

The Wor(1)ds of Neapolitan Arts and Crafts

The Wor(l)ds of Neapolitan Arts and Crafts:

*Cultural and Linguistic
Perspectives*

Edited by

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-3139-2

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3139-0

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PREFACE

This volume gathers the results of a series of research projects carried out by doctoral students of the PhD course in “European Languages and Specialized Terminology” coordinated by Carolina Diglio at the University of Naples “Parthenope”. The essays focus on the terminology of traditional Neapolitan arts and crafts, analyzed from a linguistic and cultural perspective. They represent the ideal continuation of a line of terminological research started a decade ago and pursued by a group of scholars from Southern Italy, including Jana Altmanova among others. The collection, therefore, integrates and further develops previous research, which was disseminated through the publication of some edited books devoted to the study and re-evaluation of Neapolitan handiwork and crafts¹. It is a unique interdisciplinary field of research that benefits from the tools of both terminological and cultural/historical analysis, shedding light on a world that, from a scientific point of view, is scarcely investigated in Italy and almost unknown abroad. With some exceptions, the trades examined in the contributions still exist in Naples and in the Campania region, handed down for generations either by following traditional procedures or by renewing their tools and techniques; in any case, they represent an important component of the cultural heritage of the area.

The collection is divided into two sections, corresponding to the two languages in which the articles are written, although the terminological analyses focus on Italian, English, Spanish and French. This choice does not only reflect the academic expertise of the authors, but is also expressly demanded by the very linguistic and political legacy of Naples: as former capital of the wider Kingdom of Naples (1282-1815) and later of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies (1815-1861), the city was alternately dominated by French, Spanish and Austrian rulers thus absorbing in its society,

¹ See: C. Diglio, J. Altmanova (éds). 2012. *Dictionnaires et terminologie des arts et métiers*. Fasano-Parigi: Schena-Alain Baudry & C^{ie}; G. Fabbricino Trivellini (a cura di). 2012. *Arti e Mestieri napoletani nel contesto europeo*. Fasano: Schena; Giovanni Dotoli (ed.). 2012. *Les Cahiers du dictionnaire*. Special number, n° 4; and C. Diglio, J. Altmanova (éds). 2013. *L’art de l’orfèvrerie: parcours linguistiques et culturels*. Paris: Hermann.

traditions and language several elements of other cultures. In this respect, all the contributions further prove the indivisibility of language and culture: foreign dominations, especially the Spanish and French rules, have left lasting marks on the Neapolitan customs and trades, which the researchers have tried to uncover by delving into the terminology of local art and craftsmanship. It is no coincidence that in many cases the reference language is not Italian, but Neapolitan – almost an idiom in itself rather than a dialect – that over the centuries has been elevated to a kind of *lingua franca* in a multi-cultural society.

The areas explored by the contributors are diversified, comprising both prominent and less celebrated aspects of the Neapolitan culture, which, in their turn, have spread across southern Italy. Among the former, preeminence is given to ancient trades linked to gastronomy, beginning with the art of Neapolitan *pizzaiuolo*, recently included in the UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and the *maccaronaro*, viewed as a forerunner of modern street food sellers, as well as the *chianchiere* (the butcher) and the pastry maker. Other chapters revolve around the equally-famed sector of local artistic handicraft, comprising lexicographical analyses of the art of eighteenth-century *presepi* (cribs) and their figurines, the stucco technique and its materials, the fine Amalfi paper and the Neapolitan lute-making.

A second important line of investigation has unveiled and retraced the evolution of the terminology connected to the trades of the sea, describing professional figures such as the diver (treasure hunter) and the coral dealer. Moreover, obscure and humble professions have been explored, unearthing the linguistic richness behind the manufacture of ropes, as well as the old art of the *sportellari* (the basket makers) and of the shoemakers, who greatly contributed to the success of Italian footwear.

Taken as a whole, the volume enlightens and revives traditional trades, arts and crafts of Naples and of southern Italy from novel, linguistic perspectives, illustrating the interpenetration of the “words” and “worlds” of the Neapolitan handicraft.

Naples, June 2018

Raffaella Antinucci, Carolina Diglio, Maria Giovanna Petrillo

PREFACE

Ce recueil présente les résultats d'une série de recherches menées dans le cadre du Doctorat en « Euro-langages et Terminologies Spécialisées » de l'Université de Naples « Parthenope », dirigé par Carolina Diglio. Les contributions se concentrent sur la terminologie des arts et métiers traditionnels de Naples, analysés d'un point de vue linguistique et culturel. Ils représentent la continuation idéale d'un courant de recherche terminologique fondé il y a une dizaine d'années et réalisée par des chercheurs du sud de l'Italie, parmi lesquels il faut citer Jana Altmanova. Ce recueil complète et développe donc les recherches antérieures, diffusées par la publication de plusieurs ouvrages visant à collecter, étudier et réévaluer les produits de l'art et de la manufacture napolitaine¹. Il s'agit d'un champ d'étude interdisciplinaire unique en son genre, qui utilise les outils de l'analyse terminologique, culturelle et historique, éclairant un monde, d'un point de vue scientifique, encore peu étudié en Italie et presque inconnu à l'étranger. À quelques exceptions près, les professions couvertes par les contributions existent encore à Naples et en Campanie, transmises de génération en génération à la fois en suivant la tradition et en renouvelant les techniques et les outils ; il s'agit en tout cas d'une composante importante du patrimoine culturel de l'une des plus anciennes villes du monde.

