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Soprintendenza per i Beni culturali
e ambientali di Palermo

MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

by **Orietta Sorgi**

REGIONE SICILIANA
Assessorato dei Beni culturali
e dell'Identità siciliana



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Twenty Itineraries Designed to Help You Explore the Cultural Heritage of Palermo and its Province

project by: *Ignazio Romeo*

R.U.P.: *Claudia Oliva*

Soprintendente: *Maria Elena Volpes*

Markets and street food

by *Orietta Sorgi*

photographs: *Salvatore Plano* (fig. 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 26, 28, 29, 32, 33, 39, 40, 43, 51, 52);

Maurizio De Francisci (fig. 10, 24, 34, 38, 41, 44, 45); *Francesco Passante* (fig. 18, 22, 23, 25, 31, 35b, 36);

Fabio Militello (fig. 5, 6, 20, 30, 35a); *Dario Di Vincenzo* (fig. 46, 49, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58).

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Assessorato dei Beni culturali e dell'Identità siciliana

Dipartimento dei Beni culturali e dell'Identità siciliana

Soprintendenza per i Beni culturali e ambientali di Palermo

Via Pasquale Calvi, 13 - 90139 Palermo

Palazzo Ajutamicristo - Via Garibaldi, 41 - 90133 Palermo

tel. 091-7071425 091-7071342 091-7071411

www.regione.sicilia.it/beniculturali

MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

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The markets in Palermo are a long-term phenomenon, due mainly to their stubborn resistance to change over time. Sprung up in strategic points of the ancient city, destined, almost as if by natural vocation, to commerce, situated along the course of rivers or near the port, our markets have tacitly ignored any attempt to be shifted to more functional locations. Thus those, which have survived modernization, such as the Capo, Ballarò and the Vucciria, have remained put, maintaining their original environmental and cultural model. Within what, nowadays, can be considered an urbanised medieval location, in amongst the squares, alleys and courtyards of the historical center, ephemeral architectural structures are raised daily, created from simple materials: curtains and umbrellas, marble counters and wooden stalls, with dangling light-bulbs, colorful signs and religious images devoted to the protection of commerce. Amazing displays of fruit and vegetables are never randomly arranged but always according to implicit rules of colour combinations;

hides of butchered meat are exhibited as if they were trophies and triumphs of fresh fish are elaborately decorated. All this takes place against a soundscape of stall-keepers shouting their wares, known as “abbanniate”, an advertising language sui generis, and a legacy of the ancient heralds and town criers of the Palermitan Senate.

The truth is that the traditional street market is still today “a total social fact” in which the economic aspects also take on recreational, religious, social and cultural significance.

MARKETS IN THE HISTORY OF PALERMO. A LONG-TERM PHENOMENON

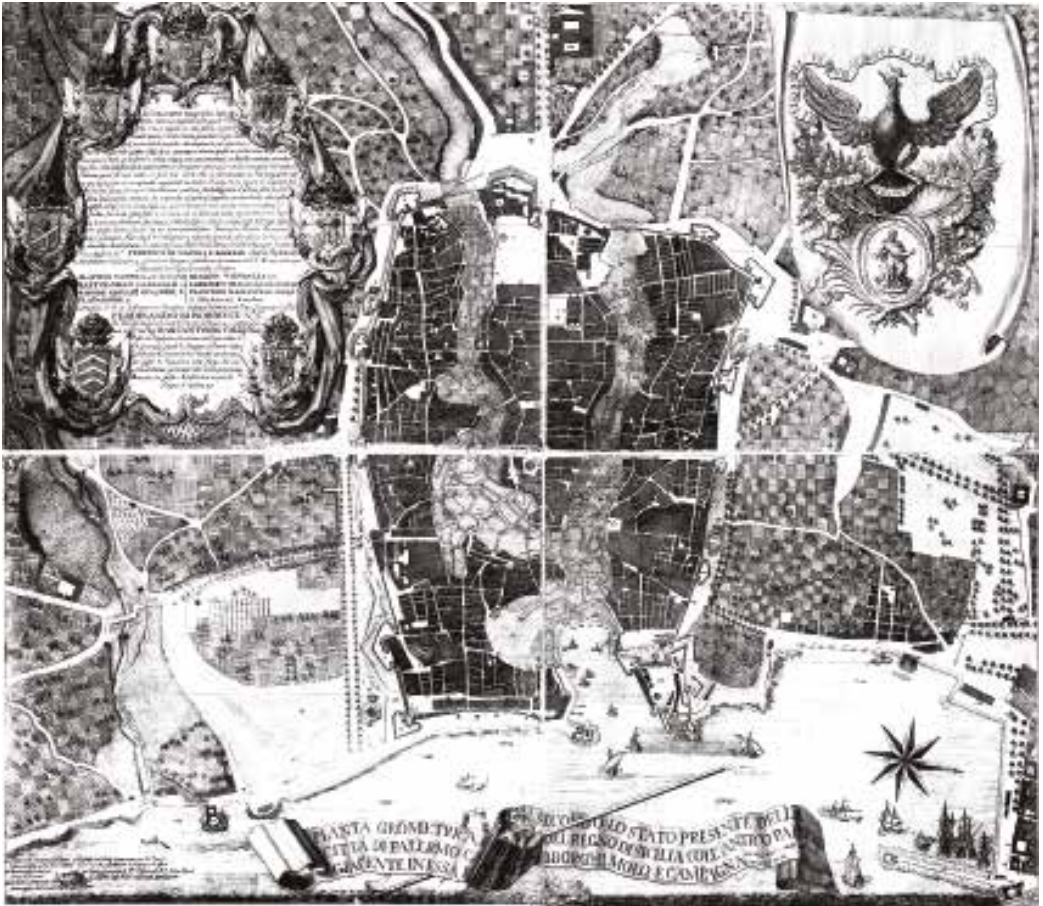
From the beginning, Palermo seemed destined to trade, almost inevitable due to its ideal location, enclosed between the hills and the sea. Situated at the center of the Mediterranean, the city harbour soon became an important port of call for international trade, a clearing point for diverse goods arriving from distant countries. From the large agricultural estates inland, vast quantities of wheat were sent to the city, both for local requirements and for export, as well as a wide range of seasonal produce from the surrounding orchards and vegetables gardens.

When, at the end of the 10th century, a trader from Baghdad, *Ibn Hawqal*, visited Palermo, he made the following annotations in his travel notebook concerning the organization of the markets:

Most parts of the markets are between the mosque of 'Ibn Sīqlāb and this Quartier Nuovo: for example the Oliandoli market [Oil traders] that includes all the workshops of sellers of this commodity.

*The moneychangers and grocers also live outside the city walls; and similarly the tailors, the armourers, the braziers, the wheat sellers, and all the other craftsmen. But the butchers have more than one hundred and fifty shops within the city walls to sell meat; and here (between the two neighborhoods mentioned earlier) there is only a handful. This (large number of workshops) shows the importance of the markets and the large number of those employed. This can also be inferred from the vastness of their mosque; one day when it was full of people, I counted roughly seven thousand people: because during prayer there were more than thirty-six lines of people, each of which numbered around two hundred people. (translation by Michele Amari in his *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula* of 1880).*

This valuable testimony reveals how the city was already, under the dominion of the Muslims, divided into neighborhoods, each according to its markets: the Cassaro and the Galca corresponded to the *paleopolis* (the original city), where the main general emporium was situated, known as the *As-asimat* (the row), and in all likelihood already present during the Punic-Roman and Byzantine era; the Kalsa, headquarters of the emirate, with what would then become the *Fieravecchia*; and the districts which were part of the first expansion outside the city walls: the Ballarò, which stretched along the Kemonia, and whose name is still of uncertain etymology, but may refer to a collection point for products coming from the surrounding agricultural villages; the Seralcaldi with the Il Capo market, situated on the higher part (Caput Seralcadi), stretched out along the *Papireto*. To this list should be added the spice market, *Suq-âl-Atta-rin*, near the Mosque, between the current church of San Nicola di Tolentino and the Piazza Sant' Anna, as well as a few others of minor importance and size. Even *Edrisi* and *Ibn Gubayr*, during the Norman age, referred to a thriving city, full of merchandise, where Muslims, settled in these new quarters, owned all the businesses.



At that time in fact, this structure remained substantially unchanged, eventually encompassing the neighbourhood of Porta Patitelli, built on areas made available after the landfill of the harbour, near the ancient port of *Bab-al-Bahar*.

Ugo Falcando, chronicler of the Norman period, in the 12th century, mentioned the settlement of guilds from Amalfi and later from Genoa, Pisa and Catalonia in the neighbourhood of the Lodges, between what is now Piazza San Domenico and the modern day neighbourhood of Vucciria, spilling over along Piazza Garraffello, which later on would become known as the *loggia mercatorum*: the Amalfi guild traded in cloth and silks, and resided in Piazza Sant' Andrea, while the other craftsmen and various merchants, chose to reside in the Garraffello

district. The Bocceria Grande was located, during the Angevin period, in the same neighbourhood, in Piazza Caracciolo. Home of the slaughterhouses and the meat market, it was moved, in 1454, to the area between Via Candelaï and Piazza Sant' Onofrio. From then on, the Vucciria, old Boucherie or Foglia market, would sell only fruit and vegetables.

In the 16th century the historian Tommaso Fazello confirmed the presence of a market in each neighbourhood: the Cassaro, with the old Arab market '*As-simâr*', along Via Marmorea today known as Corso Vittorio Emanuele; the Albergaria, where the great *Ballarò market* was situated; the district of Seralcadi with *the Capo market*, connected through the *platee magne*, to a new commercial area between Via San Agostino

1
Geometric plan of the city of Palermo by Marchese di Villabianca, first edition, 1777

and Via Bandiera; *the Vucciria market* in the neighbourhood of Porta Patitelli and *the Kalsa market* in the Fieravecchia, today's Piazza Rivoluzione. According to the reports of the gentleman Vincenzo Di Giovanni, in his *Del Palermo Restaurato* from the 17th century, and later of the Marchese Villabianca in Palermo d'Oggiogiorno at the end of the 18th century, the Via Toledo (now Corso Vittorio Emanuele) and Via Maqueda constituted the new commercial axis of the city destined to house elegant boutiques for the rich upper classes, whilst the traditional *piazze de grascia* (markets) remained confined to the old neighbourhoods in the medieval city (**fig. 1**).

The market locations within the city remained unchanged for the whole of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, until the Allied bombings of 1943 provoked a slowdown in trade. Post war, despite the migration of local residents to the new suburbs, the old markets slowly resumed their activities. However, urban expansion towards the northern suburbs was unstoppable: already in the 16th century with the extension of the harbour wharf to the north, beyond Porta San Giorgio where the tuna fishery was located, a new market developed in a little suburban village grouped around the church of Santa Lucia. This was the point of arrival for most of the fishermen and sailors from the Kalsa and Castello San Pietro. Thus Borgo Santa Lucia assumed the character of a fish market thanks to its proximity to the port, where there were also a number of containers and deposits for wheat. This new neighbourhood, located to the north of the old town, received a strong boost from a group of Lombardy merchants who monopolised the wheat trade.

