



Preservation of traditional culinary art and culture of the people of Asante Mampong, Ghana

Jemima Tuaah Boaho¹ , Dickson Adom²  & Prosper Setsoafia² 

¹ Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana.

² Department of Educational Innovations in Science and Technology, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana.

ABSTRACT

Indigenous culinary practices are repositories of cultural knowledge, social memory and communal identity, yet many are declining under the pressures of urbanisation, changing food preferences and weakened intergenerational transmission. This study documented the indigenous culinary practices associated with major foods in Asante Mampong, Ghana. A qualitative participatory ethnographic design was used. Twenty-three participants, comprising queen mothers, community elders, food producers, women's group leaders and farmers, were purposively selected and interviewed using a validated semi-structured interview guide. Participatory observations on food preparation and consumption were also made. Interview transcripts, field notes and observational data were thematically analysed with the support of NVivo 15. The findings identified diverse full-course and stand-alone meals, authentic preparation techniques, traditional culinary artefacts, seasonal and ritual consumption patterns, gendered dining arrangements and food-related taboos. Participants attributed the decline of these practices to limited awareness of their perceived health benefits, reduced availability of indigenous crops, modern food preferences and weakened youth participation in culinary learning. The study contributes to scholarship by providing a micro-cultural ethnographic record of indigenous culinary practices in Asante Mampong and by demonstrating how material culture, ecological seasonality, ritual life and intergenerational knowledge transmission jointly shape culinary continuity. It provides an evidence base for community-led documentation, education and heritage preservation initiatives that can accommodate modern preferences without eroding cultural authenticity.

Keywords: Asante Mampong, Indigenous Culinary Practices, Cultural Heritage, Indigenous Knowledge, Culinary Heritage Preservation.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous culinary practices serve as living archives of cultural identity because they preserve communal memories, values, rituals and aesthetic knowledge across generations.¹ Although cooking

¹ Morris Brako, "Preserving Culinary Heritage: Challenges Faced by Takoradi Technical University Food Service Lab Students," *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews* 21, no. 3 (March 30, 2024): 1536–45, <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.21.3.0882>; Gladys Ogochukwu Chukwurah et al., "Cultural Influence of Local Food Heritage on Sustainable Development," *World* 6, no. 1 (January 7, 2025): 10, <https://doi.org/10.3390/world6010010>; Kai-Sean Lee, "Cooking up Food Memories: A Taste of Intangible Cultural Heritage," *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 54 (2023): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.11.005>.

was historically treated mainly as a craft, it is increasingly understood as a creative and cultural practice through which communities organise ingredients, techniques, presentation and meaning.² Therefore, food exceeds its nutritional function. It can embody histories, social relationships and cultural symbolism, while providing a shared medium through which communities interpret and communicate their collective experience.³

In this study, the term indigenous culinary practices refers collectively to locally recognised foods, recipes, ingredients, preparation techniques, culinary artefacts, consumption customs and the meanings attached to them. Such practices contribute to cultural identity, religious and social life, and the transmission of indigenous knowledge.⁴ They may also function beyond the local community by supporting cultural representation, tourism and gastrodiplomacy.⁵

Ghana's culinary heritage is diverse and culturally symbolic. Among the Asante, food practices are connected to communal values, social organisation and historical memory.⁶ Asante Mampong, a prominent traditional area in the Ashanti Region, retains distinctive indigenous culinary practices associated with agricultural cycles, rites of passage, gender roles, household organisation and royal traditions. These practices are sustained not only through recipes but also through specialised knowledge of ingredients, utensils, preparation sequences and appropriate occasions for consumption.

Despite their significance, indigenous culinary practices are increasingly threatened by urbanisation, global food influences, changing dietary preferences, environmental pressures and weakened intergenerational knowledge transfer.⁷ The existing studies have examined endangered Ghanaian dishes, food heritage, gastrodiplomacy and broader Asante indigenous culinary practices,⁸ but they provide limited ethnographic documentation of the specific foods, techniques, artefacts and cultural meanings found in Asante Mampong. This study addressed this micro-cultural gap by identifying and reproducing selected indigenous meals, documenting their authentic preparation, examining their cultural undertones and analysing factors contributing to their decline. In doing so, it positions indigenous culinary practices in Asante Mampong as a distinct field of indigenous knowledge worthy of documentation and preservation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indigenous Culinary Practices, Identity and Heritage

Food is central to anthropological interpretations of culture because it links material needs with identity, memory and social organisation.⁹ Traditional foods are generally distinguished by their historical continuity, locally recognised ingredients, production methods and association with a particular

² Samuray Hakan Bulut and Ebru Zencir Ciftci, "International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science," n.d.; Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, *Arguing about Art: Contemporary Philosophical Debates* (Routledge, 2013).

³ Olubukola S Adesina, "Projecting Nigeria's Soft Power Through Culinary Diplomacy," *African Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues* 20, no. 1 (2017): 140–49; Lee, "Cooking up Food Memories: A Taste of Intangible Cultural Heritage."

⁴ Brako, "Preserving Culinary Heritage: Challenges Faced by Takoradi Technical University Food Service Lab Students"; Chukwurah et al., "Cultural Influence of Local Food Heritage on Sustainable Development."

⁵ Adesina, "Projecting Nigeria's Soft Power Through Culinary Diplomacy"; Lee, "Cooking up Food Memories: A Taste of Intangible Cultural Heritage"; A Trihartono et al., "The Early Stage of Indonesia's Gastrodiplomacy: In the Middle of Nowhere?," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 485, no. 1 (May 1, 2020): 012008, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/485/1/012008>.

