

Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

Review of:

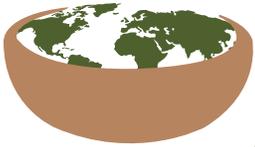
Madrid: A Culinary History

Maria Paz Moreno. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018. Pp. xii + 202, introduction, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, series foreword.

By: Susan Eleuterio

Another of the Big City Food Biographies, *Madrid* accomplishes succinctly what editor Ken Albala describes as the Series' purpose: it demonstrates how "food is used to define the identity" of cities (ix). Author Maria Paz Moreno, an essayist, poet, literary critic, and professor of Spanish, lyrically supports her thesis that "food is intertwined with history in Madrid" (1). While she focuses on "the devotion that Madrileños have for their beloved city's" food and drink, she also highlights the influences from all of Spain on Madrid's foodways and from its inhabitants dating back to prehistoric times (1). Similar in presentation to the volume on Rio de Janeiro, this text includes descriptions of Madrid's natural resources (which are bountiful), its people (particularly kings, chefs, cooks, and culinary writers), its markets, historic cookbooks and restaurants, and its traditional dishes. My one wish for this volume is that there be a couple of maps. Even if readers have been to Madrid, a map of the various regions Moreno references and a map of the city itself marked with places of culinary significance would make it easier to follow along on this journey of several centuries.

Madrid's food heritage continues to reflect the influence of the Arabic Moors who conquered most of the Iberian Peninsula by AD 711. They established Madrid (as *Magerit*—later *Mayrit*—"place with abundant water") as a military fort on the Manzanares River along with a system of agriculture featuring orchards, cattle, and a variety of crops and food methodologies—which Moreno showcases as still present in Madrid's language (*azúcar* or sugar), desserts (*buñuelos*, *roquillas*, and *alfeñiques*, boiled sugar which was imported to Mexico by the Spanish and is featured for el Día de los Muertos), and seasonings (saffron, cinnamon, cumin, and coriander, among others). Another major influence outlined in this text is that of the Jewish community,



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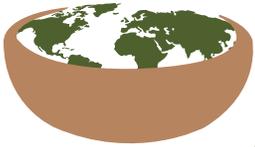
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which before the Christian “Reconquista” of Spain, and later, the Inquisition, originated some of Madrid’s most traditional dishes, particularly the *cocido madrileño* (a chickpea stew with vegetables). Moreno takes the reader on a fascinating journey through the evolution of this dish which eventually featured pork, an ingredient she and other food historians note was added to test the religious commitment of *conversos*, or Spanish Jews who had converted (on pain of death) to Christianity (16-24). She uses *cocido* made without any meat to describe the impact of the Spanish Civil War on Madrid’s population, which survived food shortages and rationing even after the war ended (65-67).

Moreno examines the history of specific tapas (*tortilla de patatas*, *patatas a la brava*, cod fritters with roasted peppers known as *Soldiers of Pavia*), main dishes (the aforementioned *cocido*, tripe, sea bream, and a variety of roasted meats (which she notes are preferred over fish except for cod), and desserts (*torrijas*—a kind of French toast—flan and rice pudding done Madrid style, and *leche merengada*, a milkshake with egg whites). In each case, she provides recipes and references to the specific nature of how these dishes are prepared, eaten, and enjoyed in Madrid. She also documents the rise of elite cuisine, particularly, but not limited to Ferrán Adriá’s world famous molecular gastronomy, contrasting it with what she notes is “the popular cuisine which is affordable and based on flavors, ingredients, and textures that are familiar and accessible to the majority of the population” (74).

A chapter entitled “Too Many Kings Spoil the Broth,” traces the establishment of Madrid as Spain’s capital and the influence of New World foods from tomatoes, potatoes, and peppers to chocolate and coffee, which continues today. Armchair tourists will also be able to use this volume to “visit” some of the oldest restaurants and markets in Europe, including Sobrino de Botín, founded in 1725, which became an Ernest Hemingway hangout. Moreno makes the point that some restaurants equally proudly claim that “Hemingway never ate here.” One of the most interesting stories related about restaurants is that of The Embassy, a tea salon operated by an Irish ex-patriot who hosted British spies during World War II and helped to hide Jewish refugees and Allied servicemen who were escaping to Portugal.

In contrast to the Series biography of Rio, *Madrid* is incredibly well referenced with careful notes and an extensive bibliography. In her introduction, Moreno confesses that having grown up in a small town in Spain, “for a long time I did not even like Madrid all that much.” She found the size and pace stressful, but was able to change her perception through the intervention of her brother-



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in-law (“whose family has deep roots in Madrid”), who patiently took her and her husband on a tapas and wine tour of Old Madrid. She reminds us that “the shortest way to a person’s heart is through the stomach” (2) and confirms that her gustatory journey through this major city led her “de Madrid, al cielo” (from Madrid to the heavens), a saying she quotes in the introduction. I highly recommend beginning your own gastronomic exploration of Madrid with this volume.