Today's Markets: a mix of tenacity and change

The markets that have survived the great transformations of the 20th century, such as the Capo, Ballarò and Vucciria, are still there, where they have always been since their inception, exhibiting, throughout their long life, a strong resistance to change. Sprung up in strategic locations of the ancient city, near the sea or along the riverbanks, they have maintained their ancient environmental and cultural configuration, refuting any attempt to shift them to more appropriate and functional locations. Although the modern network of roads and the new shopping centers has gradually replaced their traditional context, the markets persist as islands or fragments of the past: an odd but vital scenario that daily repeats itself despite everything, a peculiar liturgy in a sort of miraculous harmony (**fig. 2-4**). This living memory, replenished daily by a dense web of human relationships and by a set of oral practices, ensures that the streets, squares and courtyards of the medieval city continue to act as a framework for community relations. (**fig. 5-6**). The continuing presence in the city of terraced houses, a combination of living quarters and workshop, recall an existential period in which residence and work cohabited in the same environment, giving rise to numerous opportunities for social gatherings. In these strongly traditional areas, ephemeral stalls are assembled and dismantled every day: brightly coloured tenting, striped umbrellas (**fig. 7**), temporary stalls and marble counters illuminated by rows of dangling light bulbs and protective devotional images as well



MARKETS AND STREET FOOD



3

*The Capo Market.
Via Porta Carini*

4

*The Vucciria Market.
Via Maccheronai*

as photographs of dead family members, decorated with candles and flowers, where the head of the family, often the founder of the commercial activity, stands out centrefront (fig. 8). In amongst the wares on display are the so-called “pizzini”, labels displaying prices written for the sole purpose of attracting customers, giving them the illusion of saving, often not actually true: 0.99 cents instead of a euro (fig. 9). Finally the “coppi” complete the essential kit of the market: these are sheets of yellow-ocher paper or old newspapers rolled into a cone (fig. 10), arranged in wicker “coffe” (shoppers or baskets), ready to be filled. On the walls the shop signs with the name of the market stall holder, painted on wood in vibrant tones, usually depicting the groceries for sale but occasionally the production environment, especially marine landscapes, or else devotional images for the protection of the business (fig. 11). It is a marginal universe made out of recycled material, in which a poverty perpetuating value system reigns, defined by Oscar Lewis as the “culture of poverty”, in his work of 1973, in areas that while physically centrally located, are nowadays also places of social segregation. In sharp contrast to this is the showy abundance of groceries and the magnificent displays laid out on the counters: imposing pyramids of fruit and vegetables (fig. 12), erected according to chromatic codes that are never casual and construction methods validated over time, both aimed at attracting the attention of passersby; slaughtered animals hanging from hooks and exhibited outdoors as though they were trophies

(**fig. 13**), whole fish and slices of large fish carefully arranged on marble counters, beautifully decorated (**fig. 14**); strings of garlic hung like garlands and bouquets of chili for good luck (**fig.15-16**). This scenic landscape is underscored by the market's soundscape, consisting mainly of the cries of the vendors, the buzz of the buyers and nowadays the deafening noise of mopeds wending their way through the throng of passersby. Voices, sounds and noises become inextricably interwoven, sensations peculiar to a market, with its vibrant multicoloured effects and intense aromatic and acoustic sensations.

The truth is that the traditional market is still today a “*total social fact*”, according to an expression used in French sociology, and in particular by Marcel Mauss, in which reciprocal relationships between people are created, transcending the purely economic aspects and creating religious, recreational and social obligations in various forms. A place of exchange not only of goods or property but of knowledge and experience, a place of interrelations and communication as the fundamental element of every culture.

On the other hand it is exactly the market soundscape that recalls the old Sicily, when communication was through speech. Given that the use and dissemination of newspapers was limited to the narrow circle of the landed aristocracy, the rising urban middle class and the clergy, the transmission of knowledge remained verbal for much of the population. Thus it was the town criers who announced the acts of the Senate and all public events to the



5
*Vicolo Scarparelli
in Ballarò*

6
*A Courtyard
giving onto the
Vicolo Brugnò in
the municipality
of the Palazzo
Reale*





rhythm of the drum. The *tammurinaro* or town crier, combining his cries with the beating of his musical instrument, became an expert in this particular rhetorical rhythm and through his oratory informed the people of the most important news. This was also the function of the storytellers who, in the public squares, narrated the news, often highly coloured or romanticised, using information boards and musical accompaniment. There is no doubt that the vocal technique and the specific cadence of the *abbanniate*, that is of the public announcements made by the market criers, must originally have been based on those forms of oral communication, with that declamatory emphasis so effective in attracting people's attention. It is an advertising language *sui generis* in which the use of figures of speech, such as the metaphor, prevails: take for example the cries or “*abbanniate*” in the Capo market, of the sellers of broad beans, in which the quality of the beans are likened to the sweetness of

7

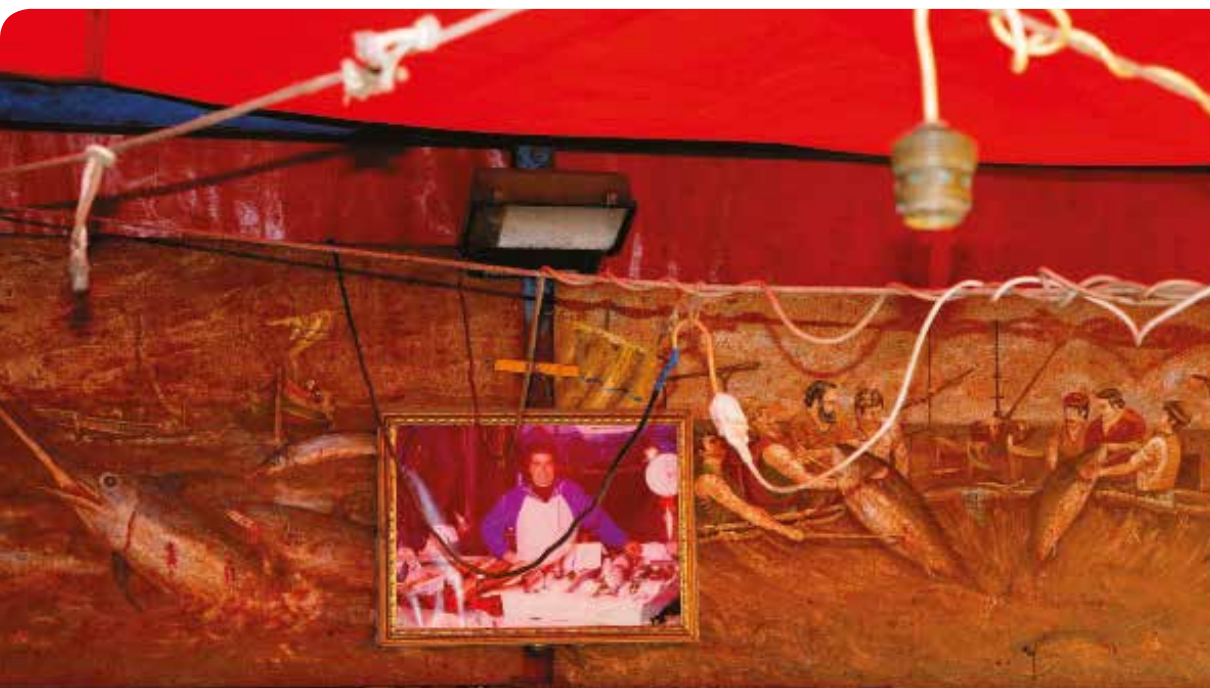
*Market décor in the
Ballarò Market*

8

*The Capo Market.
Devotional images and images
of the deceased for
the protection of
commerce*

9

*The Ballarò Market.
Pricing labels*



MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

cannameli, or honey cakes; or that of the sellers of peppers, in which their texture is vaunted as being better than that of meat, considered, by the poor, a rare privilege. In the Capo market today, the quality of white grapes is still likened to the golden locks of ladies' hair, whilst the quality of spinach is associated with the strength of Popeye the sailor man, as portrayed in comics and cartoons. The beauty of fresh

tuna (*tunnina*) is likened to that of a "young girl" and is therefore kissable (the holler is generally accompanied by a kiss on the fish's cheek). Elsewhere metonyms are resorted to – an expression substituted for something in close association - as in the case of the *abbanniate* for fruit and vegetables: *u culuri cci a taliari*, in which the colour is considered sufficient proof of the freshness and goodness of the product, or hyperbole



is utilised, exaggerating the qualities and size of the wares. In some cases, the yells of the seller may assume licentious tones and allusive references as in the *abbanniata* for zucchini or cucumbers. A phenomenon that in many ways recalls life in the square in the Middle Ages, when life was lived in public, where the sense of community was expressed through ritual and collective behavior and the use of strong and colorful language,

often shouted out and even grotesque, frequently alluding to the “bottom half” of the body, to quote Bakhtin.

The diverse development of the modern city to accommodate motorway traffic has caused the slow decline of small high street businesses. Nowadays, the ancient figure of the peddler has almost disappeared and with it his daily repetitive routes, anchored in tradition and aimed at a regular clientele



12

*The Capo Market.
Display of fruit and
vegetables*



13

*The Ballarò Market.
Sale of meat*

14

*The Vucciria Market.
Fishmonger*

tied to the vendor by ingrained habit: today they are still to be found in large numbers, but with a more permanent location with their “*lape*”, a three wheeled van, found at every city intersection.

Outside the market, the hawker survives here and there as a *castagnaru* (hot chesnut seller), with his portable furnace or as an ice cream vendor stationed outside schools or by the numerous *sfuncionari* (sellers of local pizza) spread around the city using loudspeakers to compensate for the noise of traffic. The *riffaturi* (seller of lottery tickets) is a common market figure who announces his arrival by pushing a cart full of fish and calling out winning numbers. He has a briefcase full of lottery tickets, which he shakes constantly in order to attract customers. The *riffa* is in fact an itinerant lottery that takes place in the popular neighborhoods in Palermo: the best known is the *riffa ra spisa* which awards the winner a box of fish of particular value such as large prawns (**fig. 17**).



15

*The Capo Market.
Display of
chilli*

16

*The Capo Market.
Display of garlic*

17

*Via Maccheronai
in the Vucciria.
“Riffaturi”*



18

*Piazza Caracciolo.
Street vendor selling
bread and spleen
(pani ca meusa)*

Street food

Street food plays a central role in Palermo's markets and it is offered both by temporary stalls and by more permanent fixtures. Fatima Giallombardo, in her "La Cucina di Strada a Palermo" written in 1995, defined it as a sort of large public buffet, regulated by codes differing from and sometimes totally opposed to those of home cooked food, where women rule is undisputed and where food is served in a specific "order". While the consumption of food in the home presupposes a laden dinner table around which the family unit comes together at specific moments during the day, street food is consumed outdoors at any time and is aimed at men, in an atmosphere of real gluttony and devoid of rules and regulations. In fact, it deals with very particular foods, derived in large part from offal or animal entrails that are then prepared in such a way that the dishes are destined to be consumed predominately by men. It is food by men for men, devoured on the spot, usually standing up, using one's hands and washed down by large amounts of beer or wine.

