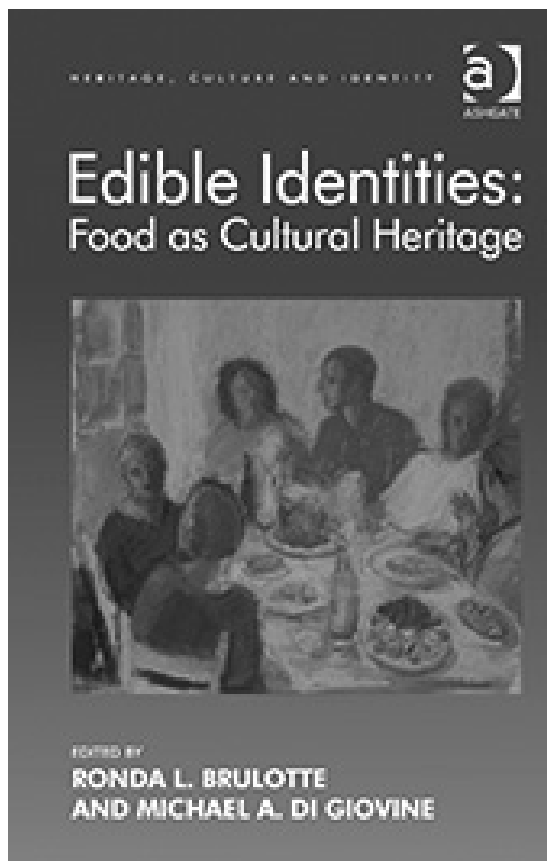


book review

Edible identities: Food as cultural heritage

Food as cultural heritage is a problematic topic. Who does this heritage belong to? How can something so ephemeral be preserved? Who decides what is worth preserving? These are just a few of the questions asked in Ronda L. Brulotte and Michael A. Di Giovine's collection of essays on food and drink as cultural heritage. This book raises critical questions about a number of different heritage preservation projects from UNESCO and ecomuseums to food activism and tourist offerings throughout the world.



In the introduction, Di Giovine and Brulotte set the stage giving working definitions for terms

such as heritage and terroir, and they also grapple with the ways in which food plays a part in ethnic identity. The outline of UNESCO initiatives to recognize food as intangible cultural heritage lays a good base for the many chapters that deal with specific UNESCO cases. Rather than merely provide a laundry list of the books contents, the authors set the stage for further inquiry: “[...] we should also examine the strong socio-cultural impacts that are often subtle, viscerally experienced on individual levels, and subject to long-term processes of transformation. These are what we have called ‘edible identities’”. (21)

The book is not broken into sections but the editors have thoughtfully organized this volume. The first two chapters deal with the invention of tradition and the concept of the taste of place in the United States - a country known for the invention of novelties rather than time-honoured traditions. This is exactly the point that Heather Paxson makes in her chapter on artisanal cheese production. In keeping with this spirit of reinvention, Warren Belasco pushes the concept of terroir beyond its limited French definition to mean “a pride in place - any place [...]”(39). Belasco then applies this new definition to the case of foodways in Washington, D.C., a city not generally associated with culinary excellence.

The next chapters look at the ways in which specific foodstuffs become objects of heritagization. Grasseni looks at the reinvention of two Alpine cheeses and how these products create local competition. Here the role of ecomuseums in constructing authenticity and locality is particularly interesting. The social ascription of authenticity is also at the heart of Greg de St. Maurice's chapter on heirloom vegetables as culinary heritage in Kyoto. The author raises important questions about the role of nostalgia continuity in the maintenance and production of heritage varieties of vegetables. Di Giovine's chapter also deals with the construction and reinvention of culinary heritage. In this case, cucina casareccia in the southern Italian town of

Pietrelcina has the potential to revitalize the local economy and culture.

Williams-Forson's chapter on African American culinary heritage shifts gears and focuses in on questions of ethnic identity. The author challenges readers to think beyond homogenizing categories such as soul food to consider the complexity and diversity of African American cuisines in the United States. Kozorog's chapter on salamander brandy in Slovenia address the role of drink in the construction of identity. At the same time it raises questions about what food and drink items can and cannot become heritage. It seems that 'hallucinogenic heritage' will not be making the UNESCO world heritage list anytime soon.

Brulotte and Starkman consider the ways in which Oaxacans employ indigenous culinary heritage as a way of claiming authenticity. This chapter presents the case of caldo de piedra and conflicts surrounding the preparation of this dish for tourists. The focus on performance is particularly interesting here. Sammells chapter also considers the ways in which heritagization transforms local foods. The author argues that the inscription of cuisines to the UNESCO List of Intangible Heritage "creates 'haute traditional' cuisines by linking elements perceived as 'local' with those seen as 'cosmopolitan'". (143)

Garcia-Fuentes, Bassols and Banales's chapter focuses on place. In this case markets are vehicles for not only the preservation of food heritage but also urban renewal and revitalization across the classes. In contrast, Terrio's chapter on the craft of French chocolate making focuses on skill and production. Terrio looks at the efforts of French chocolatier to raise the status of French chocolate through its construction as a form of intangible cultural heritage tied to the skill of its producers. Similarly, bakers in Germany try to raise the status of bread as cultural heritage. Bendix explores the challenges of this initiative and looks at initiatives beyond UNESCO heritage lists that add value to

cultural products such as Geographical Indications. Focusing on place, Castellanos and Bergstresser explore corn's connection to geography and the changing meanings of this foodstuff as it moves from place to place, making definitions of corn as food heritage extremely complex. In the final chapter, Counihan focuses on Italy to look at the role of cultural heritage in food activism. She reveals the tensions apparent in the promotion of local food, the naturalization of some foreign foods and the rejection of other immigrant foods: "Cultural heritage discourse in food activism is mobilizing support for local products, economies, and traditional knowledge, however it is not so easily inclusive of non-local people, cuisines, and cultures, nor of the laborers who produce local foods." (226-7)

Most of the chapters of this book are relatively short, and they would make good reading for undergraduate classes. At the same time, an excellent balance is struck between ethnography and theoretical considerations, making many chapters suitable for graduate classes in the Anthropology of Food and courses focused on cultural heritage. With so much media attention focused on UNESCO World Heritage lists and food's role as cultural heritage, this book makes a timely contribution to the literature of Food Studies and the Anthropology of Food. The editors have done an excellent job covering a variety of cases that fall within the UNESCO lists and cases that focus on alternative forms of heritage promotion and preservation. The geographic coverage leans to the West and it would have been nice to see more cases from Asia and Africa. This is perhaps a reflection of what the editors see as the bias of UNESCO's work and western concepts of heritage more generally.

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