

Book Review of Edible Insects and Human Evolution

Julie J. Lesnik

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Reviewed by METIN I. EREN

Department of Anthropology, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242, USA; meren@kent.edu

In *Edible Insects and Human Evolution* Julie Lesnik has written an enjoyable, informative, concise, and authoritative volume. Lesnik is a biological anthropologist but has penned a book of high relevance and interest to audiences beyond biological anthropology, such as biology, archaeology, cultural anthropology, sociology, ecology, and food science. This reviewer, an archaeologist, was so drawn in that I finished it in only two days. Yet, Lesnik's unpretentious and clear writing style makes this book accessible to the public at large.

Chapter 1 introduces the volume, the anthropology of food, and the eating of insects—"entomophagy." Modern insect eating, insect eating taboos, and other global patterns are discussed in Chapter 2. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 respectively cover insect eating as documented in the ethnographic record, the nutrition of entomophagy in reproductive ecology, and how non-human primates make use of insect resources. These first five chapters together lay an important foundation to the human evolution discourse presented in Chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 6 mines the pre-*Homo* fossil and archaeological records to hypothesize how insects could have played a vital role in the lives of Australopithecines. Chapter 7 shifts to the potential role that insects could have played in the survival of *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*, *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*, and *Homo sapiens sapiens*. A very grounded and refreshing Chapter 8 proposes several future avenues of exploration, data collection, and targeted research to support or falsify the ideas presented in the previous two chapters. Lesnik concludes her book with an

excellent discussion on the future incorporation of insects into the diets of people living today.

Production-wise, *Edible Insects* is one of best produced volumes this reviewer has encountered from the University Press of Florida. The images and tables are clear, the cover art is lovely, the index is thorough, and the overall product is a pleasure to read and consult.

Overall, any anthropologist who reads *Edible Insects* will walk away wondering just how much past insect eating we are missing from the human experience—both generally-speaking, as well as in specific temporal periods. For example, as an archaeologist with strong interests in the late Pleistocene North American Clovis culture, I wondered what insect sources these foragers may have utilized during the peopling process. And how exactly, as hunter-gatherers continually moving into unfamiliar territory for several centuries, did Clovis people learn which insects to eat and which insects to avoid? My work in East Africa and focus on experimental archaeology led to other questions—could the experimental use of stone flakes for the processing of insects lead to identifiable insect processing microwear? Clearly there is much work to be done, yet without Lesnik's book, many anthropologists might not even know that such work is necessary.

Without reservation, this reviewer recommends *Edible Insects*. While some readers may come away from the book with more questions than answers, Lesnik is to be congratulated for inspiring those questions, and pointing the way to tangible answers.