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Review Of "The Sushi Economy: Globalization And The Making Of A Modern Delicacy" By S. Issenberg

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be known as a “cancer of the whole body” (277). Although Demaitre is hardly the first to focus on this complex, puzzling, and dreaded disease, his work is, to date, the most thorough examination of how contemporaries understood leprosy and dealt with its sufferers.

Leprosy figures in virtually all textbooks on the history of medicine, often presented as motivation for the establishment of exclusionary facilities and proto-hospitals (leprosaria) or as a way to show how medieval societies stigmatized and shunned the ill or objectified them as sinful and polluted. Yet we have little understanding of leprosy as a lived experience and, as Demaitre shows, we often accept a series of myths about the perception of leprosy and the attitude toward lepers in the premodern world. This lacuna is curious because the “waves and presence of leprosy have generated more extensive documentation, in academic writings and archival records, than any other premodern health-related issue” (278). Demaitre’s own study relies more heavily on the first—academic writings—than on archival material per se (and a good percentage of his “archival” documentation exists in published form). Nonetheless, his eight chapters guide us reliably through the tangles of naming, diagnosing, judging, and treating leprosy.

The arrangement of chapters is generally topical and thematic, although the last four chapters follow a (somewhat meandering) chronological thread. Early sections introduce the sources, discuss in vivid detail the *iudicium leprosum* (that “crucial encounter between medicine, the disease, and society” [x]), and probe the significance of naming and taxonomizing. Subsequent chapters deal with the difficult issues of etiology and explain how, over time, leprosy came to be seen as both contagious and hereditary; how medical verdicts on leprosy assumed increasing weight (what Demaitre calls the “medicalization of the diagnosis of leprosy” [39 and passim]); and, finally, how despite the horror of the diagnosis, medicine never abandoned lepers to their fate. Despite the unanimity of medical opinion that pronounced leprosy incurable, physicians softened the blow by dedicating themselves to preventive measures and to ameliorating symptoms.

Along the road of this long journey from Hippocrates and Galen to one of Demaitre’s little-known heroes, the eighteenth-century Finnish physician, Isaac Uddman, Demaitre debunks a number of myths: medical writers had little to say, for instance, about avoiding a leper’s touch or touching a leper; leprosy and plague precautions differed; and medieval society did not automatically exclude lepers. Likewise, his findings support what other scholars have argued: that “until the late thirteenth century, leprosaria served more as charitable shelters for the incurable than as isolation wards for the contagious” (141).

Still, the story of leprosy and society has its darker side. Harsher measures against lepers were enacted, especially in late medieval and early modern urban centers. Growing epidemiological concerns and the tighter packing of people led to fears that resulted in severer measures, but physicians were, according to Demaitre, not to blame. Demaitre contrasts “academic [medical] restraint” and “popular pressure” (149), but although he often speaks of public pressure (or official measures that ran counter to medical thinking), he fails to discuss its shape or explore its formation. Rather, we are left with somewhat vague references to almost visceral reactions motivated by anxiety or even terror. Likewise, he seems unduly comfortable speaking about medical science in the premodern period when no such thing existed. This is all a bit strange because Demaitre is well aware of the perils of writing Whiggish history (255). In his hurry to push a more subtle understanding of academic writings and physician practice (which he certainly succeeds in doing), Demaitre unwittingly slips into an unnecessary privileging of physicians as cool scientific heads. Nonetheless, Demaitre’s physicians, his patients, and, if to a lesser extent, municipal authorities emerge as real people dealing with numerous concerns, all the while struggling not so much to condemn or castigate, but to classify and comfort.

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Issenberg, Sasha

The Sushi Economy: Globalization and the Making of a Modern Delicacy

New York: Gotham Books

323 pp., \$26.00, ISBN 978-1-592-40294-6

Publication Date: May 2007

Sasha Issenberg’s riveting account of the emergence of a once rather obscure Japanese street food staple as a universally desired indulgence and prime indicator of global economic development is both very informative and entertaining. Initially assigned to write on this topic for *Philadelphia Magazine*, Issenberg soon found himself immersed in the multiple histories behind the sushi phenomenon. Through firsthand observation and careful research on five different continents, the author vividly illuminates the fortuitous confluence of those histories—economic, social, technological, and culinary—and its profound worldwide influence.

The first part of the book, titled “The Freight Economy,” consists of four chapters that fit together like jagged pieces of a large puzzle. The completed picture shows why and how bluefin tuna from the North Atlantic coast—previously considered

inedible and a nuisance fish—became the most precious air cargo bound for export to Japan’s Tsukiji fish market. Fitting seemingly disparate parts into a convincing whole for the benefit of readers is a major strength of Issenberg’s narration pattern. Subsequent chapters might list more global locations than a Bond movie, but the far-flung locales illustrate the global interconnectedness of the sushi economy in an exemplary way.

