

Food and locality

Heritagization and commercial use of the past

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Geographical roots of food?

Identifying a food culture with a locality has always involved a trade-off between searching for roots and recognizing they are not planted in any one spot but entail exchanges and borrowings from remote origins. But even this tension between the local and the supralocal is a simplification: it rests on the assumption that food cultures can be identified by place alone. Actually, highly different food regimes may be at work in one and the same place, and have been so in the past. Class stratification may afford a first prism dividing up food culture domains, but it then interweaves with gender, religious observance, ethnic belonging and so on.

Does this mean that any attempt to find a relationship between food and place is a waste of effort? No, indeed: such a relationship can definitely be established. But one does need a critical analysis of the various factors bearing on the link between food and place, since they are cultural and historical constructs rather than causal connections between milieus in nature/history and food cultures.

A cuisine rich in victuals of different kinds, prepared from a wide range of ingredients at times exotic in provenance, was typical of the food culture found in the courts of Europe from the late Middle Ages to the early modern era; the diet of the people was more closely locally connected, perforce. For most of the population poverty dictated the choice of diet.

A plentiful cosmopolitan cuisine reigned at court (Montanari 2014); it was garnished with rare and exotic ingredients indicating wealth, though also a background of culture deriving from greater familiarity with distant lands. The omnivorous court bracketed produce and specialities from the most disparate places under one gastronomic pantheon. The provenance factor did not point to a single relationship between the food and a specific place, but created a variegated exotic aura around a rich culinary spread.

The first question is therefore when an exclusive relationship began between food and geographical provenance. This is far from simple, for that connection has taken on quite different meanings in the variety of historical contexts.

In the 15th century *Libro de arte coquinaria*, thought to be one of the texts ushering in the Renaissance diet, Maestro Martino rarely identifies foods by their place of origin (Martino 2001). There are cases where he does, of course: we find *mirrause catalano*, a “half roast” already cited in one of Europe’s oldest recipe books, the *Libre de totes maneres de potatges de menjar*, an anonymous manuscript from 1324 which Maestro Martino may have come across during his stay at Naples. There is also talk of *coppiette al modo romano*, *macaroni romaneschi*, *cavoli alla romanesca*, *macaroni siciliani*, bolognese pie, ova fricellate a la fiorentina, starne al modo catalano and minestre alla catalana. Yet many of these names do not trace back to a consolidated local style of preparation: they were quite accidentally linked to how Martino came across them. They did not form a consistent gastronomic geography linking raw materials, customs and recipes to any specific place.

In later centuries place names defining foods became more common. In France, which made an early start with political centralization and territorial integration, a series of mid-17th-century treatises and recipe books – with François Pierre de la Varenne’s 1651 *Le cuisinier françois* to the fore – began to call a national style of cooking “French” (de la Varenne 2001). This mode of definition by nation came to prevail in the 19th century, conferring an inward-looking and an outward-looking dimension on geography. Inwards, the national frame led to “regional cuisines” emerging as a factor of abundance, or one looked outward to compare with or distinguish from other national cuisines.

De la Varenne’s book makes extremely rare reference to local recipes. French cuisine means that of Paris; the capital is not just the symbol of French unity, but also the only place where resources from all over France were available, with the court based there, the city consumers prosperous and the whole French transport system radiating from the capital (Abad 2002).

One century later more and more references emerged to the lands contributing to the abundance and prestige of the national cuisine. Dishes began to be cooked in Provençal, Flemish or Burgundian style if French; Milanese, Genoese and Neapolitan style if Italian. Such dishes refer to specific ingredients and styles of preparation, but do not yet amount to a consistent picture of regional cuisines (Csergo 2007).

The first great fascinating tour of French gastronomic areas was published in 1782 with the first edition of *Histoire de la vie privée des français depuis l’origine de la nation jusqu’à nos jours* by Pierre Jean-Baptiste Legrand d’Aussy (1782). Paris continued to unite and symbolize the wealth of a national cuisine whose identity is based on a model composed of regions. We thus see a blend between the high model spreading from the court to the urban bourgeoisie, and a low model bringing a wealth of popular cooking tradition from the provinces (Parkhurst Ferguson 2004).

In Italy, where national unification came later, the rift between the elite and the people was far more marked than in France. The diet of the new Italy’s elite

shows that France was gastronomically in the lead, as in many other European countries. A national reaction against French gastronomy set in during the late 19th century in many European countries from Germany to Spain. French influence was accused of preventing the deep spirit of national cookery from reviving (Storm 2016). Hence the appearance of national recipe books, such as Emilia Pardo Bazán's *La cocina española moderna*, stemming from a careful ethnographic survey hymning the national spirit and exploring its regional gastronomic traditions (Pardo Bazán 1913; Paz Moreno 2006).

The Italian 19th century saw recipe books referring to specific places, though they continued to be heavily influenced by French cuisine. No serious survey of local food cultures took place; local dishes were branded as specialities when they were actually common to many regions (Capatti and Montanari 1999; Meldini 1997).