⁶ Linda Cobbah, Michael Erasmus Edumadzie, and Jacqueline Ogoe, "Endangered Indigenous Ghanaian Dishes: Home Economics Students of University of Education, Winneba, Ghana's Perspective," *Kwame Nkrumah University Multi-Disciplinary Journal-Zambia* 1, no. 1 (2023): 5–16; Brandi Simpson Miller, "Foodways and Empire in 19th Century Asante Diplomatic Relations," *The Soas Journal Of Postgraduate Research*, 2016, 33.

⁷ Wisdom Kofi Adzakor, "Globalization of Africa; A Review of Culinary Development and It's Economic Trends in Ghana," *Research Review*, July 30, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.52845/currentopinion.v4i2.256>; Morris Brako, "Preserving Culinary Heritage: Challenges Faced by Takoradi Technical University Food Service Lab Students"; Chukwurah et al., "Cultural Influence of Local Food Heritage on Sustainable Development."

⁸ Cobbah, Edumadzie, and Ogoe, "Endangered Indigenous Ghanaian Dishes: Home Economics Students of University of Education, Winneba, Ghana's Perspective"; Miller, "Foodways and Empire in 19th Century Asante Diplomatic Relations"; Samuel Nani, "Projecting Ghana's Soft Power Through Gastrodiplomacy" (PhD diss., 2019); Richmond Yeboah and Diana Ashie, "Promotion of Local Food as Tourism Product in the Cape Coast Metropolis: An Explorative Research," *Heliyon* 10, no. 24 (December 2024): e40950, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e40950>.

⁹ Nir Avieli, *Food and Power: A Culinary Ethnography of Israel*, vol. 67 (Univ of California Press, 2017); Simona Stano, "Semiotics of Food," in *International Handbook of Semiotics* (Springer, 2015), 647–71.

community or place. However, defining culinary heritage only by the age of a recipe is insufficient. The cultural significance of a meal also depends on who prepares it, how it is prepared, the artefacts used, the circumstances of consumption and the meanings assigned to it. This broader view is important because it treats culinary knowledge as a social practice rather than a fixed collection of recipes.

The relationship between food and place further explains why indigenous culinary practices become markers of belonging. Local agro-food systems are shaped by ecological conditions, available crops and historically developed techniques.¹⁰ However, culinary authenticity is not purely geographical. Migration, ingredient substitution and technological change may produce modified culinary practices that retain cultural familiarity while departing from earlier methods. The literature therefore presents a tension between continuity and adaptation: rigid definitions of authenticity may exclude evolving practices, whereas unrestricted modification can weaken the cultural knowledge that makes a food tradition distinctive.

African culinary histories illustrate this tension. Indigenous communities developed diverse food systems from locally available grains, vegetables, fruits and livestock, but trade, colonisation and mobility introduced new crops and preparation practices.¹¹ These encounters did not simply replace indigenous cuisines; they generated selective adaptation, resistance and hybridisation. Consequently, African culinary practices should not be treated as static remnants of the past. Preserving them requires attention to the historical processes through which communities decide which ingredients, techniques and meanings remain culturally authoritative.

Studies in Ghana demonstrate both the cultural value and vulnerability of indigenous foods. Miller shows that Asante indigenous culinary practices historically communicated status, hospitality and diplomatic relationships,¹² while Atuna et al. document continued preferences for indigenous vegetables and their perceived benefits.¹³ Cobbah et al. and Brako, however, identify declining knowledge and preparation of endangered Ghanaian dishes, especially among younger people.¹⁴ Yeboah and Ashie further show that local foods can support tourism, but commercial promotion may privilege marketable dishes over less visible household and ritual foods.¹⁵ Taken together, these studies establish the importance of culinary heritage, but leave unresolved how preservation can protect local specificity while permitting practical adaptation.

Threats to Continuity and the Research Gap

The literature attributes the decline of indigenous culinary practices to interacting social, economic and environmental forces. Globalised food markets and urban lifestyles favour convenience and standardised tastes; climate variability affects the availability of indigenous crops; and reduced participation in household food preparation weakens intergenerational transmission.¹⁶ These explanations are useful, but much of the literature remains descriptive and treats “Ghanaian” or “African” food heritage as a broad category. Such framing can obscure variations in recipes, artefacts, social rules and ritual meanings among particular traditional areas.

The specific contribution required, therefore, is a community-level account that connects foods and preparation techniques with the cultural institutions that sustain them. Few studies have documented

¹⁰ C. Clare Hinrichs, “The Practice and Politics of Food System Localization,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 19, no. 1 (2003): 33–45; J. Sanz-Cañada and J. Muchnik, “Geographies of Origin and Proximity: Approaches to Local Agro-Food Systems,” *Culture and History Digital Journal* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1–19.

¹¹ Michael Dietler, “11. Culinary Encounters: Food, Identity, and Colonialism,” *The Archaeology of Food and Identity (Occasional Paper No. 34)*, 2007; James C McCann, *Stirring the Pot: A History of African Cuisine* (Ohio University Press, 2009).

¹² Miller, “Foodways and Empire in 19th Century Asante Diplomatic Relations.”

¹³ Richard A. Atuna et al., “Types of Indigenous Vegetables Consumed, Preparation, Preferences and Perceived Benefits in Ghana,” *Journal of Ethnic Foods* 9, no. 1 (September 8, 2022): 38, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-022-00154-3>.

