

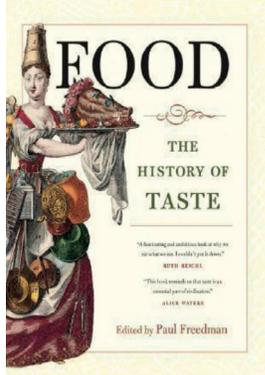
BOOK REVIEW / KİTAP İNCELEMESİ



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Food: The History of Taste by Paul Freedman

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Author: Paul Freedman,
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Gastronomy and Culinary Arts,
University of Gaziantep, Gaziantep,
Türkiye.

✉ ceyhunucuk@gmail.com

Asst. Prof. Dr. PhD., Tekirdag Namik
Kemal University, Sarkoy Vocational
School, Tekirdağ, Türkiye.

✉ ceyhunucuk@gmail.com

Asst. Prof. Dr. PhD., Istanbul
Gelism University, Department
of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts,
Istanbul, Türkiye.

✉ ceucuk@gelisim.edu.tr

Abstract

Paul Freedman, in his book *Food: A History of Taste*, explores the social, aesthetic, and historical dimensions of food. He examines cultural diversity, showing that individuals are shaped not just by their biological traits but also by their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Spanning from hunter-gatherer societies to modern-day food culture, the book delves into how social status, rituals, and cultural changes have influenced what people eat. Ten chapters, each written by different authors based on thorough research, offer diverse perspectives. This review is based on the Turkish edition of the book. Freedman's interdisciplinary approach, incorporating education, science, and technology, has led to the creation of many innovative ideas.

Keywords

Taste history, Food History, Paul Freedman, Gastronomy History

Paul Freedman is a history professor at Yale University who is particularly well-known for his research on medieval Europe. Freedman, who studies the linkages between history and gastronomy, is also known for his research on social hierarchy, religion, and agrarian communities. In 2007, one of the most important books Freedman published was *Food: A History of Taste*. This book examining how taste has evolved through different periods and cultures. *Yemek, Damak Tadinin Tarihi* is the Turkish version, published by Oğlak Yayınları in 2008, which this review focuses on. The main objective of *Food: A History of Taste* is to trace the historical evolution of cuisine, examining both the sensory qualities of food and its social, artistic, and cultural significance. The book aims to demonstrate that attitudes toward food preparation, consumption, and presentation provide insights into social identities across different historical periods and cultures. *Food: A History of Taste* emphasizes that food is not just about taste but reflects human identity, culture, and communication between societies. Freedman combines insights from disciplines like history, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, classics, economics, and medical texts to present an encyclopedic view of how meals have been deeply connected to social structures throughout history.

The chapters of the book present coherent assessments of culinary cultures across essential historical periods. Each chapter focuses on a specific era or region, illustrating how food held cultural and social significance within that society. The section on Alan K. Outram's work examines prehistoric food production, consumption, and social organization, shedding light on how early humans obtained and consumed food, as revealed by archaeological evidence such as cut marks on animal bones and stone tools. Outram explores the hunter-gatherer lifestyle and its impact on social structure. In this section, food is shown to have played a role not only in survival but also in establishing social hierarchies in early communities. This narrative suggests that food culture has always been a social foundation, extending beyond its role as mere sustenance.

HUNTER-GATHERERS AND THE FIRST FARMERS: The Evolution of Taste in Prehistory

In this section, Outram explores how environmental constraints and the evolution of kitchen tools influenced the dietary habits of prehistoric humans, focusing on how these factors shaped their food choices. Archaeological evidence, such as bone remains and tools, provides key insights. Outram highlights the transition from hunting to agriculture, showing how early humans developed distinct diets driven by both cultural preferences and practical needs. New isotope analysis methods offer detailed revelations about historical diets, demonstrating that taste is not purely a biological phenomenon but also significantly shaped by cultural contexts.

THE GOOD THINGS THAT LAY AT HAND: Tastes of Ancient Greece and Rome

In this chapter, Grimm discusses the deep connections between ancient Greek and Roman culinary traditions and their social and religious customs. While food was essential for sustenance, it also played a vital role in rituals and hospitality. The lavish feasts of Homer's heroes, with tables overflowing with meats and drinks, symbolize social hierarchies and communal bonds. In this era, food was not merely a necessity but a cornerstone of social interaction and community life.

THE QUEST FOR PERFECT BALANCE: Taste and Gastronomy in Imperial China

Waley-Cohen describes food preparation, serving, and consumption as having monumental significance, integral to all aspects of life, especially within Chinese culture, which is known for its deep appreciation of food. Early texts suggest that food preparation is a marker of civilization and closely linked to governance. Influential figures such as Yi Yin drew parallels between philosophical concepts and culinary practices, asserting that effective governance is akin to good cuisine, requiring balance, attention, and skill.

