



Situating foodways and foodscapes

Dalla tavola al terreno

a cura di
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A Osvaldo Raggio (1951-2022)

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‘Situating foodways and foodscapes’.

An introduction

*Roberta Cevalco, Valentina Pescini, Robert Hearn**

Foodways and foodscapes are intertwined in myriad ways and are central to multiple lifeworlds. Research into the diverse conceptual, theoretical and practical considerations that entangle food, space and place is innumerable in terms of the constituent disciplinary traditions (‘menus’), sources (‘ingredients’) and methodologies (‘recipes’)¹.

However, much research has tended to flatten and simplify the intrinsically complex enmeshments that link foodways and foodscapes through the use of general and generalising ahistorical interpretative models that – moreover – often employ terminologies (‘identity’, ‘local’, ‘traditional’) that whilst easily ‘marketable’, readily comprehensible and seemingly suitable for the globalised industrial food systems are, in fact, of increasingly debatable or restricted utility when applied to a specific temporal and spatial context. In these ‘traditional’ and ‘local’ marketing operations, precisely what is intended to (re-)discover and (re-)enhance is instead lost. It is, therefore,

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¹ R. Feagan, *The place of food: mapping out the “local” in local food systems*, in «Progress in Human Geography», 31(1) (2007), pp. 23-42.

necessary to return and (re-)discuss the interpretative models, analytical methodologies, and associated terminologies in order to (re)place, (re-)localise, (re-)temporalise and (re-)spatialise ‘traditional’ local foods in their specific ‘*liens au lieu*’².

This book presents a different historical and environmental approach to the study of the links and relationships between foodways and foodscapes that is innovative to and in the rapidly ascending gastronomic sciences, underlining the importance of recognizing and re-inserting spatially and temporally specific environmental, social and cultural factors and values embedded in the study of local food heritage. The complexity of the ‘*liens au lieu*’ of local food productions – a relationship never ahistorical but made elastic by historical processes – is explored from by way of different but intersecting perspectives, spanning a broad remit of archaeological, cultural, ecological, political, and social approaches. Indeed, the sixteen case studies presented in this volume explores the multiple relationships existing between local foodscapes and their associated foodways drawing on a variety of different analytical tools and methodological approaches inspired by geographical-historical microanalysis, historical ecology, and the archaeology of environmental resources.

This volume is the result of long-lasting interdisciplinary collaborations between Università degli Studi di Genova, the University of Nottingham and Università di Scienze Gastronomiche di Pollenzo, co-producing research in the ‘common lands’ bridging geographical, historical and environmental studies applied to the characterization of local food heritage and their ‘individual’ landscapes. These investigations are motivated by the desire to study the practices of food production, the related eating habits and the local food landscapes – foodways and foodscapes, and in general the food systems – through a high-resolution spatial and temporal contextualization, perspectives

² L. Bérard, P. Marchenay, *Les produits de terroir: Entre cultures et règlements*, CNRS Éditions, Paris 2004.

fundamental to a historical, geographical and environmental microanalysis. This microanalytic contextualization facilitates the exploration and recognition of the (im-)material relationships that have become deconstructed or rendered invisible over time, such as those between situated production practices, contextual knowledge and the historical ecologies of specific sites. The geographical stories that emerge from such an approach (re-)connect and (re-)situate foodways in their precise and particular individual and idiosyncratic foodscapes and their associated ecologies. It is the production and consumption practices of local foodways that have created the ecology of '*terroirs*' and individual rural landscapes over time and that are central components of the living heritage; inescapable (in)tangible cultural heritage.

However, in this new path emphasizing the historicizing processes that is here proposed, the theme of foodscapes does not appear without complications nor risks: in fact, human beings cannot be considered simple 'biotic factors' in the landscape or in the ecosystem, as currently it even assumes in the landscape ecology approach. The 'biotic factor' is not born out of social history: it is shaped and dominated by human history and action. In such a complex matter as developed by landscape ecology, it seems imperative that the gastronomic sciences seek to develop and clarify the very concept of local foodscape in a new and fully historical meaning, capitalising on the documentary possibilities recently offered by historical geography, historical ecology, and from the environmental resources archaeology.

As highlighted in several chapters of this book, the proposed historical approach differs greatly in terms of themes, method, and sources from the much of the 'conventional' histories of food – particularly those exploring food consumption – or gastronomy where the general modes of food consumption are modelled on the chronology and the action of general socio-economic histories and not on the observation of historical and environmental processes at the local, topographical, scale.