The smoke and the pungent smell of these dishes attract habitual consumers, who gather around the stalls and manifest their virility by eating and drinking to excess (fig. 18). Nowadays, however, the street gastronomy that prevails in Palermo such as the fried food shops with their fritters and croquettes (fig. 19), the sale of roasted chestnuts or slices of citron sprinkled with salt (fig. 20) as well as freshly squeezed fruit juices (fig. 21) sold in kiosks along the streets, is exempt from this connotation of "food for men".



19

*The Ballarò Market.
Figgitoria
(fried food stall)*



MARKETS AND STREET FOOD



20
*The Ballarò Market.
Citron fruit stall*

21
*Via Maccheronai
in the Vucciria.
Sale of citrus fruit
juice*

Although falling into the category of street foods, they are now enjoyed by all and no longer remain within the confines of a market but have spread out into residential neighbourhoods and into resort areas such as Mondello.

The traditional repertoire of street food mainly consists of *stigghiola* (lamb kebabs), *mussu* and *masciddaru* (boiled beef offal), *quarumi* (boiled entrails), *frittula* (doughnuts of fried entrails), *pani ca mieusa* (bread and spleen), *babbaluci* (snails), (fig. 22-24) but also includes *sfinciuni* (local pizza), (fig. 25) *puippu vugghiutu* (boiled octopus), (fig. 26), *saidde a beccafico* (beccafico sardines), *surra* (tuna belly), *favi sicchi in umitu* (dried beans stew), and *caidduna e cacuoccioli mpastietta* (thistles and artichokes fried in batter), *pullanchielli*

(boiled corn cobs), boiled potatoes and artichokes, *ficurinnia* (prickly pear), (fig. 27) and *muluna russa* (watermelons), to note the most important.

The *stigghiola* is made up of lamb guts, roasted over charcoal and served with salt and lemon. The presence of the *stigghiolaro* along the market borders is easily recognized by clusters of entrails hanging on the stalls, big clouds of smoke caused by cooking on broilers and by the particular smell. *U mussu* is a boiled dish made from various parts of cattle, served cold and seasoned with salt and lemon. It contains various parts of the animal in addition to the muzzle from which it takes its name: *masciddaru*, jaw, *funcia* and *nasca*, mouth and nose, *arra*, foot, *caiccagnolo*, heel bone, *fruntali*, instep, *rinuocchiu*, knee and in



22
*The Capo Market.
 Sale of boiled beef
 offal (mussu and
 masciddaru) at Porta
 Carini*

23
*The Capo Market.
 Peddler of fried entrails
 (frittola) at Porta
 Carini*

24
*The Ballarò Market.
 Babbaluci (snails)
 stall*



MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

25

*The Capo Market,
Via Porta Carini.
Sfncionario*

general, all the muscular parts formed by connective tissues. On the counters the pieces are presented already cut into bite size portions served on a plate or in a sheet of oiled paper.

Quarumi is a dish consisting of a mix of entrails, taken predominantly from various parts of the stomach and intestines. It is a true example of boiled entrails, seasoned with onions, celery and carrots and then eaten together with the broth. A *quarumaru stall* is characterized by a large steaming pot from which the seller pulls out the pieces and then cuts them up on request. *Frittula* is a dish that defies description, composed of all the leftovers from the slaughter of cattle, pigs, sheep and goats (*sivu i chianchieri*). These leftovers, collected from butcher shops, are first



26

*Piazza Caracciolo
in the Vucciria.
Market seller of
boiled octopus*



heated in a large iron pot (*fustu*) where they fry slowly in suet, (*saimi*), and then boiled once again to keep them soft and finally compressed into the shape of a doughnut. The *frittularu* offers his wares in a large basket covered with a checkered cloth, from which the doughnut is extracted and sold either in a piece of bread or eaten directly with the hands (**fig. 28**).

U pani ca meusa or *vastiedda* is a focaccia stuffed with spleen and lung and seasoned to taste with caciocavallo cheese cut into thin strips and ricotta whose presence or absence characterises it as *maritata* or *schietta*, i.e. accompanied or simple. Precooked slices of spleen are offered over the counter and then fried in lard when eaten.

The tavern can be considered a complement to street food, attracting predominantly male customers strongly threatened by an existential precariousness. The copious consumption of wine and the resulting state of intoxication, accompanied by gambling practices such as the “touch”, become a form of redemption from their marginalization (**fig. 29**).



27
The Borgo Vecchio Market.
Sale of prickly pears

28
The Ballarò Market.
Eating fried entrails
(frittola)

MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

Market feast days and the religious symbolism of food

Neighbourhood religious festivals seem periodically to breath new life into the markets. This can be attributed mainly to the stimulation of local parishes but also to that of the Brotherhoods, who play an important role in the bonding between sacred and profane, spreading and activating local religious groups. In these cases the market takes on a different aspect: stalls, umbrellas and hangings are no longer used, instead the balconies of the local residents are draped with embroidered sheets for the passage of the procession and the alleys are adorned with lavish illuminations. The sounds of the traditional crys appear to find renewed strength and vigour in the ritual

29

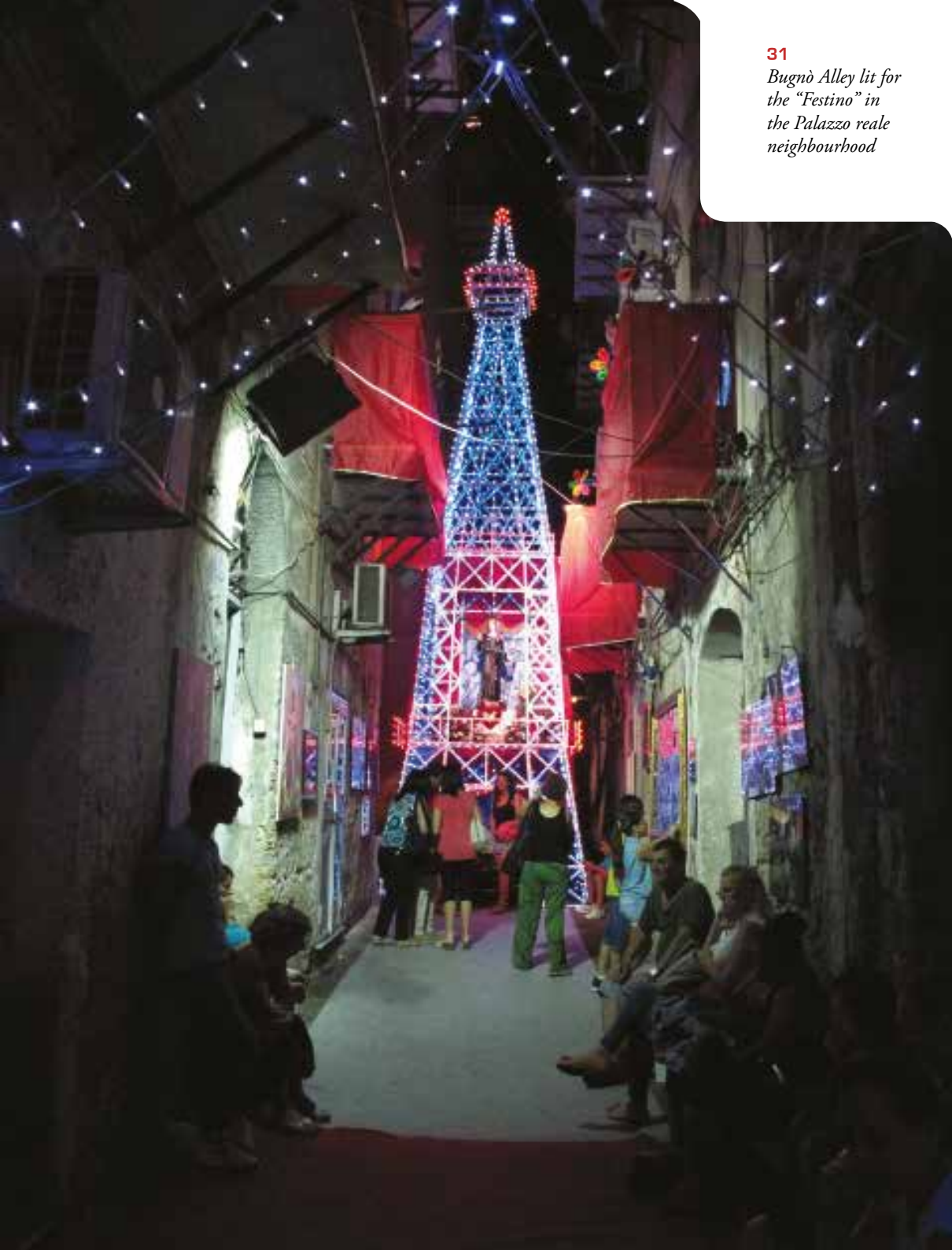
*Piazza Garaffello
in the Vucciria.
Playing "touch" in
the tavern*

30

*The Procession of
Maria SS. della
Mercede in the Capo
neighbourhood*

invocations: this happens in September for the Feast of the Madonna della Mercede (**fig. 30**), Patron Saint of the Capo and protectress of the market (*A Rregina ru Capu è... Viva a Maronna a Miccè*) or in the Ballarò for the Feast of Maria SS.ma del Carmelo (**fig. 32**) in July. In addition to devotional bread, which in its various symbolic forms marks the passing of the religious calendar in every neighbourhood, even the food stalls assume, on these festive occasions, a new meaning. During Easter the copious quantities of lambs slaughtered and displayed in the market butchers shops symbolise, in the death of the animal, the death of God the Saviour. The periodical display of cakes and other foods illustrates that food is not just to be eaten but has an intrinsic value, serving