¹⁴ Cobbah, Edumadzie, and Ogoe, “Endangered Indigenous Ghanaian Dishes: Home Economics Students of University of Education, Winneba, Ghana’s Perspective”; Morris Brako, “Preserving Culinary Heritage: Challenges Faced by Takoradi Technical University Food Service Lab Students.”

¹⁵ Yeboah and Ashie, “Promotion of Local Food as Tourism Product in the Cape Coast Metropolis: An Explorative Research.”

¹⁶ Adzakor, “Globalization of Africa: A Review of Culinary Development and It’s Economic Trends in Ghana”; Morris Brako, “Preserving Culinary Heritage: Challenges Faced by Takoradi Technical University Food Service Lab Students”; Bright Tetteh, Samuel Tawiah Baidoo, and Paul Owusu Takyi, “The Effects of Climate Change on Food Production in Ghana: Evidence from Maki (2012) Cointegration and Frequency Domain Causality Models,” *Cogent Food & Agriculture* 8, no. 1 (2022): 2111061.

the indigenous culinary practices of Asante Mampong through the combined perspectives of cultural custodians, food producers, women's group leaders and farmers, supported by participatory observation. This study addresses that gap by examining culinary practice as an integrated system of meals, material artefacts, ecological knowledge, social relations and intergenerational learning rather than as a list of endangered dishes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a qualitative research design because it sought detailed interpretations of the indigenous culinary practices of the Asante Mampong Traditional Area. The design allowed the researchers to explore local knowledge on food choices, recipes, ingredients, preparation, presentation and cultural meaning from the perspectives of recognised knowledge holders.

Research Method

A participatory ethnographic method was used to obtain an in-depth account of everyday activities and cultural customs associated with food preparation and consumption. Through interviews, immersion and participatory observation, the researchers examined the artistic, material and social dimensions of indigenous culinary practices in their community setting.

Population and Study Sample

The study population comprised recognised holders of indigenous culinary knowledge in the Bretuo clan of the Asante Mampong Traditional Area. They included community elders, queen mothers, food producers, women's group leaders and farmers. Twenty-three participants were selected purposively based on their knowledge of Asante Mampong food practices and, where applicable, their traditional responsibility for preparing food for the royal family (Table 1). Sample adequacy was guided by information power rather than statistical representation.¹⁷ By the twenty-third interview, no substantively new themes were emerging, indicating that the sample provided sufficient depth and diversity for the study aims.

Table 1: Participant categories and rationale for selection

Participant category	Number selected	Rationale for selection
Queen mothers	2	Custodians of traditional food types, recipes and royal culinary knowledge in the Asante Mampong Traditional Area
Food producers	9	Experienced practitioners responsible for preparing indigenous meals
Community elders	5	Custodians of historical and cultural knowledge concerning indigenous culinary practices
Women's group leaders	2	Knowledge holders concerning food types and the traditional selection of women who prepare food for the royal family
Farmers	5	Producers of ingredients used in indigenous meals
Total	23	

¹⁷ Kirsti Malterud, Volkert Dirk Siersma, and Ann Dorrit Guassora, "Sample Size in Qualitative Interview Studies," *Qualitative Health Research* 26, no. 13 (November 10, 2016): 1753–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Data were collected using a validated semi-structured interview guide and an observation guide. The interviews explored major indigenous foods, recipes, preparation procedures, cultural meanings, preservation challenges and strategies for transferring knowledge to younger generations. With permission, interviews were audio-recorded and supported by still photographs and field notes. The recordings were transcribed, translated into English where necessary and organised for analysis.

Participatory observations were made during the preparation and consumption of selected indigenous meals. The researchers worked with community members to document ingredients, recipes, preparation sequences and culinary artefacts. Attention was also paid to the rituals, symbolism, gender arrangements and social interactions associated with food preparation and consumption in the Asante Mampong Traditional Area.

Data Analysis Procedure

Interview transcripts, field notes and observational records were thematically analysed with the support of NVivo 15. Two researchers independently coded the data, compared their coding decisions and resolved differences through discussion. Related codes were organised into coherent themes and subthemes. The analysis combined participant quotations, interpretive summaries and observational evidence to produce a contextually grounded account of the findings.¹⁸

Ethical Considerations

The Research Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology gave institutional approval. Each participant provided informed consent through a signature, thumbprint or witnessed verbal consent. The voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw were explained. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and permission was obtained before photographs or audio recordings were taken and used for academic and publication purposes.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study addressed three research questions: (a) Which indigenous meals of Asante Mampong can be reproduced and documented for cultural conservation? (b) What cultural meanings are associated with the indigenous culinary practices of the people of Mampong? (c) What factors contribute to the decline of these practices? Analysis of the interviews, participatory observations and field notes generated themes concerning categories of indigenous meals, authenticity in preparation, culinary artefacts, cultural meanings and threats to continuity.

Identification and Reproduction of Indigenous Meals in Mampong

Categories of Indigenous Mampong Meals

Participants classified the indigenous meals of Mampong into two broad categories: full-course meals and solitary or stand-alone meals. One participant explained:

“When it comes to the people of Mampong and our indigenous foods, we have full-course meals and solitary or stand-alone meals.”

