

The Gastronomy of the Department of Bolivar as Intangible Cultural Heritage: Ancestry, Preservation, and Tradition Bearers in Cartagena

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the academic literature has conceptualized the gastronomy of the Department of Bolivar in Cartagena as a form of intangible cultural heritage, with particular attention to ancestry, cultural preservation, and the role of tradition bearers in the transmission of culinary knowledge. The study was developed as an integrative literature review with a critical analytical orientation, bringing together conceptual, empirical, institutional, and comparative scholarship on food heritage, safeguarding, memory, territorial identity, and patrimonialization. The findings indicate that gastronomy is increasingly framed as a multidimensional heritage domain in which food memory, ancestry, rituality, and territorial belonging converge. The review also highlights the importance of tradition bearers, especially traditional female cooks and other living custodians of culinary knowledge. A central conclusion is that, although the conceptual literature on food heritage is robust, scholarship specifically focused on Cartagena and Bolívar as culinary heritage sites remains fragmented. The article argues that the gastronomy of the Department of Bolivar should be understood as a territorially grounded and historically layered form of intangible cultural heritage whose continuity depends on living tradition bearers, but whose scholarly visibility remains uneven.

Keywords: The gastronomy of the Department of Bolivar; intangible cultural heritage; tradition bearers; ancestry; safeguarding; Cartagena

INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy is increasingly understood as more than the preparation and consumption of food. Across heritage, food, and cultural studies, it has become a privileged site for examining the intersections of memory, identity, social practice, and territorial belonging (Almansouri et al., 2021; Dembedza et al., 2022; Richards, 2021). Food-related practices encode ways of knowing, sensory repertoires, ritual sequences, and historically sedimented relations to place. From this perspective, gastronomy is not merely a culinary domain, but a cultural field through which communities reproduce continuity, negotiate difference, and sustain collective meaning over time (Zocchi et al., 2021).

This broader understanding is especially relevant in contexts where culinary practices are deeply intertwined with historical layering, social diversity, and struggles over recognition. In such settings, gastronomy offers an important lens for the study of intangible cultural heritage, since it links embodied knowledge to intergenerational transmission, local

memory, and the ongoing enactment of cultural life (Dembedza et al., 2022; Zocchi et al., 2021). Food heritage, in this sense, does not reside only in emblematic dishes or codified traditions, but also in the labor of those who prepare food, in the spaces where culinary knowledge circulates, and in the territorial and affective worlds that render food culturally meaningful (Almansouri et al., 2021; Matta, 2019).

These issues are particularly significant in Cartagena and Bolívar, where food traditions emerge at the intersection of African, Indigenous, and European inheritances, Caribbean historical formations, urban and regional dynamics, and contemporary pressures related to tourism and heritage visibility. Yet despite the cultural richness of this terrain, the academic treatment of gastronomy in Cartagena and Bolívar remains comparatively fragmented. While Cartagena has been widely discussed as a heritage city and as a symbolic center of tourism, urban memory, and Afro-Caribbean cultural politics, its gastronomy has not been examined with equivalent analytical density as a heritage domain in its own right (Alzate, 2019; Saba et al., 2023). This imbalance raises a central question: how has the literature conceptualized gastronomy in relation to ancestry, preservation, and living bearers of tradition in a territory where heritage is otherwise central?

This article addresses that question by reviewing the academic literature on the gastronomy of the Department of Bolívar in Cartagena through the lens of intangible cultural heritage. More specifically, it examines how scholarship has approached the relationship between gastronomy, memory, ancestry, safeguarding, and the role of tradition bearers in the transmission of culinary knowledge. Rather than producing primary ethnographic evidence, the article critically synthesizes existing conceptual, empirical, institutional, and comparative scholarship in order to identify dominant approaches, recurring tensions, and unresolved gaps.

