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Journal of Ethnic Foods

journal homepage: <http://journalofethnicfoods.net>

Review Article

Changes in the social and food practices of indigenous people in the New Kingdom of Granada (Colombia): through artifacts



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 June 2018

Received in revised form

31 July 2018

Accepted 1 August 2018

Available online 6 August 2018

Keywords:

Colombia

Colonial food practices

Cookware

Ethnic food

New Kingdom of Granada

ABSTRACT

Changes in social organization and food systems in a community could be understood through the modifications that occurred to cookware in a specific period of time as these artifacts are not only thought for a final purpose but also represent the values, beliefs, and meanings of the culture that has created them. To understand this correlation, this text explores how the arrival and subsequent settlement of Spanish conquerors in South America, specifically in the New Kingdom of Granada (Spanish colonial province located in modern-day Colombia—from the 16th to 18th century), modified indigenous cookware and, therefore, some part of their social life. This analysis was carried out by reviewing documents that describe the cookware used by indigenous peoples before the Spanish settlement, the social shifts that occurred through the alterations of those utensils, and the views that Spaniards had of the “new” lands and its peoples. It was possible to appreciate how the variations in cookware signified a reorganization of indigenous cultural and social life, as well as an imaginary construct of what it meant to be indigenous (synonym to savages, barbarians, and uncivilized people).

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1. Introduction

Cuisines around the world reflect the blend of cultures. People and products have traveled from one continent to another, an aspect that has brought changes in diets and ways of preparing food [1], even to ecosystems [2], and therefore, regional eating habits have also been transformed [3]. These transformations not only enable humans to be nourished but also indicate how food becomes an important part of humans' social, political, economic, and cultural life [4], which, at the same time, define people and what they have become [5].

These exchanges have not always been amicable. During the Spanish conquest and their subsequent settlement in the American colonies (Fig. 1), the social organizations of native people were disrupted, compromising their eating habits. Indigenous diets changed dramatically, and they were obliged to grow European food and leave their “savage” way of life [6], which included altering, to some extent, their way of preparing food and the cookware used in the process.

To understand how these modifications came into place, it is not enough to describe the foods that colonizers introduced and prohibited. In addition, an analysis through the cookware used in the New Kingdom of Granada (Fig. 2) before and after the Spanish settlement allows seeing a bigger picture as these artifacts, as part of the material culture of a community, show the role that objects play in the construction of cultural processes [7–10]. This is to say that objects are capable of embodying experiences of a time and place [10] as they pass from what Giard [3] called the *natural history* to the *material and technical history*. The former refers to the physical space where plants grow and animals live (affected by the soil and climatic conditions where they grow) [3], and the latter, to how humans use what they find in that space to create and recreate their beliefs (including agricultural techniques and domestication) [3]. Thus, the function and material of an artifact involve a judgment over the territory, which through its modification into an object prints a cultural meaning and value [7].

The modifications on what seemed to be insignificant objects (cooking pots, glasses, cutlery, etc.) show the struggles that brought the encounter among the indigenous people and the Spaniards in such territory. On one hand, it is possible to observe how some of those utensils are still found within the current cultural process but “cannot be expressed [...] in terms of the dominant culture”, which Williams [11] called the *residual*. On the other hand, there are

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Fig. 1. Confrontation between Spaniards and Native Americans (detail), in Van der Aa, Pieter. Collection of the most memorable trips in the Indies Oriental and Western. Leiden, 1707. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

cultural traits that have prevailed in their *dominant* form [11], that is to say that those utensils are considered normal in a historical moment as the “effective” and the “hegemonic”.

Thus, this review aims to analyze how the changes made in the cookware of the indigenous people from the New Kingdom of Granada altered their way of eating and preparing food. First, this review will explore the cookware and foods that were found in the New Kingdom of Granada, then, will consider how such transformations started with the hegemonic discourses of the Spanish evangelizing enterprise, and finally, will focus on how the urge to implant a civilizing process created an imaginary about the bodies and practices of the indigenous people.