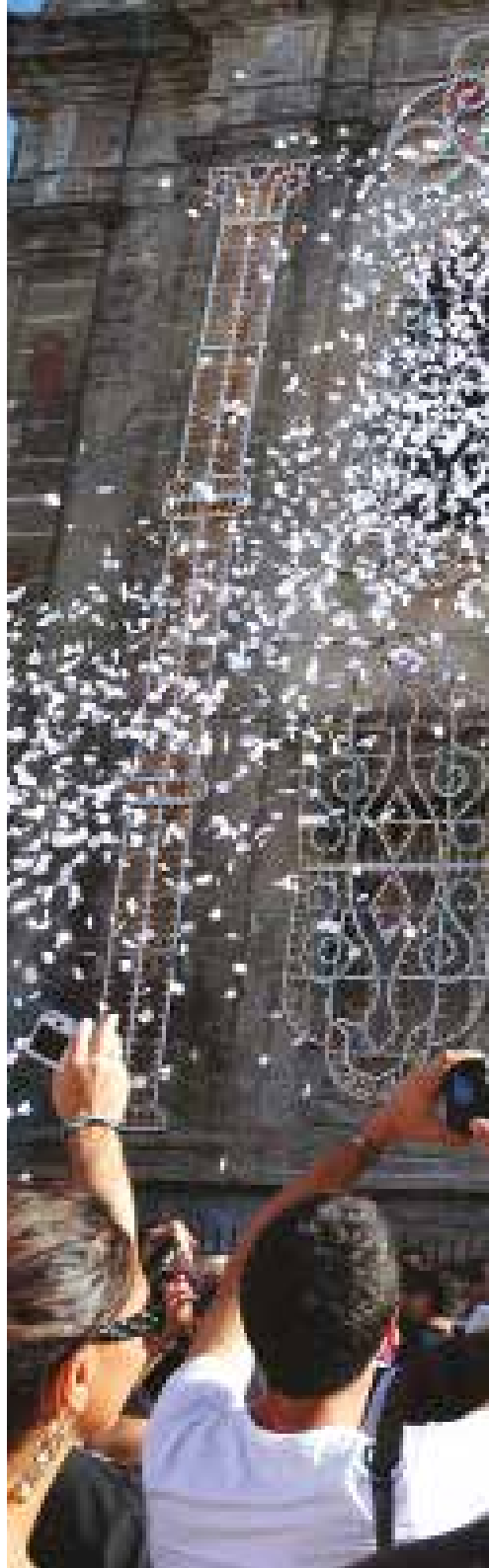




32

*Procession of
Maria SS. del
Carmelo in
the Ballarò
neighbourhood*

mainly to indicate that this day is a different day, it is a festive day. On November 2nd, All Souls Day, failing the traditional Olivella Fair, the presence of certain foods underscores ancient beliefs in the resurrection of the dead and the traditional giving of gifts to children. On these days, apart from the muffolette of the dead, offered in all the bakeries, markets stalls become a real triumph of marzipan and nuts (**fig. 33**), which, together with the *pupaccena*, a baby figurine made of sugar (**fig. 34**), will serve to fill the traditional cannistru (basket) during the dinner for All Souls, a testimonial of the funeral feast that strengthens the link between the living and the dead. The celebratory symbolism is accentuated during the period of the greatest concentration of ceremonial occurrences, namely the ending of winter and the arrival of spring. The new season is inaugurated in Palermo with the lighting of the San Giuseppe bonfires, the traditional “flames” that illuminate the downtown alleys on its eve. Markets, on these occasions, are combed for unwanted material by bands of children who build woodpiles under adult supervision, who then ignite them and control the flames (**fig. 35**). On the same occasion sumptuous poor man’s tables are set up in the Capo and the Vucciria, for the “down and out” of the neighborhood, in honour of the Holy Carpenter, the protector of the poor. This takes place in Piazzetta Meli, near the church of San Domenico, in the municipality of Castellammare, where every year a long open air poor man’s table is prepared by an





MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

33
*Via Maccheronai
in the Vucciria.
Almond marzipan
pastry stall during
the celebration of
the Feast of All
Souls*

34
*Baby figurine
made out of sugar.*

organising committee (fig. 36). The sacredness of the event significantly alters these places. The occasion is marked by new hangings for the votive shrines dedicated to San Giuseppe and illustrated panels announcing the Feast Day. A woman circulates between passersby asking for alms and a musical group sings Neapolitan songs. In the center there is a table set for the guests with a wide variety of dishes and alcoholic beverages, a literal food orgy. Compared to the past there are some obvious innovations such as the prevalence of commercial restoration and



the decline of domestic preparation of the various foods, as well as the introduction of some foods such as pork meat originally not allowed in what used to be a traditional vegetarian menu. Notwithstanding these apparent transformations it would appear that what occurs in the Vucciria underscores the real meaning of the Feast Day in which the myth of the existing social order is overturned, placing the poor at the top of the hierarchy and removing, via the banquet's opulence, the daily grind of misery and emargination. For the celebration of Santa Rosalia, the

patron saint of Palermo, the old quarter of the Fieravecchia in the Kalsa relives a moment of great popularity in which street food plays a central role. During these particular days many street vendors pitch their stalls in an area stretching from Piazza Marina to Porta Felice and along the Foro Italico, the traditional "seawalk": delicacies on offer include: *calia* (toasted chickpeas), *simenza* (pumpkin seeds), *nucidda atturrata* (toasted hazelnuts) and nougat, along with the overwhelming smell of caramelised almonds in sugar and the "gelato di *campagna*".

35

The "Flames of San Giuseppe" in the Papireto and in Piazza Castello



MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

36

*Piazzetta Meli.
The Poor Man's
Table set up for
San Giuseppe*

These grandiose wooden structures are gaily painted, decorated in the same style as that used for painting donkey carts, depicting various episodes from the life of the Saint. Last but not least are the peddlers of *babbaluci* (stewed snails cooked with garlic and parsley), of boiled corn on the cob, contained in large pots of warm water, or of *granite* (slush puppies) (*granite*), freshly prepared grated ice and a syrup to taste such as mint, black cherry or barley.



THE HISTORICAL MARKETS OF PALERMO



37
Piazza della Fieravecchia. Map 334 of the Bourbon Land Register. Mortillaro-Villarena Archive
A. Piazza della Fieravecchia B. The Lattarini Market (Sug-al-Attarin)

LA KALSA

The Piazza della Fieravecchia (**fig. 37**), today Piazza Rivoluzione, was once the home of a market, as attested by two documents from 1236 and 1238 that describe a *platea Asinorum* where the livestock market was held. Other subsequent writings of the 14th and 15th century, held in the Magione archives, confirm the presence of a fair or market, hence the name of the square. A description from the start of the 17th century by the historian Vincenzo di Giovanni states as follows: *In this square live all the agricultural workers and they normally meet here on their day off. This is also a beautiful*

and spacious square for all things edible. In the middle there is a beautiful marble fountain, which spouts water from a Nymph holding a horn of plenty, pouring water into the first basin; and that one, overflowing, also pours water from four monsters, which are in the large fountain (transcription of Gioacchino di Marzo published in 1872).

In 1687 it was decided to remove the fountain and place it in the Strada Colonna, today Foro Italico: the Piazza Fieravecchia was deprived of its fountain needed to supply the fruit and vegetable market with water.

Fortunately, shortly thereafter, a new fountain was positioned there. The statue

38

*Piazza
Rivoluzione in
the Kalsa. Statue
of the Guardian
(Genio) of
Palermo*

of the Genio of Palermo from the Molo, near the convent of the Mercedari Scalzi, is a mythological figure depicting an old man who represents and protects the city (**fig. 38**). In addition to the square, the Fieravecchia market included a small portion of what is now Via Garibaldi, and in the vicinity the old spice market, *Sug-al-Attarin*, was located between the new church of San Nicolò da Tolentino and Piazza Sant' Anna, which nowadays houses a variety of merchandise, clothing and household goods. Although the food market no longer exists, the district is repopulated during the Feast of San Rosalia, filled with stalls of chickpeas and pumpkin seeds (*calia and semenza*), snails (*babbaluci*) and cold watermelon. As evidence of the ancient splendour of the area, the Antica Focacceria St. Francesco (**fig. 39-40**) still stands in the square, the place par excellence for street food.

Originally the site was the chapel, part of the palace of the princes of Cattolica, that was left to their family cook, Alaimo, to use as a fried food shop and local bistrò. The altar was therefore converted into a counter for traditional dishes: bread and spleen (*meusa*), bread and fritters (*schetta and maritata*), potato croquettes (*cazzilli*), soft pizza (*sfincione*), thistles and fried broccoli. Since 1834 the shop has sold its products to people from all walks of life, open both to the “people” generally understood in the romantic-risorgimental sense, and to the local aristocracy who habitually used it as a meeting place.

Rumour has it that Garibaldi's soldiers frequented the bistro during the uprisings





that led to the unification of Italy. Over time, the gastronomic repertoire was further enriched with a range of new traditional dishes, with the aim of increasing on-site consumption of various delicacies. The place has never completely lost its original function linked to the Prince's testament and the guidelines laid down by the first owner, the cook Alaimo. Today, however it has become a restaurant and pizzeria with tables outside in the square dominated by the Church of San Francesco. With the last owners, the Conticello, the Antica Focacceria has become the symbol of the struggle against the "pizzo" (protection money). In the same neighbourhood, in the Cala of Palermo, there is another traditional street food site known as *Pani ca meusa* (focaccia stuffed with spleen) in Porta Carbone (**fig. 41**). Opened in 1943 and specialising in the classic Sicilian flatbread, topped here with strips of caciocavallo cheese and lemon: the variant that would seem to be - according to those in the know - the purist's version.

39
*Antica Focacceria
 San Francesco.
 Via Alessandro
 Paternostro*



**MARKETS
AND STREET FOOD**

40

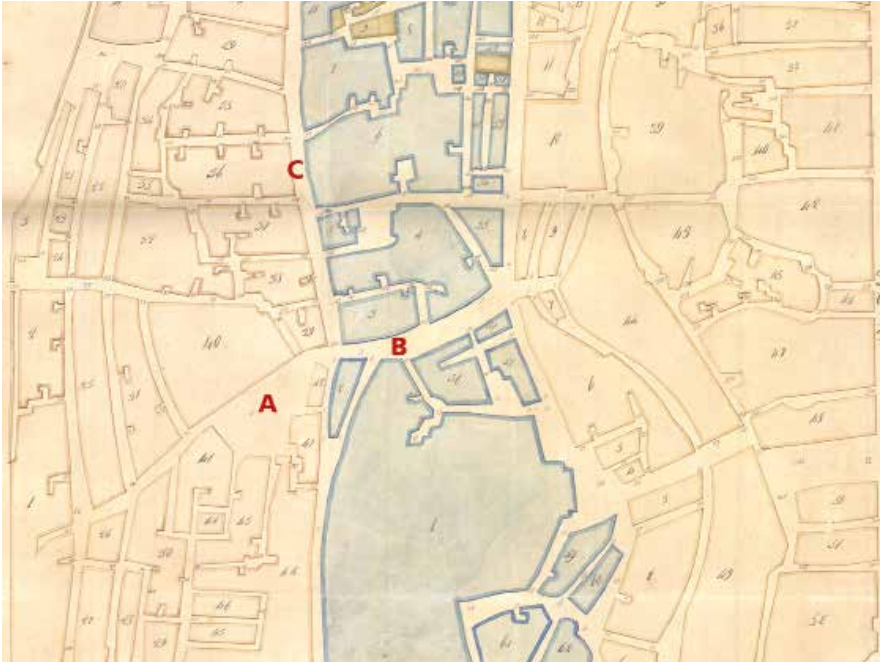
*Antica Focacceria
San Francesco.
Cooking counter*



41

*Pani ca meusa in
Porta Carbone.
Cala di Palermo*





42

The Ballarò Neighbourhood. Map 335 Bourbon Land Register. Mortillaro-Villarena Archive. A. Piazza del Carmine. B. Via Ballarò. C. Via dell'Albergheria

BALLARÒ

The Ballarò Market originated in the 10th century, according to the testimony of the Arab merchant *Ibn Hawqal*, in the Arab quarter (*rabat*) outside the city walls that constituted the first urban sprawl. The big market, in fact, developed in the southern part of the hamlet, between the mosque *Ibn Siqlab* and the Quartiere Nuovo. Hawqal is the first to refer to it, connecting its creation to its vicinity to a farming village near *Baida*, *Bahara*, from whence the merchandise came. The name may derive also from *Segel-ballareth*, which in Arabic

means the seat of the fair. The persistence of this name is also confirmed by a series of archival documents: the first, dating from 1287, speaks about a *contrata Ballarò* and a second, of the same era, reports of a *macellum Ballaronis*. A third, in 1327, cites a public square in Ballarò, that is, a market intended for all kinds of food and not just meat. The first nucleus must have developed along Via Ballarò, originally a narrow and winding road, which in the 15th century was widened until it assumed its current configuration of a square, situated between the Monastery of Santa Chiara and the convent of the Carmine. The medieval

MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

43

*Porta Sant' Agatha
in the Palazzo
Reale Municipality*

Via Alberghiera, similar in concept to the alleyway, which ran into the square, in the 16th century became the *platea magna*, a commercial street that was widened in order to align the taverns along it and to allow the passage of wagons.

