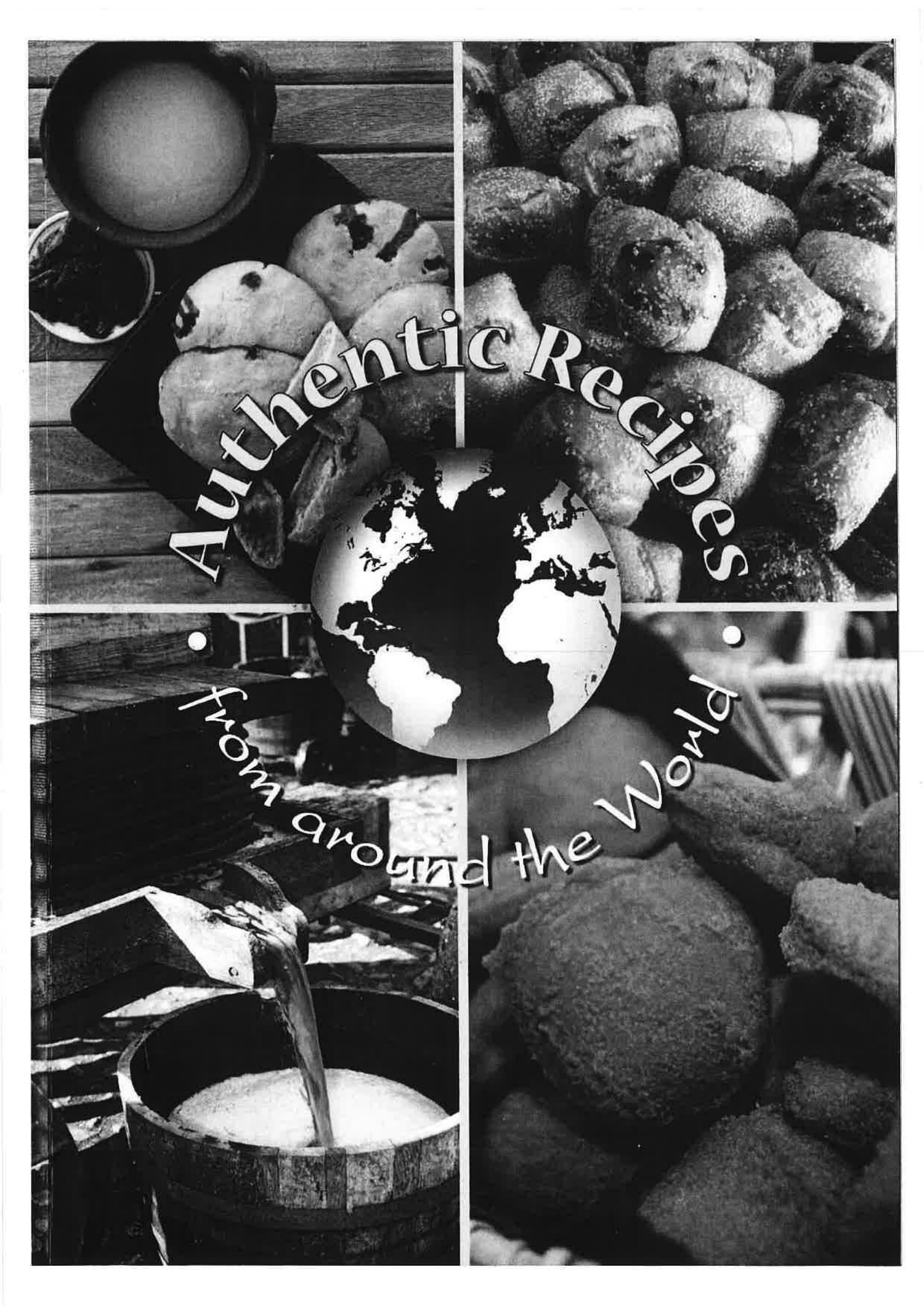




Authentic Recipes

• from around the World •

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Casgliad y Werin Cymru
People's Collection Wales



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Introduction: Consuming Authenticity

It was a little under a decade ago that I first visited Mexico and started to think about the cultural importance of cuisine and consumption. Although I had read about the history of food in Mexico and was going there to research historical documents about alcoholic drinks, I was staggered by the diversity and vibrancy of a culinary culture that—at least back then—had such a limited reputation in the UK. This taught me that experiencing the cuisine of different parts of the world, of different regions within our own countries or of different traditions is a process of discovery, often joyous and surprising, a way of learning about our own and others' heritage.

It is therefore with great excitement that I find myself introducing this book, *Authentic Recipes from Around the World*, in which we try to encourage some thoughtful reflection on what the term “authenticity” means when we talk about foods and drinks. In particular, we want to think about how history, time and temporality can be used to make particular cultural products seem “authentic” or the “real” thing. Temporal categories like “origins”, “traditions” and “timelessness,” and the emotional connections they can evoke, like feelings of nostalgia and belonging, are at the heart of our approach.

