



Cambridge Society for the Application of Research

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Not Mammoth Steaks *Again?* The Neolithic Diet

Professor Martin Jones

George Pitt-Rivers Professor of Archaeological Science
University of Cambridge

7.30 p.m., Monday 17th March 2008

The Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Churchill College, Storey's Way, Cambridge

Dr Jones writes:

The Neolithic diet

From mammoths steaks to grass seeds is remarkable dietary shift, but it has happened within a single species, our own. A large part of human evolution has involved adaptation to the consumption of large animals, and yet the last ten thousand years has witnessed the growing domination of the human food web by cereal grain. Some have seen this as the precondition for human progress and civilisation, others as a nutritional disaster and the source of many modern ills.

Bio-archaeology, the direct archaeological study of past traces of organic life, has been greatly refined in recent years, and allows a much closer inspection of the surprising transition described above. In this lecture, a series of specific bio-archaeological case studies are examined to cast light on our species' unusual dietary transition

About the Speaker:

Martin Jones has been George Pitt-Rivers Professor of Archaeological Science at the University of Cambridge since 1990, and in the previous decade held a lectureship at the University of Durham. Throughout his career he has been examining the fragmentary traces of ancient food from the archaeological record.

The focus of his research is the changing human use of plants as a source of food, and the relationships between the meal, the food quest and wider patterns of change in society and the human environment. His research group bring together methods from archaeology, biology, genetics, and chemistry, to explore a range of case studies spanning the globe. His current research projects include: an examination of early food sharing circles in the Upper Palaeolithic of Central Europe; an exploration of North Chinese farming origins and their impact on Asia and Europe; and a study of pathways of agricultural spread within Europe.

Three of his more recent titles are "*The molecule hunt*"; "*Archaeology and the search for ancient DNA*" and "*Feast: why humans share food*."

The Organising Secretary adds....

A critical review for "**Feast: Why humans share food**" says:

".....is a terrific new book from archaeologist Martin Jones, which uses the structure of a 12-course gourmet meal to present the evolutionary social history of people eating together.

The second chapter, "Are we so different? How apes eat", illuminates how we humans are different from our primate cousins, the chimpanzees. It opens with a description of a nuclear family meal in Gombe National Park, Tanzania, and a feast for the whole band some ten years earlier, in fascinating detail.

Other chapters cover a 500,000-year-old Homo erectus meal of a horse at [Boxgrove](#), a Neanderthal meal at [Abric Romani](#) (46,000 years ago), modern humans at [Ohalo II](#) (23,000 bp), and Neolithic farmers at [Jerf-el-Ahmar](#) (11,000 bp). Next we visit the Neolithic hill fort at [Hambleton Hill](#) (3500 BC), a feast at a Mycenaean palace at [Pylos](#) (1200 BC), a feast of the Roman Empire outpost at [Colchester](#) (AD 45) and a poor person's meal of the same era identified from the [Huldre Fen bog body](#). Finally we see into a medieval monk's repast at [Moreaucourt Abbey](#) (AD 1372), and a family dining on TV dinners in a suburban living room (AD 1954).

(Jones, Martin. 2007. *Feast: Why humans share food*. Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0-19-920901-9)

Professor Jones comes highly recommended, and his subject is certainly original! Needless to say, he uses first-class science to unravel what first appear as unanswerable questions; **enjoy!**

Coffee will be available, as usual, in the foyer outside the lecture theatre, from ~7pm onwards

Best Regards

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