The full-course meals identified through interviews and observation included ‘ɛbunuabuno’ (cocoyam-leaf soup) with fufuo; ‘werewere’ soup with fufuo; ‘borɔdee ampesie’ (boiled plantain) with ‘kontomire’ (cocoyam-leaf) stew; varieties of yam, including ‘mfuom’, ‘nkyekyerɛ’ and ‘apuka’, with kontomire stew; ‘akaw’ (unripe cocoyam) with ‘apɔtɔnsu’; cassava with ‘meko yerawa’ (ground pepper) and palm oil; ‘koko’, also called ‘borobe’ or ‘five minutes’, with ground pepper and tomatoes; cocoyam fufuo with ‘abenkwan’ (palm-nut soup); and ampesie with ‘adua’ (beans) and palm oil.

The solitary or stand-alone meals included ‘Akapinkyin’; ‘Aprapransa’; forms of ɛtɔ or tɔ, including ‘kɔkɔtɔ’ (mashed plantain) and ‘mankeni tɔ’ (mashed cocoyam), also known as ‘ɔgɔɔ’;

¹⁸ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 7-101.

‘Nuhu’, prepared from cocoyam or yam; ‘Nkyekyerewa’, a maize-based meal eaten with groundnuts or pawpaw; ‘Akyiwigo’; ‘Nkanfoo’, a yam dish traditionally prepared overnight because of its long cooking time; ‘Akankyee’; ‘Adibi’; and ‘Ahurugya’, a cassava-based meal.

The range of full-course and stand-alone meals demonstrates that indigenous culinary practices in Asante Mampong comprise a structured culinary repertoire rather than a small collection of isolated dishes. The classification reflects differences in meal composition, preparation time, social use and ingredient availability. Fufuo and ampesie have been identified elsewhere as prominent Asante foods,¹⁹ but the present findings extend that literature by documenting locally named accompaniments and less visible stand-alone meals rarely represented in broader accounts of Ghanaian cuisine. The findings therefore show how regional culinary identity is expressed through specific combinations of ingredients and techniques.

The dependence of many dishes on locally cultivated plantain, cocoyam, yam, cassava and leafy vegetables also supports Hinrichs’ argument that food practices are embedded in local ecological and production systems.²⁰ However, the findings indicate that cultural continuity depends more on crop availability. Knowledge of the appropriate combinations, sequence of preparation and contexts of consumption is equally important. Preserving only the names of meals would therefore provide an incomplete record of Mampong culinary heritage.

Authenticity in the Preparation of Indigenous Meals

Participants defined authenticity through the combined use of locally sourced ingredients, inherited preparation techniques and traditional utensils. From their perspective, a meal could lose part of its indigenous character when processed substitutes or mechanised methods replaced the materials and procedures through which the dish had historically been prepared. One participant stated:

“Food items such as cassava and palm nuts must come naturally from the farm or garden. The meal must also be prepared in the traditional way with traditional tools and utensils. For example, fufuo must be pounded in a mortar with a pestle, not milled by a machine. The palm nuts must also be pounded and prepared, rather than using nkulenu, the processed canned palm-nut paste, which is not natural (personal comm., elderly woman, 2023).”

The researchers prepared selected indigenous meals with participants and documented the techniques through direct observation. The preparation of fufuo with abenkwan is presented in Figure 1 and Table 2, while the preparation of kɔkɔɔtɔ and Ɔgɔɔ is presented in Figure 2 and Table 3.

Preparation of Abenkwan (Palm-Nut Soup) with Fufuo

Abenkwan with fufuo is an indigenous full-course meal prepared in Asante Mampong.

Table 2: Ingredients and procedures for preparing abenkwan with fufuo

Ingredients	Palm nuts
	Plantain
	Cassava
	Water
	Fish, including salmon, totobi and herring
	Snails
	Onions, pepper, salt and local spices
Procedure	Preparation of abenkwan 1. Wash the palm nuts and place them in a kukuo with water. 2. Boil for approximately 30 minutes, or until the nuts are tender, and drain the water. 3. Pound the palm nuts to separate the pulp from the kernels.

¹⁹ Miller, “Foodways and Empire in 19th Century Asante Diplomatic Relations.”

²⁰ Hinrichs, “The Practice and Politics of Food System Localization.”

	- Mix the pounded pulp with hot water and sieve it into a clean kukuo to remove the kernels and fibres. - Wash the fish and other protein ingredients thoroughly. - Season and cook the firm fish with ground onion, salt, local spices and a small quantity of water. - Cook the snails separately in a small quantity of water. - Pour the sieved palm-nut liquid over the partially cooked fish and simmer over medium heat. - Continue cooking until red palm oil appears on the surface. - Add the snails and delicate fish near the end of cooking to prevent them from breaking apart. Adjust the salt to taste.
	Preparation of fufuo - Peel the cassava and plantain, cut them into appropriate pieces and wash thoroughly. - Boil the cassava and plantain in a kukuo until tender but not excessively soft. - Pound the cassava and plantain separately, in either order. - Mix and pound them until the mixture is smooth, mouldable and uniform. The resulting dough is fufuo.



Figure 1. Prepared abenkwan (palm-nut soup) and fufuo

Source: Field research, 2023

Preparation of ɛto

The participants identified different forms of ɛto, including ‘kəkɔto’, prepared from ripe and unripe plantain, and ‘mankeni to’, prepared from cocoyam and also known as ‘Ɔgɔɔ’.