If we take the 1874 *Cuciniera bolognese*, a reprint of a book that came out in 1857 under the title *Il cuoco bolognese*, we find a gamut of French recipes and various Italian specialities, but no mention of *tagliatelle al ragù* or *tortellini*; on the other hand, *sfrappole* and *crescentine* are listed, which shows some connection with local cooking. In the same years there were similar examples such as *Il cuoco milanese e la cuciniera piemontese: manuale di cucina indispensabile per ogni ceto di famiglia* (1859). Replacing “chef” with “cook” (*cuciniera*) is typical of many late 19th-century publications and marks a clear shift in the destination of recipe books: they were no longer confined to “male professionals”, but designed for middle-class ladies aiming to improve the preparation of food in the family and when guests were invited (Coveri 2012; Ratto 2004). This was the public that Pellegrino Artusi addressed.

Artusi's *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene*, which is rightly or wrongly taken as the book that unified Italian gastronomy, is based on a very limited portion of Italy. Half of Artusi's recipes come from Emilia, Romagna and Tuscany, and the other areas are only explored as and when the Italian railway network expanded to cover them.

In *100 specialità di cucina italiane ed estere* (1908) we read that “just as each of our regions has had a school and character of its own in painting, sculpture, architecture, etc., so in the way of preparing food, the culinary art, each part of Italy has specialities all its own.” But again, although the recipes are classified by city, there are some rather generic attributions and a failure to mention certain dishes that would shortly become icons of their region. Thus we have *tagliatelle* at Bologna, but not *tortellini*; *pesto* is missing from Genoa; Roman cuisine lacks all typical features; calf's head à la Livornese appears among Piedmontese dishes.

Abroad too at this time there seems to be little interest in connecting food with place. The German journalist Hans Barth takes the reader on a cultured tour of taverns in the main Italian cities from Verona to Capri. Yet his guide contains the briefest of generic information about food and wine; he is more detailed on beer, and waxes long and anecdotal on popular eating places in the sections devoted to city architecture and history (Barth 1908).

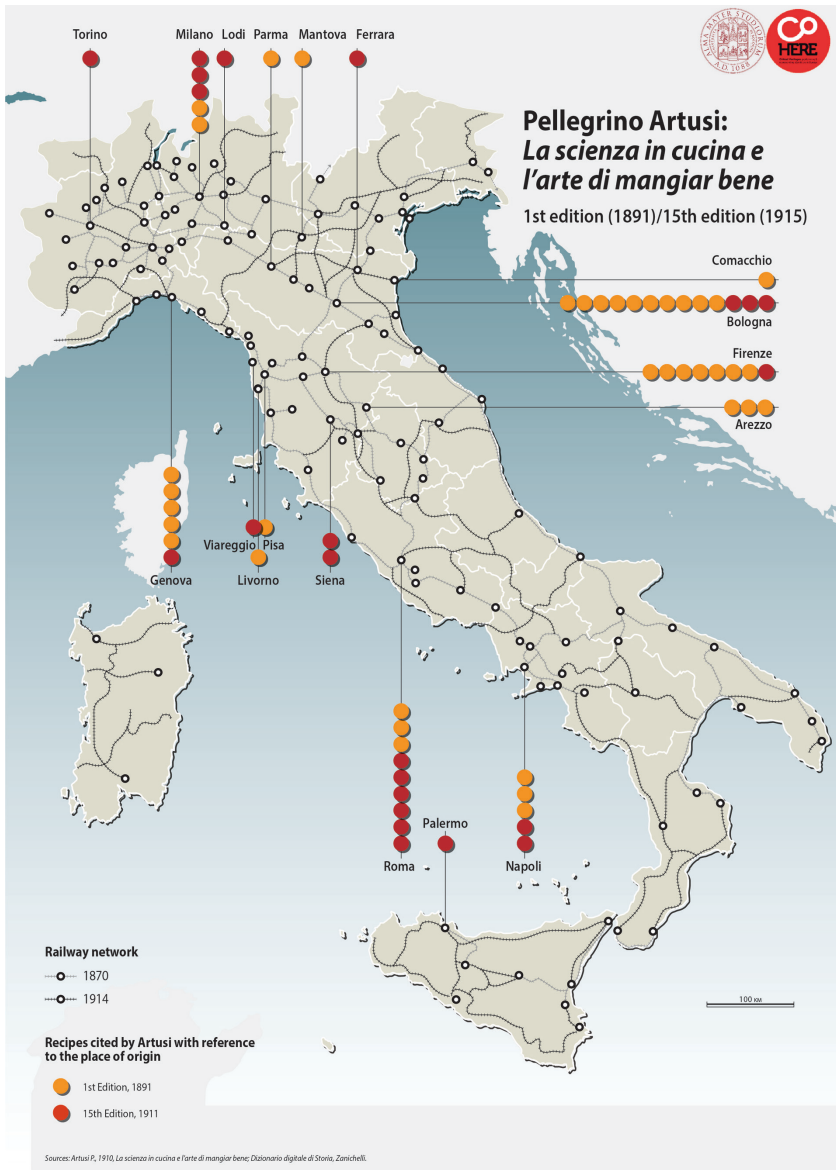


Figure 4.1 Pellegrino Artusi, *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene*. Recipes. Place of origin