THE PLEASURES OF CONSUMPTION: The Birth of Medieval Islamic Cuisine

Miller explains that the concepts of halal and haram as outlined in the Quran and Hadith form the basis of Islamic cuisine. Early Islamic food mirrored the Prophet's simple, rural eating habits, but as Islam expanded and interacted with Greek, Egyptian, and Persian cultures, the cuisine became more refined. Halal meats, grains, and dairy products formed the foundation of this culinary tradition.

FEASTING AND FASTING: Food and Taste in Europe in the Middle Age

Woolgar explains that in medieval Europe, social status and religious rituals were closely linked to food culture. While aristocratic tables were filled with lavish meals and extravagant foods, the lower classes often struggled to find sufficient sustenance. Insights into the dietary habits of the upper classes, especially during the 1200–1500 period, are revealed through historical records and archaeological findings.

NEW WORLDS, NEW TASTES: Food Fashions after the Renaissance

Cowan argues that geographical discoveries profoundly transformed European food culture. The introduction of new foods and spices significantly altered European eating habits. These new flavors were swiftly adopted by the aristocracy, enhancing culinary culture, and their spread was supported by humanist ideals and growing trade networks.

THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN CONSUMER AGE: Food Innovations from 1800

Teuteberg examines how technological advancements in the 19th and 20th centuries impacted culinary culture. Industrialization and urbanization brought significant changes to food culture, with new technologies and food production methods shaping daily eating habits. In the modern consumer era, both food production and consumption processes have seen substantial improvements.

CHEFS, GOURMETS AND GOURMANDS: French Cuisine in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Drouard explains that, beginning in the 19th century, French cuisine evolved as a system of interactions between chefs, gourmets, and customers. Notable figures such as Carême and Brillat-Savarin made significant contributions to gastronomy, laying the foundation for modern French cuisine. During this period, gastronomy became closely tied to social status.

DINING OUT: The Development of the Restaurant

Shore explains that restaurant culture originated in Paris in the mid-18th century and gradually evolved into the modern concept of restaurants over a span of 250 years. Initially serving only the wealthy, restaurants began to cater to a broader clientele over time. The rise of restaurants played a key role in shaping culinary culture and had a profound impact on social life.

NOVELTY AND TRADITION: The New Landscape for Gastronomy

Scholliers points out that social and cultural changes in the late 20th century were tied to shifts in culinary practices and taste. After 1945, food innovations and choices became a way for individuals to express their social and cultural identities. Changing consumer preferences reflected broader societal shifts, as new cuisines and tastes were embraced. Freedman's work demonstrates how social transformations, technological advancements, and global exchanges have shaped how people perceive food and taste. It shows that food is more than just a biological necessity, serving as a marker of social status, cultural identity, and aesthetic experience. The book explores the evolution of food production methods, their influence on cuisine, and the increasing globalization of food, especially since the industrial revolution and modern technology. One striking aspect is how food has become a cultural symbol in contemporary societies. The final chapters offer insightful analysis of modern challenges related to food, globalization, and its perception as a status symbol. Freedman's analysis deepens our understanding of how food shapes identities, social standing, and cultural connections.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The author declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

The author is an Editorial Board Member/Editor-in-Chief/Associate Editor/Guest Editor for [Global Food History] and was not involved in the editorial review or the decision to publish this article.

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Summary

Paul Freedman, a professor of medieval history at Yale University, is known for his research on the intersection of gastronomy and history. His 2007 book, *Food: A History of Taste* (translated into Turkish in 2008 as *Yemek, Damak Tadının Kitabı*), examines how our sense of taste has evolved through human history, exploring how food has served as more than just sustenance, but as a symbol of social identity, culture, class, and communication between societies.

The primary purpose of *Food: A History of Taste* is to follow the evolution of food, looking at not just its sensory qualities but also its sociological, artistic, and cultural significance. Freedman draws from history, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, and economics to analyze how meals have been intertwined with social structures throughout history. Each chapter is dedicated to a specific period or region, offering a holistic explanation of culinary traditions and their societal and cultural impact.

For example, in the chapter on prehistoric food practices, Alan K. Outram explores the shift from hunter-gatherer lifestyles to agriculture, showing how early humans' food choices were influenced by environmental constraints and cultural preferences. Similarly, the chapter on ancient Greece and Rome illustrates how food was integral to social and religious rituals, with feasting playing a significant role in symbolizing status and social bonds.

The book also covers key periods like Ming China, medieval Islamic cuisine, and medieval European food cultures. Christopher Woolgar, for instance, discusses how medieval European cuisine linked food to social status and religious practices, showing how eating became tied to identity.

As the book moves into modern history, it examines how the age of exploration introduced new tastes and foodstuffs to Europe, and how industrialization and technological advancements transformed food production and consumption, leading to a globalized food culture. Freedman also explores the development of French haute cuisine and the restaurant industry, highlighting how these changes reflected shifts in social norms and economic conditions.

The final chapters address contemporary issues like globalization, food as a cultural symbol, and modern consumption challenges. Overall, *Food: A History of Taste* argues that food is not just a biological necessity but a symbol of social status, cultural identity, and aesthetic expression, capturing the broader transformations in society over time.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that they have no known competing financial interests.