Le volume est divisé en deux sections, correspondant aux deux langues dans lesquelles les contributions sont rédigées, bien que l'analyse terminologique se concentre sur l'italien, l'anglais, l'espagnol et le français. Ce choix ne reflète pas seulement la compétence académique des auteurs, mais il est expressément motivé par l'héritage linguistique et politique de la ville : en tant qu'ancienne capitale du vaste Royaume des Deux-Siciles, Naples a été dominée au cours des siècles par les souverains français, espagnols et autrichiens, absorbant ainsi dans sa société, ses

¹ C. Diglio, J. Altmanova (éds). 2012. *Dictionnaires et terminologie des arts et métiers*. Fasano-Parigi : Schena-Alain Baudry & C^{ie}; G. Fabbricino Trivellini (a cura di). 2012. *Arti e Mestieri napoletani nel contesto europeo*. Fasano : Schena; Giovanni Dotoli (ed.). 2012. *Les Cahiers du dictionnaire*. Special number, n° 4; and C. Diglio, J. Altmanova (éds). 2013. *L'art de l'orfèvrerie: parcours linguistiques et culturels*. Paris : Hermann.

traditions et sa langue de nombreux éléments d'autres cultures. À cet égard, toutes les contributions démontrent l'intime inséparabilité de la langue et de la culture : les dominations étrangères, en particulier les Espagnoles et les Français, ont laissé des traces indélébiles sur les coutumes et les métiers napolitains, que les chercheurs ont tenté de dévoiler/retrouver, en s'immergeant dans la terminologie de l'art et de l'artisanat local. Dans de nombreux cas, la langue de référence ne sera pas l'italien, mais le napolitain qui, au fil des siècles, est devenu une sorte de *lingua franca* au sein d'une société multiculturelle.

Les domaines explorés par les chercheurs sont diversifiés et présentent des aspects connus et moins connus de la culture napolitaine, qui à leur tour se sont répandus dans tout le sud de l'Italie. Parmi les premiers, l'accent est mis sur l'artisanat ancien lié à la gastronomie, à commencer par l'art du *pizzaiuolo* napolitain, récemment inscrit sur la liste du patrimoine culturel immatériel de l'humanité de l'UNESCO, et le *macaronaro*, précurseur des vendeurs modernes de cuisine de rue, ainsi que le *chianchiere* (boucher) et le pâtissier. D'autres chapitres s'occupent du secteur tout aussi célèbre de l'artisanat artistique local, avec l'analyse lexicographique de l'art des crèches du XVIII^e siècle et de leurs figurines, la technique du stuc et de ses matériaux, le papier fin Amalfi et la lutherie napolitaine.

Un deuxième axe de recherche important a révélé et retracé l'évolution de la terminologie liée aux métiers de la mer, comme le *tuffatore* (chercheur de trésors marins) et le *commerciant di corallo*. En outre, des professions obscures et humbles ont été explorées, mettant en lumière la richesse linguistique cachée derrière la fabrication des cordes, ainsi que derrière l'art ancien des *sportellari* (les fabricants de paniers) et des cordonniers, qui ont contribué dans une large mesure au succès de l'industrie italienne de la chaussure.

Dans son ensemble, le volume illumine et remet en vogue les arts et l'artisanat traditionnels de Naples et du sud de l'Italie dans une nouvelle perspective linguistique, illustrant l'interpénétration entre les « mots » et les « mondes » de l'artisanat napolitain.

Naples, juin 2018

Raffaella Antinucci, Carolina Diglio, Maria Giovanna Petrillo

ENGLISH SECTION

CHAPTER ONE

THE ART OF PIZZA MAKING IN THE NEAPOLITAN TRADITION: A TERMINOLOGICAL STUDY

MARINA NICEFORO

1 The origins of Neapolitan pizza

Pizza is one of the most widespread foods in the world. A fast comfort food, the secret of its success lies probably in its cheap and easy realisation; starting as a poor man's meal, today pizza comes in countless different types, topped with the most diverse ingredients and made in a variety of styles. Nowadays pizza is part of the cuisine of many countries, therefore it can be rightfully considered an international dish or a global food. However, Neapolitan pizza is the only one in the world with an official "identity card". In December 2017, the art of Neapolitan *pizzaiuolo* was finally included in the UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity¹; moreover, Neapolitan pizza is granted the official EC label of Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG).

The origins of the word *pizza* are uncertain. It may be derived from the past participle of the Latin verb *pinsare* (to flatten, to spread out); in ancient Greece and Rome, *pinsa* was a type of flatbread with various toppings (usually oil and spices or herbs) cooked on a hot stone. Another possible etymology is from Greek *pitta*, or from the Langobardic word *bizzo*, meaning "bite". The term *pizza* was first used in an Italian cookbook around the year 1000 (Forno Bravo, 5). In any case, it seems clear that the art of making bakery products from simple ingredients such as water, flour and yeast was already mastered as long as 2000 years ago.

