



BOOK REVIEW

*Taste – Power – Tradition; Geographical Indications as
Cultural Property, Göttingen Studies in Cultural Property,
Volume 10*

Sarah May, Katia Laura Sidali, Achim Spiller, Bernhard
Tschofen, (eds.)

(Göttingen, Universitätsverlag, 2017)

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● **Steven Engelsman**

Director, Weltmuseum Wien, Austria (retired)

Who does not know them? Parmigiano cheese, Parma ham or Barolo wine from Italy, Roquefort cheese and Bourgogne wine from France, Gouda cheese from the Netherlands, Serrano ham or Rioja wine from Spain, Feta cheese or ouzo from Greece, Allgäuer Emmental from Bavaria and all those other authentic and regional European cheeses, meat and fish products, pickled vegetables, wines, spirits and so on that grace a connoisseur's elegant dining table. They are the top of Europe's culinary heritage. And as such, they are of course an important part of Europe's intangible cultural heritage.

However, none of these famous regional products has been inscribed on the UNESCO *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*. Currently numbering 470 elements, this list only mentions a very few of them. For instance, only two of them list cheese:

French cuisine does, since in France cheese can serve as a dessert; or Belgian beer, since it is sometimes used to rinse Belgian cheeses. But none of these regional agricultural products is inscribed on the ICH list in its own right, as something produced with special skills and traditional knowledge. So there, in UNESCO's world, they do not feature as prominent elements of intangible European culture.

Nevertheless, they are prominent elements of European agriculture. And so these European regional 'foodstuffs' – this is the official EU word for them – are listed and protected through other lists and schemes. In 1992, the EU introduced an elaborate system of protection of geographical indications. This quality control system distinguishes three categories. PDO – Protected Denomination of Origin which applies when a

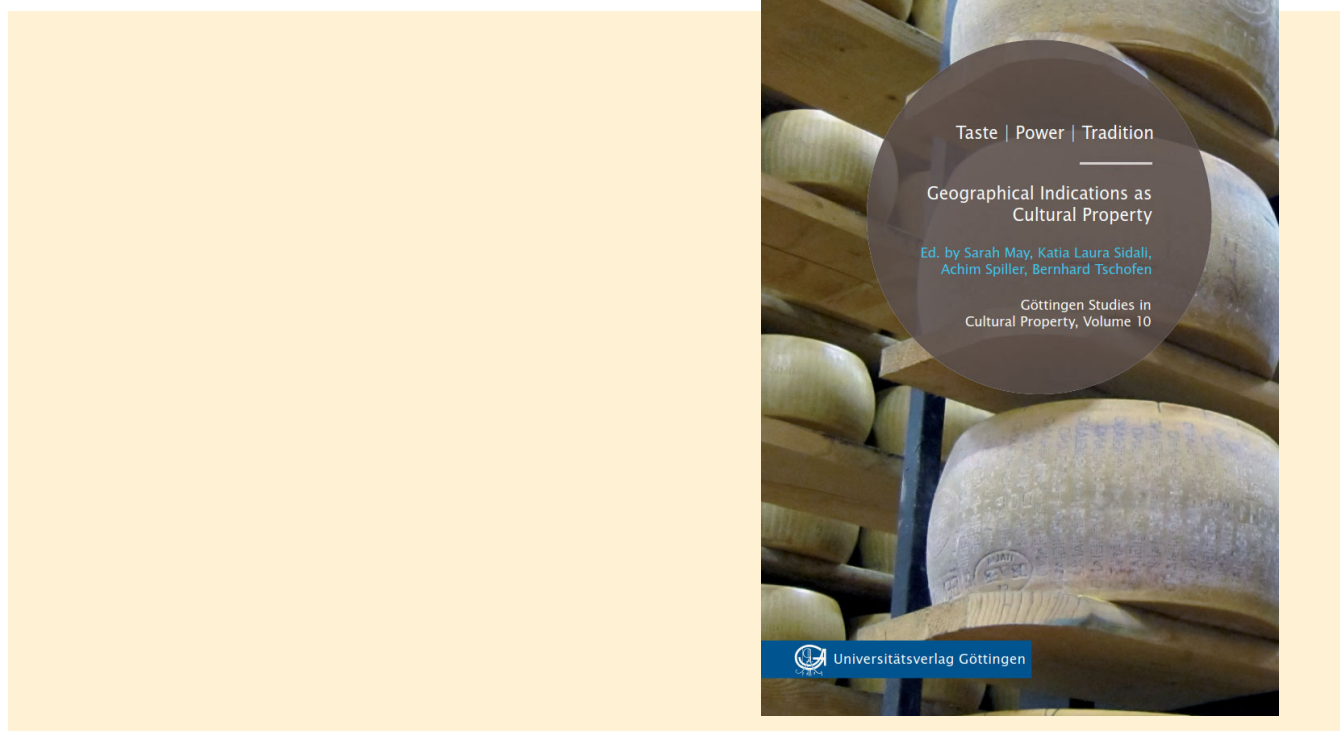
product is produced, processed and prepared in the specific geographical area. PGI – Protected Geographical Indication; this label applies when the product is linked to the region where it is produced, processed or prepared, although the ingredients need not necessarily come from that geographical area; for example Copra di Parma is a ham produced in Parma from imported Dutch pigs and cut in a way different from Parma ham. And finally, in 2006 a third label was added: TSG – Traditional Speciality Guaranteed and applies when a product has a traditional character, but is no longer linked to a special geographical region; for instance ‘Dutch herring’, which might well be produced in Denmark or Norway, but according to the traditional Dutch method.