Furthermore, this volume also provides specific insights into the scientific discussion on the environmental impacts of food production

rediscovering and enhancing the quality of localized food production and the related positive environmental impacts (positive externalities) which should be taken into consideration in environmental policy and planning measures.

The historical and environmental characterization of the *'liens au lieu'* connects the different contributions presented in this book which are varied in terms of historical sources used. Archival documents, travel diaries and accounts, herbs, pollen spores, microcharcoals, historical cartographies, maps and photographs, recipe books, terraces, rural buildings, and oral histories are just some of the historical, geographical and archaeological traces of food heritages yet to be (re)discovered.

1. The contribution of Osvaldo Raggio (1951-2022) constitutes an important model of how a cultural micro-history of food, foodways and forms of sociality can be observed using specific archival sources. Raggio explores the private archives of some Genoese aristocratic families in the 18th century (*e.g.* Durazzo, Grimaldi, Pallavicini, Brignole Sale) providing detailed documentation on ceremonial food consumption and on the establishment of modern table manners (*manière de table*)³.

2. Valentina Pescini and Diego Moreno present an overview relating the archaeological study of food together with the main issues that food archaeologists have addressed in the last decades. At first, the authors highlight how archaeologists are very familiar with food, foodways, foodscapes and the relatives archaeological traces however noting how a specific research sector dealing with such a topic is still missing or

³ Osvaldo Raggio, to whom this volume is dedicated, wrote an important book on the Durazzo family: O. Raggio, *Storia di una passione. Cultura aristocratica e collezionismo alla fine dell'ancien régime*, Marsilio, Padova 2000, as well as on the history of rural society in *ancien régime* Liguria: O. Raggio, *Feuds and State Formation 1550-1700. The Backcountry of the Republic of Genoa*, Palgrave Macmillan, Londra 2019.

struggles to emerge clearly. The interpretative models, descriptive categories and analytical tools employed by archaeologists are presented and exemplified. Secondly a peculiar case study is presented dealing with the characterisation of the historical dynamics that affected the spatial distribution of habitats and herbs populations employed in disappearing food-gathering practices: the '*Gatafin*'. The tools of Environmental Archaeology and the approaches of Historical Ecology has been used and discussed: in this perspective the environmental effects/externalities (activation) of localised food production and consumption practices become the center of the archaeological analysis and observable in unconventional archaeological sites (off-sites).

3. Reaching back into classical antiquity, Emlyn Dodd's chapter focusses on the extant archaeological evidence in illuminating the production of wine, the dominant beverage in Italian antiquity, the archaeological approach supplemented by contemporary ancient texts, including some, most importantly Cato the Elder, Pliny the Elder and Varro, from the Italian peninsular itself. Exploring archaeometric techniques, including geophysical and chemical analyses alongside traditional methods of survey and excavation, this contribution examines an area of the Italian peninsular during the Early Roman period to Late Antiquity (c. 8th century BCE to 600 CE), such temporal and geographical confines enabling the discussion of winemaking and its use for both domestic and export markets, tracing periods of prosperity and decline, on various scales and for a range of sociocultural groups, strata and purposes.

4. Antonella Campanini's contribution is part of the many studies she has dedicated to food as cultural heritage. In this case she proposes a critical analysis of some literary sources to explore the meaning of the localisation of food and gastronomic products (and their commercialisation), favoring the relationship between a single text and literary tradition with respect to the local genesis of arguments and gastrotoponyms. A sort of pleasant journey is carried out between the late Middle

Ages and the early Modern Age in regional and citizen gastrotoponyms linking food quality products to the places of production, in times still distant from marketing, to identify the changing meaning that gastrotoponyms acquire and the possible pitfalls connected to their use.

5. Practices of food consumption and sociality between the 17th and 18th centuries are discussed in Giacomo Nervi's chapter, observing a context ideally distant from the aristocratic, worldly Genoese one: the Certosa di San Pietro in Varatella di Toirano (Savona). The contribution proposes a very interesting approach to monastic accounting in the Modern Age, based on the systematic examination of some documentary funds from the Ligurian archives. The author highlights the great variety of individual practices, eating habits as well as the quantity and quality of the products consumed (among which olive oil stands out). What emerges is the impossibility of identifying a codified local (traditional) 'Carthusian foodway'. The monastery's food and foodways change over time, intersecting with increasingly complex food supply chains, often extraneous to the local reality.