2. Cookware

In the narratives of the chroniclers who arrived to America, it is possible to find that the cookware they saw the indigenous people were using was made of stone, clay, and gold [12]. With stone, the indigenous people created “instruments to grind and cut” [12]; with clay, they made pans; and with gold, they made drinking glasses for ceremonial uses. In addition, it was possible to find *fogones de tres piedras* (Fig. 3A) or *tulpas de fogón* (Fig. 3B) to cook food [13]. There were also cups or bowls made of pumpkin (Fig. 4) and coconut used to serve food or to keep fresh water. Wooden and wooden roots (Fig. 5) were used to make grinders, basins, and trays. Some tree leaves were used to wrap food, and their fibers were

used to make all types of baskets to keep food and, in other cases, to knit colanders [13] (Fig. 6). From animals, leather was obtained to make sacks and the bones and beaks were used as cutlery; and in the case of sacrificing tortoises and armadillos, they used the shells as bowls, pans, or saucepans [12].

This list of cookware recovered by Patiño [13] and Martínez [12] has a close relation with what Giard [3] called the *natural history* and the *material and technical history*. Indigenous people used what was available in their geographical area such as plants, minerals, and animals to transform them according to their necessities, in this case to basins, pans, wraps, etc. (Fig. 7). Therefore, when the chroniclers listed those utensils, they ended up talking not only about the natural resources found in the zone but also about their ingenuity and capacity to transform the environment in response to what they considered was good to eat.

This demonstrates that the indigenous peoples inhabiting the New Kingdom of Granada had a social organization that responded to their beliefs [8]. Cookware was a cultural manifestation of what they shared as a community (Fig. 8), and the style and use of those objects marked their values [7]. For instance, the style and material of the ceremonial golden glasses that indigenous people used in their rituals of abundance (praying and giving offerings to their gods to secure their harvest) represented a direct relationship between them and their gods [14,15]. Moreover, the use of this glass strengthened and tightened the social ties of the group [14]. In this way, “the symbolic world was regulated to ensure the absence of extremes that could break the fragile balance of food production” [14].

Objects were created following community practices. The golden glass was not only to pour a beverage; it was also a way to practice their beliefs and to come together as a group. Therefore, there is a ritual even before the golden glass was made, starting with choosing the right material, continuing with making the utensil, and finishing with preparing the drink. Therefore, cooking food is not just a matter of technique; it is also to conceive the cultural beliefs before making any piece of cookware [8]. Cooking, whether it is for a ceremony or for everyday life, becomes a repetitive act that assures the nourishment of the body and soul and the survival of the community. This means that such practices are not as evident as one might think; their significance is lost in the repetitiveness of the act and becomes apparent only in the encounter with the other [3] group or person whose practices differ greatly from one's own.

3. Practices and the evangelizing enterprise

After 1492, Spanish colonizers occupied part of the American territory, and in doing so, transgression on daily practices of both sides became obvious, which, not evident to Spaniards and indigenous peoples, was clear in their encounter (which also brought conflicts among them). For instance, according to the chronicles, food patterns of indigenous people were not only a mystery for Spaniards but also unpleasant [6]. The Spanish dietary process at that time responded to a Christian religious order [16] (Fig. 9). They could only eat products that were written in the Bible [6], (which were easily found in the “old world”). In this way, Christians' beliefs organized the diets of colonizers, prioritizing foods that were not cultivated in American soil: cereals, beef, pork, goat meat, fruit liqueurs, and spices [16]. In such a way, a taxonomy that differentiated food from clean to dirty was not only mentally elaborated [6]; changing the indigenous eating habits became a huge part of the evangelizing process [14].

However, the dietary patterns of the indigenous people were not the first thing that occupied the conquerors' thoughts. The vast fertile territories to which they come across, the incipient

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