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Historical Roots of Quality Products: A Seventeenth Century Description of Mortadella di Bologna

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1. Introduction

In tourism studies, the consumption of food during the holiday is not only considered an essential form of nourishment but it is increasingly seen as an important element in the marketing of a destination and as a means to improve the travel experience through contact with the local cultures represented by food items. Local gastronomy and local products, in fact, are being viewed as an important asset to define and to represent social and cultural peculiarities belonging to a given country (Bessi re, 1998; Mak et al., 2012). In this context, local products are considered one of the several layers that go under the name of the countryside cultural capital representing the expression of a country, of its society, and of its history (Tregear et al., 2007). This capital can be said to consist of landscape (rivers, lakes, mountains), of historic buildings (churches, villas, archaeological sites), of local traditions (customs, folklore, crafts, festivals) and of local foods (Bessi re, 1998; Garrod et al., 2006). These different layers of cultural capital have given birth to a form of tourism that aims at exploiting the identity of a place and that is filed under the labels of rural tourism, heritage tourism and gastronomic tourism (Richards, 2002; Sims, 2009).

The pivotal role of local products of agricultural or of animal origin in shaping the peculiar traits of a region is acknowledged by the European Community (EC) as well. The EC, in fact, with the characterization scheme known under the name of PDO/PGI/TSG labels aims at stressing the products' qualities and the specific production standards. These quality brands serve to raise the market profile of protected food items linked to local practices developed along the centuries. In tourism, these labelled foods can serve to stress local usage, local

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traditions and the collective historical identities of a location (Bowen & De Master, 2011; Trubek & Bowen, 2008).

Current literature has stressed this link between foodstuff and local practice connected to specific territories (Bowen & De Master, 2011) and several descriptions of local labelled foods are available. Among these studies, one can quote the description of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese (de Roest & Menghi, 2000), of Culatello di Zibello, of the Beacon Fell traditional Lancashire cheese (Tregear et al., 2007), of several French (Bérard & Marchenay, 2006) and Polish cheeses (Bowen & De Master, 2011), or a comparison between Italian and Danish cuisines (Hjalager & Antonioli Corigliano, 2000). Even the Mortadella di Bologna and its historical roots have been surveyed, with reference to the description of this sausage in Italian literary and iconographic sources (Cantoni & Cattaneo, 2001).

This bulk of literature adds to the knowledge of local quality products in several ways: by describing the main organoleptic features; by stressing the link between regional/historical manufacturing praxis; and by shaping the image of local foodstuff with specific reference to the history of the product and to the identity of a location. These layers can be used as one of the different marketing strategies that stay behind cultural/heritage/rural and gastronomic tourism and behind the many promotional activities, like gastronomic fairs or food-and-wine routes, that stay behind the complex world at the base of tourism activities.

Among the available studies describing the historical origins of local quality products, a research line that seems to have been paid little attention concerns the role the literature produced by British travellers to Italy can play in connecting local Italian foods to the territory and to its history. The only available study concerns one of the oldest depictions of Caciocavallo cheese written in a seventeenth century travel book dealing with Italy (Cianflone, 2013).

To fill in part this gap, this paper wants to discuss the case of Mortadella di Bologna and one of the earliest descriptions of this sausage given by Ellis Veryard, a seventeenth century Briton that had extensively travelled across Europe and the Levant.

The paper is organized as follows: first the Grand Tour as a cultural phenomenon is briefly introduced; then Mortadella di Bologna as a EC labeled food is sketched, together with information on the recipe; then the seventeenth century excerpt is presented together with the scanty information gained on its author. The concluding remarks will stress the added value offered by historical evidence to better characterize local quality products for cultural/gastronomic tourism.

2. The Grand Tour

Italy has always attracted British travellers. In the medieval and early modern times, voyagers were pilgrims or churchmen *en route* to the Holy Land or to

Italian places of worship, with Rome at the forefront. In the age of Humanism and in the early Renaissance, travellers were students interested in attending Italian universities in pursue of the new ideas of classic scholarship brought out by the re-discovery of ancient Latin and Greek authors. After the breach with Rome a novel type of traveller crossed the Alps. He did not travel for religious matters or to be imbibed by the Humanistic culture. He travelled to refine his education in the domains of arts and architecture, both ancient and contemporary. He visited continental countries to learn foreign languages and courtly skills, such as dancing and fencing, to enter diplomacy or to gain preferment at the English court (Pine-Coffin, 1974). This modern type of traveller initiated a different trend in travel: the Grand Tour.