The review proceeds from the understanding that gastronomy should not be reduced to recipes or touristic consumption. Instead, it is treated as a living cultural system sustained through embodied practice, territorial identity, and historically layered forms of continuity (Dembedza et al., 2022; Richards, 2021). Within this framework, tradition bearers, including traditional female cooks, market-based knowledge holders, and other living custodians of food practices, occupy a central position. Their labor not only preserves culinary forms but also sustains the social reproduction of heritage itself (Beltrán and Mora, 2022; Gallego et al., 2024; Matta, 2021). At the same time, heritage recognition is uneven, and processes of safeguarding and patrimonialization may simultaneously enable visibility and generate exclusion, simplification, or bureaucratic mediation (Eichler, 2020; Zocchi et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop, the article advances the following argument: The gastronomy of the Department of Bolívar in Cartagena can be understood as a form of intangible cultural heritage sustained through food memory, ancestry, territorial belonging, and living tradition bearers; however, the literature remains fragmented in its treatment of Cartagena and Bolívar as specific culinary heritage sites, revealing the need for more territorially grounded and analytically situated scholarship. By organizing and interpreting a dispersed body of literature, the article contributes not only to food heritage studies, but also to broader debates on safeguarding, recognition, cultural continuity, and the politics of heritage visibility in the Colombian Caribbean.

METHOD

This study was designed as an integrative literature review with a critical analytical orientation. Rather than generating primary data through interviews, participant observation, or ethnographic documentation, it examines and synthesizes existing

scholarship in order to identify how the gastronomy of the Department of Bolívar in Cartagena has been framed in relation to intangible cultural heritage, ancestry, safeguarding, and the role of tradition bearers. This methodological shift reflects the transformation of the original project from a fieldwork-based qualitative design centered on documentation and participation to a review article focused on the critical organization of published knowledge.

The review was guided by the following question: How has the academic literature conceptualized the gastronomy of the Department of Bolívar in Cartagena as a form of intangible cultural heritage, particularly in relation to ancestry, cultural preservation, and the role of tradition bearers in the transmission and safeguarding of culinary knowledge? From this question, the review pursued four analytical aims: to identify the main conceptual approaches used to study gastronomy as cultural heritage; to analyze how tradition bearers are represented within processes of culinary transmission; to examine how scholarship links gastronomy to territorial identity and historical layering in Cartagena and the wider Colombian Caribbean; and to identify debates related to preservation, patrimonialization, tourism, and contemporary transformation.

The search strategy combined broad conceptual retrieval with targeted territorial and policy-oriented searches. At the conceptual level, the review prioritized literature on intangible cultural heritage, culinary heritage, heritage food, food memory, ancestry, intergenerational transmission, safeguarding, patrimonialization, gastronomic territories, and the commodification of food traditions (Almansouri et al., 2021; Dembedza et al., 2022; Macêdo et al., 2025; Zocchi et al., 2021). At the territorial and contextual level, the search focused on Cartagena, Bolívar, the Colombian Caribbean, Afro-Colombian and Afro-Caribbean food practices, traditional female cooks, market cooks, *cocineras tradicionales*, and Colombian cultural policy related to traditional cuisines (Beltrán and Mora, 2022; Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia, 2012; Saba et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2020). Keywords were used in both English and Spanish in order to capture the uneven linguistic distribution of scholarship on heritage, gastronomy, and Colombian regional studies.

The corpus was built progressively. First, the bibliography included in the original project functioned as a seed bibliography, helping define the thematic boundaries of the review and its initial conceptual language. Second, additional academic sources were incorporated through iterative searches designed to strengthen five areas: gastronomy as intangible cultural heritage; food memory and ancestry; tradition bearers and traditional female cooks; safeguarding and cultural policy in Colombia; and Cartagena/Bolívar as a territorially grounded but underrepresented heritage context. Because the available literature on Cartagena and Bolívar is more limited than the broader scholarship on food heritage, the review also included comparative studies from Colombia, Latin America, and other heritage-food contexts when they offered strong analytical relevance (Matta, 2019; Wijaya, 2019; Wondirad et al., 2021).

Inclusion criteria prioritized peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly chapters, institutional policy documents, and academically robust comparative studies that addressed at least one of the following dimensions: gastronomy as heritage, culinary memory, ancestral knowledge, tradition bearers, safeguarding, patrimonialization, territorial identity, or the relationship between food traditions and tourism. Comparative literature was retained when it provided conceptual tools that could illuminate the Cartagena/Bolívar case without displacing it. By contrast, sources were excluded or deprioritized when they were purely promotional, narrowly focused on tourism marketing, limited to visitor satisfaction without heritage analysis, or only weakly connected to the article's core concerns.