6. The chapter by Claudia Vaccarezza, Anna Stagno and Caterina Piu combines, geographical-historical sciences, applied natural sciences and archaeology with a microanalytical approach to reconstruct the history of two distinctive cultural landscapes of the Gulf of Tigulio hinterland (Genoa): the terraced hazelnut groves and the irrigated terraced chestnut groves, already included in the National Catalogue of the Historic Rural Landscapes. The studies highlight the complex relationships linking the food products to the systems of management of the environmental resources, included the 18th century long history of conflicts for the irrigation of chestnut groves in the Sturla valley. The problem of conservation and transmission of this rural and environmental heritage is discussed through the different local micro-institution involved in recent valorisation projects and actions on a local and regional scale.

7. Nicola Gabellieri and Daniele Tinterri, in their contribution on the Val Bisagno area (Genoa, Italy), propose a critical analysis of documentary and cartographic sources originated by the 18th-century conflicts for the control of the water supply related to the 17th-century expansion of the Genoese public aqueduct in the higher Bisagno valley. It is thanks to these conflicts between various social actors, in particular the owners of the Genoese large estates villas in the lower Bisagno valley and the peasants of the higher valley, that it is possible to shed light, with details of great interest, on the 18th century systems of local production (and their individual landscapes) such as the system of orchards and vegetable gardens (*orti di villa*) in the lower valley and the irrigation system used mainly for chestnut trees and terraces cultivated with beans in the upper valley.

8. Drawing on extensive research into topographical art in northwest Italy, Pietro Piana, Charles Watkins and Ross Balzaretto chapter combines scrutiny of drawings and paintings by travellers and visitors made when visiting Italy together with their written accounts, exemplifying how such sources can provide useful insights to the history of viticulture and their styles of cultivation in the 18th and 19th centuries. This richly illustrated contribution provides clear evidence that viticulture was widespread, including in places where it is now less common, the sources moreover creating expectations of what Italian viticulture was meant to look like, the ‘wild’ nature of Italian viticulture and the ‘picturesque’ nature of all the festooned vines helping to shape ideas that Italy was an exotic and romantic land, which helped in turn to attract readers for travel writing.

9. Rebekka Dossche’s study of the historical rural landscapes of the Val Borbera (Piedmont, Italy) explores the position and prominence of practices of apiculture, beekeeping and honey production in the context of intensive agro-silvo-pastoral systems in this area of northwest Italy, characterized by a high balance between human management, restrictive

environmental conditions and biological diversity. Such landscape moreover underwent destabilizations as large areas of land were abandoned and depopulated since the second half of the 20th century, and converted from productive rural areas to those of remote low-fertility. Drawing on a combination of evidence gleaned from archival documentation and other written sources and thereafter contextualized in later oral sources, historical cartography and aerial photography, this interdisciplinary and multisource chapter discusses the temporal and spatial evolution of apiculture, beekeeping and the production from the late 18th century to the modern day in a specific case study area, highlighting the significance of these practices and their productions as valuable indicators of bio-cultural diversity and heritage in these parts of the northwest Italian Apennines, and indeed elsewhere across Europe.

10. Rebecca Ford's chapter presents the particular case of watercress in 19th century England, drawing on a rich combination of written and visual historical sources in local histories, professional and hobbyist agricultural and botanical journals, and newspapers. Presenting a microhistorical study of the Springhead watercress plantation on the outskirts of London, this chapter discusses the role played by watercress in the contemporary life of that city, its associations with an idealised countryside, and the symbolic space it held in the imagination. Discussing urban-rural contrasts in the depiction of cress, and of its gatherers, producers and sellers, Ford's contribution shows that over time, watercress became perceptually dislocated from the places where it was grown and became intertwined with the city of London, elucidating on why, in the Victorian era, there might have been a consumer desire to re-localise this leafy food, embedding it back in the countryside. Thereafter examining the emergence of the Springhead plantation as a visitor attraction and performative space, and how it was promoted in ways that echoed idealised imaginings of the cultures of cress, this chapter exemplifies the intricacies and fruitfulness of high resolution studies in local foods and foodways.