About this time Ballarò assumed its definitive layout, even though its origin dates back to the Saracens. It is certain that, in the 16th century, the historian Tommaso Fazello confirms the presence of a square that *con voce Saracina era chiamata* (Saracen voices called it) *Sege-ballarath* and later Michele Amari in the translated text of *Ibn*

Hawqal, mentions a market called *Balbara* and states that *Balbara*, which is written as *Balarah* in the Latin documents from the time of William II, in the 12th century was a Muslim village near the site where this monarch raised the magnificent Cathedral of Monreale... (this information is taken from the book by Rosario La Duca published in 1994, *I Mercati di Palermo*).

During the reforms of the Bourbon government (**fig. 42**), even the Ballarò market underwent some improvements involving the construction of colonnades and stalls, similar to those in the Vucciria.



Unfortunately, as noted by the Marquis di Villabianca, these measures were only partially successful due to the narrow alleys. In the 20th century, the British American bombings of World War II caused the destruction of the architectural curtain, which, fortunately, was restored after the war, though only for the small shops, in order to facilitate their commercial recovery. Nowadays, the Ballarò remains the largest popular market in Palermo. The structure of the market in the neighbourhood of Palazzo Reale has not changed significantly from its original

layout and it remains crammed, to a large extent, between the Piazza Ballarò and Piazza Carmine, dominated by the Church. In fact the whole selling area extends along Via Chiappara al Carmine, up to the Arco di Cutò, bordering on Via Maqueda. On the other side one can gain access from Via San Mercurio in Via Benedettini, or from Corso Tukory passing the ancient Porta San Agata (**fig. 43**), or else along the Via Università, passing by the Casa Professa. It is still an extremely vital market, having born the brunt of the influx of immigrants who, for the last 30 years, have settled in

44-45

*The Ballarò
Market.
Immigrants*



46

*Nativity Scenes
made of Bread.
Congregation of
Bakers (Fornai),
Church of Sant'
Isidore Agricola in
Albergheria*

the district and where the presence of the Church of Santa Chiara functions as an importante social centre (fig. 44-45). As mentioned, the presence of the Brotherhoods plays a strong role in favouring social cohesion. One in particular, is that of the Bakers (*Fornai*), established in the 17th century and based in the church of Sant'Isidore Agricola all'Albergheria. In

addition to the traditional Good Friday procession, for over twenty years (1992) the Brotherhood of Bakers (*Panettieri*) have set up in the sacristy of the Church, during the Christmas season, nativity scenes made entirely of bread, ephemeral sculptures, set against an evocative backdrop, that every year is enhanced by new elements combining tradition and modernity (fig. 46).





47
*The Capo
 Neighbourhood.
 Map 336,
 Bourbon
 Land Register.
 Mortillaro-
 Villarena Archive.
 A. Piazza Capo.
 B. Porta Carini*

IL CAPO

The market is still situated at the top of the old Arab district “degli Schiavoni” (*Harat-as-Saqalibah*), renamed *Seralcadi* during the Norman age. It stood right at the intersection between Via San Agostino, Via Beati Paoli and Porta Carini where there was a small widening known as Piazza Capo. The *Caput Seralcadi* constitutes, therefore, the upper part of the neighbourhood, extending beyond the northern watercourse, the *Papireto* (fig. 47). This site was established during the first urban expansion, beyond the ancient

Punic-Roman fortress surrounded by mighty walls, called *al-Qasr* (the Castle) by the Arabs. According to *Ibn Hawqal*, it was part of the five districts making up the *Borgo* (*rabat*), outside the walls. Earliest archival reports are the chronicles of *Ibn Giubair* in 1184 that refer to the Capo as a neighbourhood populated by Muslims engaged in commerce. Notarial acts of the 11th century already mention the sale of *case solarate* to use as residential workshops, bordering the *platea pubblica Seralcadi*, later known as *platea magna*, due to its commercial vocation. In the 15th century the market expanded to include

48

Chianchere (derived from the word Chianca - where meat was sliced)



the slaughterhouses that had established themselves between Via Candelai and the Discesa dei Giovenchi, subsequent to the conversion of the Vucciria into a purely horticultural market. The new commercial expansion included; the Vicolo dei Giovenchi and the Discesa delle Capre, used by the animals being led to the slaughterhouses; the Vicolo dei Sanguinazzai, named after the black pudding sausage makers; the Piazza, the Alley and Courtyard of the Caldamai, named after the sellers who cooked animal entrails, (*quaruma-ra*). On this Square the Brotherhood of Butchers built in 1589, a church dedicated to the Madonna delle Grazie. The Vicolo delle Chianche was ultimately destined for the butchers' shops, as identified by the tree stumps (*chianca*, **fig. 48**) normally used to cut up their meat. Another slaughterhouse, known as "Ucciditore alla Guilla", already present in 1553, according to Villabianca, was located between the churches of SS. Cosma and Damiano, and San Giovanni alla Guilla. Both the Ucciditore alla Guilla and the Bocceria Nova were abolished in 1837, when the butchers' shops were transferred to Ponte di Mare, near the tuna traps of San Erasmo. Di Giovanni, in the above mentioned *Del Palermo Restaurato*, written in the early 17th century, mentions the Piazza del Capo as offering *an abundance of all sorts of fruit, due to its closeness to the gardens (orchards), and of fish, because of being on the way to Carini and Castellammare*. Even the *Capitoli e Ordinazioni* of 1761 confirms that the Capo market once stretched along Via



49

*The Morello
Bakery. Via
Cappuccinelle al
Capo.
Mosaic panel*

MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

Porta Carini, via Cappuccinelle and Via Beati Paoli, and included the first part of Via Sant' Agostino. A city guide of 1844 refers to a business in the nearby Piazza San Cosmo.

After the Second World War, despite the destruction caused by bombs along Via Beati Paoli, the Capo resumed its sprawling growth.

The main access to the market is the 14th century Porta Carini, which, along the Via Carini, leads to the Piazza Capo, at the centre of the market, dividing into Via Cappuccinelle and Via Beati Paoli. Along the latter axis and between the Piazza Beati Paoli and Monte di Pietà, continuing on from the food market, is the dry goods market. It is located in Sant' Agostino, once connected to Via Bandiera, before the intersection of Via Maqueda. The Via Sant' Agostino-Bandiera, created specifically as a commercial street, originally connected the big Capo market with that of the Bocceria, passing through the Bocceria Nova or della Carne and through the Conceria district before finally reaching the port. Even today it is quite an active and busy market, serving an up-market clientele because of its proximity to Palermo's Crown Court and the Teatro Massimo. Over the last decade the traditional sounds of the market have gradually died down, with only the occasional seller remaining. Nowadays proof of the ancient cultural and artistic vitality of the district remains symbolised by the shop sign of the Morello Bakery, located on the ground floor of the Palazzo Serenario, in Via Cappuccinelle, directly opposite where the road widens and the

steps lead to Piazza Sant' Anna al Capo, dominated by the church of Maria SS.ma della Mercede.

Besides the Liberty style shop-sign, bearing the stallholder's name made, mosaic fashion, out of geometric glass tesserae, there is also, alongside the entrance, a mosaic panel: it depicts Demetra (*a pupa ru Capu*), clothed in a priceless robe and wearing rich jewelry on her wrists, in the act of treading barefoot across the grass (**fig. 49**). This artifact, in stark contrast to all the surrounding dilapidation, dates from the first decade of the 20th century, when an enlightened merchant, Salvatore Morello, decided to install, in the neighborhood, a bakery unlike any other, transforming it into a work of art. Symbolically the decision to dedicate the art of breadmaking to Demetra is not fortitious, as she serves as the protector of the earth's fertility and the production of wheat and bread as the final moment in the cycle of cereal production. The presence of the Morello bakery along the main axis of the Capo also testifies to the historical role that bakeries played in traditional market spaces, precisely for the importance of bread in the people's diet. Inside the bakery, closed for at least a year, the décor is Liberty in every detail, from the metal and glass lamp to the plaster ceiling roses with floral motifs. Unfortunately the whole Palazzo Serenario in Via Cappuccinelle, where the Liberty style panel is located, is extremely rundown and it is now almost impossible to make out the bakery sign, as it is covered by scaffolding.