After selection, the literature was analyzed through a thematic coding and synthesis process. Sources were grouped into recurring analytical clusters: gastronomy as intangible

cultural heritage; food memory, ancestry, and cultural continuity; tradition bearers and intergenerational transmission; safeguarding and patrimonialization; territorial identity and the Colombian Caribbean; and tourism, commodification, and the transformation of food heritage. This procedure allowed the review to move beyond descriptive accumulation toward a critical reading of convergences, tensions, and absences in the literature. This procedure allowed the review to move beyond descriptive accumulation toward a critical reading of convergences, tensions, and absences in the literature. The final review corpus is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Studies Included in the Review Corpus

N o.	Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	DOI	Main analytical use in the manuscript
1	Almanso uri, Mohammed, et al.	2021	Exploration of Heritage Food Concept	<i>Trends in Food Science and Technology</i>	10.1016/j.tifs.2021.01.013	Defines heritage food; links food, people, and place
2	Alzate, J.	2019	Champeta's Heritage: Diasporic Music and Racial Struggle in the Colombian Caribbean	<i>Transposition</i>	10.4000/transposition.3254	Frames Afro-Caribbean heritage politics in Cartagena
3	Beltrán Rueda, Karen, and Jorge Mora Forero	2022	Análisis de las cocineras tradicionales en las plazas de mercado de afluencia turística en Bogotá	<i>Sosquua</i>	10.52948/sosquua.v4i2.784	Supports tradition bearers, gender, and market cooks
4	Dembedza, V., et al.	2022	Impact of Climate Change-Induced Natural Disasters on Intangible Cultural Heritage Related to Food: A Review	<i>Journal of Ethnic Foods</i>	10.1186/s42779-022-00147-2	Frames gastronomy as food-related intangible cultural heritage
5	Eichler, J.	2020	Intangible Cultural Heritage, Inequalities and Participation: Who Decides on Heritage?	<i>The International Journal of Human Rights</i>	10.1080/13642987.2020.1822821	Supports heritage governance, participation, and exclusion
6	Gallego, E., et al.	2024	Identity and Culture Based on the Traditional Cuisine of Bello City, Antioquia, Colombia	<i>Food Ethics</i>	10.1007/s41055-024-00152-y	Colombian comparative case on identity and tradition bearers

7	Huete-Alcocer, N., and R. Hernández-Rojas	2022	Does Local Cuisine Influence the Image of a World Heritage Destination and Subsequent Loyalty to That Destination?	<i>International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science</i>	10.1016/j.ijgfs.2022.100470	Supports tourism and destination-image discussion
8	Macêdo, A., et al.	2022	Gastronomic Territories: Critical Review of the Literature	<i>Studies in Social Sciences Review</i>	10.54018/ssrv6n1-008	Supports territorial identity and gastronomic landscapes
9	Matta, Raúl	2022	Documenting the UNESCO Feast: Stories of Women's 'Empowerment' and Programmatic Cooking	<i>Social Anthropology</i>	10.1111/1469-8676.12990	Supports safeguarding, bureaucracy, and women tradition bearers
10	Matta, Raúl	2019	Mexico's Ethnic Culinary Heritage and Cocineras Tradicionales (Traditional Female Cooks)	<i>Food and Foodways</i>	10.1080/07409710.2019.1646481	Core source for traditional female cooks and living heritage
11	Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia	2012	<i>Política para el conocimiento, salvaguardia y fomento de la alimentación y las cocinas tradicionales de Colombia</i>	Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia	—	Institutional framework for safeguarding traditional cuisines
12	Mora, D., et al.	2022	Gastronomic Experiences as a Key Element in the Development of a Tourist Destination	<i>International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science</i>	10.1016/j.ijgfs.2021.100405	Supports tourism and gastronomic experience arguments
13	Moreno-López, N., et al.	2022	Exploring Traditional Colombian Foods and Customs: A Contemporary Perspective on Ancestral Products	<i>TransAmerica Review</i>	10.62910/3ny6qm58	Supports ancestry, memory, and intergenerational continuity
14	Osorio, D. G.	2020	Traditional Colombian Cuisines: Objects and Ritual	<i>Projetica</i>	10.5433/2236-2207.2020v11n3esp.p166	Supports rituality and Colombian traditional cuisine framework