Peoples and regions

In the decades straddling 1900 a new interest arose in the people and their culture, manifested in research into folklore, art and literature. Within this cultural framework regional cuisine began to be considered as an expression of culture and social customs rooted and established in an environment.

The 25 volumes comprising the *Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari siciliane* (Library of Sicilian Popular Traditions), published by Giuseppe Pitré between 1871 and 1913, never take food as a specific topic. Where it does constantly appear is in the words of songs, folk tales and other stories, as well as in the description of festivities and popular customs and language. The people gained recognition for their own culture, a basic part of which was seen to be diet and cuisine.

Thus, while there was growing attention to the local, as part of a cultural heritage including popular traditions, “high culture” kept its national or European character, while the regional themes now being put forward by small pockets of provincial intellectuals had an important role in building regional identity. To most of the Italian population the region was a more artificial entity than the nation for which Risorgimento rhetoric and post-unification state school education had created an identity basis via cultural and educational institutions. So the idea of identifying food by its region of origin was far from trite.

The conditions for regionalism gaining greater visibility coincided with the beginning of the 20th century. Regionalism steadily took on an anti-academic profile in line with the intellectual stance of a new generation belonging inside the anti-Giolitti political archipelago. Such provincial intellectuals were given a voice by a highly influential periodical interpreting the cultural turn under the apt name of *La voce*. Among such young intellectuals was a gamut of political leanings, going from an intellectual of European stature like Renato Serra (Raimondi 1993), to writers interpreting the provinces in outspokenly nationalist tones, like Curzio Malaparte. A welter of regional journals combined economic and political information with an interest in folklore and local traditions. Some of them formed the mouthpiece of associations or museums that were active in the neighbourhood. Even the great national myth of the Risorgimento began to be reappraised for its local dimensions, while antiquarian studies turned their sights on the remote origins of the regions (Cavazza 1997; Porciani 1996).

Parallel with this interest in the provinces, literature increasingly focused on “the people”, often romanticizing them: from the slums of Naples seen through Francesco Mastriani and Matilde Serao, to the Sicilians Giovanni Verga, Luigi Capuana and Federico de Roberto, the Calabrian Nicola Misasi and the Tuscans Renato Fucini, Ferdinando Martini and Mario Pratesi (Asor Rosa 1966). Though of differing approach and artistic value, these writers’ works fuelled the distinction between “popular poetry” stemming from the people, rooted in a landscape and expressing a historical legacy fed by customs and oral traditions and now brought to light by artists, and “cultural poetry” (*poesia*

d'arte) as studied at the academies. Benedetto Croce would shoot down that distinction, only admitting the difference between art and non-art (Croce 1929), but it was nonetheless being scientifically validated by studies in folklore, demology, linguistics and glottology. Such milieus were largely conservative in their political leaning, or embraced a form of humanist socialism blended with Christian piety and quite different from what was then called “scientific socialism” with its pronounced internationalist vocation.

In the academic milieu interest in folklore developed out of ethnology and demology. At the 50th anniversary of Italian unification in 1911 an important exhibition was held in Rome on “Italian ethnography”, promoted by Lamberto Loria, the founder of the Società di Etnografia Italiana (Puccini 2005). On show were a series of items meant to represent the regional character of Italian popular cultures. These were eked out by materials from the Florentine Museum of Ethnography, the first nucleus of the National Museum of Popular Art and Traditions that came into being almost half a century later. The year 1909 had seen the birth of another ethnographic museum, that of Palermo created by Giuseppe Pitré.

These threads came together to foster the idea of the region as a linchpin in a renewed national movement, which enjoyed champions such as the marquis Giovanni Crocioni, whose cultural, political and educational interests espoused the region as a building block in national identity. Regional identity, they saw, strengthened Italian identity, and thus found favour with the strongly patriotic side to Fascism, as well as promising a new alternative to “cosmopolitan American-style” modernity. Reviving “local traditions” figured in the drive to modernize Italy’s tourist infrastructure. “Popular fêtes” would be exhumed, adapted and more or less invented; they proved to be one of totalitarianism’s favourite ways of organizing people’s free time.

The “birth” of regional cuisines

It is important to realize that systematic attention to the regional aspect of cookery was the result of these broader cultural and political transformations.