In modern times, the city of Naples is the place where pizza as it is known today was born. Starting from the 18th century, pizzas were cooked and sold in the streets by street vendors who carried them around inside

¹ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/art-of-neapolitan-pizzaiuolo-00722>.

round copper containers called *stufe*²; the first pizzerias were informal restaurants where street vendors would stop for some rest. The first proper pizzerias appeared during the first decades of the 19th century, although Pizzeria Port'Alba, allegedly established in 1738, claims to be Naples' oldest pizzeria³. Tables and benches were set for guests other than street vendors, and pizzerias flourished around the city; the above-mentioned Pizzeria Port'Alba, for example, opened a comfortable two-storey place in 1830 (Forno Bravo, 6).

By this time, tomato was also used as a topping, and pizza Marinara was a classic. This pizza was probably named after Neapolitan *marinari* (Neapolitan for sailors), who were the first to ask for a pizza with a “twist”: garlic was the cheap and tasty ingredient added to tomato and oregano on this kind of pizza⁴. However, pizza Margherita still had to be invented. Where history meets legend, chronicles tell the story of Raffaele Esposito, a humble *pizzaiolo* from the old city centre, making the first pizza Margherita for King Umberto I and Queen Margherita of Savoy. Raffaele Esposito was the owner of pizzeria “Da Pietro il Pizzaiolo”⁵; in 1889, during a Royal visit in Naples, Raffaele Esposito was summoned at the Palace of Capodimonte, where he prepared three types of pizza to be offered to the Royals: pizza *mastunicola* (strutto lard, cheese, and basil), pizza marinara (tomato, garlic, oregano and oil), and a third type of pizza garnished with tomato, mozzarella cheese, basil and oil—resembling the colours of the new-born Italian flag, namely green, white and red.

² See <http://www.spigoloso.com/cucina/il-glossario-della-pizza-napoletana/>; <https://www.lucianopignataro.it/a/napoli-pizzeria-portalba-antichissima-nel-cuore-bibliofilo-della-citta/21870/>.

³ <http://www.pizzanapoletana.org/showassoc.php?id=140>; <https://www.lucianopignataro.it/a/napoli-pizzeria-portalba-antichissima-nel-cuore-bibliofilo-della-citta/21870/>

⁴ http://www.compagniadellapizza.it/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=224&Itemid=118.

⁵ In 1780 pizzeria “Da Pietro il Pizzaiolo” (also called “Pietro...e basta così”) was established in Salita Sant’Anna a Palazzo, in the surroundings of the Royal Palace. The name derives from Pietro Colicchio, one of the first owners. Having no brothers and sons, Colicchio handed over the pizzeria to Enrico Brandi, who then transferred the activity to his daughter Maria Giovanna Brandi, the future wife of Raffaele Esposito. Today, Pizzeria Brandi is still one of Naples’ most famous pizzerias. For the history of Pizzeria Brandi, see <https://www.lucianopignataro.it/a/pizzeria-brandi-dell%E2%80%99invenzione-della-pizza-margherita-nel-1889/18571/>; <http://www.brandi.it/inglese/index3.html>.

According to the story, Queen Margherita appreciated this latter pizza so much that Esposito decided to name it after her⁶.

2 Real Neapolitan Pizza

Today, pizza making is a shared craft and a global business, but it is firstly an art and a cultural tradition in Naples. Neapolitan people have over time committed to the preservation of traditional pizza making, and in June 1984 the AVPN (Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana) was founded “to promote and protect in Italy and worldwide the “true Neapolitan pizza” (“verace pizza napoletana”)⁷. The Association started with the aim of fighting the improper use of the denomination “Original Neapolitan Pizza”, and developed a protocol in order to increase the value of pizza prepared according to the old Neapolitan tradition. The AVPN *disciplinare* establishes the characteristics of the approved “Verace Pizza Napoletana” (real Neapolitan pizza), with indications concerning products, method of production and production techniques, condiments and required equipment, as well as norms regulating the use of the brand name and logo for members around the world. The label “Verace Pizza Marinara” has been bestowed upon two types of pizza: “‘Marinara’ (tomato, oil, oregano, and garlic) and ‘Margherita’ (tomato, oil, mozzarella or fior di latte, grated cheese and basil)” (APVN, 1). In the next section, the terminology of pizza making will be analysed starting from the Italian and English versions of the AVPN’s *disciplinare*.

Neapolitan pizza is the only kind of Italian pizza with official recognition from the European Community: since February 2010, it has acquired the label of Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG). Following Commission Regulation No 97/2010,

‘Pizza Napoletana’ TSG is distinguished by a raised rim, a golden colour characteristic of products baked in the oven, and a tenderness to touch and to taste; by a garnished centre dominated by the red of the tomatoes, perfectly mixed with oil and, depending on the ingredients used, the green of the oregano and the white of the garlic; by the white of the mozzarella

⁶ For the story of pizza Margherita, see <https://www.lucianopignataro.it/a/pizzeria-brandi-dell%E2%80%99invenzione-della-pizza-margherita-nel-1889/18571/>; <http://www.brandi.it/inglese/index3.html>.

⁷ See http://www.pizzanapoletana.org/eng_chisiamo.php.

slabs which are laid either closer together or further apart, and the green of the basil leaves, which are lighter or darker depending on the baking⁸.