15	Richards, Greg	2018	Cultural Tourism: A Review of Recent Research and Trends	<i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i>	10.1016/j.jh tm.2018.03.005	Supports cultural tourism and heritage visibility
16	Richards, Greg	2021	Evolving Research Perspectives on Food and Gastronomic Experiences in Tourism	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	10.1108/IJC HM-10-2020-1217	Supports foodscapes, tourism, and gastronomic experience
17	Saba, Manuel, Gabriel Elías Chanchí Golondrino, and Leydy Karina Torres-Gil	2023	A Critical Assessment of the Current State and Governance of the UNESCO Cultural Heritage Site in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia	<i>Heritage</i>	10.3390/heritage6070287	Anchors Cartagena as a heritage-governance context
18	Salge, M.	2024	Debates and Reflections from the Cultural Heritage Perspective on the “Plan Especial de Salvaguardia: Saberes y Tradiciones Asociados a la Manifestación del Viche/Biche del Pacífico Colombiano”	<i>Naturaleza y Sociedad. Desafíos Medioambientales</i>	10.53010/zbfy4689	Supports safeguarding policy and patrimonialization debates
19	Turner, K., et al.	2020	Food Sovereignty, Gender and Everyday Practice: The Role of Afro-Colombian Women in Sustaining Localised Food Systems	<i>The Journal of Peasant Studies</i>	10.1080/03066150.2020.1786812	Supports Afro-Colombian women, food systems, and memory

20	Wijaya, S.	2019	Indonesian Food Culture Mapping: A Starter Contribution to Promote Indonesian Culinary Tourism	<i>Journal of Ethnic Foods</i>	10.1186/s42779-019-0009-3	Comparative support for food culture, identity, and transmission
21	Wondird, A., et al.	2021	Culinary Tourism as a Driver of Regional Economic Development and Socio-Cultural Revitalization: Evidence from Amhara National Regional State, Ethiopia	<i>Journal of Destination Marketing and Management</i>	10.1016/j.jdmm.2020.10.0482	Supports tourism, revitalization, and transformation of heritage
22	Zocchi, D. M., et al.	2021	Recognising, Safeguarding, and Promoting Food Heritage: Challenges and Prospects for the Future of Sustainable Food Systems	<i>Sustainability</i>	10.3390/su13179510	Core source for patrimonialization and safeguarding

As shown in Table 1, the corpus combines conceptual, comparative, Colombian, Caribbean, and policy-oriented sources, allowing both analytical breadth and territorial anchoring.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Gastronomy as Intangible Cultural Heritage

In this review, gastronomy is not treated as a mere assemblage of dishes, ingredients, or culinary techniques. Instead, it is approached as a socially embedded cultural system in which preparation, consumption, memory, rituality, and transmission converge (Almansouri et al., 2021; Dembedza et al., 2022). This perspective aligns with scholarship that understands food-related practices as part of intangible cultural heritage: living expressions sustained through everyday practice, collective recognition, and intergenerational continuity (Zocchi et al., 2021). Within this framework, gastronomy encompasses not only what is eaten, but also how food is prepared, who prepares it, where it is shared, what meanings are attached to it, and how it mediates relationships among people, territories, and histories.

Food Memory, Ancestry, and Cultural Continuity

A central premise of this article is that food practices function as repositories of memory and ancestry. Food memory refers not only to recollection in a narrow cognitive sense, but also to embodied and affective forms of continuity carried through tastes, smells, textures, gestures, festive practices, family routines, and shared modes of preparation and

consumption (Dembedza et al., 2022; Moreno-López et al., 2024). Culinary knowledge often survives less through formal codification than through repetition, apprenticeship, and participation in domestic, communal, and market-based spaces. Ancestry, in turn, is treated not as a static inheritance, but as a historically layered and socially enacted relation to the past, particularly in the Colombian Caribbean, where food traditions are inseparable from questions of racialization, belonging, and cultural reproduction (Turner et al., 2020).