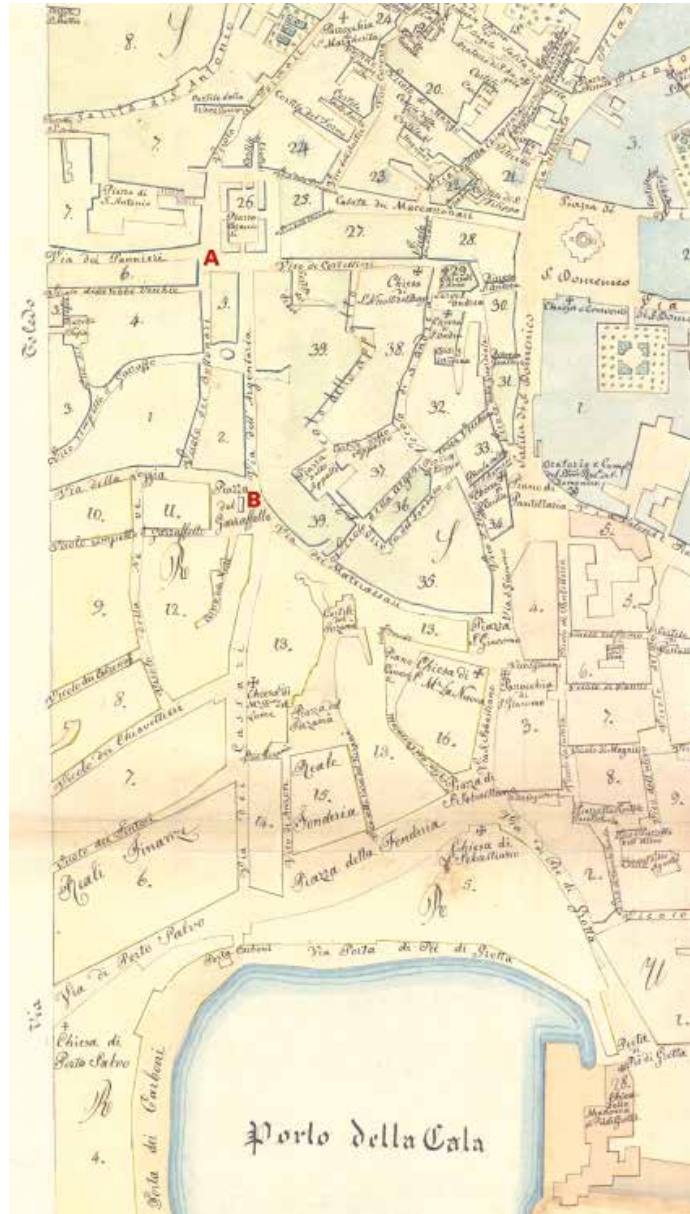
The Vucciria Neighbourhood. Map 337 Bourbon Land Register. Mortilla-Villarena Archive.

A. Piazza Caracciolo.
B. Piazza del Garraffello

LA VUCCIRIA

The site where the Vucciria market developed between the 10th and the 12th centuries was reclaimed land from the marsh area of Castellammare and from the silting up of the ancient harbour caused by debris from the Papireto and Maltempo rivers (**fig. 50**). The first map of the market area can then be traced back to the Angevin era: a document dated 1299 refers repeatedly to the name “*macellum Porte Patitellorum*”. The Bocceria Grande or *macellum magnum*, in today’s Piazza Caracciolo, was in fact, in the 14th century, the biggest market for the slaughter and the sale of meat: when later, as previously mentioned, this was moved to the Monte di Pietà, between Via Candelai and Piazza Sant’ Onofrio, the Vucciria became a purely fruit and vegetable market. It was called Bocceria Vecchia, to distinguish it from the Nuova, that of the butchers’, and it was connected to the Garraffello, the *logia mercatorum*, home to the Genoese, Pisan and Catalan merchants. The Porta Patitelli neighbourhood thus took on its current layout inside the Piazza di Grascia, selling all types of groceries.

In 1615 Di Giovanni described the Vucciria like this: *The Bocceria square is full of all that you could desire. It is square shaped. In the western corner there are the shops that sell dairy products (frutti di mandra), sausages and other cured meat; south and north every type of fruit and vegetable (leafy food) can be bought; left and right hawkers auction off goods. In this square, given the wide open space all*



51
Piazza
Caracciolo. The
Vucciria Market

52
The Taverna
Azzurra in Via
Maccheronai in
the Vucciria

around, in the middle there is a raised dias; and inside, in the remaining space, there is another raised dias, in the centre of which there is a marble fountain, where the water cascades from a Triton into a smaller fountain for the convenience of all those who frequent the square. In the first sector, on the eastern side and for a further two zones, fish and birds are sold; in the northern zone (at 12 o'clock), poultry, pomegranates and other fruits, that have no precise location; in the western zone wild herbs, and in the south domestic herbs. In the second sector, on the western side, sheep, pigeons, chickens and other similar animals; in the northern zona white bread; in the western zone asparagus, wild palm shoots (ciafaglioni), tender thistle leaves (fanghe), snails and other similar things; in the northern zone, cardoons, lixiandri and wild salad; everything you could possibly desire can be found in this square. In 1783 the Viceroy Caracciolo, to whom the Piazza Vucciria was dedicated, enriched the market area with colonnades and brick and mortar stores, as described by Villabianca: *The Bocceria Colonnades. In the new design of the shopcounters and gables, that is the roofs, of the vendors' stalls, created in May of this year 1783, I, Villabianca noted down that the Bocceria della Foglia took on a totally different aspect. And I here add that colonnades made out of noble stone and crowned by balustrades of the same stone covered the stores built all around (the square). These colonnades covered the ground and the terraces and, replacing the shop gables, formed a continuous cover, serving as balconies to the houses above, which were part of the stalls, so that the square took on the shape of a noble amphitheater. Hence this*

work, with reason, was generally applauded. And Gaspare Palermo, in his famous *Guide* of 1816 added: *In the center of the square there is a fountain, under which, as mentioned, flows the river Garraffello, and here poultry and fish are sold, and at one end there is a hut made of planks, known as the Bilancione, where a price list is affixed listing all goods subject to tax and presided over by a subaltern of the 'atacapani', who are Deputies of the square, officials of the Tax Magistrate, known as the Senato. Any buyer who mistrusted the price, weight or quality of the goods could appeal, in order to obtain a report from the Deputy of the Square or from the Senatore Priore, who would then examine the petition, and if the seller were found guilty, would condemn him to the restitution of the damages suffered by the buyer and to the punishment prescribed by the relative clauses of the Senate.*

These testimonies, duly reported in the above mentioned *I Mercati di Palermo* by Rosario La Duca, attest to the vitality of a neighbourhood that, even though it was formed more recently than the other markets, already existed under the French with a specific commercial destination. This was bolstered by the presence of the Logge and a close network of artisan craftsmen who had their headquarters in the neighbouring streets: Via Frangiai, Via Materassai, Via Chiavettieri, Via Pannieri, Via Maccherronai, Via Coltellieri, Via Cassari.

The French painter Gaston Vuillier, visiting Palermo in 1893, wrote a very effective description of the Vucciria: *The market, known as the Vucciria, swarms with people;*



MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

the name comes from the French word boucherie – a throw back to the Angevin era. There, as though in a kaleidoscope, I admired thousands of strange light effects, and the rainbow colours of the rags: and yet it was only possible to see cauliflowers, carrots, tomatoes, cucumber and bizarre shaped pumpkins. The butchers and the macaroni sellers were also there, hidden away in obscure small stalls. And from amongst this mass of things rose the clamour of men and children, in large part out in the open air, or else under the canopies. It is especially curious the way in which the words were accompanied by a range of facial expressions. It reminded me of Arab life, which I had frequented recently. The child sellers were everywhere; and doing their utmost to sell their goods; motivated, perhaps, by the desire to spend the evening at the Paladini theatre. One carried a basket of cooked artichokes, a poor man's meal; another had only onions and some garlic. An old woman, holding five or six eggs, remained curled up at a street corner, until evening, waiting for a potential buyer. I could not help notice the children: I was attracted by those little impertinent faces, with those black eyes, sparkling, full of intelligence and vivacity. I watched some of their secret meetings in which little was spoken but there was a great deal of gesticulating.

In the late 20th century the Vucciria was also painted by Renato Guttuso and photographed by Enzo Sellerio, in addition to being chosen, on several occasions, as a film-set by various directors (**fig. 51**). The rubble of the Garraffello is still today a source of inspiration for avant-garde artists, not only local, but foreigners who elect to base their studios there. Yet, despite its glorious past and its unquestioned fame, it is the market that has suffered the greatest degree of neglect as well as the gradual impoverishment of its original cultural fabric. Traditional commerce appears to be confined along Via Maccheronai, the access road to the market from Piazza San Domenico, where, in days gone by, pasta would be handmade, well as Piazza Caracciolo, the first stretch of the Argenteria Vecchia and Via Pannieri. Everywhere else appears to have been converted into pubs, cafés and taverns, even the historical ones such as the Taverna Azzurra, now a disco. (**fig. 52**). Only the street names remain as a memorial to all those workshops, once an important complement to the life of the market.



ANCIENT STREET VENDORS AND STREET TRADE

Giuseppe Pitrè, the great Palermo scholar (1841-1916), portrayed street trade for the first time, during the Sicilian Exhibition of Ethnography in 1891-1892, in a section dedicated to the arts and trades in the National Exhibition of Palermo. On completion of the Exhibition, the collection moved to the small rooms of the Assunta in Via Maqueda, which had been designated to display the first nucleus of the Sicilian Ethnography Museum. When, in 1934, Giuseppe Cocchiara took over the management of the Museum in the stables of the Casina Cinese in the Parco della Favorita, he reorganized the collection, creating an itinerary that led through the rooms depicting hunting and fishing, agriculture and stock-rearing: from the production of resources to the techniques of commerce.

The collection consists of work tools, signs, historical photos and prints, and thirty statues of street sellers (fig. 53-58), made of wood, glue, cloth and plaster, a visual concept that often includes the entire working environment. According to notes made by Pitrè, it was gifted by the collector Girolamo Nicotra. The scholarly Pitrè wrote about the entire

phenomenon in the last volume of his monumental *"Biblioteca delle Tradizioni Popolari": La famiglia, la casa, la vita del popolo siciliano*, (A History of Popular Traditions: The family, the house and the life of the Sicilian populace) in which there is a transcription of all the *abbanniate*. It was Pitrè and Alberto Favara who first attempted to classify the cries of the *"banditori"*, in

53-54

Street sellers of salted sardines and roasted chestnuts.

"Giuseppe Pitrè" Sicilian Ethnography Museum in Palermo



MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

55

Water seller.
"Giuseppe
Pitrè" Sicilian
Ethnography
Museum in
Palermo

relation to the different food types, their seasonality and their provenance. Both agree that there is a distinction between the *abbanniate* of the street sellers and the *abbanniate* of the *putia*, those of the stallholders and shopkeepers. The first have a more pronounced melodic accent that is also reflected in the content, as though the seller is not only advertising his wares but also his presence, covering the whole ever-changing area around him. The latter have a drier and more concise rhythm because of their location within a universe of recognisable signs, a complex polyvocal context, resulting from the close contiguity of the line of shops and the spirited repartee between the criers. The first character in the series of street sellers is the *acqua-annivata* (water-carrier)

56

Egg seller.
"Giuseppe
Pitrè" Sicilian
Ethnography
Museum in
Palermo

(fig. 55), not only depicted as he was in days gone-by, with the simple terracotta jug balanced on his shoulder and his shot glasses, but also in a more modern version with the typical wooden stool, brightly decorated with geometric motifs, holding the glasses and aniseed flask, *zammù*, the strainer for squeezed lemon juice and a series of small plates. The water-carrier is easily recognizable by the typical chatter that announces the possibility of some refreshment on really warm days: *Ch'è bella quann'è Frisca! S'un è frisca, 'u nni vuogghiu' ranu! Sciala-curuzzu! Arricriacuori! Va pigghiativi 'U gilatu!* - (How good it is when it is fresh, if it is not fresh I do not want money! It refreshes the heart! Take an ice cream!)(This, and all the



following citations of traditional *banniate* are from the aforementioned work of 1913 by Giuseppe Pitrè “*La Famiglia, la Casa, la Vita del Popolo Siciliano*”). Other characters in the collection include the *sferracavadduotu* (fishseller) with the traditional fisherman’s cap, trousers rolled up to the calf and shirt unbuttoned at the chest. The figure is carrying a wicker basket full of fish and a small set of scales. The name indicates that the seller came from the small fishing village of Sferracavallo, from where he daily set out daily to sell his catch in the streets of the Vucciria, announcing his presence as follows: *Haju pisci I lenza vivi, haju chè pisci* - (I have live fish and what fish!) - Or *Sasizza di mari, li veri asineddi; Sciala puvirieddu, un rotulo menza lira cicirieddu! Va pigghiativi sta muzziata! L’ultima pitanziedda haju!* – (Sausages from the sea, the real donkeys! Enjoy my poor man, a cone of tiny fish for half a lira! Take this food, it is the last food I have left!). According to Pitrè the *sferracavadduotu* was a well-known figure in the poorer districts of Palermo, arousing both surprise and compassion, as he usually spent the night at sea, returning to land in the early afternoon and, carrying the heavy baskets on his shoulders, he would walk into town to sell his fish. There is also a peasant woman, known as the *Zza Vanna murrialisa uvara*, (the egg seller) (fig. 56) who came in from Monreale once a week to sell fresh eggs to her *parrucciani* (customers).