However, the most prestigious acknowledgement for Neapolitan pizza was probably the inclusion, in December 2017, of the art of Neapolitan *pizzaiuolo* in the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The long-awaited decision was proclaimed seven years after the initial request by the Italian Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Forestry; in particular, in 2015 the Italian selection commission decided to put forward the art of Neapolitan pizza-making for inclusion in the UNESCO's list, a decision boosted by a resounding online petition collecting more than 850,000 signatures around the world. According to the commission,

the art of pizza-making was a central element of Neapolitan and Italian identity, and a symbol of the brand of Italy around the world. Italy wants the Neapolitan pizza to be distinguished from rivals such as New York-style pizza⁹.

The prestigious list offers protection under the UN Intangible Cultural Heritage convention. As maintained by the UN,

the goal of safeguarding, as with other forms of intangible cultural heritage, is to ensure that the knowledge and skills associated with traditional artisanry are passed on to future generations so that crafts can continue to be produced within their communities, providing livelihoods to their makers and reflecting creativity¹⁰.

Nonetheless, it was only in December 2017 that UNESCO approved the Italian nomination for the following reasons:

[...] Pizzaiuoli are a living link for the communities concerned. There are three primary categories of bearers – the Master Pizzaiuolo, the Pizzaiuolo and the baker – as well as the families in Naples who reproduce the art in their own homes. The element fosters social gatherings and intergenerational exchange, and assumes a character of the spectacular, with the Pizzaiuolo at the centre of their 'bottega' sharing their art¹¹.

⁸ <http://eurlex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32010R0097&from=EN>, L 34/10.

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/mar/04/italy-neapolitan-pizza-unesco-cultural-heritage-naples-food>.

¹⁰ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/traditional-craftsmanship-00057>.

¹¹ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/art-of-neapolitan-pizzaiuolo-00722>.

Tradition, culture heritage, arts and crafts are thus the most appropriate attributes for Neapolitan pizza making.

3 The terminology of pizza making

The terminology of pizza making is clearly derived from Italian and Neapolitan, being Naples the place where *pizzaioli* developed their own working language. Notwithstanding its specificity, the terminology of pizza making is part of the broader field of bakery, which includes all terms relative to the production of bread, sweets and all kinds of baked goods. The terms analyzed in this research have been extracted from the Italian AVPN's *disciplinare*, and subsequently compared with the official equivalents provided in the English version of the same document.

3.1 Production technique

For what concerns pizza production, the specification gives precise instructions, listing production phases as follows:

ITALIAN TERMS	ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS
Impasto	Mixing
Prima lievitazione	First stage of dough rise
Staglio a mano	Dough hand cut
Seconda lievitazione	Second stage of dough rise
Formatura del disco di pasta	Forming the pizza base
Condimento	Garnishing
Cottura	Cooking

Table 1-1. Production Technique

The above terms and terminological expressions define the essential phases of pizza making. At a first glance, not all terms are strictly technical or domain-related; some of them can indeed be found with reference to others, more generic cooking processes. Possibly, these were chosen and employed because they are more easily understood by readers and AVPN's members outside Naples. As will be shown, variants exist for the majority of these terms.

As for the production technique, after mixing, the dough is left to rise for two hours, and is then hand-cut into little dough balls; a second stage of dough rise is necessary before the pizza base can be formed. Once this is done, the pizza base can be garnished and then cooked (AVPN, 3-4).

Other terms related to pizza production in the AVPN's specification include:

ITALIAN TERMS	ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS
Punto pasta	Optimal point
Temperatura di fermentazione	Levitation temperature
Temperatura di conservazione	Storage temperature
Mozzatura	(Mozzarella) hand cutting
Incordatura	Imbalance (of the dough)

Table 1-2. Other Terms. Production Technique

The term *optimal point* refers to the ideal condition of the dough at the end of the mixing phase. As for *incordatura*, this appears in the section devoted to mixers as one of the possible problems during this phase:

Over-working the dough (and the subsequent over heating of the dough) results in an imbalance of the glutinous properties and fibre of the dough and has a subsequent effect on the properties of the dough and end product (AVPN, 8).

Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that the term *mozzatura*—usually the process of mozzarella hand cutting—is here used to better explain the *staglio* phase, which is also done by hand cutting. The levitation and storage temperatures are also specified in both versions of the *disciplinare*. The subsequent section of the AVPN's text is dedicated to pizza making equipment.

3.2 Equipment

As for the tools used in traditional pizza making, the VPN Association contemplates the following basic equipment:

ITALIAN TERMS	ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS
Orciuolo in rame	Copper oil canister
Pala in legno e metallica	Wood and metal pizza peel
Pala in acciaio	Steel pizza peel
Impastatrice a forcella o a spirale	Fork or spiral dough mixer
Mattarelle	Rising boxes
Spatola	Spatula
Forno a legna	Wood fire oven

Table 1-3. Equipment

While a limited number of mechanical equipment (dough mixer) is allowed, the guidelines are rather specific for what concerns the other tools. Pizza should be prepared manually, with the aid of a *spatula* (also called *dough cutter* elsewhere) to cut the dough and separate dough balls in the final stages of preparation; dough balls are formed manually and placed in rising boxes for the second stage of rising. Once the pizza base is formed thanks to the expert handwork of the *pizzaiolo*, a wooden or metal pizza peel is used “to place the pizza in the traditional pizza oven”; additionally, a steel pizza peel is required “to move the pizza in the oven and remove the pizza once it has cooked” (AVPN, 9). Even the characteristics of the traditional wood fire oven are strictly regulated, as well as the ideal cooking temperatures to be reached inside the oven, together with the recommended cooking time, and final temperatures of the products¹².