Tradition Bearers as Living Heritage Actors

The concept of tradition bearers is central to the article. Tradition bearers are understood not simply as individuals who preserve recipes, but as living cultural actors who sustain, adapt, interpret, and transmit heritage through practice (Matta, 2019; Matta, 2021). In food-related heritage, these actors may include traditional female cooks, market vendors, family knowledge keepers, community cooks, and others whose labor anchors the continuity of culinary systems (Beltrán and Mora, 2022; Gallego et al., 2024). Their role is not merely technical, but also social, pedagogical, and symbolic.

Safeguarding, Patrimonialization, and the Politics of Recognition

The notion of safeguarding is indispensable to the study of gastronomy as heritage, but it cannot be treated uncritically. Safeguarding refers to the actions through which cultural practices are recognized, documented, promoted, transmitted, and sustained, yet the literature shows that it is never neutral (Eichler, 2020; Salge, 2024; Zocchi et al., 2021). It is intertwined with patrimonialization, the process through which certain practices are selected and elevated as heritage. These processes necessarily involve questions of authority, representation, and exclusion. In the Colombian case, this issue is especially salient given the existence of a national policy framework for traditional cuisines (Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia, 2012).

Territorial Identity and Gastronomic Landscapes

Gastronomy is also approached here as a marker of territorial identity. Food practices are anchored in places, ecologies, trade routes, local histories, urban markets, neighborhood networks, and symbolic geographies (Macêdo et al., 2025; Richards, 2021). The concept of gastronomic territory emphasizes that culinary heritage emerges from the interaction between food, place, memory, and social actors. In this sense, Cartagena and Bolívar are not incidental settings, but constitutive of the meanings attached to the gastronomy of the Department of Bolívar.

Tourism, Commodification, and the Transformation of Food Heritage

A final concept structuring this review is the tension between heritage preservation and transformation under tourism and market conditions. The literature consistently shows that tourism may function both as a mechanism of visibility and as a force of simplification (Richards, 2018; Richards, 2021; Wondirad et al., 2021). Culinary practices can be revitalized through tourism, but they can also be reformulated according to consumer expectations, branding logics, and marketable notions of authenticity. This ambivalence is particularly relevant in Cartagena, where heritage is deeply intertwined with tourism and public representation.

FINDINGS

The reviewed literature reveals a clear shift from understanding gastronomy as a matter of recipes, ingredients, or consumption patterns to framing it as a complex heritage system composed of practices, meanings, memories, territorial relations, and living actors (Almansouri et al., 2021; Dembedza et al., 2022; Zocchi et al., 2021). Across the corpus, gastronomy emerges not simply as a culinary repertoire, but as a socially embedded form of knowledge through which communities reproduce belonging, negotiate historical

continuity, and make cultural difference legible. At the same time, the literature is uneven. While conceptual and comparative scholarship provides robust tools for analyzing gastronomy as intangible cultural heritage, the treatment of Cartagena and Bolívar as specific culinary heritage sites remains fragmented.

From Cuisine to Intangible Cultural Heritage

A first major pattern in the literature is the conceptual expansion of gastronomy beyond food preparation. The strongest theoretical works insist that food-related practices must be understood as part of intangible cultural heritage, not merely because they involve inherited techniques, but because they embed social relations, ritual sequences, ecological adaptation, and collective memory (Dembedza et al., 2022; Zocchi et al., 2021). Gastronomy thus appears as a multidimensional cultural domain that includes production, preparation, commensality, symbolic value, and territorial inscription.

Food Memory, Ancestry, and Cultural Continuity

A second cluster of studies shows that food functions as a vehicle of memory and ancestry. Culinary continuity is not primarily explained through written transmission or formal preservation mechanisms, but through everyday repetition, family-based teaching, communal participation, and embodied habit (Moreno-López et al., 2024; Turner et al., 2020; Wijaya, 2019). The literature also suggests that ancestry should not be treated as a fixed origin or essential identity marker. Rather, ancestral food knowledge appears as historically layered, adaptive, and socially mediated, especially in Latin American and Afro-descendant contexts (Matta, 2019).