The Grand Tour, considered a typical phenomenon of the British aristocracy and, later, of the wealthy British and American elites, has been thoroughly studied in the last decades and the main traits of this event have been extensively discussed (see, among others, Chaney, 1998; Towner, 1985). It was undertaken, soon after graduation, for culture, education and also for pleasure. It was characterized by a prescribed circuit, mainly based on France, Germany, Switzerland, the Low Countries and Italy. In Italy, northern and central regions were visited, with cities and towns such as Padua, Mantua, Florence, Venice, Rome and Naples being object of lengthy stays. The Grand Tour was characterized by a seasonal flux related to the climate and to the Italian festivals. The journey, in fact, usually started in autumn, as it was essential to cross the Alps before the winter snow made the travel difficult. Christmas or Easter time were usually spent in Rome because the religious festivals, and the related rituals, were considered an attraction that, in some cases, raised anti-Catholic feelings (Gash, 2010).

Almost all grand tourists left an account of their travel experience in the form of diaries, letters or travel books. In these literary works each author aimed at presenting a description of the localities he had visited, with special reference to private, public, and religious buildings; to sculptures, to paintings, and to ancient and contemporary inscriptions found in museums and in private collections; to religious and secular festivals and sometimes, as is the case with Veryard, to local customs, food included.

3. The Mortadella di Bologna

The Mortadella di Bologna is a typical Italian sausage traditionally made from pork cuts. The product is conditioned following definite and standardized procedures in northern and central Italy, corresponding to Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont, the Province of Trento, Lombardy, Marche, Lazio and Tuscany.

The meat from pork cuts is forced through a mincing machine to get a paste. To this pig fat, in the form of strips, is added to let the sausage gain the typical appearance where white dots are interspersed within the pinkish minced meat.

Prescribed seasoning and conditioning agents are allowed such as salt, pepper, a small quantity of sugar and a limited amount of nitrites and or nitrates, and pistachio nuts. The product is then cased in natural or synthetic casings and cooked by dry hot forced ventilation to stabilize the organoleptic characteristics and to ensure a long shelf life (Barbieri et al., 2013). The dimensions of the final product vary. Mortadella items range in weight from 1 kg to more than 50 kilograms, the mean weight being of about 12 kilos (Barbieri et al., 2013). Mortadella production has a large market, both for national consumption and for export. About 750,000 tons are produced every year; 27,000 are sent to the EC countries (Barbieri et al., 2013). From 1998, mortadella di Bologna was acknowledged as a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) food item so that the PGI protected Mortadella di Bologna must be prepared following a strict production framework regulated by the EC Regulation 1549/98.

The Mortadella di Bologna, as a typical Italian product, has a long history. The name is thought to originate from two Latin words. Some think it comes from the adjective *mortada*, meaning pale because of the typical pinkish colour proper of the sausage; others connect the name to *myrtatum*, in reference to the myrtle berries used to condition and to flavor the minced meat (Cantoni & Cattaneo, 2001). Among the available literary sources, it is known that in 1242 the product was named in one regulation from the town of Bononia granting the privilege of conditioning pig meat to the Bolognese butchers (Cantoni & Cattaneo, 2001). Among the other literary sources, the product is quoted by Boccaccio in his *Decameron* (ca. 1350-1355); while the earliest recipe dates to the 1600s, when it was stated that to the minced meat sugar and cheese should be added to make the sausage (Cantoni & Cattaneo, 2001). The product was so popular among the Italian contemporary *gourmands* that the cardinal Farnese, in 1661, issued the first product specification stating that only pork meat should be employed to prepare the sausage (Cantoni & Cattaneo, 2001). In this literary context, the historical evidence brought out by Ellis Veryard can be of interest to offer the description from a foreign source.

4. Ellis Veryard's description

Little is known of Ellis Veryard (1657-1714), apart from few scanty details about his life. He was a physician, or Medicine Doctor as he styles himself in his travel book (Veryard, 1701) dealing with his extensive travels in and around Europe and other Eastern countries.