Table 3: Ingredients and procedures for preparing ɛto

Ingredients	Ripe and unripe plantain; cocoyam
	Groundnut paste
	Roasted groundnuts
	Fish, including mɔmɔne and kobi
	Boiled eggs and palm oil
	Pepper and ginger (kakaduro)
Procedure	Preparation of kəkɔto - Peel and wash the ripe and unripe plantain, then cook for 10 to 12 minutes or until tender. - Grind pepper, ginger and mɔmɔne in an earthenware bowl. - Add the unripe plantain and grind until smooth. - Add the ripe plantain and continue to grind. Mix in groundnut paste to taste and grind until smooth. - Add palm oil. Garnish with roasted groundnuts where desired. - Serve with boiled eggs.

Preparation of Ɔgɔɔ

1. Peel and wash the cocoyam, then roast it over the fire.
2. Grind hot pepper, bitter pepper and onion in an earthenware bowl.
3. Add groundnut paste to taste and continue grinding until smooth.
4. Add washed and roasted salted tilapia (kobi) and grind it into the mixture.
5. Mix thoroughly, add palm oil and garnish with roasted groundnuts where desired.



Figure 2. Prepared kakawto
Source: Field research, 2023

Traditional Artefacts Used in Meal Preparation

Community interviews and participatory observations identified a range of artefacts associated with the preparation, storage, serving and consumption of indigenous meals. These objects are not merely functional utensils; they preserve knowledge of local materials, specialised craft production and culturally appropriate methods of handling food. Table 4 presents the principal artefacts documented in the study.

Table 4: Artefacts used in meal preparation in Asante Mampong

Item	Description and Use
Kodoɔ	A wooden vessel carved in the form of a saucepan and used in meal preparation.
Calabash	A bowl made from the hardened shell of a gourd (<i>Lagenaria siceraria</i>), commonly used for serving beverages, palm wine and water.
Komiti	A bowl traditionally used to serve respected adult men.
Calabash ladle	A wooden ladle shaped like a calabash with an elongated handle.
Apɔɔyowa	An earthenware bowl used for serving meals and grinding ingredients such as pepper, onion and tomatoes.
Ahina	A clay pot used to store and cool water.
Atere	A metal spoon used to serve food.
Plete	An aluminium plate used to serve food.
Dadesen	An aluminium cooking pot used in meal preparation.
Kukuo	A clay cooking pot used in meal preparation.
Ayowa or Asanka	A small clay bowl used for grinding ingredients, preparing food and serving meals.
Bankuta	A wooden stirring implement used to prepare foods such as banku and kokonte.
Ankwere	An aluminium container used to store water.
ɛta	A wooden ladle used during meal preparation.

Bukyea	A moulded-clay fireplace used for cooking.
Leaves of plants	Plant materials, including maize husks and plantain leaves, are used to wrap, cover or prepare food.



Figure 3. A typical kukuo and apɔɔyowa

Source: Field research, 2023



Figure 4. Selected meals and serving artefacts documented during the study

Source: Field research, 2023

A = dadesen; B = calabash

The documented artefacts demonstrate that Mampong culinary knowledge is materially embedded. Items such as the kukuo, apɔɔyowa, asanka, bankuta and bukya shape texture, temperature, flavour and the social presentation of food. This finding develops Anquandah's broader account of Ghanaian material culture by showing that everyday culinary objects are active carriers of heritage rather than passive historical remnants.²¹ Replacing them may improve convenience, but it can also alter sensory qualities and weaken knowledge of local craft traditions. Preservation efforts should, therefore, document both recipes and the material practices through which those recipes acquire cultural authenticity.

²¹ James Anquandah, "The People of Ghana: Their Origins and Cultures," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, no. 15 (2013): 1–25.

Cultural Meanings of Indigenous Culinary Practices in Mampong

The findings showed that indigenous culinary practices in Mampong play social, ritual, ecological and regulatory roles. Meals provide nourishment, but they also transmit knowledge, organise relationships and communicate expectations concerning age, gender, season and ceremony. The following themes explain these cultural meanings.

Communal Bonds and Social Cohesion

Indigenous meals were central to festivals, family gatherings and communal celebrations. Preparing and sharing such meals allowed relatives, including younger family members and those who live outside the community, to encounter foods that were no longer regularly prepared.

“These meals were sometimes prepared during festivals when relatives and family members came from afar. This allowed relatives and young people who had not been exposed to the meals to taste them. Some meals, such as werewere with fufuo or werewere with nkatenkwan, were also eaten after the observance of Akwasidae (personal comm., elderly man, 2023).”

Participants also associated shared household meals with affection, reciprocity and collective belonging.

“Families used to eat together to the extent that everyone in the home could eat another person’s food. The elders often tasted food from each wife or woman in the household, and leftovers were given to the children. Eating as a group fostered love among families (personal communication, elderly woman, 2023).”

Ritual Uses of Food

Certain foods were prepared for culturally significant transitions and were governed by rules concerning who could prepare or consume them.

“Traditional priests and members of the royal household had a special white eto meal for young women who experienced menstruation for the first time. Men were not permitted to eat this meal (personal comm., elderly man, 2023).”

Seasonal Consumption of Foods

The consumption of indigenous meals followed the agricultural calendar and the seasonal availability of ingredients.

“Some foods, such as snails, were available during the rainy season. When a food was in season, people ate it frequently. When plantain was abundant, they prepared kakawto, fufuo, ampesie and roasted plantain. In those days, most households had farms, so people ate what was seasonally available (personal communication, elderly woman, 2023).”

Personal Preference and Convenience

Although cultural rules shaped some meals, participants also described flexible household choices based on preference, cravings, preparation time and the arrival of visitors.

“There were no general restrictions on eating these meals. People ate what they felt like eating. In the past, the head of a family could request a particular meal, and an experienced woman in the household could prepare it (personal comm., elderly man, 2023).”