Tradition Bearers, Traditional Female Cooks, and Intergenerational Transmission

A third major finding concerns the centrality of tradition bearers in the continuity of culinary heritage. Food heritage is sustained not by abstract cultural values alone, but by individuals and communities who embody, interpret, and transmit knowledge through practice (Beltrán and Mora, 2022; Gallego et al., 2024; Matta, 2021). Tradition bearers do not only pass on recipes; they transmit repertoires of taste, standards of quality, ritual knowledge, and territorial meanings. The literature also makes clear that this process is deeply gendered, with women occupying a central role in the preservation and transmission of food knowledge (Beltrán and Mora, 2022; Matta, 2019; Turner et al., 2020).

Safeguarding, Patrimonialization, and Public Policy in Colombia

A fourth pattern concerns the relationship between safeguarding, patrimonialization, and institutional recognition. The literature shows that the safeguarding of food heritage cannot be understood solely as preservation in a neutral sense. Rather, it involves processes through which specific practices are identified, documented, classified, promoted, and legitimized (Eichler, 2020; Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia, 2012; Salge, 2024). In the Colombian case, the national policy framework on traditional cuisines is repeatedly referenced as a key point of departure for recognizing food practices as part of the country's intangible cultural heritage (Gallego et al., 2024; Osorio, 2020).

Cartagena and the Colombian Caribbean: Heritage Visibility, Cultural Politics, and Analytical Gaps

A fifth major finding concerns the status of Cartagena and the Colombian Caribbean within the literature. Cartagena clearly appears as a culturally dense and symbolically powerful heritage site. Scholarship on heritage governance, Afro-Caribbean cultural politics, and recognition struggles confirms that the city is a key locus for debates about memory, race, tourism, patrimonialization, and urban representation (Alzate, 2019; Saba et al., 2023). Yet scholarship specifically focused on Cartagena's gastronomy or Bolivarian culinary heritage remains far less consolidated. The Colombian Caribbean offers an

important intermediate scale, since regional studies on food heritage and intangible heritage governance provide useful bridges for interpreting Cartagena and Bolívar (Eichler, 2020).

Tourism, Commodification, and the Transformation of Food Heritage

A final thematic cluster addresses the relationship between tourism, commodification, and the transformation of traditional food practices. Tourism can provide visibility, economic viability, and symbolic recognition for local cuisines, but it may also simplify and aestheticize food traditions in ways that privilege marketable authenticity over historical complexity (Huate-Alcocer and Hernández-Rojas, 2022; Mora et al., 2021; Richards, 2018; Wondirad et al., 2021). The literature therefore suggests that gastronomic heritage should be read as a field of negotiation rather than as a fixed inheritance.

DISCUSSION

The literature reviewed in this article supports a broad but important conclusion: The gastronomy of the Department of Bolívar in Cartagena can be understood as a form of intangible cultural heritage sustained through memory, ancestry, territorial belonging, and the labor of living tradition bearers, yet its scholarly treatment remains fragmented when compared with the cultural significance of the territory itself. This conclusion emerges not from a single body of localized research, but from the convergence of conceptual, comparative, Colombian, and Caribbean-oriented scholarship that together makes the case for reading gastronomy as a heritage system rather than as a merely culinary domain.

A first major implication of the review is that gastronomy must be interpreted as a living heritage system (Almansouri et al., 2021; Dembedza et al., 2022; Zocchi et al., 2021). A second contribution lies in clarifying the analytical importance of tradition bearers, especially traditional female cooks, whose labor is constitutive of heritage itself rather than peripheral to it (Beltrán and Mora, 2022; Gallego et al., 2024; Matta, 2019). The review also shows that ancestry and food memory are central to understanding culinary continuity, but they should be read as dynamic and historically layered rather than essentialized survivals from the past (Turner et al., 2020).

A further key insight concerns the relationship between safeguarding and patrimonialization. Safeguarding is not simply a technical process of preservation, but a political process of recognition shaped by institutions, policy frameworks, and competing representations of what counts as heritage (Eichler, 2020; Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia, 2012; Zocchi et al., 2021). In this respect, Cartagena presents a particularly revealing case. The city is clearly present in scholarship as a heritage city, yet gastronomy remains comparatively underdeveloped as an autonomous field of analysis (Alzate, 2019; Saba et al., 2023). This asymmetry is analytically significant because it indicates not the absence of heritage in Cartagena, but the uneven visibility of different heritage forms within academic and institutional discourse.