The second part of the book, titled “The Food Economy,” follows the expansion of sushi to Southern California and from there to the rest of the United States. Sushi’s wide acceptance by U.S. consumers was dependent on many simultaneous developments, like a new openness for foreign cuisines and the newly found appreciation for simple, fresh food; healthy eating; and Japanese aesthetics. However, restaurants did their best to meet local taste preferences, as evinced by that great staple of the U.S. sushi experience: the California roll. It is no coincidence that the itinerant Japanese sushi chef Nobu Matsuhisa started his restaurant empire in Los Angeles, with sushi preparations that stray far from tradition. In another chapter, Issenberg tells the fascinating story of Texas chef Tyson Cole, who, through determination, talent, and excellent schooling by Austin’s best Japanese sushi chefs, has become one of the few renowned non-Japanese sushi chefs. Cole debunked stereotypes of Japanese superiority in sushi craft and taste, which is welcome because this is a business where “ethnic symmetry was a matter of image as well as culinary integrity” (133).

Concurrent with the emergence of sushi as global cuisine and the status of bluefin tuna as a highly prized delicacy, the inevitable dark side of the global sushi trade emerges—from collapsing tuna stocks to international tuna smuggling rings. As the New England tuna fishing business suffers from overfishing in countries as far away as the Mediterranean, tuna “ranchers” in Australia and other countries try to overcome erratic availability and vanishing sustainability of bluefin by ranching the fish in off-shore pontoons. At Kinki University in Japan, tuna is farmed (i.e., bred and raised in captivity), a difficult and costly undertaking. Although laws against overfishing exist, there is often no enforcement. The book’s last chapter describes the most recent development in the global sushi saga—a development that does not bode well for tuna stocks around the world. The Chinese have discovered sushi, and Japanese restaurant entrepreneurs are readily obliging their new craving, even if it could mean, as one observer wistfully remarks, that within a short time the only good tuna, now a privilege of Japan, will only be found in restaurants in China.

Issenberg has an intellectual and visceral connection to sushi, and in the

book, the historian's penchant for factual presentation is balanced by the novelist's eye for descriptive detail, mostly to good and humorous effect. Although the frequent evocation of samurai culture might only relate to sushi chefs on the level of simile, Issenberg's descriptions bring the esoteric world of sushi alive. Tokyo's famed Tsukiji fish market "is a vast and unnavigable messy farrago of tight streets and hectic crossings, the result of years of constant adjustment combining the spirit of creative destruction and nostalgic neglect" (258).

Concerning questions of taste and tradition, Issenberg seems to take a laissez-faire attitude that embraces all sushi styles. He equally hedges his bets when addressing the question of the imperiled status of many types of fish—contrary to the urgent warnings of many environmental groups. After reading about the many ironic twists and unexpected turns of sushi's global ascendance, the disappearance of the tuna would be a sad coda to this fascinating story.

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Smail, Daniel Lord

On Deep History and the Brain

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286 pp., \$21.95, ISBN 978-0-520-25289-9
Publication Date: November 2007

In *On Deep History and the Brain*, Daniel Lord Smail, a professor of history at Harvard University, argues that human history begins in the distant past of man's biological evolution in preliterate Africa. His interdisciplinary approach to history derives from his firm grasp of historiography, his collaboration with natural scientists, and his fascination with natural history.

For Smail, "deep history" is the "bundling" of the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods with the Postlithic age to provide a fuller chronology of the human condition than the divisions of history and prehistory. Smail suggests that the best approach to the human narrative should primarily focus on the study of biology, the brain, and human behavior. Historians should integrate anthropology and biology with history, using new genetic and archeological research, for a better understanding of how the human brain has interacted with historical culture.

In the first three chapters, "The Grip of Sacred History," "Resistance," and "Between Darwin and Lamarck," Smail provides a good overview and analysis of traditional historiography. He explores some of the accepted notions that are "obstacles" (6) to the acceptance of deep history: the religious origin of man and the secular rise of civilization, how historians have often

resisted or given lip service to "the dark abyss of time" (42), and the problems of coming to grip with the different theories of human cultural evolution.

Smail proposes in the fourth and fifth chapters, "The New Neurohistory" and "Civilization and Psychotropy," respectively, that the deep history of human culture is a "biological phenomenon" (154), the continuing "intersection" (117) of biology, psychology, and civilization. Historical change occurs in civilizations through emerging "mood-altering practices, behaviors, and institutions" classified as "psychotropic mechanisms" (161). The author suggests a wide variety of case studies: song and dance, religious ritual, literature (novels), sports, mood-altering substances (alcohol and coffee), sex and pornography, and economic activities (shopping). He asserts that new cultural devices, both locally and globally, influence our basic body chemistry.

Daniel Lord Smail's introductory book, *On Deep History and the Brain*, is both a stimulating and complex approach to understanding the human past. The author's "crusade" is to encourage historians to become more scientifically literate and biologists and physiologists to be more historical. I highly recommend this book for those interested in historical methodology and for instructors of Western and world civilization survey courses.

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