Despite the fact that women were a rare presence in street trade, the egg-sellers were fairly widespread. They came in from agricultural villages nearby, Settecannoli,

San Lorenzo, Vergine Maria, Resuttana, Boccadifalco, arriving in the city having collected all the eggs from other women in the neighbourhood in order to meet the requirements of their clients. The sellers generally wore long skirts down to their ankles, protected by an apron (*fadali*) a shawl over the shoulders (*guardaspaddi*) and a knotted handkerchief on the head and would carry two baskets full of eggs in their arms. The appellation *murrialisa* in this case was also applied to other sellers of groceries, as the Monreale was highly considered for the freshness of its products. There is, in fact, a statue of a *strawberry seller*, who would go around in springtime carrying several baskets, some filled with strawberries, others with scales with their

57
Pumpkin and
zucchini flowers
seller. “Giuseppe
Pitrè” Sicilian
Ethnography
Museum in Palermo



typical gold plates and another to hold money. Calling out *A trentaruranedda li frauli! Frauli gruossi! Frauli frischi!* she would tempt passersby when the price of the fruit, previously rather steep, became accessible to all budgets. Pitré also describes some of the little stratagems used by the strawberry seller: how, for example, the weight of the goods would be falsified, or in the particular arrangement of the fruit in the baskets putting the best on the top, leaving the damaged fruit underneath. Other *murrialisi* figures are those of the sellers of vegetables and bread: produce coming from the fields of the Conca d'Oro, known as the Parco, was always a guarantee of the high quality of the goods. They descended in the city shouting: *Parchitani l'haiu e di lu Parco, tale ca vinniru uora, talè!* - (I have come from the Parco and from the Parco they have also come. Look!) - For pears: *pina butiri, si mancia e si vivi* - (pears are like butter, you can eat and drink them) - and for muscat grapes: *l'haiu vrunnu comu l'uoru stu zibibbu* - (my grapes are as blond as gold). But the real treat lay, during Pitré's era, in the offer of large seasonal figs that the vendor announced were as sweet as a "real ice cream", *a veru gelatu*. A character immortalized in the Museum's collection is the *cucuzzaru*, seller of pumpkins and pumpkin flowers (fig. 57), in high demand during the summer for their refreshing powers and wonderful taste. When these fruits were no longer in season, the seller reappeared with the classic *cartedda* (basket) full of cucumbers, announcing, by his cries, the quality of the product in playful allusive tones: *Ma chi sù stanghi I puorti! Palamiti vi vinni pi citruola!* (but what are they?

Carrying-poles! Palermitans, I am selling you cucumbers!) The sellers of seasonal fruits were considered to belong to the *muralisi: di la prima è, di la prima!* (they are as fresh as they come) were the cries used to sell fresh salad or young green beans: *ma chi su agghi* those used to compare their smoothness to sewing needles. The seller of broccoli, *vruccularu*, and eggplants (fig. 58), *petrucciani*, present at every crossroad with his basket of vegetables, would shout out encouragements by alluding to a good caponata (mix of diced vegetables): *Va facitivi a capunata! Va facitivili fritti*. Not forgetting the *u puliparu*, street vendor of boiled octopus, whose presence is still widespread in the markets of Palermo, like the *ficurinnaru*, seller of prickly pears, nowadays sold everywhere, not just in the old city centre.

One of the most insecure figures amongst the street hawkers, was that of the *herb seller*, who not only did not have a kitchen garden of his own but also had no neighbourhood network to help him collect his products. He would roam the countryside in search of what the land could offer: *Haju finuocchi di muntagna! la marva, la cardiedda! La cardiedda tiènnira, 'a marva! Cicuoria di muntagna, haju 'a cicuoria!* (I have fennel from the mountains, I have mallow, chicory...). With the arrival of autumn, the herb seller, at the first sight of rain, went looking for mushrooms: *Na pitanza nn'ju funci!* or big fat, shiny blackberries *Amuridduzzi fatti! Fatti 'amurieddi, fatti!* Small ripe blackberries, ripe blackberries! In extreme cases the "gypsy", digging along the cracks in the rock-face would find slugs, and

snails, a delicacy much enjoyed by the Palermitans and with the approach of winter went around the city to the cry of his chant: *Na pitanza nn'haju ca duorminu! Ah ca nn'haju 'na pitanza! Ah ca nn'haju pitanza!* (I have dishes of snails – that are asleep! I have snails!) Or else: *Crastuna nivuri cu li fa à l'agghiotta!* (big blacks snails, who wants to cook them in a soup!) Among the herb sellers there was also the seller of basil who, in spring, would carry large bunches or young plants in clay pots, *grastuddi*. The cry is happy, auspicious, announcing the arrival of the summer season: *U gurano un mazzu basilicò! Va pigghia- tivilla 'na grastudda di basilicò!* - (A coin, 2 cents, a bunch of basil! Come and buy a basil plant!) This street seller was

considered extremely important due to the absolute centrality of basil in Sicilian cuisine, used as seasoning during the summer months. Every house had to have a plant on the balcony, exposed to the sun and watered frequently.

There are also statuettes of a series of various hawkers selling sweets and spirits to youngsters or adults, often consumed during recreational activities. One of the earliest hawkers to appear was the *lu cafitteri* who would wander through the streets of Palermo at dawn, carrying a dim light and chanting *Cafitteri! Na pigghiativi 'u cafe!* (coffee, come and get a cup of coffee) a real winter pickup for the workers who, during the rigours of winter were forced to leave home to reach their place of

58
Broccoli seller.
"Giuseppe Pitrè" Sicilian
Ethnography
Museum in
Palermo



MARKETS AND STREET FOOD

59

Workers, peeling lemons used in the preparation of essences. Palermo 1900. "Giuseppe Pitrè" Sicilian Ethnography Museum in Palermo. Interguglielmi Foundation

work. Wrapped in a long coat and with a cap on his head, the *cafitteri* went around with a device that was both a portable stove and a coffee machine, a hot liquid that appeared to be coffee but was actually an infusion of roasted barley.

During the popular festivals *lu siminzaru* prepared a basket divided into various compartments holding chickpeas, roasted beans, walnuts and almonds. The figurine in the Pitrè Museum is boat shaped, normally used during the Feast of Santa Rosalia, decked out for the occasion with sails, flags, fringes and cards, so as to make the presentation and the offering more festive. On these occasions, the *calamiraru* would also go around with his barrow, the

tavulidda, laden with sweets for sale to the children: *frisilli di batia*, *cannola*, *biancu manciari* or *calameli* and the *ammarrapanza* made of dried figs wrapped in a pastry crust. The *nivularu* (waffle seller) went around with a basket slung from his shoulders full of *nevuli* (waffles) for the children, along with cookies, doughnuts and roasted seeds.

In the archives of the Pitrè Museum there is also a large collection of historical images depicting the street vendors, realised in black and white on glazed paper, the work of some of the most famous photographers of the time: Eugenio Interguglielmi (fig. 59), Francesco Paolo Uzzo (fig. 60) and Giuseppe Incorpora. From a visual

Dalla Collezione PITRÉ, Costumi Siciliani. - Serie I^a. - PALERMO. 13-4-02



Fabbrice di tipo di limone (Gli operai abruzzesi e molisani i limoni per estrarne il succo)

*Al qualyre indomica in la mura
dell'acide e del moffto i fuffu
fuffu i compari.*

standpoint they developed a vast quantity of documentation covering the main occupations of the time, immortalising, through their camera lens, embroiderers, gardeners and fruit vendors, cutters of lemon zest used for making essences, local women intent on collecting water in the *quartane* (jugs) made of terracotta. In this section are also some ancient shop signs, which Pitrè divides into two distinct categories, natural and artificial: the first derive from the shop itself as, for example, the large key hanging over the locksmith's entrance or the copper buckets advertising the barber's shop; the second were intended as advertisements, to attract the attention of the passerby. These are brightly

coloured plaques on which, for example, in the case of a tavern, a young Bacchus is depicted astride a barrel, accompanied by the slogan “*Viva la Divina Provvidenza, ogni bene da Dio viene*” (Long live the Divine Providence, all good things come from God), alluding to the benefits of drinking wine (**fig. 61**). Or, in the case of a tobacconist, the sign depicts an elegant gentleman with a top hat and a cigar in his mouth, accompanied by the motto “*E io sempre fumo*” (And I always smoke). The latter, unlike many other aspects of the street traders, nowadays definitively extinct, are still extremely current. They have maintained their original function, albeit utilising different language forms.

60

Greengrocer. Francesco Paul Uzzo. 1900. “Giuseppe Pitrè” Sicilian Ethnography Museum in Palermo

61

A tavern sign. Mixed technique on wood, second half of the 19th century. “Giuseppe Pitrè” Sicilian Ethnography Museum in Palermo



A CALENDAR OF THE MOST IMPORTANT NEIGHBOURHOOD FESTIVALS

SAN GIUSEPPE CELEBRATION

18th March 18:00 to 19:00

**Vampe di San Giuseppe
(Bonfires in honour of San Giuseppe)**

Castellammare District (Vucciria)
Piazza Castello and Piazza Sant'Eligio
Monte di Pietà neighbourhood (The Capo)
Piazza del Capo
Palazzo Reale – Albergheria district (Ballarò)
Via Mura di Sant'Agata and Piazza Gallinaio
District Tribunali (Kalsa)
Piazzetta Magione e Piazza Montesanto
Between San Erasmo and La Bandita the out-of-commission boats are still burnt as a sign of devotion to the Saint.

