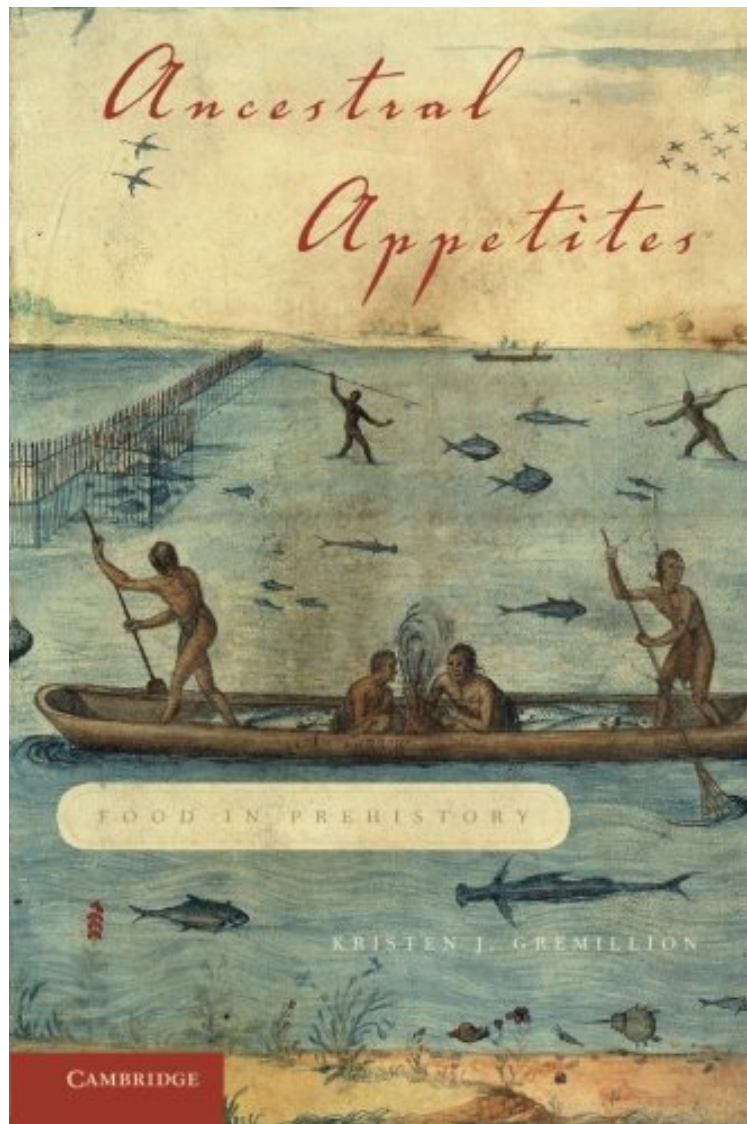


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Ancestral Appetites: Food in Prehistory

Kristen J. Gremillion

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Kristen J. Gremillion : Ancestral Appetites: Food in Prehistory before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ancestral Appetites: Food in Prehistory:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An accessible read and a great broad overview of human food ecology By Brian A. Sparr In her 2011 book, Ancestral Appetites: Food in Prehistory, Dr. Kristen J. Gremillion of Ohio State University does an admirable job of weaving together a narrative of how humans came to enjoy (or at least subsist on) the foods they eat in the myriad ways that they do so. A paleoethnobotanist by trade, Dr. Gremillions

research interest is in the reconstruction of prehistoric diets through the study of the sometimes scant remains left by plants that were utilized as food by ancient peoples. As such, a strong ecological theme runs throughout the book, starting with the biological and behavioral adaptations we've acquired from our long lineage as mammals, primates, hominins, and ultimately humans, and continues with the multitude of cultural innovations and adaptations we have plied in our ongoing search for sustenance. That theme is a strong reminder that, despite claims of human exceptionalism, as a species we are no more removed from the necessity of interacting with the world around us than any other organism. While the versatility we possess in those interactions is impressive, in the end we are born, we eat, we (possibly) propagate, and we die, a cycle that has commonality in all the domains of life. If our acquired biological adaptations form the skeletal frame of the foods we can consume, it is our culture that puts meat on those bones, and the resulting appearances vary widely throughout the world. Already quite the dietary generalists in that we can thrive on a number of different types of food, humans have learned, through a combination of accumulated knowledge and flexibility, how to expand that even further. By no means an inevitable process or progress, even, the intensification of our quest for nutrition including foraging, cooking, agriculture, and industrial food production nevertheless allowed us to spread to nearly every habitat on the planet. One particular observation that is made near the end of the book bears repeating and expansion. It has become very popular to engage in natural vs. unnatural arguments concerning the topics of food, health, the environment, and conservation. Dr. Gremillion rightly calls them out as being unproductive, meaningless, or even harmful. She cautions against falling for fads or political ideology, and instead enjoins us to look at the issues we face scientifically. There is no unnatural, as we are ourselves products of natural processes who use natural elements, compounds, and materials in ways governed by the natural laws of the universe. Tools are not unique to humans, and neither are food processing or agriculture. Even medicinal practices have analogs in other animals. If we are to solve the global issues facing contemporary society, we must put aside the notion that we are somehow removed from the natural order. I easily recommend Dr. Gremillion's book as an excellent overview of human food ecology from an evolutionary, prehistorical, and documented historical perspective. Pulling from various lines of research and evidence, she paints a clear picture of how food is foundational to many of our behaviors and accomplishments as a species. Her writing style is accessible to a wide range of readers, and the subject matter is attractive to both those with a passing curiosity of food history/human ecology and academics whose own research falls outside the realm of diet. Perhaps more importantly for casual readers, she illustrates how archaeologists determine what is likely to be true, not true, and when to withhold judgment if the evidence is sparse. By outlining what we know, she also points the way to future research.

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Very interesting
By Monty
Very good read on an interesting subject. good look at the co-evolution of humans and food technology, and the culture that surrounds it
1 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Good Read
By fresh0288
This book is a very good read, I would recommend it to any one who would like to learn more about this kind of stuff!

This book explores the relationship between prehistoric people and their food - what they ate, why they ate it, and how researchers have pieced together the story of past foodways from material traces. Contemporary human food traditions encompass a seemingly infinite variety, but all are essentially strategies for meeting basic nutritional needs developed over millions of years. Humans are designed by evolution to adjust our feeding behavior and food technology to meet the demands of a wide range of environments through a combination of social and experiential learning. In this book, Kristen J. Gremillion demonstrates how these evolutionary processes have shaped the diversification of human diet over several million years of prehistory. She draws on evidence extracted from the material remains that provide the only direct evidence of how people procured, prepared, presented, and consumed food in prehistoric times.

"Highly recommended." Choice
"Gremillion has certainly achieved her goal of creating a comprehensive and accessible book about food and prehistory." Helen Ohlke, *Journal Canadien D'Archeologie*
"The author's comfort with a wide variety of biological (botanical and zoological), anthropological, and archaeological evidence is apparent, and her ready grasp of the material allows the work to flow fluidly." William Pestle, *American Anthropologist*
About the Author
Kristen J. Gremillion is an Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Ohio State University. She has published many articles on human dietary variability in journals including *American Antiquity*, *Current Anthropology* and the *Journal of Archaeological Science* as well as several edited volumes.