“When the tide goes out, the table is set”: Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Zooarchaeology in Coastal Washington

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In the U.S., Indigenous communities often suffer poor health at greater rates than non-Native populations. This is due, in part, to economic stresses, restricted access to territory, and centuries of government assimilation programs. To remedy these health disparities, many Indigenous communities are revitalizing traditional foodways, establishing food sovereignty, and reclaiming their rights to local food sources. In this talk, I present zooarchaeological research implemented to aid in these initiatives. Through Community-Based Participatory Research with the Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe and the Chinook Indian Nation, I examine the subsistence system of past Chinook and Lower Chehalis peoples in Willapa Bay, Washington, and demonstrate that local marine resources were central to their foodways. Archaeological research provides tangible evidence of the historical importance of marine resources for these communities and helps establish a historical precedent pertinent to their negotiations for legal rights to culturally relevant food sources. Using a series of community-defined public goods, this collaborative, data-driven research translates and adapts the foodways of a nearby archaeological site into modern healthy food practices.

Anna Antoniou is a recent Ph.D. from the University of Michigan and the incoming Mellon Native American Studies Initiative Postdoctoral Fellow at the American Philosophical Society Library and Museum. Through community-based participatory research, she uses an archaeological understanding of past subsistence practices to serve Indigenous groups in their efforts to revitalize traditional foodways, reclaim legal rights to culturally relevant resources, and improve dietary health. Her research has been funded by the National Geographic Society, Rackham Program in Public Scholarship, and the American Philosophical Society. She has conducted fieldwork in Arizona, British Columbia, California, Cyprus, Michigan, North Carolina, Romania, and Washington.