Convenience also influenced how often particular dishes were prepared.

“Some meals take a long time to prepare and are therefore not eaten frequently. Akapinkyin, however, can be prepared quickly, so it is eaten more often. It can also be prepared when an unexpected visitor arrives (personal comm., elderly man, 2023).”

Gendered and Age-Based Dining Practices

Dining arrangements reflected gender and age hierarchies. Men, women, elders and children could be served separately, and the type of food served sometimes differed among these groups.

“These meals were often eaten in separate groups. Men ate separately from women and children, and elders were usually served apart from younger people. On some occasions,

adults received werewere and ebunuabunu, while children were served ampesie with adua and palm oil (personal comm., elderly woman, 2023)."

Food-Related Taboos

Participants described sayings and taboos that regulated eating behaviour. Some appeared to communicate practical concerns about safety, while others protected access to particular foods for specific age groups.

"It was considered taboo to talk while eating. This rule was intended to prevent people from choking during meals (personal comm., elderly woman, 2023)."

"Young men were told not to eat koko because it would cause erectile dysfunction. Koko was soft and considered suitable for older people. The warning discouraged young men from consuming it all and leaving none for the elderly (personal communication, elderly woman, 2023)."

The accounts of festival and household meals show that sharing food was a mechanism for reproducing collective identity. This supports Chukwurah et al., who emphasise the role of local food heritage in sustaining social and cultural relationships, but the present study adds an intergenerational dimension: gatherings created opportunities for younger relatives and migrants to encounter culinary knowledge that routine household practice no longer guaranteed.²² Communal meals therefore functioned simultaneously as social events and informal heritage-education spaces.

The ritual and seasonal findings demonstrate that indigenous culinary practices in Mampong were organised by cultural and ecological time. The use of a special meal during a female rite of passage parallels Boakye's account of food in Krobo dipo initiation, although the rules of participation and the meal itself were culturally specific to Mampong.²³ Similarly, the seasonal consumption of snails, plantain and other crops corresponds with Tonui et al.'s finding that indigenous food consumption varies with production cycles.²⁴ However, in Mampong, seasonality was not only an issue of supply; it shaped the household menus and reinforced knowledge of the local environment.

Gendered and age-based dining arrangements were consistent with Miller's observation that Asante households could share meals while maintaining differentiated service.²⁵ The Mampong evidence shows that such arrangements communicated status, respect and age-specific entitlement. At the same time, these practices should not be interpreted as only fixed restrictions. They also organised distribution within large households and reflected culturally recognised responsibilities. This distinction is important to understand how culinary practices reproduce social order without reducing them to simple descriptions of who ate separately.

Food taboos similarly combined symbolic authority with practical regulation. The prohibition against talking while eating communicated a safety principle, whereas the warning directed at young men protected a soft meal valued by older people. This finding is in agreement with Owusu-Darko et al. and Demi, who show that West African food taboos can regulate health, access and social conduct.²⁶ The Mampong examples demonstrate that apparently supernatural sanctions may encode practical community priorities. Their cultural meaning should therefore be interpreted rather than dismissed, while recognising that claims about medical effects were participant beliefs and were not clinically tested in this study.

²² Chukwurah et al., "Cultural Influence of Local Food Heritage on Sustainable Development."

²³ P. A. Boakye, "Dipo: A Rite of Passage among the Krobo of the Eastern Region, Ghana" (University of Tromsø, 2010).

²⁴ Kenneth Kipngeno Tonui, Agatha Christine Onyango, and Collins Ouma, "Seasonality of Associations between Production of Indigenous Foods and Food Security Status of Mother-Child Dyads in Kisumu County, Kenya," *Bmc Nutrition* 10, no. 1 (2024): 8.

²⁵ Miller, "Foodways and Empire in 19th Century Asante Diplomatic Relations."

²⁶ Patricia G Owusu-Darko, Moses Kwaku Golly, and Eric Owusu-Mensah, "History of Eating Customs, Food Traditions, and Dietary Taboos across Western Africa: An Overview on Health Implications, Safety Measures, and Regulatory Frameworks," *Nutritional and Health Aspects of Food in Western Africa*, 2024, 9–30; Suleyman Mohammed Demi, *Assessing Indigenous Food Systems and Cultural Knowledges among Smallholder Farmers in Ghana: Towards Environmental Sustainability Education and Development* (University of Toronto (Canada), 2019).

Factors Contributing to the Decline of Indigenous Culinary Practices in Mampong

The participants identified four interconnected threats to continuity: limited awareness of the perceived health and medicinal value of indigenous meals, declining availability of some crops, modernisation and changing taste preferences, and reduced youth engagement in culinary learning.

Limited Awareness of Perceived Health and Medicinal Benefits

Older participants believed that younger people had limited knowledge of the nutritional, satiety and medicinal qualities traditionally associated with indigenous meals. The following quotations represent participant perceptions rather than laboratory or clinical measurements.

“In those days, the food was healthier. Indigenous meals could keep you satisfied for a long time, but my children do not know this (personal communication, elderly man, 2023).”

Another participant emphasised the perceived value of local herbs and fish:

“Indigenous meals were prepared with great care. Local herbs and fish such as mɔmɔne were nutritious and used as spices. People believed these foods helped them remain healthy and reduced the need to visit the hospital. Younger people do not know this (personal communication, elderly woman, 2023).”