As of today, 1,428 regional products have been labelled by the EU, with another 178 in the pipeline; the latest addition being the PDO label for Lough Neagh Pollan – a white fish from Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland that happens to be very popular in Switzerland.

As a matter of fact, the EU certification scheme does not only apply to European countries. Fabio Parasecoli explains in his essay on *Geographical Indications, Intellectual property and the Global Market* how the World Trade Organisation made the EU open up its

registration scheme to non-EU countries. China, Turkey and Thailand have done so, some 40 of their products are listed now. But Switzerland has not; its famous Emmentaler cheese features on the EU list as a *PDO protected product from the Allgäu region in Bavaria, Germany* (sic!). Actually, the list is easily accessible and searchable through the Database of Origin and Registration DOOR on the European Union website.

This European quality system has been the subject of an extensive multidisciplinary and multinational research project, under the leadership of Achim Spiller at the Institute of Historical and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Tübingen, and Bernhard Tschofen (now in Zürich) at the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Göttingen. The project focused on the regulations and effects of the EU system, and *on the structures of governance and everyday practice in a cultural property regime that, at the same time, connects consumers, producers and local stakeholders* (Tschofen and Spiller in their ‘Introduction’). The results of this research project have now been published as volume number 10 in the Göttingen Series on Cultural Property, under the title *Taste – Power – Tradition, Geographical Indications as Cultural Property*. It contains 10 articles by nineteen authors altogether.



The book is fascinating reading, and highly informative. *Geographical Indications are meant to increase the value of goods, enhancing their reputation and protecting them from the competition of similar products. At the same time, they constitute entry banners for products located outside the area of the Geographical Indication* writes Fabian Parasecoli in the contribution quoted above. So this is all about the power to define borders and zones of inclusion and exclusion, about money, about increasing profit margins, about elevating agricultural products above the level of ordinary staple food or commodities. If one thing becomes clear, it is that there is no such thing as simple attribution of geographical labels. It is all a matter of dealing, negotiating, and careful manoeuvring.

This I learned especially from Dr Sarah May's contribution 'Shaping Borders in Culinary Landscapes. European Politics and Everyday Practices in Geographical Indications'. She compares the process and the effects of the registration of two German cheeses: the Allgäuer Emmental from Bayern and Baden-Württemberg and the Odenwälder Frühstückskäse from Hesse. The states of Bayern and Baden Württemberg actively support applications for quality labels, both through a competence centre of food that carries out research and development, and through political lobby and administrative support. They are extremely successful; and hence so is the Allgäuer Emmental cheese. However, not all dairy farmers who claim to make Allgäu Emmental have eventually made it into the strict demarcation of the region to which the PDO label now applies, so they are unhappy. On the other hand, there are also some dairy farmers inside that region who now refrain from using the PDO label because they do not want to adjust their traditional way of cheese making to the strict regulations that come along with the new labels; so they don't care.

The Odenwälder Frühstückskäse from the state of Hesse, on the other hand, is a completely different story. The state of Hesse does not have an office and the lobby to support PDO applications. So their certified Frühstückskäse is the produce of one single dairy firm, in the Hüttental, that had to do all their marketing and branding by themselves; the cheese was awarded a PDO label nevertheless, but has not really lifted off to become a well-known label.

Another fascinating story is about Halloumi in Cyprus, in an article by Gisela Welz entitled 'Pure Products, Messy Genealogies. The Contested Origins of Halloumi Cheese'. Traditionally, this cheese was produced all over Cyprus, both on the Turkish as well as on the Greek part of the island. And it was made from a mixture of milk from goats and sheep. In 2009, large industrial dairies in the Greek part of Cyprus applied for a PDO label of Halloumi, from the Greek part of Cyprus, based on a recipe using cow milk only. Protests came from two sides: dairies on the Turkish side protested against the hijacking of what they considered also their traditional cheese, and local herders of the flocks of goat and sheep protested in the streets of Nicosia, bringing their animals along, to safeguard the requirement that Halloumi cheese be made with a substantial amount of goat and sheep's milk. Not surprisingly this PDO application failed.

There are a few more articles about cheese making in Europe which was obviously the central topic in the research project. Moreover there are contributions that provide perspectives on geographical indications outside Europe. Let me just list them here: on certification of grapes and mangoes from Sao Francisco basin in Brazil, on non-EU geographical indicators from Brazil, Serbia and Thailand, and on Peru's attempts to brand itself as a food nation with a world class cuisine.

Recommended reading! And actually, free of charge under a creative commons license when you download the e-book version. 