3.3. Other terms

Apart from the “official” terminology provided in the two versions of the AVPN’s document, online glossaries on dedicated websites in Italian and English¹³ provide impressive lists of bakery terminology. These sources confirm that the language of this domain is characterised by a consistent degree of technicity. In addition, a certain level of standardisation in the language of pizza making and bakery is also revealed. There are many synonymous terms for those previously identified, among which:

¹² For more information on pizza cooking and ovens, see AVPN. *Regulations for obtaining use of the collective trade mark “Verace Pizza Napoletana” - (Vera Pizza Napoletana)*. pp. 7-9.

¹³ See <https://www.pizzamaking.com/pizza-glossary.html>;
<http://www.sandiegomagazine.com/San-Diego-Magazine/November-2013/San-Diegos-Best-Pizza/A-Glossary-of-Pizza-Terms/>;
<http://ryanspizzablog.blogspot.it/p/glossary-of-pizza-terms-and.html>;
http://www.compagniadellapizza.it/index.php?option=com_glossary&func=display&letter=All&Itemid=83&catid=45&page=1;
<http://laconfraternitadellapizza.forumfree.it/?t=58921272>;
<http://www.spigoloso.com/cucina/il-glossario-della-pizza-napoletana/>.

ITALIAN TERMS	ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS
Puntata	First stage of dough rise
Apretto (a Appretto)	Dough hand cut
Stesura	Forming the pizza base
Infornata	Oven cooking
Punto Pasta	Optimal point
Agliara	Copper oil canister
Batocchi	Dough Balls
Martolelle	Rising boxes, dough trays, alimentary cases

Table 1-4. Other Terms

As shown above, the terms chosen for the AVPN's specification are evidently less technical, whereas other glossaries provide more accurate bakery-related terminology. Accordingly, the first stage of dough rise is called *puntata*, while the *staglio* hand cut is elsewhere reported as *apretto* or *apretto*. The dough balls—usually known as *panetti*—are sometimes called *batocchi*. Finally, the above-mentioned *mattarelle* appear in the variant *martolelle*, while in English they are generically described as rising boxes, dough trays, or alimentary cases.

4 Conclusive remarks

Some of the most common terms within the sub-domain of pizza making have been illustrated; as it has been shown, this terminology is part of the wider field of bakery, although it has its own degree of specificity. Moreover, the language of pizza making appears to be rather standardised as a result of a long-term development. Originating in Naples, this terminology was exported around the world together with the procedures and techniques related to this ancient art.

Like any other cultural tradition, traditional pizza making has maintained its original characteristics over the centuries thanks to the utmost devotion of generations of Neapolitans; as a result, a protocol protecting the legacy of traditional pizza making at a global level has been created to ensure the continuation of this inestimable cultural heritage. What is more, not only was this art exported abroad in nearly all the countries of the globe, but its related knowledge and expertise was also passed on and shared with people from outside Naples and Italy. Every day there are new AVPN member pizzerias from Japan, the US, the UAE and Australia, as further proof of the enormous prestige that real Neapolitan pizza has gained. It is no coincidence, then, that pizza is the most known Italian word according

to a survey made by Società Dante Alighieri¹⁴, not to mention the enormous economic value generated by the pizza business.

Despite all this, the existence of real Neapolitan pizza is threatened by fake Italian or local products used to make pizzas; a recent study has shown that two out of three pizzas contain ingredients from foreign countries, or lack the official P.D.O. (Protected Designation of Origin) and T.S.G. labels¹⁵.

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CHAPTER TWO

FROM *MACCARONARO* TO STREET FOOD: A CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC STUDY

GABRIELE BASILE

1 Introduction

The busy and colourful street life of Naples has always fascinated travellers from all over the world, whose journals have, in their turn, stimulated the interest of academics and institutions. Although the rediscovery of traditions, customs and old trades of the Capital City of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies has always been an important source of research, previous studies in the field of old Neapolitan trades have neglected to consider one of the most peculiar figures in the plethora of artisans and street vendors that crowded the streets of the city: the *maccaronaro* (also spelled *maccarunaro*) that is to say the pasta vendor. It is precisely the purpose of this paper to investigate this figure, trying to understand its origins and legacy.

2 The *maccaronaro*'s stall

In order to understand the prominence of such a figure in the context of Neapolitan street life, one must first focus on the importance of the merchandise he used to sell: as a matter of fact, *macaroni*, and in a broader sense, pasta, were equally important in the diet of both rich and poor people, noble and peasants, and have been considered as a powerful social and cultural element of aggregation.

