

Food Security beyond Cereals: A Cross-Geographical Comparative Study on Acorn Bread Heritage in the Mediterranean and the Middle East

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THE RESEARCH

This article aims to contribute to the limited literature on traditional gastronomic knowledge concerning acorn-based bread by ethnographically documenting the ingredients, preparation techniques and consumption practices of baked goods made from acorn seeds and flour that are still used today or at least still present in living memory. By acknowledging the importance of acorn fruits in the cultural heritage of local communities and their potentially crucial application as an alternative solution for the future of rural economies, this study aims to open a debate on the potential effects that the revitalisation of acorn-based products and associated foodscapes may have on the sustainable development of rural and marginal regions in the Mediterranean, Central Asia and the Middle East.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- to ethnographically document acorn-based products (ingredients, preparation techniques and consumption practices)
- to explore the possible evolution of the alimentary role of these products and associated practices in the past century
- to analyse, from a geographically comparative perspective, similarities and differences, as well as the dynamics underpinning the conservation or erosion of the traditional gastronomic knowledge.

FOODSCOUTING RESEARCH

Period: 2020 - 2022

Key locations: Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Afghanistan and Syria

Criteria: Past evidence of the use of acorn | Pastoral and agro-silvopastoral systems | Quercus spp. as a key biocultural resource



RESEARCH STEPS

	Activities
Desk research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Archaeological and Historical Evidence for the Consumption of Acorn BreadEthnographic Evidence for the Consumption of Acorn Bread
Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Analysis of eco-gastronomic units of concern linked to acorn in Mediterranean and Middle East67 elderly community members: Personal observations, informal conversations and semi-structured
Data analysis: Qualitative comparative case method	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ingredients, steps and preparation of acorn-based breadPast and present role of these products and their associated gastronomic valuesReasons behind the abandonment or continued use of these products

MAIN FINDINGS

Acorn Bread in the Mediterranean and the Middle East: A Comparative Analysis

		Mediterranean ^a	Central Asia and Middle East ^b
Product category	Bread	AL/CA/SY	-
	Flatbread	-	AF/IRN/IRQ
	Other	SA	-
Taxon	Bitter varieties	AL	AF
	Sweet varieties	SA/CA/SY	AF/IRN/IRQ
Ingredients	Acorn flour	SY	AF/IRN
	Acorn flour and cereals/legumes	AL/CA	IRQ
	Acorn, clay and ash	SA	-
Drying and cleaning/shelling	Boiling and drying	AL	IRQ
	Roasting	SA/CA/SY	AF/IRN/IRQ
	Sun-drying	SA/CA	IRN/IRQ
Leaching techniques	Boiling	SA	-
	Boiling and drying	AL/CA/SY	AF/IRQ
	Roasting	CA	-
	Pounding and washing	-	AF/IRN
Breadmaking (cooking)	Boiling	SA	-
	Metal griddle/Pan	-	AF/IRN
	Vertical oven	-	-
	Wooden oven	AL/CA/SY	IRQ

^a AL (Algeria), CA (Calabria), SA (Sardinia), SY (Syria). ^b AF (Afghanistan), IRN (Iran) and IRQ (Iraq).

Acorn bread as a famine food

- Safety net during periods of starvation and war
- Association with times of poverty

Stronger alimentary value in pastoral systems where:

- Cereal cultivation was difficult
- Oak forests predominated over other tree species

A fading tradition

- Last evidence of consumption in the first half of XX century
- No longer produced: 1. time-consuming, 2. loss of knowledge

FROM DOCUMENTATION TO REVIVAL?

Plant-based and gluten-free products

- Acorns as food ingredients to be used in nutraceuticals, food supplements and functional foods (gluten-free biscuits, bread, cakes, noodle).

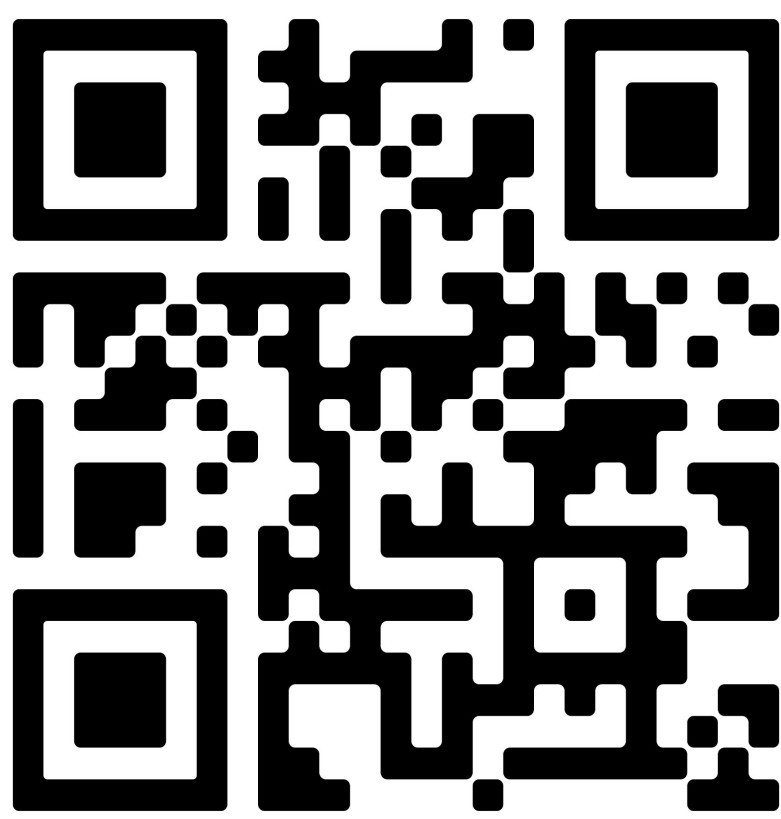
Alternative crops to face climate change

- As an emergency or 'bailout' crop, for when other crops fails or are unavailable.

Gastronomy and tourism

- New source of inspiration and an item to be included in new menus or dishes.
- Local characterisation to add new dimension to its use by local communities.

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