19th March

**Mense di San Giuseppe
(Poor Man's Table set up in honour of San Giuseppe)**

The Neighbourhoods of the Vucciria and Capo

GOOD FRIDAY

The following Brotherhoods organize the most important processions on Good Friday in honour of the Madonna Addolorata following the urn symbolizing the dead Christ:

Congregation of the Cocchieri (Coachmen)

One of the oldest, founded in 1594, based at the Church of the Madonna dell'Itria in Via Alloro, in the old district of the Kalsa. On the evening of Good Friday the coachmen shoulder the urn of the dead Christ and the statue of the Addolorata (Mary weeping), wearing 18th century livery.

Congregation of Santa Maria del Lume

Also known as the Cassari or Casciari because it is formed by local artisans who made wooden boxes and caskets. Based at the Church of Santa Maria la Nuova, in Piazza San Giacomo la Marina, in the Vucciria neighbourhood. On the evening of Good Friday the brotherhood carry the Addolorata (Mary weeping), by Girolamo Bagnasco, on their shoulders in procession.

Congregation of Fornai (Bakers)

Based at the Church of San Isidoro Agricola all'Albergheria. In addition to the traditional procession of the Addolorata (Mary weeping) behind the urn of the dead Christ, the Brotherhood of Bakers also stage a live reenactment of the Passion of Christ.

Congregation of Nostra Signora della Soledad (Our Lady of Soledad)

Founded in 1590, located in the Ballarò neighbourhood in the Church of Sant'Anna dei Calzettieri, in Via Rua Formaggi. The Good Friday procession goes along all the streets of the Palazzo Reale district, intersecting with that of the Bakers'.

Congregation of Maria SS. Addolorata and Cristo morto alla Guilla

Based at the Church of San Giovanni alla Guilla, in Via Beati Paoli, two steps away from the Capo market. The Brotherhood follow the procession wearing hoods and roam around the Capo neighbourhood and the Olivuzza quarter.

.....

SANTA RITA

.....

22nd of May

Cloister of the Church of Sant' Agostino, in the same street in the Monte di Pietà neighbourhood.

.....

On the 22nd of May, there is, in the church cloister, the blessing of the roses as an act of devotion to the Augustinian nun Saint Rita. She is known as the *aggrizzamariti* (putting husbands back on the straight and narrow), because of her protective powers over marriages in crisis and the family.

FEAST OF SANTA ROSALIA

.....

15th July

From the Cathedral to the Marina

.....

From Piazza Cathedral to the Marina
The evening before, 14th July, the very famous chariot procession moves from the Cathedral of Palermo crossing all the Cassaro (Corso Vittorio Emanuele) to the Marina, where it ends with a impressive firework display amidst stalls of toasted chickpeas, red pumpkin seeds and snails.

MARIA SS. DEL CARMELO

.....

Last Sunday in July

The Kalsa neighbourhood

Church of Santa Teresa in the Kalsa

The Ballarò neighbourhood

Church del Carmine, Piazza Carmine a stone's throw away from Ballarò market of which she is considered the protector

MARIA SS. DELLA MERCEDE

.....

Last Sunday in September

The Capo neighbourhood

of which she is considered the protector.

.....

The procession moves from the church of the same name to Piazza Sant'Anna al Capo. The statue is by Girolamo Bagnasco.

MARIA SS. DEL ROSARIO

.....

The first Sunday in October

At the church in Piazza San Domenico

.....

It is considered the last celebration of the summer and takes place mainly in the Vucciria neighbourhood. The procession from Piazza San Domenico crosses over Via Maccheronai going through all the neighbouring streets.

A SMALL GLOSSARY OF STREET AND TRADITIONAL FOOD

1 ARANCINE

In modern Italian, considered masculine: *arancini*. Small round balls of rice, filled, coated with breadcrumbs and fried. Widespread throughout Sicily, the filling varies according to the area and, nowadays, according to the imagination of whoever prepares them. More traditional, in Palermo, are the *arancine con carne* (with meat) (filled with red sauce and peas) and the *arancine al burro* (cooked in butter) (with melted cheese and diced ham).

2 BABBALUCI [SNAILS]

Small *snails*, traditionally eaten during the Feast of Santa Rosalia: they are purged for a day in water and salt, subsequently boiled and then cooked in a pan with garlic and parsley, and, for those who like it, with a little chopped tomato.

3 CALIA E SIMENZA

This classic couple, sold on the stalls in characteristic *coppi* (cones), is made from toasted chickpeas (*caliati*, from which *calia*) and red pumpkin seeds (*simenza*), sundried and sprinkled with salt.

The same street hawkers sell boiled *luppina* (lupins), peanuts and *nucidda atturrata* (toasted hazelnuts).

4 CAPONATA DI MELANZANE

A dish which probably has maritime origins, prepared with fish, from which it derives its name (*capone*, scorpion fish or dolphin fish). But in the *caponata di melanzane* (eggplant caponata) there is no longer any fish. It is prepared with chunks of fried eggplant, celery, olives, capers and tomato sauce in vinegar with sugar. Equally tasty is the *caponata di carciofi* (artichoke caponata).

5 CROCCHÈ

Potato croquettes, vulgarly and jokingly also called *cazzilli*, which are eaten fried, like the *panelle* (dough made from chickpeas), and often eaten together with them.

6 CUBAITA [NOUGAT]

Among the stalls of sellers of food specialties, the seller of nougat was always present; is now almost extinct. Called the *cubaita* (from the arab *qubbayt*) a typical version is the one made with unpeeled almonds and sugar. But there is also the *giuggiulena*, nougat made with honey and sesame, and the colorful *gelato di campagna* (country ice cream), made of sugar, with pieces of almond and candied fruit; nor should one omit the mouth watering *mandorle caramellate* (caramelised almonds in sugar), also called *mandorle fragolate* (strawberry almonds) because the caramelisation process turns them pink.

7 FIGURINNA

In the collection of fresh fruit sold and eaten in the street, first place should rightly be awarded to the *fichi d'India* (prickly pears), which are, for better or worse, an emblem of Sicily. Those sold over the counter are always extremely large, and are cut up in front of the buyer by the seller with consummate skill. Other fruits to be born in mind are *muluna russa*, (red watermelon) a symbol of summer, and *cedri* (citron), served sliced and seasoned with salt.





8 FRITTULA

A *frittula* (doughnut made from boiled entrails) is formed from all the leftovers from the slaughter of cattle, pigs, sheep and goats (*sivu i chianchieri*). These leftovers are first heated in a large iron pot (*fustu*) then fried slowly in *sugna* (lard) and then again boiled in order to keep them soft and finally compressed like a doughnut. The *frittularu* (seller of frittula) traditionally offers his wares in a large basket covered by a chequered cloth.

9 FRIED FOOD IN BATTER

Batter is one of the basic ingredients of the traditional Palermo *friggitorie*. It is prepared with flour, yeast and water. Whatever food desired is first dipped into the batter and then thrown into a pan of boiling oil. In Palermo mainly thistles, artichokes and broccoli are fried in batter, after first having been blanched.

10 MARTORANA FRUIT

All Souls Day, traditionally a high holiday in Palermo, is filled with bright colours – in sharp contrast to the Italian name of the Religious Holiday (Festa dei Morti – the Day of the Dead). The *frutta di martorana* (sugar and almond flour cakes) are named after the convent of nuns that made them famous.

They are characterised by their palette of reds, browns, orange and a particularly vivid green.

11 MUSSU E MASCIDDARU

U mussu (boiled beef offal) is boiled beef, served cold and seasoned with salt and lemon. It is a mix of various parts of the animal, not only from the snout from which it takes its name: from the jaw, mouth and nose, foot, heel, neck of the foot, knee, and in general all the muscular parts formed from connective tissue. On the counter the pieces are laid out already cut into small pieces on a plate or wrapped in a sheet of wax paper.

12 PANELLE

Sheets of dough made from chickpea flour, cooked over a slow fire with salt and water and allowed to cool. It is then fried in hot oil and eaten piping hot, alone or in bread, along with **crocchè** (croquette potatoes).

13 PANI CA MEUSA

U pani ca meusa or *vastiedda* is a focaccia (*muffuliettu*) stuffed with spleen and lung and seasoned with thin strips of caciocavallo cheese and ricotta. On the counter the slices of spleen are already pre-cooked and then fried in lard at the moment of sale.

14 PUIPPU VUGGHIUTU

[BOILED OCTOPUS]

Boiled octopus is also an important component of Palermitan Street Food. It is presented on large coloured plates, cut up in front of the buyer and served warm, with abundant lemon juice.

15 PULLANCHIELLI

[CORN COBS BOILED]

The boiled cobs can be found in most greengrocers, in large pots of hot water, but are sold occasionally by street sellers: hawkers who traditionally peddle their wares the beach of Mondello. In addition to the corncobs, some grocers offer in the same pots **potatoes** or **boiled artichokes**; and also trays of **baked onions**.

16 PUPACCENA

What has been said so far about the colours used to decorate the *frutta di martorana* also applies to the sugar statuettes which are likewise prepared for All Souls Day: with the addition of a range of garish blues and turquoise, used, once upon a time, to decorate the clothing of the ladies, knights and paladins and nowadays that of modern cartoon heroes.

17 QUARUMI

Quarumi are boiled entrails, consisting mainly of various parts of the stomach and intestines, flavoured with onions, celery and carrots. The stall of the *quarumaru* is characterised by a large steaming pot from which the seller removes the pieces at the request of the customer.





18 ROSTICCERIA

Rosticceria is used to indicate the specialties sold by delicatessens, originally served as appetisers or amuse-gueles by the upper class, but can now be found in all the Palermitan bars. They consist mostly of a variety of stuffed brioche pastry. There are the *calzoni*, baked and fried, with ham and mozzarella, *rizzuole* (from the french rissoles), the *ravazzate*, the *spiedini*, etc.

**19 SAIDDE A BECCAFICO
(BECCAFICO SARDINES)**

Prepared with sardines boned and beheaded, sprinkled with a filling of breadcrumbs, raisins and pine nuts, rolled and roasted with a bay leaf and lemon seasoning.

20 SFINCIUNI

Soft pizza (*sfincia* in Sicilian dialect denotes the preparation of soft pastry) topped with pieces of tomato, onions, anchovies, caciocavallo cheese and oil. Street vendors sell it by the slice from their characteristic and specially fitted out “ape” (literally “bee”, a three wheeled van, a type of Piaggio Ape).

21 STIGGHIUOLA

The *stigghiùola* are kid or lamb intestines, cleaned, skewered, roasted over coals and seasoned with salt and lemon.

22 ZAMMÙ (OR ANISEED)

The beverage kiosks and, before them, street sellers, used to offer what was considered a great thirst quencher, a glass of ice-cold water, with a few drops of aniseed placed in the bottom of the glass by means of a bottle with a long metal spout. Aniseed is a liqueur akin to the French *pastis* or the Greek *ouzo*. The liqueur would come up to the surface, in the form of a milky cloud, and with its penetrating aroma seemed to reinforce the fresh taste of the water.



photographs:

Salvatore Plano (fig. 1, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 20);

Maurizio De Francisci (fig. 2, 19, 21); *Francesco Passante* (fig. 3, 6).

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