The origins of macaroni are uncertain, almost clouded in mystery, and the etymology itself remains debated. While Angelo Abenante, one of the historical trade union leaders of the pasta business, maintains that the term was first cited in Naples in a private deed in 1295 (Abenante 2002, 14), it is widely recognized that pasta had existed in Sicily since the IX century. Moreover, as Alberto Consiglio claims, bearing in mind that Sicily was a

sort of bridge between East and West, it may not be completely wrong to suppose that pasta (he refers to *vermicelli*) originated outside of the Italian peninsula (Consiglio 1997, 50). As far as the name is concerned, the majority of sources seem to agree on the Greek origin of the word, from *μακαρ* which means “blessed”, and, in a broader sense, came to signify “the food of the Gods”.

Whether invented by the Arabs or by the Chinese (as other scholars maintain), the use of *macaroni* became a distinct feature of Neapolitan life in the XVII century: Consiglio quotes a passage from *Giornali di Napoli dal MDXLVII al MDCCVI* in which Antonio Bulifon describes a celebration on 13 January 1617, in which almost ten thousand people consumed some four hundred pounds of *macaroni*, in a feast provided by the Duke of Ossuna.

Macaroni were, as already stated, appreciated by the rich and the poor alike, yet there were strata of the population so indigent they could not even afford to cook that dish on a daily basis. As Matilde Serao, one of the most important writers and journalist of the XIX century, notes,

Appena ha due soldi il popolo napoletano compra un piatto di maccheroni cotti e conditi; tutte le strade dei quartieri popolari hanno una di queste osterie che installano all’aria aperta le loro caldaie, dove i maccheroni bollono sempre, i tegami dove bolle il sugo di pomodoro, le montagne di cacio grattato, un cacio piccante che viene da Cotrone. (Serao 2016, 49)¹

Serao also records the effect that these particular stalls produced on travellers from abroad:

Anzi tutto, quest’apparato è molto pittoresco, e dei pittori lo hanno dipinto, ed è stato da essi reso lindo e quasi elegante con l’oste che sembra un pastorello di Watteau; e nella collezione di fotografie napoletane, che gl’inglesi comprano, accanto alla *monaca di casa*, al *ladruncolo di fazzoletti*, alla *famiglia di pidocchiosi*, vi è anche il *banco del macaronaro*. Questi maccheroni si vendono a piattelli di due e di tre

¹ “As soon as the Neapolitan people have enough money, they buy a dish of cooked and dressed macaroni; all the streets of the popular districts have one of these inns setting up their open-air boilers in which the macaroni always boil, the pans in which tomato sauce boils, the mountains of grated cheese, a spicy cheese that comes from Cotrone”. (Translation mine. All subsequent translations are mine unless otherwise stated).

soldi; e il popolo napoletano li chiama brevemente, dal loro prezzo: nu doie e nu tre. (Serao 2016, 49-50, emphasis in the text)²

Serao records in 1884 what was already an important problem: unemployment, which, of course, had not passed unnoticed. It is worth considering what Renato Fucini, a writer and journalist from Tuscany, had written just seven years before about the populace of Naples and its alleged laziness:

Da questa tendenza della loro indole e dalla scarsità di opifici che potrebbero accogliere quelli che stretti dalla necessità vi si adatterebbero, risulta quella moltitudine di semioziosi, che si danno al lavoro avventizio nei luoghi di maggior movimento commerciale o al piccolo commercio ambulante per le vie della città, tormentando il prossimo in centomila maniere dalla mattina alla sera. (Fucini 2014, 37)³

In this sense, the *maccaronaro*, together with all the other street food vendors, contributed to the daily sustenance of the huge masses of urban poor which crowded the streets of Naples. Its origins are quite uncertain: Umberto Franzese states that the first ones appeared in the XVII century and enjoyed a period of great diffusion in the XIX century before disappearing (Franzese 1997, 36). Such a version is corroborated by Pietro Gargano, who maintains that “I maccaronari, come tali, sono un ricordo. L’ultimo operò sotto il ventoso porticato di via dei Tribunali fino alla vigilia della prima guerra mondiale” (Gargano 1995, 32)⁴ and by Giuseppe Marotta, who records that

Nel 1912 erano più panorami di Napoli gli spaghetti che il Vesuvio e il mare. [...] ogni vicolo aveva un refettorio, pieno di creature col piatto in

² “First of all, this whole equipment is very picturesque, and painters have depicted it and made it very clean and almost elegant, with the innkeeper looking like one of Watteau’s shepherds; and in the collection of Neapolitan photographs, bought by English travellers, next to the *nun of the house*, to the *petty handkerchiefs thief*, to the *lousy family*, there is also the *maccaronaro stall*. These macaroni dishes cost either two or three coins; and the Neapolitan people call them according to their price: *a two* and *a three*”.

³ “As a consequence of this tendency of their character and of the scarcity of factories that could accommodate those in need, there is a multitude of semi-idle, devoted to temporary work in the places of greatest commercial movement or to small commerce in the streets of the city, tormenting their neighbours all day long in a hundred thousand ways”.