He started his tour at the beginning of April, 1682 (Veryard, 1701:1), since he says to be in Holland on April 6th. From thence he travelled south and was in France and then Italy.

Apart from this reference, the author gives few details concerning the dates of his tour. From indirect evidence we know that he was in Rome when Lord Castleman arrived and presented his credentials as the British ambassador to

the Holy See (Veryard, 1701:202). Since Castleman acted as king James' ambassador in the years 1685-1688, one can hypothesize that Veryard's Italian stay took place between 1684 and 1686. This detail is important for the chronological contextualization of the report, since it can help to put the description of Mortadella in the right chronological setting.

In the pages about Bononia, Veryard described the places he deemed of interest. He, in fact, depicts the major Bolognese buildings such as convents, churches, the two towers; the inscriptions he found and the history of the university. Before concluding the report of his stay, he inserted the short narrative concerning the products of the country, namely "grain", corn and wine (Veryard, 1701:146-147). He, then, adds the description of Mortadella, reported below for the first time (be noted that the original writing has not been altered, the only insertion has been put in square brackets):

They likewise make a sort of sausages, called *Mortadella di Bologna*, and sent into all parts of Europe. They chop their Hogs Flesh in different small [pieces], and having well seasoned it with common salt, pepper, cloves, and a little salt-petre, they fill the large guts of bullocks, sheep, or hogs, and when they have lain a gut two days in brine, they boyl them, taking care that they are rather under than over boiled; then they hang them up in chimney till they are dry; they keep them an year or two.

Considering Veryard's words were written more than three centuries ago, to be more precise in the years 1684- 1685, as indicated above, the text should be considered not only the earliest accounts of mortadella by a British traveller but also a description that is very close to modern food specifications, as reported by in force regulations.

Current EC Law concerning the description of a labeled product, as issued by the Council Regulation 510/2006, states that to characterize local quality products the following items should be used: 1) evidence that the product originates within a defined geographical area; 2) a description of the specific growing or production practice and 3) the main physical, chemical, microbiological characteristics.

Surprisingly, Veryard's few sentences concerning the Mortadella di Bologna meet two out of the three modern product specifications. In less than one hundred words, in fact, Veryard describes the Mortadella di Bologna by stating the place of production and what can be seen as the trade-name of the product. He seems to meet the second requirement when he introduces the typical manufacturing praxis by declaring that the mortadella is made from minced pork meat to which seasoning agents are added, namely salt, pepper, cloves and salt-petre. He then adds that the product is cased in animal guts; put in brine before being boiled to be stored for maximum of two years.

What is interesting to stress is the fact that this excerpt introduces, probably for the first time, the typical Italian sausage to a British audience. The only difference between the seventeenth century manufacturing proceeding and the modern one is in the use of cloves instead of pistachio nuts and in the use of synthetic casings and of the more sophisticated conditioning procedures that ensure a long shelf-life.

5. Conclusion

Local gastronomic foods and local specialties play an important role in shaping the travel experience since regional quality products are being considered a means to define the cultural identity of a location. This recognition at the EC level has led not only to the inscription of European products within a register but also to several initiatives aiming at fostering heritage and territory-based linkages (Bowen & De Master, 2011; Tregear et al., 2007). At the local level, gastronomic products are already being exploited in local events such as gastronomic fairs and food-and-wine routes, where the link between the territory and the eating habits are part of a marketing strategy to promote a tourist location. To valorize local food specialties an additional input can be offered by paying attention to evidence taken from travel books. As shown in the case object of this paper, the Mortadella di Bologna and its seventeenth century description, can be exploited as a cultural strand in different ways. First of all, it can serve to stress how some production methods are inscribed in the history of a place, of which non-Italian evidence is an important part. Additionally, by re-calling the collective memory of a society (Bessi re, 1998) in which the British travellers may have their share, the historical evidence presented above can serve to stress how the product was appreciated in the past as it is today. Lastly, it can serve to highlight that culinary methods to prepare local foods are connected to local manufacturing practices and to gastronomic expertise that has been slightly altered by the so called McDonaldization of food consumption (Ritzer, 1995).

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