Vittorio Agnetti’s 1910 recipe book surveys the regional varieties of Italian gastronomy and shows how cooking conformed to locality, that is to say, places endowed with environmental and cultural consistency. Agnetti’s voyage of discovery in quest of “popular regions” was designed to hymn the riches of national cuisine: “from the somewhat German inhabitants of Friuli to the somewhat Arab ones of Sicily we see the widest variety both of physical structure and of taste preferences”. It is thanks to that diversity that “our national cuisine, though almost entirely unknown, far outstrips in variety and excellence the far-famed French cuisine” (Agnetti 1910, 5–6). Such nationalistic trumpet-blowing does not omit the hybrid territories to the north and the south; that aspect would be lost in the touring guide’s systematization of regional cuisines occurring in the high Fascist period.

In reviewing the Italian regions, Agnetti presents a Piedmont under French influence, though beginning to emancipate itself: the French *fondue* is now seen as an “insipid hors d’oeuvre”, and has turned into the more refined and filling *fondua*. The Ligurian section opens with *pesto*, while the cooking in Lombardy is “if not the best, the most widespread and best-known especially abroad. The many Italian restaurants in Paris, London and Vienna serve nothing but Lombard dishes” (Agnetti 1910, 29). *Risotto, cotoletta alla milanese, ossobuco, frittura piccata, panettone* and *torrone* are pinnacles of Lombard cuisine. But Agnetti’s regional coverage is still incomplete: Artusi stopped at Naples; Agnetti gets as far as Sicily and Sardinia, but makes no reference to Calabria, Puglia, Basilicata, Abruzzo, Umbria and Marche. The lion’s share goes to Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, showing how Agnetti depends on Artusi’s geographical selection. Rome figures in Agnetti’s guide but fails to shape the national diet: where regional diversity in France is measured against the unquestioned lead of a central Paris, Italy has no such pattern and appears more uncertain, a bundle of territories lacking any clear hierarchy.

Alberto Cougnet’s weighty treatise enlarges on local cuisines as part of its overt anthropological interest in cookery. It draws its examples from far and wide, even outside Europe. But its panorama of Italy never strays beyond the centre north (Cougnet 1910).¹ Of course, many parts of the inland south were still fairly inaccessible and off the tourist route for which gastronomic guides now catered.

From a clean rift between the aristocracy’s cosmopolitan tastes and a popular style of local/regional culture, the rising middle class took on the role of “representative of the people” and became the force behind modernization of the country’s tourism and infrastructure. The emergence of regional cuisines thus came to affect the catering sector. Where France had dominated the entire 19th century, as of the early 20th century local dishes began to figure on hotel and restaurant menus while, come the 1920s, Italian gradually entered the nomenclature of gastronomy (Capatti 1998, 2015).

The *Guida gastronomica d’Italia* published by the Touring Club Italiano is certainly the first systematic, complete classification based on a deliberate and explicit policy of linking food to place (Touring Club Italiano 1931). That project was launched in spring 1928 by the Milanese Rotary Club; it enjoyed the backing of Ugo Ojetti, a leading Fascist intellectual.²

The work was a novelty in the journalistic field and stands out from all previous works for its range of coverage and solid underlying research. It took several years to draw up, being the result of massive reconnaissance in the field, involving institutions, experts and the public at large. The guide’s ethnographic ambition was to map popular cuisine by painstaking research at a local level. This began with a questionnaire targeting 5,000 “consuls” (under Fascism consuls were honorary colonels from the voluntary national militia), 1,800 doctors and 600 pharmacists. It went on to involve the National Fascist Confederation of Farmers and its many provincial branches, 92 provincial economic councils, 100 or so members of the Federation of Farmers’ Cooperatives, numerous female

provincial *fasci*, 400 *podestà* (Fascist mayors), 300 heads of teaching staff and 500 primary teachers. Then there were the experts: about 100 manufacturers of gastronomic specialities, hotel managers, chefs, restaurant managers and many Touring Club members who had learned of the project from the main touring magazines: *Le vie d'Italia* and *L'Albergo in Italia*.

The mass of feedback produced a rich picture of diet and food specialities across the peninsula, tens of thousands of pages for the editors to sift in compiling their first edition. For a later revision they went back to consulting the field: 700 draft versions were printed and circulated to the top local experts for their emendations and additions. The resulting volume was more than 500 pages in length and presented dishes from all Italian regions and most of the provinces (Capatti 2003; Portincasa 2008).

In his introduction to the work the agricultural under-secretary, Arturo Marescalchi, recalled an exhibition of Italian gastronomic specialities he had organized at Casale Monferrato early on in the century. Apart from his political role, Marescalchi could claim professional know-how. Born at Baricella near Bologna in 1869, he trained as a wine-maker at the celebrated Conegliano institute; he completed his education in France and then practised as a journalist. He founded and edited the periodical *L'Italia vinicola e agraria*, was the mainstay of wine-growing associations and became the president of the Association of Italian Wine-Makers and the National Fascist Federation for the Wine Trade. He entered the parliament with the liberals in 1919, went over to the Fascist and national ranks and remained in the parliament until 1934, when he was nominated as a senator of the kingdom. His two main works, published in the 1930s, are the *Storia del vino e della vite in Italia* (*History of Wine and Vines in Italy*), and *Il volto agricolo dell'Italia* (*The Agricultural Face of Italy*). The link between the farming landscape and the wine and food cultures was a central focus for Marescalchi, who became the guide's political godfather and personally checked and supervised the parts devoted to wine.