⁴ “Maccaronari, as such, are just a memory. The last one used to work under the windy colonnade in via dei Tribunali until the eve of World War I”.

grengo sulle soglie dei “bassi” nelle piazzette ai Ventaglieri, a Sant’Eligio, al Cavone, a Foria, ai Tribunali, a Port’Alba si vendevano spaghetti anche cotti, c’erano giganteschi fornelli all’aperto con pentole che avrebbero potuto contenere il Louvre; “un due!”, “un tre!” gridavano i garzoni porgendo i piatti al cuoco e sottintendendo porzioni da due o da tre soldi. (Marotta 2006, 51)⁵

What is more, the American journalist Corby Kummer, in a 1986 article for *The Atlantic*, maintains that “The number of pasta shops in Naples went from sixty to 280 between the years 1700 and 1785”. Kummer also insists on the fact that pasta was hung to dry and cooked almost everywhere in the streets:

Neapolitan street vendors sold cooked spaghetti from stalls with charcoal-fired stoves, working with bowls of grated Romano cheese beside them. Customers would follow the example of the barkers, who lifted the long strands high and dropped them into their mouths. (Kummer 1986)

Picturesque descriptions of *maccaronari* and *lazzari* (the poorest amongst all street people) struck the imagination of Italian and foreign writers alike. Carlo Tito Dalbono provides a detailed description of a nineteenth-century stall adjacent to a tavern:

In sul limitar della taverna, e talvolta schierata in bella ordinanza sul davanti di essa vedesi una falange di piccoli focolari o fornelli di terra e mattoni ove s’innalzano caldaie, si muovon padelle, si scoperciano pignatte. I maccaroni, e chi nol sa, sono la forma onde lo straniero contrassegna la plebe napoletana. (Dalbono 1853, 74)⁶

After a brief description of the production of pasta and a list of the towns famous for their pasta (namely Portici, Amalfi, Torre Del Greco,

⁵ “In 1912 spaghetti represented the Neapolitan landscape more than Vesuvius and the sea. [...] each alley had its refectory, full of creatures holding a plate on their womb and standing on the threshold of the “bassi” in the squares at the Ventaglieri, Sant’Eligio, Cavone, Foria, the Tribunali; in Port’Alba cooked spaghetti were sold too. There were huge outdoor burners with pots capable of containing the Louvre itself; “a two!”, “a three!” shouted the shop boys while handing out the plates to the chef and implying two or three-coins portions”.

⁶ “On the edge of the tavern, and sometimes placed in fine order on its front, a phalanx made of small fires, and earth and brick stoves, where boilers are raised, pans are moved and pots are discovered, can be seen. Macaroni, everybody knows, is a term used by foreigners to label the Neapolitan plebs”.

Torre Annunziata and Gragnano), Dalbono claims that, among the various dressings, Neapolitans prefer cheese:

Di lato alla ampia e fumante *calda a maccaronense* è un ampio piatto, bacino o *scafarea* di bianco formaggio, nuova piramide di Egitto, ornata dalla punta alla base da strisce nere fatte col pepe, e sul culmine della quale spesso è posato un pomodoro, o in mancanza di questo, un fiore rosso. [...] Talvolta poi dopo il formaggio i macaroni si tingono di color purpureo o paonazzo, quando cioè il tavernaio del sugo de' pomodoro o di *ragù* (specie di stufato) copre, quasi rugiada sui fiori, la polvere del formaggio e l'avvolgimento de' serpeggianti *vermicelli* o *maccaroncelli*. (Dalbono 1853, 75, emphasis in the text)⁷

Dalbono also provides an ironic description of the *maccaronaro* (although he calls him *tavernaio*, the innkeeper) as an example of precision and rectitude:

Egli è attento innanzi a sè: di rado il popolo si appella a lui per ingiustizia, egli è uomo imparziale e il grano o il tornese sono rappresentati dalle sue mani. A dir corto, egli ha nelle mani la squadra, le seste negli occhi, e se taluna volta si lascia corrompere sino ad accordare uno o due macaroni in più, è soltanto per amor d'una piccina. [...] Egli è impassibile innanzi al suo dovere, e senza essere un geometra, un algebrista ovvero un così detto contabile, egli ha la cifra dei macaroni con sè, e conosce senza eccezioni la difficile operazione del dividere. (Dalbono 1853, 75)⁸

In *Popular Customs, Sports and Recollections of the South of Italy* (1846), Charles Mac Farlane recalls with nostalgia his travels to Naples between the years 1816 and 1827, and devotes a whole chapter to the so-

⁷ “On the side of the large and steaming macaroni cauldron is a large dish, basin or tray of white cheese, new Egyptian pyramid, adorned from the base to the top by black stripes made with pepper, and on whose summit is often laid a tomato, or, if the latter is not available, a red flower. Sometimes macaroni become purple or red, when the innkeeper covers, as dew covers flowers, with tomato sauce or ragout (a kind of stew) the cheese powder and the winding of twisting vermicelli or macaroncelli”.

