

## Introduction

The foodways, consumption habits, eating- and drinking-related material culture, and social and political uses of food during the Late Iron Age in south-east England were distinctly different from those of previous periods, as is evident from settlement and mortuary contexts alike.

Despite a relative continuity in the foodways of Britain's later prehistory, by the Late Iron Age the material culture record from this region reveals a host of developing trends in the foodway, particularly in farming practice, food storage and preservation strategies, the procurement of exotic luxuries from cross-Channel exchange, the elite consumption of food and drink and—perhaps most significantly—the changing relationship between consumers and their food. Some of these developments were evidently in part an indirect result of increased engagement with Gaulish and Roman Europe, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of imported tablewares, foods and drinks, the expansion of ceramic repertoires and production techniques and the adoption of rich cremation burials. Yet neither increased exchange with the Roman or Gallic worlds nor the arrival of continental emigrants is sufficient to account for the fairly dramatic changes in indigenous attitudes toward, use of, and beliefs regarding food and drink. Though many of the emerging traditions may have had parallels across the Channel, the forms these traditions took on post-adoption were often distinctly British. Indigenous Britons were apparently selectively opting into specific continental technologies rather than adopting wholesale a Roman or continental cultural package, and were doing so in ways that were more compatible with local practices and which served their specific needs. Novel types of food, drink and consumption-related material culture were beginning to be used to communicate new forms of identity and grouphood against a backdrop of a precarious and dynamic socio-political climate.

Despite the fact that emerging notions of both individual and group identity, manifestations and expressions of wealth and status, and shifting belief practices were evidently reflected in these developing food practices, to date there is a dearth of studies that explore preparation and consumption practices in the south east during the Late Iron Age (Champion 2019). This project intends to address this shortcoming in Iron Age scholarship by assessing the development, scope, and significance of changes to culinary practices and food consumption during the Late Iron Age in south-east England through a synthetic overview of published and unpublished results of excavations from south-east England.

### 1.1 Research aims and analytical focus

This book contributes to ongoing debates concerning

change and continuity in foodways and food-related practices between the Middle and Late Iron Age in south-east England. It seeks to explore how food procurement, processing, preservation, storage, preparation and consumption were structured, experienced and transformed over time, and how these practices intersected with broader social and cultural developments, including mortuary practices. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which food and drink practices were used to articulate social relations and identities within communities undergoing increasing regional and extra-regional connectivity.

The study approaches these questions through a synthetic analysis of published and grey literature from Cambridgeshire, East Sussex, Essex, Greater London, Hertfordshire and Kent.

Change is assessed through multiple strands of evidence, including developments in ceramic assemblages and technologies; faunal and human skeletal material; plant assemblages; and food- and hearth-related material culture such as querns, utensils, cauldrons, buckets, tankards and firedogs. By bringing together these diverse datasets the project aims to reconstruct foodways as integrated, responsive systems, rather than discrete categories of material evidence.

The work is structured around four primary research questions. First, it asks how the lifecycle of food operated during the Middle and Late Iron Age, from initial procurement until final consumption, and what physical, technological and social infrastructures underpinned each stage. This includes consideration of agricultural strategies, processing technologies, culinary practices and the social organisation of labour involved in food production.

Second, the study sheds light on how 'regular' or quotidian food consumption is represented archaeologically, and how such practices might be distinguished from more episodic or formalised acts such as feasting or ritual deposition. By focusing on the material signatures of daily dealings with food, the project seeks to foreground routine practices that are often archaeologically under-represented, but which are socially fundamental and accordingly rich in interpretive value.

Third, the work explores the pace, scale and unevenness of change in food and drink consumption during this period. It considers whether shifts in the use of ingredients, technologies and practices were rapid and transformative or otherwise gradual and selective, and how far such changes were geographically and socially pervasive within south-east England.

Finally, this work situates developments in eating and drinking practices within wider discussions of identity and cultural expression in the Late Iron Age. It explores how foodways relate to emerging articulations of individual and group identity, including displays of familiarity or affiliation with continental traditions, and how these expressions compare with changes visible in other categories of material culture. In doing so, this work considers the significance of food and drink practices within the broader context of indigenous-Roman relations, emphasising negotiation, hybridity and local agency rather than clean, linear models of cultural transition.

## **1.2 Scope, evidence and approach**

The geographical focus of the study is south-east England, an area that experienced increasingly intensive contact with continental Europe during the Late Iron Age. Chronologically the work focusses on the period from c. 150 BC to the time of the Roman conquest in AD 43, though when particularly pertinent, evidence belonging to the preceding and following periods are also considered in order to capture and assess longer-term developments and trajectories of change.

Methodologically, the analysis adopts a *chaîne opératoire* approach to the foodway, examining food-related practices from procurement through to consumption. This framework allows for the integration of diverse strands of evidence, including zooarchaeological and archaeobotanical data, human skeletal data, ceramic assemblages, structural remains and small finds. By bringing these datasets into dialogue, the study aims to reconstruct not only what was eaten, but how food was handled, transformed, utilised and experienced in different social contexts as it moved through the foodway.

## **1.3 Structure of the monograph**

The chapters that follow are organised in three main parts. Chapters 2 and 3 comprise the first part, which introduces the reader to the landscape of food studies research and in particular archaeological approaches to food and feasting, from the middle of the twentieth century until the present day.

Chapters 4 through 7 form the second part and are organised around successive stages of the foodway, tracing food and related practices through the stages of procurement, processing, storage and preservation, and preparation. Chapter 4 examines the procurement of food and drink, including pastoral and arable farming, the exploitation of wild resources, and the importation of non-local foodstuffs. Particular attention is paid to patterns of diversification

and specialisation, and to the ways in which new resources were incorporated alongside long-established subsistence strategies. Chapter 5 turns to food processing, considering butchery practices and the transformation of cereals into both flour and fermented beverages. These activities are explored not only as technical processes, but as socially embedded practices with implications for labour organisation and consumption. Chapter 6 addresses food storage and preservation, focusing on the range of strategies employed to manage surplus and risk. The increasing importance of salt is considered in detail, both as a preservative and as a commodity that reshaped aspects of production and distribution. Chapter 7 then examines food preparation, reviewing the evidence for sources of heat, cooking vessels and utensils, and a range of cooking techniques. Together, these chapters highlight the selective adoption of new technologies and the persistence of established culinary traditions.

In Chapters 8 and 9, the focus shifts towards a more theoretical discussion of the role that food played in Iron Age society and the ways in which it was used to channel intended social and political outcomes. Chapter 8 shifts the focus to consumption and its social contexts. It begins with an examination of the consumers themselves, drawing on skeletal evidence to explore patterns of diet and consumption across age and sex. This is followed by an analysis of developments in tablewares and drinking equipment, and a broader discussion of dining practices, social display and etiquette. Through this material, the chapter considers how food and drink contributed to the articulation of personal and group identities, and what Late Iron Age cuisines can reveal about social differentiation and cultural affiliation in south-east England.

Chapter 9 moves beyond the strict chronological boundaries of the Late Iron Age to situate food and consumption within a wider colonial framework. Drawing on comparative material from the Mohawk Valley of colonial North America, it explores the role of foodways in negotiating identities and relationships within colonial frontier settings, and argues for the utility of the ‘middle ground’ as an interpretative model for Late Iron Age and early Roman Britain. In doing so, it calls for a reframing of prevailing narratives that have tended to privilege linear or transitional accounts of cultural change.

The final chapter synthesises the main findings of the study and reflects on their broader implications, outlining directions for future research and considering how the archaeology of food can contribute to wider debates on the entanglements between material culture and colonialism, identity and cultural interaction.