The guide's main purpose – to identify the tight link between place and food – is clearly argued in the introduction, which goes out of its way to assure the reader that classifying dishes by region and province in no way contradicts the national principle; indeed, it enhances it and displays its wealth. “Our aim here is merely to point out what foods and wines are special from an Italian regional, provincial and local viewpoint [...] the Guide in short enables and encourages one to appreciate Italian produce. And that is good work for the nation” (Touring Club Italiano 1931, 5).

Food bears witness to the cultural heritage enshrined in local natural features and in the anthropological traits of the inhabitants; the guide is a detailed *vade mecum* to the land of Italy:

as to how there may sometimes be visible connections with the type of inhabitants, their lifestyles and work patterns, and sometimes even with their religious beliefs or fund of legends. [...] [O]ne inevitably looks for

affinities between the character of a people and the wine it prefers as its habitual refreshment. The wines of Piedmont may be hard, rough and austere, but they conceal firmness of purpose and virtuosity of “nose”. Fine and subtle are the most famous wines of the Venetian hills. The wines of some parts of Emilia and Romagna are boisterous and expansive without any hidden snares.

(Touring Club Italiano 1931, 6)

Underlying these remarks is an “environmental determinism” that forms one of the cognitive hallmarks of the guide. The idea that the people’s character is shaped by environment and climate had a long tradition, of course, coming down from Aristotle to the French and German Enlightenment, especially via Montesquieu. Although it acknowledged that many dishes could be consumed in various localities, the guide’s objective was to pinpoint the places where there was a fundamental connection between food and locality: “If one is drawn to a speciality, one needs to know where the authentic, genuine, perfect form is to be had. This is what the Touring’s painstaking work makes possible” (Touring Club Italiano 1931, 7).

The guide is regional and provincial, plotting the rich mosaic of Italy’s gastronomic identity; it thus rules out “imported victuals and beverages – national or maybe cosmopolitan” (Touring Club Italiano 1931, 11). The aim of the map is to classify gastronomy in Italy, stripped of its many links to cultural and commercial exchanges with broader areas which, at various points of history, provided the real context in which the local cultures actually formed.

The example Marescalchi chooses for an exclusive relationship between food and place could hardly have been more unfortunate. He advises “tasting the traditional couscous at Trapani”. It is well known that the dish hails originally from sub-Saharan Africa and then spread to western Islamic regions. Trapanese fishermen imported it from the Maghrebian coast and adapted it to their own lifestyle, introducing a notable innovation: a fish condiment, not meat or vegetables as in Islamic couscous. The “Trapanese speciality” was just the kind of “cosmopolitan connection” that Marescalchi wished to avoid: it spanned the shores of two continents as well as the Muslim, the Christian and the Jewish worlds. Clearly the idea of a national food, based on regional variants, derived from an exclusive idea of the relationship between culture and locality: ethno-centric, in other words. For that bond to be tight, one had to deny all other connections crossing the nation and making it permeable, subject to constant change, nourished by encounters with outside from which innovations might occur and later become established.

When the topic of Trapanese cuisine comes to be analysed in greater detail later on in the core of the book, there is a fleeting allusion to the dish’s unspecified “exotic origin”, though that is secondary to its specific Trapanese form. The decisive Arab influence in Sicilian gastronomy is hushed up; the emphasis is on the “peculiar needs of the population in terms of the climate and the raw

materials they use, reflected in the customs of the peoples that succeeded one another in the island over the centuries” (Touring Club Italiano 1931, 437). Once again appears the allusion to an outside factor that the book’s underpinning methodology had excluded, in favour of the idea that food and cooking were indissolubly and exclusively embedded in the locality. Thus “the island’s confectionery masterpiece”, *cassata*, is presented as though no borrowing had occurred from outside encounters. The truth is that, though only codified in its current version at the end of the 19th century, *cassata* has nearly 1,000 years of history. Its roots lie in innovations imported by the Arabs to the island’s food history: cane sugar, bitter oranges, lemon, lime and mandarin. Baked *cassata*, which need not be sweet, stemmed from this encounter between Arab ingredients and Sicilian sheep cheese. It later became fixed as a dessert when *pan di Spagna* (sponge cake) from the Spanish court arrived in Sicily – a long, fascinating, complex story which once again entails the mingling of histories and the crossing of borders.