The review also underscores the importance of territorial identity. Scholarship on gastronomic territories, foodscapes, and regional heritage shows that food practices are inseparable from place, not only in terms of ingredients or culinary branding, but in the deeper sense that gastronomy encodes relations to environment, neighborhood, market circuits, migration histories, and symbolic geographies (Macêdo et al., 2025; Richards, 2021). This territorial perspective is especially relevant for Bolívar and the Colombian Caribbean, where culinary identity is shaped by coastal and inland exchanges, Afro-descendant histories, local economies, and urban-rural continuities.

At the same time, the review confirms that food heritage in Cartagena cannot be analyzed apart from tourism and commodification. Tourism may support recognition and revitalization, but it may also simplify or aestheticize local cuisines according to market

expectations (Richards, 2018; Wondirad et al., 2021). In a city like Cartagena, where heritage and tourism are deeply intertwined, gastronomy occupies an unstable position between cultural continuity and market adaptation. The key question is therefore not whether transformation occurs, but how it occurs, under whose terms, and with what effects on the people and practices that sustain heritage from within.

Taken together, these findings allow the article to formulate its central analytical proposition: The gastronomy of the Department of Bolívar in Cartagena should be understood as a territorially grounded and historically layered form of intangible cultural heritage whose continuity depends on living bearers of tradition, yet whose scholarly and institutional visibility remains uneven within broader regimes of patrimonial recognition. This proposition links memory, ancestry, gendered labor, safeguarding, territorial identity, and tourism into a common analytical field. It also clarifies the article's contribution: not the production of primary ethnographic evidence, but the critical organization of a fragmented field in order to show both what is already conceptually available and what remains insufficiently developed.

Finally, the review points to a clear agenda for future research. More territorially specific studies are needed on Cartagena and Bolívar, particularly on traditional female cooks, market-based culinary knowledge, Afro-Cartagenian food memory, neighborhood and community food practices, and the role of institutions in shaping the visibility of gastronomy. Such work would not only enrich the study of Colombian food heritage, but also help correct the current imbalance whereby Cartagena is extensively theorized as a heritage city while its gastronomy remains comparatively underexamined as a heritage domain in its own right.

CONCLUSION

This article has reviewed the literature on

the gastronomy of the Department of Bolívar in Cartagena in order to examine how it has been conceptualized in relation to intangible cultural heritage, ancestry, preservation, and the role of tradition bearers. The review shows that the available scholarship provides a robust conceptual basis for understanding gastronomy as a living cultural domain shaped by memory, embodiment, territorial identity, and intergenerational transmission. Across heritage, food, and cultural studies, gastronomy emerges as far more than a collection of recipes or a touristic attraction: it appears as a socially embedded system through which communities sustain continuity, encode historical experience, and negotiate cultural recognition.

A central conclusion of the article is that tradition bearers are indispensable to the continuity of food heritage. The literature consistently demonstrates that culinary memory is preserved not by abstract discourse alone, but through the labor of living actors who prepare, teach, adapt, and transmit food practices in everyday life (Beltrán and Mora, 2022; Gallego et al., 2024; Matta, 2021). At the same time, the review makes clear that safeguarding and patrimonialization are not neutral processes. Heritage recognition can support visibility and transmission, but it may also filter, simplify, or bureaucratize living practices (Eichler, 2020; Zocchi et al., 2021).

One of the article's most significant findings is the persistence of an analytical imbalance: while Cartagena is widely recognized as a heritage city, its gastronomy remains comparatively underdeveloped as a specific object of scholarly inquiry (Alzate, 2019; Saba et al., 2023). For that reason, the article argues that the gastronomy of the Department of Bolívar should be treated as a central component of Cartagena's and Bolívar's intangible

cultural heritage, not as a secondary or merely illustrative element of a broader patrimonial landscape.

Further scholarship is needed on traditional female cooks, market-based culinary knowledge, Afro-Cartagenian food memory, neighborhood and community food practices, and the institutional conditions under which culinary heritage becomes visible or remains marginalized in Cartagena and Bolívar. By synthesizing the literature currently available, this article seeks to provide a foundation for that task.

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