The book is part of a larger research project, *Consuming Authenticities: Time, Place and the Past in the Construction of Authentic Foods and Drinks*, which is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in relation to their major research theme, *Care for the Future: Thinking Forward through the Past*. We are exploring authenticity in relation to foods and drinks from different parts of the world that feature in this book: pulque (an alcoholic drink from central Mexico), flaounes (celebration Easter pies from Cyprus), Welsh craft cider, and acarajé (a street snack from Brazil). Our work also combines academic expertise with the expertise of various practitioners: food and drink producers, chefs, food writers, heritage and museum professionals and others. We hope to foster increased awareness about the complexity of cultural and historical relationships involved in the culinary sphere and in defining authenticity, by bringing together people and perspectives from food cultures around the world.

What makes authenticity?

Authenticity is not a single thing, nor, in an objective, final sense, is it real. Authenticity is defined in different ways and for different reasons according to perspective; it is often more subjectively felt or experienced than objectively observed, and it operates on a spectrum rather than in absolutes. In the case of a recipe for a particular dish, it is very difficult, probably impossible, to find a single recipe that will satisfy *everyone's* view of what that dish should be—accounting for individual tastes, family traditions, regional specialities, local ingredients, historical techniques and so on. But it is often easier to reach consensus on some recipes being more or less authentic than others.

Why does it matter?

Of course, in legal, commercial and cultural terms, claims to authenticity for this or that food or drink are regularly made, often in absolute terms. Culinary products can depend on ideas about authenticity for commercial success, drawing emotional responses from consumers and evoking a sense of local, ethnic or even national identity through their consumption. But to describe such foods or drinks as authentic can be a politically, economically and culturally charged process, particularly

when it means labelling a different, rival version or product inauthentic. In this sense, authenticity can be a central ingredient in the celebration and commemoration of different identities, social practices and histories. However, it can also marginalise, exclude, exploit or damage others, and so it is important to understand how such ideas come about.

Authenticity, Time, Place and the Past

These complicated issues around authenticity have long been studied by scholars of food and, to a lesser but still important extent, alcoholic drinks. A uniting theme across this research is the recognition that elitist, exclusionary and culturally imperialist viewpoints can sometimes inform how foods and drinks are projected as authentic, although claims to authenticity can also be used to defend against these viewpoints in other contexts. Much of the scholarship dwells on the role of place and locality in promoting images of authenticity, especially in terms of how particular people or places are identified as the origin point of authentic foodstuffs. Also widely explored have been the concepts of *terroir* and the formal legal frameworks that recognise and protect the special provenance of certain products, such as *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* enjoyed by champagne. Categories of time, temporality and history certainly haven't been ignored, but they have generally been given less attention than place, locality and globalisation. We aim to bring both perspectives together, by considering the roles played by historical knowledge, narratives about the past and future, and temporal concepts such as timelessness, nostalgia, origins and traditions.

What do a Mexican drink, a Cypriot pastry, a Brazilian croquette and Welsh cider have in common?

This might sound like the opener for a convoluted punch-line, but we deliberately chose to focus on foods and drinks that came from very different backgrounds and that would be unfamiliar to people outside of their own regional or national experience. This was so that we could compare similarities and differences in the way that authenticity is expressed in each case, at the same time as stoking people's natural curiosity about the culinary cultures of other parts of the world.

Each chapter of the recipe book explores more fully the different things that go into making these foods and drinks authentic, but I will point to a few interesting findings here:

- In all 4 cases, the people involved in producing the food or drink are central to how its authenticity is defined. This is perhaps unsurprising, especially when producers themselves reflect on why their product is or is not authentic. But there is considerable variation in *how* the person's characteristics contribute to the product's authenticity: skill, knowledge, length of experience, pride, passion, family relationships, links to the locality or neighbourhood, appearance, racial, ethnic or national identity.
- The importance of place to a food or drink's authenticity is often intertwined with a sense of that place's historical significance and can be very politically charged. In this sense, people's different views on where acarajé can be consumed "authentically" reveal much about the legacy of Brazil's colonial past, while flaoues are invoked in reconciliatory politics aimed at healing past divisions between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots.
- There is often no straightforward relationship between authenticity and the time involved in producing the food and drink. The slow labour of love in the making of both pulque and

cider are valorised, but the very short time in which pulque is viable and pleasant to drink is also seen as part of its enigma, while dexterity and swiftness in certain stages of making acarajé and flaounes demonstrate their producers' skill and knowledge.

- "Tradition" is as complicated, multidimensional and difficult to define as authenticity itself, but key to whether or not claims to authenticity are accepted. Tradition might be family-based and thus lead to many subtle variations in the way a food or drink is prepared, while making it no less authentic. Tradition might be rooted in the method of production, avoiding the use of modern tools and techniques. Tradition might be firmly or loosely tied to a specific origin point in the past, a myth or an interpretation of history. It might refer to all of these things simultaneously, or entirely different forms of tradition.

I hope readers will draw many other conclusions from what follows, and think about how the authenticities of foods and drinks from their own experience have been portrayed and debated in different ways. And for those who feel that the only way to truly learn about a food or drink is to try it (and who would disagree?), we hope that our recipes and stories will inspire you to get stuck in!