When the guide deals with frontier zones, the rigid nationalist policy becomes especially evident. There is a chapter on “Tridentine Venetia” and one on Venezia Giulia. Here too are fleeting references to the influence of past “foreign occupations”; but while the German influence can be found in the upper Tridentine valleys with their “alien traits of Germanic origin”, this is emphatically not the case further south “in those Trentine lands whose Italian and Venetian purity has held out, rock-like, against all attempts at absorption” (Touring Club Italiano 1931, 147).

In Piedmont too there is a marked attempt to distance the regional from French cuisine. The latter, it is pointed out with some asperity, is mistakenly over-present in 19th-century recipe books purporting to represent the region’s cookery. In the guide’s view this showed the influence of the French court over other European courts and the gastronomy of grand hotels and aristocratic families, including the city of Turin with its cosmopolitan elite. But the deeper Piedmontese provinces remained immune to such influences, so that we may conclude that “broadly speaking, the alleged influence of France on Piedmontese cooking does not exist” (Touring Club Italiano 1931, 16).

Two kinds of cuisine answer to completely different and even opposite casts of mind: “just as the one [French cuisine] goes in for the refinement of de-luxe complicated dishes, gratifying the eye before the palate, so Piedmontese cuisine keeps simple, tasty and clear-cut in its tastes, due in part to the delicious ‘raw materials’ it employs in its frank and undisguised concoctions” (Touring Club Italiano 1931, 16–17).

On closer inspection, however, precisely these “raw materials” point to France and a history of connections that hardly make Italy the kind of independent patchwork the guide would have us believe. Take *bagna càuda*, for instance, which is certainly a popular course in the Piedmontese plain and one of the hallmarks of the area’s gastronomy. An area cut off from the sea nonetheless made a dish based on anchovy sauce into its *pièce de résistance*. The

paradox would be incomprehensible without our crossing over the Provençal border, where Piedmontese salt merchants travelled from the late Middle Ages on. There they came across *anchoiade*, which they refashioned for themselves, without capers, when they brought back salted anchovies over the high passes of the Maritime Alps.

So it was, again, with Livornese cooking, where the guide picks out *caciucco* (fish soup) for praise, the word being Turkish in origin. Other typical “Livornese” concoctions cited are mullet, which dates back to the Sephardi Jews who took the tomato to Spain. But as for the fact that the town’s entire gastronomic culture stemmed from a history of marine and commercial exchanges, the guide keeps silent.

In short, it builds up an exclusive, static, ethnocentric link between the locality and its gastronomic culture. Precisely because it traces cuisine to the “spirit of the people”, it adopts a vaguely polemical tone towards any elite, cosmopolitan or French-influenced style of cooking as being rootless and needlessly artificial – a polarity that is recurrent, but that is never properly developed so as not to stir up social and political connotations. In actual fact the guide does not target the lower classes, but a middle-class consumer who needs to be attracted into the provincial hostelrys, restaurants and small hotels that the Touring Club and Enit (Ente nazionale italiano per il turismo) are urging to upgrade their image by drawing on the local cultural heritage.

It was felt that the more “authentic” folklore events were gradually dying out. This fuelled a revival of popular culture, which Fascism tried to turn into a drive for modernity (Cavazza 1997). One notes how some of the leading scholars of popular tradition were encouraged by Fascism, either because they were its creatures, like Giuseppe Cocchiara, or because they were active interlocutors like Paolo Toschi, who became the first incumbent of the chair of History of Popular Traditions founded at Rome in 1938.

In the touring magazine *Le vie d'Italia* we find many reports of popular festivities and a folklore-based photography competition showing local folk in traditional costume plying some ancient and now obsolete trade, or pictures of traditional events like *La diavolata pasquale* at Adrano. Every 1930 issue bore whole-page photos selected by this competition. At the same time the magazine *L'albergo d'Italia* plugged the link between regional food and traditions, and an infrastructure of hotels and restaurants bent on improving tourist standards in the provinces by avoiding imitation of cosmopolitan hospitality in the big international hotels.

Italy as a brand: Galbani cheese

The process of discovering the traditions, regions and food habits of the country got under way in the first decades of the century, and culminated in a regional classification of food culture that was not without foundation, but that was arbitrary in its rigid demarcation of frontiers and identity boundaries. The 1932

guide devised a regional who's who of Italian gastronomic culture which post-war food guides would still refer to. But linking food to a locality could also be the result of simple marketing strategy, as in the case of Bel Paese cheese produced by the firm of Galbani.

At the time of national unification the Italian cheese industry was comprised of small firms serving local markets. The most advanced entrepreneurship was in Lombardy, where two main production areas existed: the mountainous part with its soft cheeses, *stracchino* and *gorgonzola* to the fore; the harder Po Valley varieties, the best known of which was *grana*.