⁸ “He is very careful: it is uncommon that people appeal to him for injustice, he is an impartial man and the *grano* or the *tornese* are presented by his hands. Briefly, he has the triangle in his hands and the compass in his eyes, and if sometimes he allows himself to be bribed and grants two or more extra macaroni, it is only for the love of a little girl. [...] He is unperturbed before his duty, and although he is not a surveyor, a master of algebra or a so-called accountant, he knows the precise number of macaroni, and he is a master in the difficult operation of dividing”.

called “Maccaroni-eaters”. First of all, he discusses the etymology (*maccaroni* or *maccheroni*?) and the importance of raw materials. Secondly, he describes how the dish had already reached the shores of England, although he clearly distinguishes what one may consume in Naples, defined as “nutritious, satisfying, light and easy of digestion” (Mac Farlane 1846, 13) from “that pappy, greasy, indigestible substance, a positive disgrace to the name it bears, which is sometimes intruded on our English tables” (Mac Farlane 1846, 13). Finally, he concentrates on the *maccaronari*’s stalls and their distribution in the city:

Venders of this national commodity are established in every corner of the city of Naples. Some have shops or cellars where they prepare and retail it, but a much greater number cook it on moveable furnaces in the open air, and sell it to their hungry customers in the streets, who eat it from the dealer’s bench without plates, knives, forks, spoons or any such luxuries. In former times these maccaroni-stalls dared to stand under palaces, and lined even the Strada Toledo, and other of the principal streets, mixed up, in grotesque confusion, with the stalls of other retailers and artisans. (Mac Farlane 1846, 14)

A distinction is thus established: on the one hand there is the *maccaronaro* who occupied the corners of the road, whose equipment was made of a simple charcoal stove and the dishes, on the other hand, the *maccaronaro* who managed to recreate a small tavern, with some tables, benches and an awning. Mac Farlane gives a detailed, and colourful, description of the latter:

Some of the stationary macaroni-shops, in the popular quarters of town, are rather large and imposing edifices, having open porticoes in front, where the caldron is seen perpetually boiling over a charcoal fire, and a wine canteen in the rear, furnished with wooden stools and benches, and decorated with rude grotesque paintings on the wall, not so classical as those found in the chambers in Pompeii. It is also common to have certain pithy, significant sentences inscribed on the walls, [...] There is, or there was in my time, a group of these shops near the Capuan gate of the city, and another near the Nola gate. (Mac Farlane 1846, 14-15)

Apart from the two aforementioned examples, there can possibly be another type of *maccaronaro*, that is to say one who exercised his trade inside a bigger restaurants or pizzerias. In *Taverne Famose Napoletane* (1889) the Neapolitan poet Salvatore Di Giacomo, after dismissing many of such taverns as mere *baracche* (shacks) provides an example of a different typology. A man named Peppino, a waiter at the *Progresso*, a

restaurant in via Nardones, is discussing with the author about his father Domenico Testa, the famous Monzù (a Neapolitan word deriving from French “Monsieur” and used to describe a professional chef) Testa:

Era un bell’uomo grasso e grosso. Aveva una *pizzeria* alla salita Santa Teresa, alla sinistra di chi va a Capodimonte. La *pizzeria* era a un tempo anche bottega da *maccaronaro*: il nonno stava lì dietro il banco ogni sera, con un gran grembiale bianco sulla pancia, e scodellava i *due* e i *tre* fino alla mezzanotte. Lui a Santa Teresa e sua moglie al Cavone di S. Gennaro dei Poveri, ov’era un’altra *pizzeria* con un gran forno. (Di Giacomo 1995, 53, emphasis in the text)⁹

As far as the distribution of the stalls (and taverns) is concerned, Dalbono maintains that they can be found in “Poggio Reale, Antignano (*Ante Agnanum*) le frutte della Conigliera, il Vomero” as well as in the streets of “Porto, del Pendino, di Forcella, di S. Lucia, del Mercato” (Dalbono 1853, 72). In this regard, it is worth considering the description of Santa Lucia, one of the symbols of Naples, by Luigi Coppola:

Un gruppo di tavole rivestite di bianco tovagliuolo che non è certo tela di Fiandra, invita a sedere—e le caldaie fumiganti che fanno da lungi scorgere la presenza de’vermicelli e il soave profumo della salsa dorata, stuzzicherebbero l’appetito di un anacoreta. [...] A Santa Lucia, come a Posillipo, non si va per gustare i manicaretti della cucina francese, ma una sempre ed inalterabile è la minuta del pranzo, che umilmente si addimanda cena—i rituali vermicelli al pomodoro. (Coppola 1866, 36-37)¹⁰

What transpires from the descriptions of these authors is that virtually every district of Naples had its share of stalls: from the popular to the most elegant ones. Such a widespread coverage bears witness to the importance of the *maccaronaro* in the daily life of the city.

⁹ “He was a nice, big, fat man. He had a pizzeria on Via Santa Teresa, on the left side of those who go to Capodimonte. The pizzeria was once also a maccaronaro shop: his grandfather would stay there, behind the counter every evening, with a large white apron on his belly, and served the *twos* and *threes* until midnight. He had his shop in Santa Teresa while his wife worked in another pizzeria with a large oven in the Cavone di S. Gennaro dei Poveri”.

¹⁰ “A group of tables covered in white tablecloth, which is certainly not of the finest texture, invites to sit—and the fumigant boilers that let the vermicelli and the sweet scent of the golden sauce be perceived from a distance, would stimulate the appetite of a hermit. [...] In Santa Lucia, as in Posillipo, one does not go to taste specialties of French cuisine, but there is always just one unchanging kind of lunch, which humbly becomes dinner—the ritual vermicelli with tomato sauce”.