A third participant linked dietary change to concerns about longevity:

“In recent times, people have moved away from indigenous foods, including green leafy foods. It is not only the foods that may disappear; our lifespans may also be shortened because of what we now eat (personal comm., elderly man, 2023).”

These perceptions indicate that the decline in indigenous meals is partly associated with a weakening of the explanatory knowledge that once connected food choices with well-being. When recipes are transmitted without their cultural and perceived health meanings, younger people may have fewer reasons to value their continued preparation.

Reduced Availability of Crops and Environmental Change

Participants reported that changing weather conditions, environmental degradation and altered farming practices had reduced the availability or quality of crops and wild foods required for indigenous meals. Scarcity made some recipes difficult to reproduce and encouraged dependence on commercially available substitutes. It also weakened the transmission of cultivation and harvesting knowledge associated with those ingredients.

“Some indigenous crops are difficult to cultivate because of climate change. Mushrooms, for example, are harder to obtain under the present hot conditions. The weather used to be cooler and produced larger mushrooms. Those available now are smaller, and the taste has also changed (personal comm., female farmer, 2023).”

“Environmental and global changes have affected the food we eat. In the past, people cultivated land without relying heavily on pesticides, and participants believed that the resulting meals were more nutritious (personal communication, elderly woman, 2023).”

Modernisation and Changing Taste Preferences

Modern cooking technologies, processed ingredients and commercially available foods have changed preparation practices and expectations of taste. Participants frequently contrasted the sensory qualities of traditionally prepared foods with mechanised or processed alternatives.

“A mortar and pestle were used to prepare foods such as fufuo, unlike the blending used today. Fufuo prepared with the mortar and pestle was considered healthier and tastier. Water from an ahina was also preferred to refrigerated water, and meals prepared on a bukya were considered tastier than meals cooked on a gas stove (personal comm., elderly woman, 2023).”

Younger consumers were described as favouring sweetness, convenience and foods influenced by commercial and global culinary trends.

“Sugar is now added to meals such as kɔkɔtɔ because people want a sweeter taste. In the past, the unripe plantain was not milled, but today some people mill it and add sugar. Foods such as mɔmɔne were valued as medicine, but many young people now complain that they smell unpleasant (personal comm., elderly man, 2023).”

The issue is therefore not simply that modern foods are replacing older dishes. Modern preferences are also transforming the ingredients and techniques used within indigenous meals. Such adaptation may support continued consumption, but it can also weaken the features that participants regard as evidence of authenticity.

Reduced Youth Engagement in Culinary Learning

Participants associated the decline of indigenous culinary practices with reduced youth involvement in household food preparation. They attributed this pattern to limited patience, competing activities, the time required for traditional preparation and the convenience of purchasing ready-made food.

Two participants explained:

“One major reason for the decline is that many young people are not patient enough to learn, or they are simply unwilling. A young person may remain in her room doing something else while her mother prepares the indigenous meals (personal communication, elderly man, 2023).”

“Many young people do not want to learn how to prepare these meals, even when older people are willing to teach them. Buying food from vendors appears easier; so they would rather purchase food than prepare indigenous meals at home (personal communication, elderly man, 2023).”

The consequence is a narrowing pool of people who have the practical knowledge required to prepare indigenous meals. Because much of this knowledge is embodied and learned through observation and repeated participation, written recipes alone cannot fully replace apprenticeship within households and communities.

Factors Threatening Continuity

The findings indicate that culinary decline results from the interaction of knowledge, ecology and everyday practice. The perceptions of the health value of indigenous foods among the participants are consistent with those of Atuna et al. and Demi, who document the nutritional contribution and perceived benefits of indigenous vegetables.²⁷ Nevertheless, the present study did not test the nutritional or medicinal claims made by participants. Its contribution lies in showing that these beliefs were part of the cultural reasoning through which older people encouraged the continuity of food. Environmental concerns were also consistent with studies linking climate change and land-use pressures to food production in Ghana.²⁸ In Mampong, these pressures affected not only production but also the feasibility of reproducing culturally specific recipes.

Modernisation generated a more complex pattern than straightforward cultural loss. Mechanised processing, purchased foods and modified tastes reduced the use of some inherited techniques, yet they

²⁷ Atuna et al., “Types of Indigenous Vegetables Consumed, Preparation, Preferences and Perceived Benefits in Ghana”; Demi, *Assessing Indigenous Food Systems and Cultural Knowledges among Smallholder Farmers in Ghana: Towards Environmental Sustainability Education and Development*.

²⁸ Anslem Bawayelaazaa Nyuor et al., “Economic Impacts of Climate Change on Cereal Production: Implications for Sustainable Agriculture in Northern Ghana,” *Sustainability* 8, no. 8 (2016): 724; Tetteh, Baidoo, and Takyi, “The Effects of Climate Change on Food Production in Ghana: Evidence from Maki (2012) Cointegration and Frequency Domain Causality Models”; Francis Z. Naab, Romanus D. Dinye, and R. Kasim Kasanga, “Urbanisation and Its Impact on Agricultural Lands in Growing Cities in Developing Countries: A Case Study of Tamale in Ghana,” *Modern Social Science Journal* 2, no. 2 (2013): 256–87; George Afrane and Augustine Ntiemoah, “Use of Pesticides in the Cocoa Industry and Their Impact on the Environment and the Food Chain,” *Pesticides in the Modern World-Risks and Benefits. InTech*, 2011, 51–68.

also responded to genuine constraints of time, labour and availability. This explains why preservation efforts based only on urging young people to return to older practices may be ineffective. Atuna et al. similarly report higher consumption of indigenous foods among older than younger generations.²⁹ The Mampong findings add that the gap is sustained by changes in learning environments: When young people no longer participate in preparation, they lose the sensory and practical knowledge through which recipes are mastered.