Valsassina in Upper Lombardy had a tradition of seasonal cheese production linked to the herds pasturing in the Alps and the presence of caves suitable for seasoning. In the village of lower Ballabio Davide Galbani, a blacksmith by trade, started producing summer cheeses, and this effort was built up by his son Egidio. In the last decades of the 19th century the national railway grid extended and linked up with Europe through the railway tunnels of Fréjus (1871) and St Gotthard (1882). This completely changed the scale of markets and brought Italian companies opportunities for exportation, whilst allowing into Italy fierce competition from France and Switzerland, including soft French cheeses like Roquefort, Brie and Camembert.

Egidio Galbani knew how to profit by this market expansion and began widespread marketing of cheeses like *taleggio* and *robiola*. He built up his father's business and set up a factory in the plain at Melzo near the huge market of Milan and linked to the Milan–Venice railway. Galbani was a marketing innovator, identifying his wares as Italian. His first attempt was Robiola Italia, but undoubtedly his greatest success was Bel Paese cheese, which turned an existing symbolic heritage into a winning marketing campaign.

The name *Bel Paese* referred to a post-unification publishing bestseller whose author, Antonio Stoppani, had been a patriot, priest and geologist. He had taken part in the Risorgimento and taught geology at Milan University, as well as being an adventurous rock climber. From his deep knowledge and study of the Italian landscape he published many scientific works. His fame with the wider public was owed to an extremely successful work of divulgation, *Il Bel Paese*, first published in 1876 and already in its 41st edition by 1897. It continued to be published throughout the 20th century (Redondi 2013). It is one of the texts upon which national pedagogy was based, and set out to spread awareness of Italian natural beauty spots. It had an effective narrative structure, being composed of “30 evenings” on which “Uncle Antonio” told the family circle about the country's marvels of geology, geography and natural history. Stoppani had an audience of teachers in mind, and the book was indeed widely used in Italian schools.

Stoppani's face was well known to the public, being printed on all copies of the book. In 1906 Egidio Galbani decided to market a new type of cheese that he called *Il Bel Paese*. In this way he exploited that massive publishing success and introduced another basic innovation: on the wrapper he printed a recent

map of the Italian railway network, highlighting the connections between Italy's many cities, including an imperial projection onto the Slavic shores of the Adriatic and a picture of the Abbé Stoppani. The combination became an icon in Italian food marketing.

Though Galbani's entrepreneurial story was linked to one particular area and its cheese-making tradition, he wisely prevented his produce from being identified with one locality; as an "Italian" product it could find its niche on the whole national market and be recognized abroad. It was a major and long-lasting marketing success. Between the two world wars the company exported 30–50% of its output, above all to France, Germany Britain, the United States and South America, sometimes in the wake of Italian communities (Farrar 1939).

In the 1950s the Galbani firm began to advertise its goods on television, following the same marketing policy it had embarked on 50 years before. Its television ads were titled "Tour of the Bel Paese", alluding to the Giro d'Italia cycle race, which had become immensely popular. They were a series of shorts featuring Italian cultural and historical heritage through the homes of great artists and writers. The *compère*, Mario Soldati, accompanied viewers on a cultural tour, visiting Massimo D'Azeglio's house at Cannero on Lake Maggiore, Francesco Petrarca's last house at Arquà near Padua, Torquato Tasso's at Gattinara and Giuseppe Parini's in Brianze.

The example of Bel Paese reminds us that a gastronomic product may be associated with a place by a marketing strategy without any specific tie-up between the food and the locality. The case in point was not "Italian", but from Valsassina; by way of a "supralocal" identity, it might have been claimed as a typical transnational Alpine cheese similar to others made in the French, Swiss and Austrian Alps under the names of Fleur des Alpes, Komgskäse or Schonland.

From regional tradition to place-less nostalgia

The regionalization of gastronomic identity that took place in the early decades of the 20th century in Italy was bound up with political and publishing schemes to modernize the country. Tradition and modernity went hand in hand, as it were: discovery of the provinces coincided with the possibility of getting to know and appreciate them thanks to modern means of transport, leisure time and culture. Revival and classification of regional culinary traditions did not clash with the development of a food industry; in fact, major names from that industry advertised in the touring guide: Perugina, Sperlari and Buitoni. Post-war Italy rapidly turned into an urban, industrial society. The people's eating habits were increasingly moulded by the food industry with its marketing strategies based on television advertising and widespread distribution on which food consumption hinged.

Against this background two major cultural products furthered the relationship of food and locality in the new 1950s media: a radio broadcast by Guido Piovene *Viaggio in Italia (Travels round Italy)* between 1953 and 1956, and

Mario Soldati's television series *Viaggio nella valle del Po* (*Tour of the Po Valley*) in 1957 and 1958. While Piovene sketched a picture of the country poised before the economic boom in which cookery was recognized as a hallmark of regional variety, Soldati travelled down Italy's greatest waterway, revealing age-old local food traditions cheek by jowl with new industrial developments that revolutionized the country's feeding habits. Romantic glimpses of places off the beaten track where local specialities could be tasted at ancient *trattorias* blended happily with documentation of a developing food industry which did have the historical merit of solving the country's food problem. The two dimensions, gastronomic tradition and a future where the industrialization of food was forging ahead, could seemingly cohabit and complement one another.