11. The historical geography of a peculiar foodscape emerges from the contribution of Carlo Gemignani and Luisa Rossi who reconstruct through iconographic and documentary sources the history of mussel farming in the Gulf of Spezia at the end of the 19th century, in the 'marine' of Canaletto and Fossamastra. The authors show us how a production considered traditional today was actually born in a precise context from the encounter between a brilliant entrepreneur, a scientist and a favorable localization. Even the relations between this production system and the employed vegetable resources are seen by the authors in terms of 'activation': of the chestnut coppices reaching the sea level that provided the wood for the poles of these sea vineyards, and of the wetlands of the *Stagnoni*, vanished during the 20th century, where the marsh grasses used for the ropes were collected.

12. Roberta Cevasco and Raffaella Bruzzone discuss Giuseppina Poggi's paper on the *Prebugiun*, a set of a dozen spontaneous herbs in the Recco valley (1997), and a subsequent work carried out in the same valley by Sabrina Bertolotto and Roberta Cevasco within the «Conservatory of Mediterranean Cuisine» project (1999), to underline a potential new interest for the gastronomic sciences/cultures of the (micro) historical perspective to the site ecology. The *prebugiun* gathering sites and practices of the Recco valley are relocated in the wider geographical-historical unit of the '*Montagna di Fascia*', whose 'ancient grasslands' are revisited as part of a historical foodscape and transhumant pastoral space. The historical ecology of the sites is reconstructed also thanks to 19th century herbal sources. The complexity of the local food systems, once historically re-situated, testifies to other models of environmental resource management, whose sustainability can be historically assessed (biodiversification processes) and put into play for the management of these foodscapes.

13. Between 'domestic' and 'wild', the herbs of the *Prebugiun* are at the center of Giuseppina Poggi's contribution published in 1997 and here

reproposed. Giuseppina Poggi, combining ethnobotanical and historical approach to interpret the current site vegetation cover, documents a complex production system in the family farm of Arbora (Genoa, Italy) which include around 12 seasonal practices of collection, mowing, pruning, etc. The collection of *prebugiun* is just one of the practices documented in the site. But the most relevant aspect is that the system has ‘activation’ effects on the local environmental resources, resulting in the site and slope peculiar ecology and rich biodiversity.

14. In the debate on the ‘global’ dimension of food history, Balzaretti’s study of the discussion and depiction of Ligurian ‘peasant’ cooking – or ‘*cibo povero*’ – in English travel books from *c.* 1840 to *c.* 1914, illustrates a hitherto underexplored dimension of these myriad works, highlighting the vitality of the writers’ descriptions of quotidian life of the Genoese. Whilst these commentators certainly divulged on the lives and traditions of the Ligurian ‘elite’ classes, these sources are moreover highly valuable sources detailing the lives of Italian peasants as ethnographic subjects, the food cultures cultivated often by necessity and hardship increasingly regarded as the true spirit and essence of quintessentially Ligurian cuisines, celebrated and conserved as the genuine gastronomic cultural heritage of this northwest Italian region.

15. Robert Hearn’s chapter on ‘*la cultura del cinghiale*’ presents a critical re-examination of oral histories conducted over a decade ago in the upper Vara valley in the northwest Italian region of Liguria. Whilst the use of insights into the histories and geographies of animals derived from oral testimonies and qualitative fieldwork interviews has been the subject of some deliberation in species history and (historical) animal geography research, the chapter explores the vitality of such methodological approaches in discussing the histories and geographies of wild boar in the gastronomy of this specific valley, the species (inter-) ruptured presence in the area and hybrid biologies problematising the animals’ meats’ perception as a ‘traditional’ and ‘local’ food.

16. Finally, Don Sandro Lagomarsini, Parish priest and curator of the Museo Contadino di Cassego in the same valley, invites, in his short contribution, to a history of food in the 'Land of Varese Ligure' starting from the «*Relazione*» by Antonio Cesena (1558) and by investigating family and parish registers. The attention to local productions and practices and micro phenomena opens up to reflections that concern wider, regional and national scales. The example of the chestnut tree is significant: the development that the chestnut grove has from the mid-16th century onwards in almost all the hamlets of Varese Ligure, largely replacing the Turkey oak, is linked to the importance of the nutritional contribution of chestnut flour and can be connected to the rejection of wheat cultivation by the mountains of Varese, as well as by the entire Italian mountain, throughout the 19th century, despite the pressures of agricultural economists. The food resources of the valley, including hunting and fishing products, represent a solid basis for resistance also to recurring epidemics. All these historical ties redesign the 'land of Varese' as an individual foodscape.