Accordingly, effective preservation must balance cultural integrity with contemporary feasibility. The central challenge is to identify which elements are essential to the identity of a meal, such as core ingredients, preparation sequences, artefacts or ritual meanings, and which elements can be adapted without erasing that identity. This interpretation moves the discussion beyond a simple opposition between tradition and modernity and provides a practical framework for community-led safeguarding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, preservation initiatives should combine documentation, education, agricultural support, cultural promotion and community-led adaptation.

- The Mampong Traditional Council, working with the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, should establish a community-owned digital culinary archive. The archive should document local names, ingredients, preparation stages, utensils, songs, narratives and occasions of consumption through photographs, audio recordings and short videos. Knowledge holders should must agree on access, consent and cultural ownership protocols before materials are published.
- The Ministry of Education, local schools and vocational institutions should integrate indigenous culinary knowledge into relevant subjects and practical training. School-based demonstrations, intergenerational cooking sessions and youth apprenticeship programmes should involve queen mothers, elders, food producers and experienced cooks so learners acquire practical skills rather than relying only on written recipes.
- Community-based culinary festivals and heritage exhibitions should be organised to promote indigenous meals, artefacts and preparation techniques. Collaboration with tourism authorities and local hospitality businesses could create responsible culinary-tourism opportunities, provided that commercial presentation does not misrepresent sacred practices or remove cultural and economic benefits from the community.
- The Ministry of Food and Agriculture and local agricultural extension services should support the cultivation and conservation of plant varieties and other ingredients used in indigenous meals. Climate-resilient production, community seed banks, home gardens and farmer training would help reduce the ingredient scarcity identified by participants.
- Universities, museums and traditional authorities should collaborate on further research and documentation. Priority should be given to recipes, artefacts and ritual knowledge held by only a small number of elders, while research outputs should be returned to the community in accessible formats and should acknowledge the intellectual contributions of local knowledge holders.
- Food producers should be supported to develop hygienic and time-saving adaptations that retain the defining ingredients, preparation stages and cultural meanings of indigenous meals. Community-led standards could distinguish acceptable adaptation from changes that substantially alter authenticity. Periodic assessment should determine whether youth participation, ingredient availability and household preparation are improving.

CONCLUSION

This study documented indigenous meals, preparation techniques, culinary artefacts and cultural meanings in Asante Mampong through interviews and participatory observation. The findings showed that indigenous culinary practices in Mampong include diverse full-course and stand-alone meals whose

²⁹ Atuna et al., “Types of Indigenous Vegetables Consumed, Preparation, Preferences and Perceived Benefits in Ghana.”

authenticity is associated with locally recognised ingredients, inherited techniques and traditional utensils. These practices also organise communal solidarity, rites of passage, seasonal consumption, gender and age relations, and food-related taboos. Their continuity is threatened by environmental change, altered tastes, processed and convenient food options, and weakened youth participation in culinary learning. The study contributes a micro-cultural ethnographic record that extends broader accounts of Ghanaian and Asante culinary heritage by connecting recipes with material culture, ecology and social institutions. Sustainable preservation will therefore require coordinated documentation, education, agricultural support and community-led adaptation that protects cultural meaning while responding to contemporary realities.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Jemima Tuaah Boafo is the District Director of the Centre for National Culture at Asante Mampong in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. She is a PhD candidate in African Art and Culture researching culinary practices in Ghana in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana. She is an expert in food culture, art and science.

Dickson Adom (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer and a multidisciplinary Researcher in the Department of Educational Innovations in Science and Technology, Faculty of Educational Studies at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana. His research is a nexus between indigenous knowledge, Art, nature conservation, digital solutions, and education. He is a visiting scholar at the Pangasinan State University, Philippines, and a Research Fellow at the INTI

International University, Malaysia. He serves as a research consultant to the National Research Foundation in South Africa and an Advisor on research grant applications to the Gower Street, U.K. Dickson is an Editor for Elsevier's Scientific African Journal, Springer Nature's Discover Education Journal, Springer Nature's Humanities and Social Sciences Communications Journal, Frontiers in Human Dynamics journal and many others. He serves as a Guest Editor and reviewer for several journals, including PLoS ONE, African Identities, Oxford Intersections and many others. He is the founding Editor-in-Chief of the Research Journal in Advanced Humanities, helping the journal to be indexed in the Scopus database after one year of establishment. He was awarded Top Reviewer in the Cross-Disciplinary field by Publons in 2018. He has reviewed and edited over 600 journal articles to date. He has wide experience in editorial workflows 3 and 4 for journal publishing, with certifications from Simon Fraser University, Canada. Dickson has over 100 publications, including books, book chapters, peer-reviewed journal articles, and conference papers, with over 5,600 citations on Google Scholar, an h-index of 27 and an i10-index of 61. Dickson sits on several editorial boards and serves in various capacities for national and international conferences.

Prosper Setsoafia is an enthusiastic PhD student in art education, passionate about inspiring students' creativity and teaching. His academic training has given him strong skills in student engagement, educational research, and curriculum development. He has a reputation for having outstanding interpersonal, communication, and teaching skills. He also knows how to design inclusive, motivating learning environments. He thrives in dynamic, student-centred environments and is excited to use his training and experience to promote innovation and deliver outstanding art education.