It was in the 1970s, when a completely industrialized Italy was riven by violent social and political conflict, that marketing strategies began to pump the past for nostalgic potential.

Johannes Hofer coined the term *nostalgia* in the 17th century to describe a psychosomatic complaint widespread among young Swiss far from home. Among the causes of this separation malaise Hofer mentioned dietary habits: "the dearth of good genuine milk that those brought up on it cannot readily do without" and "inability to adapt to foreign customs and diet" (Hofer 1688, 5, 6). Being uprooted from one's feeding habits caused physiological alterations and an ardent desire to be reunited with one's place of origin. In the course of the 19th century the heuristic value of nostalgia as a medical category began to wane, and it entered the realm of poetry with the full spate of European romanticism (Boym 2001; Starobinski 1992). In this transition nostalgia underwent a semantic shift: it came to depend less on space and more and more on time. Greater familiarity with distant lands and efficient rapid transport softened the pangs of spatial nostalgia, but that which depended on time gone by seemed incurable. Only poetry could soothe the suffering by evoking the lost past and conjuring it anew in language the fleeting emotion of which provided some relief. Nostalgia thus hankers for a restored enchantment, a feeling that kindles desire for a past that never existed, and is thus a powerful tool for the engineering of desire that has grown sophisticated in our postmodern era.³

While nostalgia now permeates our commercial culture, the peculiarity of nostalgia for the food of yesteryear is its purely discursive nature. Unlike the commercializing of vintage objects that pervades postmodern consumerism, the food consumed in the past cannot be recovered: one can only frame a picture of present food in an act of aesthetic communication alluding to the past by advertising, packaging and décor at consumer venues.

The most successful example of nostalgia being used commercially as a marketing ploy is certainly that of Mulino Bianco Barilla. At a time when Italy was going through deep social crisis, with violence escalating and breeding insecurity, Barilla launched a new product line hinging on "return to nature", traditional family values and the good country life of the old days.⁴ The storyline was purely fictitious, not just because Barilla was promoting an entirely industrial product, but because Italy's country outback had endured a history of

poverty, toil and class conflict that had nothing of the rural idyll depicted in the Barilla advertisement. The nostalgia halo enveloping this publicity campaign tied the product's value to the past and cancelled the present-day industrial society whose dark side was beginning to be seen and feared. When the ad, based on a drawing of the mythical white mill, proved a huge success and consumers clamoured to visit it, the company purchased a dilapidated old farmhouse with an adjacent mill, did it up and created a real white mill in which it later shot publicity ads and organized visits by the public. The drawing of the past had become artifice, a counterfeit.

Conclusion

By using a purely invented past, Mulino Bianco Barilla achieved one of the greatest successes in the history of Italian publicity (Fasce, Bini and Gaudenzi 2016). This admittedly extreme instance shows how deeply contemporary food marketing has been affected by the nostalgic "turn".⁵ Such banalizing of the past needs to be combated in any recognition of food as a cultural heritage; we should mistrust plausible-sounding definitions of identity (Aime 2004) and highlight the plurality of resources and exchange of experience that have gone into the preparation of food in its social and cultural contexts. None of this restores a harmoniously consistent picture, but it does bring us closer to the cognitive potential of food as an expression of stories that may be complicated and tortuous.

Notes

- 1 The author, a doctor, writer and man of many parts, native of Nice but early transplanted to Genoa and later Emilia, had already published various papers showing his anthropological interest in food (Cougnet 1903, 1905).
- 2 The Italian Rotary Club involved many Milanese similar in social extraction to members of the Touring Club; on its ups and downs with Fascism, see Rambaldi 2006.
- 3 Jameson (1991) introduced the idea of nostalgia as an agent of de-historicization in postmodern culture (especially chap. 8: *Nostalgia for the Present*). Boym (2001) is critical of nostalgia for the present, which she sees as tribalism clinging to invented pasts, a position in turn contested by Cross (2015), who sees nostalgia mediated by consumer objects as a kind of individual re-appropriation of time or at least a defence against its consuming action. On the role of food nostalgia in coming to terms with subjective spatial dislocation see Swislocki (2008), Mannur (2007).
- 4 Market research into food has shown that the image of the happy family and its children is one of the most effective iconographic ways of arousing desire shot with nostalgia for consumption of a product (Vignolles and Pichno 2014, 225–38, especially 235).
- 5 Marketing studies have insisted that the use of nostalgia as the driving force in a relationship with goods exploits a dissociation of identity with respect to the present time; see J. Sierra and S. McQuitty (2007). One can still agree with Barbara B. Stern (1992), that this phenomenon is not confined to publicity, but permeates contemporary culture.

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