

Editorial

Introduction to Special Issue “Religion and Food in Global and Historical Perspective”

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The past decade has seen the expansion of research projects, presentations, and publications on topics related to religion and food. The first international symposium on religion and food in June 2014, held at the Donner Institute of Åbo Akademi University, in Turku, Finland, heralded a proliferation of research on the topic. In addition to the proceedings of that symposium (published in *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 2015), recent years have witnessed many new directions in the field.

This special issue of *Religions* brings together four articles and one review essay on religion and food. The geographic regions, temporal periods, and methodological approaches vary considerably, with the result that this issue represents the truly interdisciplinary field of study of religion and food. The articles' authors employ historical, ethnographic, sociological, archeological, and textual approaches, and look to cases in India, Russia, and Western and Northern Europe. The review essay examines an American movement that has expanded globally.

Stephen Jacobs's “A Life in Balance: Sattvic Food and the Art of Living Foundation” contextualizes the food practices of the Art of Living Foundation, a modern transnational yoga movement with origins in India. Jacobs looks to how the movement employs the concept of *sattvic* food, a notion drawn from Hindu tradition, in a broad intercultural context, and especially the UK where the group has recently expanded. He situates these food practices within the modern holistic and therapeutic religious milieu.

The food practices of individuals within modern post-Christian western cultures concerns Anna Sofia Salonen in her “Living and Dealing with Food in an Affluent Society—A Case for the Study of Lived (Non)Religion.” Salonen focuses on religious thinking and practices “outside the belief box” and outside conventional Christian religiosity. She looks to how secular people respond to questions of food affluence, the value of food, and bodily practices, and in doing so construct an “ethics of everyday food consumption” that transcends the typical distinction between religious/secular.

Utilizing medieval temple inscriptions, Andrea Gutiérrez in her “Jewels Set in Stone: Hindu Temple Recipes in Medieval Cōla Epigraphy,” unearths sacred recipes used for devotional service from the tenth through fourteenth centuries CE. Centering on their materiality and sensory nature, she argues that scholars must understand Hindu devotionism (*bhakti*) through the recipes used for temple offerings. Gutiérrez focuses on the ingredients and preparations, and argues that that Cōla period represented an important moment of development in Hindu food practices, as new forms of offerings and types of foods were developed, some of which continue to today. She historicizes the types of value present in these foods and ingredients—especially sugar—and how they represented particular religious values at the time.

Anastasia Mitrofanova, in her “Orthodox Fasting in a Postsecular Society: The Case of Contemporary Russia,” draws the readers' attention to the revival of fasting practices among Orthodox Christians in post-Soviet Russia. Adopting a “lived religion” approach, Mitrofanova studies how vernacular fasting practices developed among clergy and laypeople. Delving into online forums,

popular religious writings, and material culture, she shows how everyday Russian believers as well as priests construct a variety of fasting practices, drawing from a rich heritage of written and unwritten fasting traditions.

Finally, Banta et al., in their essay entitled, “The Global Influence of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church on Diet,” look to how this nineteenth-century new American Christian movement originated a religious food outlook with long historic and wide global influence. They note the origins of Seventh-Day Adventist food practices, particularly vegetarianism, how this related to their evangelism and mission work, and how it led to a broader focus on health and nutrition. They note particular foods, such as breakfast cereals and meat replacements, that are tied to Seventh-Day Adventist history, and also the church’s role in several important health studies. They argue for understanding diet and health teachings as intrinsic to the Seventh-Day Adventist message.

Overall, these five essays show the manner in which scholars of religion must maintain this renewed interest in food, cooking, nutrition, and other bodily practices. After a long history of focusing on questions of institutions, texts, and theological tenets, this attention to the material, bodily practices of food and eating are a necessary corrective.

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Reference

2015. *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis*. Available online: <https://journal.fi/scripta/issue/view/4707> (accessed on 4 January 2019).



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